Capitalism and the Politics of Resignation

by Peter Benson and Stuart Kirsch

Anthropologists since the 1990s have paid greater attention to the state and governmentality than to one of the most consequential forms of power in our time, the corporation. The lack of attention to corporations is especially problematic when the harm they cause is readily apparent and substantial. We propose to reorient the study of power in anthropology to focus on the strategies corporations use in response to their critics and how this facilitates the perpetuation of harm. We identify three main phases of corporate response to critique: denial, acknowledgement and token accommodation, and strategic engagement. In case studies of the tobacco and mining industries, we show how corporate responses to their critics protect these industries from potential delegitimization and allow them to continue operating in favorable regulatory environments. Finally, we connect these corporate strategies to pervasive feelings of discontent about the present and the perceived inability to change the future. Although corporations usually benefit from the politics of resignation, we argue that widespread dissatisfaction with corporate practices represents an important starting point for social change.

One of the more influential works of the 1990s is James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998). Scott shows how high-modernist projects are doomed to failure because they do not take local circumstances and knowledge into account. His work helps us to understand the simplifying effects of the state, which reduces complexity to a set of problems that are more amenable to efficient management. However, as Fernando Coronil (2001) notes in his review, money, markets, and capital play a far greater role in shaping the modern world than Scott acknowledges. In this article, we argue that this omission is symptomatic of a larger trend within the discipline, in which anthropologists pay more attention to the state and governmentality than to how corporations shape the world in accordance with their pursuit of profit, growth, and legitimacy. The lack of attention to corporations is especially problematic in circumstances in which they cause harm that is readily apparent and substantial. Consequently, we call for greater anthropological attention to the exercise of corporate power and, in particular, the strategies corporations use in response to critique and how they facilitate the perpetuation of harm.

For many years, the academy has operated in accordance with a dominant paradigm in which capitalism is said to have won.[1] Public intellectuals like Francis Fukuyama (1992), Dinesh D'Souza (2003), Hernando De Soto (2003), and Fareed Zakaria (2008) celebrate capitalism's dominance. Recent anthropological research on capitalism draws on two distinct analytical traditions. Working in a predominantly Foucauldian vein, anthropologists such as Aihwa Ong (1998, 2003, 2006) treat capitalism as a system of governmentality that reproduces neoliberal structures and subjectivities. Working in a neo-Marxist tradition, scholars such as David Harvey (1992, 2005) lament both capitalism's dominance and the ways in which neoliberalism has further entrenched rather than resolved its central contradictions (see Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). Correspondingly, the prevailing theoretical framework in anthropology combines an analysis of governmentality with a critical sensibility drawn from Marxism.[2]

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1. This article was completed before the full extent of the financial crisis of late 2008–2009 became evident. Although there is widespread recognition that systematic regulatory changes are required to address the causes of these problems, we also note that the initial response of the state was to shore up the institutions that had been the greatest risk-takers in the bubble economy rather than to protect the persons most vulnerable to the financial crisis.

2. We argue that anthropologists should pay greater attention to how corporations respond to critique, in addition to the classic ways that capitalism is analyzed in Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches (Godelier 1977; Roseberry 1997; Terray 1972). One tradition of Marxist anthropology has focused on modes of production, the political-economic organization of societies, and the constitution of ideologies, to the point of arguing that culture operates as a collective consciousness that serves the interests of capital (Ortner 1984:139–140). Another tradition of anthropology inspired by Marx has followed the lead of world-systems theory and underdevelopment theories (Gunder Frank 1967; Wallerstein 1976) and has been concerned with the imposition of external forces on

Even though scholars have shown how corporations may function like states by extending their power over producers and consumers, they rarely examine how corporations exploit their position within the capitalist world order (but see Gibson-Graham 1996).[3] In our view, both the structural contradictions of capitalism as described by Marx—the exploitation of labor, alienation, and the commodity fetishism that obscures social relations of production—and new contradictions associated with threats to human health and the environment are insufficiently challenged by the literature on governmentality.

To undertake a brief genealogical analysis of anthropology's intellectual currents, we might see the Marxist sensibilities prevalent in the anthropology of the 1970s (Nugent 2007) as having gone underground. From a strict Foucauldian perspective, the study of power and subjectivity ought to be conducted in a spirit of moral agnosticism that treats power as a relationship to be understood and renegotiated (see Deleuze 1988; Foucault 1979, 1994; Rabinow 1996).[4] However, governmentality is often cast in a negative light because it extends the power of the state. Scholarly attention to governmentality has been intellectually productive in many ways, especially in its specification of the relationship of citizenship and subjectivity to institutionalized forms of power. A common subtext of this literature is that governmentality keeps people from resisting normalizing forms of institutional power, much as ideology, from a Marxist perspective, keeps people from recognizing and resisting class structure. Critical sensibilities from the Marxist tradition remain submerged within anthropology, as indicated by the assumption that power pacifies resistance, which contrasts with the Foucauldian argument that power and resistance produce each other. The result is ethnography that treats corporations primarily as extended branches of governmentality, or anti-politics machines (Ferguson 1994), and largely ignores the political processes through which corporations promote their own interests. The strong-arm tactics of corporate power disappear into the soft forms of pastoral power that produce governable subjects. The literature on governmentality also neglects the

possibility that government regulation and state control may help to rein in corporate interests.

In this article, we propose to reorient the study of corporate power in a more productive fashion, through a focus on the tactics and strategies corporations use to respond to their critics.[5] We believe that this focus is more amenable to the way Foucault conceived of power as a field of strategies and relationships (Lazzarato 2002). Our goal is to open up the crucial role of corporations in modern politics to more rigorous analysis. We call for ethnographic research on capitalism that focuses specifically on the harm caused by industry and on how corporations shape the social management of harm. We suggest that corporate responses to critique contribute to a dominant structure of feeling in our time, which we call the "politics of resignation." Specifying how corporate power operates is necessary for locating an important source of the widespread moral discontent that permeates contemporary political sensibilities and for overcoming the prevailing assumption that one is unable to do anything about these concerns.[6] We argue that there is a direct link between corporate tactics and strategies and the general feeling of disempowerment that characterizes contemporary political life and, furthermore, that corporations actively cultivate this sensibility and benefit from it. State politics and the media are also heavily implicated in the prevalence of cynicism and resignation. However, such resignation is misunderstood when conflated with capitulation; we argue that under the right conditions, it can become the basis of transformative politics.

Anthropologists would do well to look for the effects of corporate power everywhere and in virtually everything we study. For example, the ethnography of Melanesian gift and exchange practices, which has historically been so influential within anthropological theory, has been reinvigorated by its interface with the study of mining companies in Papua New Guinea (e.g., Biersack 2006; Crook 2004; Filer and Macintyre 2006; Halvaksz 2008; Jacka 2001; Kirsch 2006, 2007, 2008; Weiner and Rumsey 2004). The capitalist economy may not have touched all locations in the world to the same extent (Coronil 2000; Ortner 1984:142–144), but the "savage slot" (Trouillot 1991) is a figment of the pre-Enlightenment imagination, and the study of transnational corporations is as much an imperative in the rain forests of New Guinea as in the industrial zones of the North. Our case studies of the American tobacco industry and the transnational mining industry in Papua New Guinea represent archetypal examples of polarized disciplinary locations for which it was once as-

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communities (Ortner 1984:141). In this split in Marxist anthropology we discern the emergence of the dominant binaries between local and global and between heterogeneity and homogeneity that shaped much of the globalization literature in the 1990s.

3. Ortner (2005:43) describes the neoliberal view of economic development and the subject, in which producers need to become flexible citizens who can best serve the interests of capital's need for labor and consumers need to become depoliticized subjects who have as their core identity or purpose not a relationship to the state or a duty of political participation but an ability to consume information and products. Individual agency becomes the medium through which power is extended. Even when economic issues are addressed in the mass media, the prevailing neoliberal ethos means that "personal acts of saving and consumption" are usually highlighted "over what happens at the workplace and in the boardroom" (Berlant 1997:8).

4. On the relationship of politics and moralization in Foucault's work, see Rabinow (1996:21, 138) and Shiner (1982).

5. Elsewhere, we describe the power of corporate oxymorons such as "safe cigarettes" and "sustainable mining," which convey a political message intended to ease the mind of an otherwise critical consumer (Benson and Kirsch 2010).

6. As historian of medicine Allan Brandt (2007:399) observes, "The widely documented decline in public trust in institutions, from the presidency to the corporation, offered a corrosive climate for accusations and exposé. Increasingly, accusations that the tobacco companies had lied were greeted with cynical anticipation: well, of course they lied."

sumed that entirely different methodologies and research problems were required. The focus on corporations reveals that the two locations may have more in common than previously assumed.

The anthropology of capitalism that we present here does not attempt to recapitulate or retheorize the distinction between formalist and substantivist positions that has long preoccupied economic anthropologists and other students of political economy (Cook 1982; Polanyi 1968). Nor does it necessarily focus on work and workplace dynamics (Burawoy 1979) or the cultural construction of economic processes and mechanisms of exchange (Gudeman 1986). Although these lines of inquiry remain relevant, we call for empirical studies of "actually existing capitalism" that focus on the specific actors, institutions, and situations in which capitalism is constituted (Bahro 1978).[7] In other words, we are calling for a study of how corporations operate, how they engage with states and publics, and how human health and environmental problems are negotiated.

While this starting point might seem obvious and even commonsensical, corporations generally fall outside the purview of anthropological research. For example, a recent collection of essays on globalization makes only limited reference to corporations rather than treating them as important ethnographic subjects (Inda and Rosaldo 2008). Corporations are mentioned only a few times in some of the leading texts in economic anthropology (Gudeman 1986; Wilk 2007). The subfield of political anthropology has dramatically changed in recent years to reflect empirical trends observed around the world; what used to be a field focused on the study of political structures, ritual processes, and customary law now complements those foci with attention to international legal regimes and human rights, governmentality, and the sociopolitical contexts of colonial and postcolonial subject formation. In contrast, economic anthropology has yet to undertake a comparable updating and broadening of its traditional focus on gifts, commodities, and exchange with a concern for one of the most consequential forms of power in our time, the corporation. We move in this direction by asking, How do corporations contribute to the shaping of widespread structures of feeling? What are the specific strategies that corporations use to engage their critics?

We begin with a brief review of the dominant approaches to capitalism in contemporary anthropology. Next, we discuss exemplary ethnographic work on corporations. We then introduce several concepts that we think are helpful for the study of capitalism. The first is "harm industry." By this, we refer to capitalist enterprises that are predicated on practices that are destructive or harmful to people and the environment: harm is part and parcel of their normal functioning.

The second concept is the politics of resignation. Following Slavoj Žižek (1989) and other scholars (e.g., Sloterdijk 1983), we refer to a structure of feeling prevalent in late modernity that is characterized by a tendency toward cynicism in political life. In Raymond Williams's (1977:132–133) influential formulation, structures of feeling are largely determined by the political economy. He argues that there is often a disjunction between dominant affective states and the ordinary affects of everyday life (Stewart 2007). Hence, he writes about "formal assent with private dissent" (Williams 1977:132), which informs our discussion of resigned politics. The politics of resignation is a powerful enabler of contemporary capitalism because it legitimizes corporate power as either inevitable or largely immovable. This attitude is exemplified in the popular American vernacularism "whatever," which conveys a sense that one has no real political choices.

Finally, we present two case studies, drawn from ethnographic fieldwork on the tobacco and mining industries, that illustrate these concepts. Although these industries are remarkable in their capacities for causing harm to human life and the environment, we do not view them as outliers or exceptions: they reveal fundamental dynamics of corporate power.[8] In each case, we show how these harm industries profit from human suffering and environmental damage—they cannot exist without them—despite making widely publicized claims about the social benefits of their activities, their commitment to abide by legal regulations, their willingness to collaborate with governments and NGOs, and their responsibility as corporate citizens. In the case of tobacco production, we examine not only the health impact of smoking but also the paradoxical convergence of tobacco industry interests and public-health regulation. For the mining industry, we describe how mining companies frequently discount or deny the true impacts of their operations until it is too late to save the environment. These case studies also provide a detailed illustration of our third concept, which is a processual model of corporate response to critique organized into three phases that structure public debate and perceptions of harm.

The unquestioned triumph of capitalism cannot be effectively explained by claims about the "waning of affect, a decline in belief, or alienation," to borrow Brian Massumi's words (2002:43).[9] Similarly, we suggest that the politics of resignation is partially based on the widespread recognition that there are fundamental problems with corporate behavior, as evident in the pervasive nature of cynical discourse. Recent

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7. Rudolf Bahro (1978) and Michael Burawoy and János Lukács (1992) first called for the study of "actually existing socialism," in contrast to the Marxist tradition of comparing socialist ideology to "actually existing capitalism."

8. See Singer and Baer's (2009) edited volume on "killer commodities" and the "corporate production of harm," which was published after this essay was completed.

9. Massumi's (1992, 2002) writings are inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze and are, therefore, in many ways at odds with the critique of ideology put forth by Žižek. Whereas Žižek conceptualizes political subjectivity in terms of contradictions that are perpetually rearticulated by symbolic mediation, Deleuze, much like Foucault, understands political subjectivity in terms of discipline and other institutional forces (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1983, esp. 26–27; Žižek 2003, 2006).

events on Wall Street have exacerbated and highlighted such concerns. The politics of resignation is testimony to the shortcomings of a mode of discipline and control that seeks to inoculate the body politic against critique and to promote satisfaction with consumer choice and flexible modes of accumulation.[10] Corporations are effective at suturing contradictions and redirecting critical energies, leaving publics and governments resigned to the harm corporations produce. The politics of resignation is, in part, a symptom of the process through which corporate power normalizes and naturalizes risk and harm as inevitable conditions of modernity rather than as relationships between corporations, bodies, and environments that can potentially be reorganized and changed (see Kirsch 2008).[11]

We conclude by calling for an anthropology of capitalism "without guarantees" that offers new possibilities for holding corporations accountable for harm. We believe that the empirical specification of how corporations operate, including how they foster resignation, has important implications for counteracting a politics in which the status quo seems inevitable. As one of us has written elsewhere, what is at stake here "is not only getting it right anthropologically or even fashioning an academy that is continually challenged by rather than isolated from the world but ultimately a politics that acknowledges a wider range of analytic possibilities" (Kirsch 2001:195).

The Anthropology of Capitalism

Times have changed since Sherry Ortner (1984) lamented, in her memorable article on theory in anthropology since the sixties, about the dominance of a "capitalism-centered view of the world." She called such a view "questionable . . . especially for anthropology" and, at least at the time, disputed the claim that "virtually everything we study has already been touched . . . by the capitalist world system, and that therefore much of what we see in our fieldwork and describe in our monographs must be understood as having been shaped in response to that system" (Ortner 1984:142–143). Ortner was understandably concerned about the portrayal of social change and history as arriving from the outside, implying a split between tradition and modernity, the local and the global

(see also Wolf 1982). She also argued that ethnography tended to portray the effects of capitalism as overly homogenizing. In contrast to the economic focus of world-systems theory and cultural materialism, Ortner (1984:142) called for increased attention to "relations of power, domination, manipulation, [and] control." Her call to study power in its various forms was widely adopted by anthropologists, culminating in the contemporary focus on governmentality. Given the accelerated pace of globalization and intensification of corporate power since the publication of Ortner's essay, we build on her insights in arguing that anthropologists need to specify how capital responds to critique, resistance, and opposition.

In this section, we review some of the most popular and influential approaches to the study of capitalism and identify a key tension between cultural approaches to capitalism and the more materialist literature on structural violence. A focus on corporations and their strategic practices forces us to take both of these dimensions of capitalism into consideration. Given that scholars following Marx focus primarily on class, labor, and production, Arjun Appadurai's (1986, 1996) work fills an important gap by studying processes of consumption and their relation to identity. His discussion of globalization builds on his earlier work on commodity flows by showing how ideas and collective identities circulate in ways comparable to the movement of commodities. His focus on the significance of consumption and consumer agency assumes greater importance today, given that strategies of resistance to capitalism increasingly take the form of ethical consumption, such as eating local foods, building green buildings, and social-choice investing. However, the celebration of agency implicit in the broader literature on consumption neglects the power of corporations in shaping the imagination of the consumer and promoting particular forms of self-fashioning and political identification.[12]

Another trend in the anthropology of capitalism examines regional differences in the organization and practices of corporations. This literature on vernacular capitalism follows the Polanyian tradition of understanding economic practices as culturally and socially embedded. For example, anthropologists have studied the cultural and economic particularities of an Italian family firm (Yanagisako 2002), the beverage industry in Trinidad (Miller 1997), a baby food factory in postsocialist Poland (Dunn 2004), advertising in India (Mazzarella 2003), and knitwear factories in India (Chari 2004). Other scholars have begun to conduct ethnography on financial institutions and practices, bringing into relief the social, cultural, and moral worlds of financiers and stockbrokers, in contrast to the supposedly value-neutral operation of markets (Fisher

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10. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005) describe how corporations have reorganized management practices since the 1960s by using the language of counterculture to promote new work practices and more subtle means of workplace control. Although the authors focus on traditional Marxist concerns about exploitation rather than problems relating to human health and the environment, they provide another example of how corporations mitigate critiques of everyday alienation through tactics of appropriation.

11. Another important feature of harm industries is how the continual development of new technologies creates new risks (Adam 1998; Beck 1992). Consequently, companies from a wide array of industries face the predicament of always being on the verge of a public critique that is potentially unmanageable.

12. A classic case of how corporations shape consumer awareness comes from the pharmaceutical industry. In Joseph Dumit's (2002) analysis of the marketing of "drugs for life," medication is conceived not as a cure but rather as a form of lifelong maintenance. This is part of a broader shift in capitalism from singular commodity transactions toward the establishment of lifelong relationships with brands or services (e.g., free cell phones are provided in return for long-term service contracts).

and Downey 2006; Hart 2001; Ho 2005; LiPuma and Lee 2004; Maurer 2005; Miyazaki 2003; Zaloom 2003).

In these studies, the abstraction of global capitalism is usefully reconceived in terms of "global capitalisms" that are situated in specific settings (Ho 2005). This literature addresses local and regional variation in order to register a theoretical and political critique of the formalist assumptions of neoclassical economics. However, a substantivist focus on embedded economies can deflect attention from the fact that transnational corporations straddle multiple local worlds. These corporations strategically exploit cultural differences to gain political and economic advantage, actively constructing or objectifying differences rather than simply adapting to them (Ong 1987). One example is how the McDonald's Corporation has successfully developed markets in East Asia by conducting research on consumer behavior, demography, and family structures and the cultural meanings of food and eating (Watson 2006). Findings from these studies were used to encode its products with culturally salient values and to create restaurants catering especially to youths and the elderly. McDonald's also trained consumers in the ways of fast food (e.g., cleaning one's own table, moving quickly through lines, and not lingering after eating a meal), mechanisms of self-regulation required to make the business efficient and profitable.

Much of the anthropology of capitalism focuses on neoliberalism. Policies of structural adjustment promoted by the World Bank that powerfully shaped markets and financial transactions were accompanied by transformations in subjective experience and the nature of citizenship. One form taken by the dialectic between structural transformation and social psychology was the casino version of capitalism that Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (2000) call "millennial capitalism."[13] Speculation was rampant, and markets were governed by complex financial mechanisms inexplicable even to traders. Getting rich quick through the lottery became a dominant metaphor of the time. As other anthropologists have noted, neoliberalism is not just an economic process (Hale 2005). It is also a structure of feeling in which perpetual optimism converts inequality and contradictions into a promised future that is said to be already happening. The Comaroffs describe how the culture of neoliberalism, especially the aura of expectation, creates a sociopolitical context that is amenable to the machinations and depredations of capital: class-based solidarities are fragmented by individual consumerism, logics of personal accountability, and the promotion of commodified ethnic and minority identities (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 2004). The speculations of millennial capitalism were

shrouded in a glittery sheen and accompanied by cultural forms that distracted from growing inequalities as well as from industrial forms of environmental risk (Beck 1992). However, the crash of subprime mortgages, the debt crisis on Wall Street, and the emerging consensus on the threat of global climate change have left us in a new moment of capitalism that may still be millennial but in a very different way.

One arena of anthropological research that has focused on the negative and detrimental aspects of industry is the literature from medical anthropology on structural violence, which refers to social arrangements that systematically bring subordinated and disadvantaged groups into harm's way, placing them at risk for various forms of suffering (Farmer 2004:307–308). The concept of structural violence is closely linked to other key words, including "social suffering" (Bourdieu 2000; Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997; Singer 2006), "everyday violence" (Scheper-Hughes 1992), and the "social course" of suffering (Benson 2008*b*; Kleinman et al. 1995). The literature on structural violence emphasizes the institutional and structural dimensions of suffering, including the role of markets, governments, and institutions. In Amartya Sen's (2001) work on famine, suffering is shown to be the result of political processes that maintain the uneven distribution of resources. A concerted goal of anthropologists has been to "resocialize" violence, suffering, and structural inequalities by identifying their underlying sociopolitical and economic causes (Farmer 2004; see also Benson 2008*a*; Benson, Fischer, and Thomas 2008; Kirsch 2001).

The literature on structural violence is specifically conceived as a move away from studying the cultural dimensions of economic processes in favor of an emphasis on risk, inequality, and harm.[14] However, the structural violence perspective tends to objectify harm without taking into account the cultural processes, such as structures of feeling, that influence responses to industrial harm. Neither the cultural approach to capitalism nor the structural violence paradigm pay sufficient attention to the corporation, but we see value in borrowing from both approaches. From the structural violence perspective, we follow the return to issues of inequality and harm that are often left out of the cultural perspective. From the cultural perspective, we heed a concern with the dynamic nature of power, with relationships between corporations, states, and people, and with how corporate ideologies shape consumer behavior and manage critique.

A combined approach that links sensitivity to cultural dynamics and attention to structural processes leads to a conception of the anthropology of capitalism as an empirical project of studying how corporations work and the harm they cause, including the ways in which corporations shape the

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13. The mining industry in Papua New Guinea has been similarly compared to pyramid investment schemes called *moni rain*, or money rain, which suggest that money will fall from the sky like rain (*Post Courier* 2002). Papua New Guineans treat resource rents from mining companies as an effortless, almost magical way to earn money. However, this holds true only as long as one fails to account for the externalized costs of mining (see Kirsch 2006:210).

14. Farmer (2004:308) admonishes against vulgar materialism and emphasizes the "materiality of the social," referring to the dynamic ways that cultural representations, spatial imaginaries, and patterns of collective experience inform political economies and societal and institutional processes.

politics surrounding harm. Consequently, we recommend a focus on the concrete biological, social, and environmental problems caused by corporate capital and the tactics and strategies that corporations pursue to avoid or manage the resulting liabilities. The anthropology of capitalism should not neglect the bottom line, by which we mean not just profitability but the predication of profits on structural violence and environmental degradation. Forms of bodily, communal, and environmental harm perpetrated by corporations are conveniently left out of public relations campaigns and marketing materials and only through legal action are they made to appear as liabilities or assets on balance sheets (Pietz 1999).[15]

Corporate Ethnography

There are a handful of ethnographic studies of corporations that examine the kind of relationship between industry and its critics that we address in this paper. In her ethnography of labor and politics in the Bolivian tin mines, June Nash (1979) describes how union strategies and nationalist politics collide as well as how indigenous peoples use symbolic politics to interpret their subordination and exploitation. Kim Fortun's (2001) work on Union Carbide and the Bhopal disaster shows how corporations work to keep industrial disasters at arm's length even after they have occurred. James Ferguson (1999) describes how low wages for mineworkers in the Zambian copper belt and limited revenue for the state keep the promises of modernity at bay. Adriana Petryna's (2005, 2007) work shows how private medical-research corporations search internationally for sites with less restrictive monitoring regimes, expediting clinical trials for medicines designed for wealthy consumers at home. Kaushik Sunder Rajan's (2006) ethnography of the biotechnology industry focuses on the textual aspects of corporate public relations, such as the "hyping" of new research and development. Finally, Robert Foster's (2008) recent discussion of consumer and shareholder activism and the Coca-Cola Company probably comes closest to the kinds of concerns we examine in this paper, through his consideration of the ways in which political rights are increasingly constrained by participation in a "consumer democracy."

The study of harm industries is inherently multisited (Marcus 1998). It involves ethnographic research inside and around corporations, from the boardrooms where important decisions are made to the courtrooms, shareholder actions, and public protests where corporations face resistance and the farms, factories, and markets where production and consumption take place. Anthropologists might consider conducting fieldwork in corporate offices to be "studying up" in

the conventional sense (Nader 1969). Such strategies entail risks of cooptation, because the tendency of ethnographers to empathize and identify with their subjects may limit their findings or critical stance. However, corporate ethnography has the potential to provide insight into the assumptions, expectations, and motivations that are socialized in people who work in corporations. Such analysis may reveal how corporate strategies are mapped out and implemented, including dissent, disagreement, and complication among corporate actors. Anthropological studies of corporations may also suggest tactics and strategies to NGOs and activists for promoting corporate reform.

There are alternative modes of studying up that do not involve ethnographic placement within the corporation, such as analysis of public relations campaigns, ethnography of corporate interactions with workers and labor unions, and documentation of discrepancies between official policy statements and actual practices.[16] Anthropologists are well positioned to analyze the paradoxes that underpin claims and practices of corporate social responsibility (Smith 2009:360–408; Welker 2009). By connecting in-depth ethnographic studies of communities to larger issues of social and public policy, anthropologists can provide a critical perspective on how corporate claims about social responsibility are legitimized at multiple levels, often with the support of governments, despite their contestation by various actors, NGOs, and social movements. For example, a study of Philip Morris and its strategies to keep tobacco on the market requires ethnographic examination of the workers who produce tobacco and the pressures they face as a result of the shifting social meanings of smoking, health-driven regulatory mandates, and international market changes (Benson 2008*b*). The study of indigenous political movements that address the environmental effects of mining projects must also take into account the response of the mining industry to the unexpected success of these new forms of resistance (Kirsch 2007, 2008).

Textual analysis of corporations, including critical readings of advertisements and marketing campaigns in the vein of Timothy Burke (1996), Kim Fortun (2001), and William Mazzarella (2003), is another potential strategy for studying harm industries. Anthropologists can study how corporations collaborate to establish a concerted strategic front and organize around shared opposition to critiques or work to structure regulation in ways that are most favorable to capital. This can include analysis of corporate public relations materials as well as internal corporate and industry documents. In both the mining industry and the tobacco industry, such documents reveal inconsistencies between knowledge about harms that

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15. As William Pietz notes, civil law restructures social relations in the form of monetary debt: "In this age of global capitalism, the sacred value of human life is recognized in what some might dismiss as the esoteric technicalities of tort law"; but in the case of harms caused by industry, "this may be the only salvation in a thoroughly civilized society" (Pietz 1999:79).

16. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for calling our attention to Michael Schudson's (1986) work on advertising, which describes how consumers buttress themselves against claims by marketers that they recognize are untrue and how advertisers are aware of this. The classic example comes from the famous Isuzu commercials from the late 1980s, in which a fictional character makes outlandish claims, acknowledging the shared fiction by which advertising operates.

corporations possess and carefully safeguard and the strategic ways that corporations frame or assuage risk, danger, and harm in their public relations. Such documents may also reveal how corporations view their critics and provide compelling evidence that corporations understand how NGOs, governments, and publics work and can be manipulated (on such revelations in the tobacco industry archives, see Brandt 2007).

Neoliberal policies of deregulation commonly transfer to corporations the responsibility to monitor their own impacts, raising questions about the ways in which industries package and use science, contour expertise and experimentation, and compromise public debate; this is seen most clearly for the tobacco industry but is also evident in recent critiques of the pharmaceutical industry (Petryna 2005, 2007; Sunder Rajan 2006). Corporate practices are increasingly contested through legal and other means, as examined in Suzana Sawyer's (2004) study of indigenous resistance to oil companies in Ecuador, Melissa Checker's (2005) account of urban pollution and an environmental-justice movement in the American South, Sarah Lochlann Jain's (2004) analysis of civil rights litigation against the tobacco industry for its practices of racialized niche marketing, and Stuart Kirsch's (2006) ethnographic research and advocacy on indigenous campaigns against the destructive environmental impacts of mining. Court cases and legal claims not only are means to gain justice or recompense but also reveal machinations of capital that otherwise remain cloaked or concealed.

Harm Industry

When we think of industrial forms of harm, many things come to mind, including dark clouds of smoke from sulfurous coal–burning power plants in Beijing; piles of microcomputer innards in Nigeria, where street kids are melting off the valuable copper and gold; seeping oil in Prince William Sound 20 years after the *Exxon Valdez* spill; melting ice caps that threaten indigenous hunting practices and animal populations; and the potentially carcinogenic properties of bisphenol A plastics, which are everywhere, from baby bottles to the water bottles that are ubiquitous in urban life. The sheer excess of problems like these seems overwhelming and incapacitating. Their complexity also makes them appear as though they are intractable conditions that people must resign themselves to living with.

Powerful events have spurred public outrage against industry, for example, the release of the 1964 Surgeon General's report on smoking and cancer, which substantially altered popular perceptions and meanings of smoking, or the publication of Rachel Carson's (1962) watershed *Silent Spring*, which catalyzed a broad-scale critique of the industrialized food system (see McWilliams 2008). These tipping points have the potential to galvanize social activism, what Ulrich Beck (1992:78) calls the "enabling power of catastrophes." However, these events are not always or fully threatening to cor-

porations, which push back by proliferating doubt and responding in ways that promote a sense of political resignation. When successful, these corporate responses fragment social movements and forms of critique that coalesce around tipping points, leading to policy changes focused on reform rather than wholesale restructuring of society and economy.

In this section, we identify three phases of corporate response to social and government critique. However, we want to emphasize that the model we propose is dynamic, that corporations move forward and back through the different phases of response, and that industries may go through these cycles more than once. Phase 1 corporate response involves a lack of engagement with externalities, which may expand to overt denial that the critique is valid or that a legitimate problem exists. Only recently, the petroleum industry was still denying the link between fossil fuel consumption, carbon dioxide accumulation, and global warming. As recently as the 1990s, the tobacco industry continued to deny that there is a direct causal linkage between cigarette smoking and disease. As we have suggested above, denial frequently involves the establishment of industry-supported "counterscience" that supports the industry position (see Beck 1992:32). The core of phase 1 corporate response is the refusal to engage publicly with critics.

The objective of phase 1 corporate response is to limit liability for externalities. For example, if the fines for operating in a manner that damages the environment or risks worker safety are not sufficiently onerous, corporations may internalize those fines as a cost of doing business rather than change their practices. The full cost of addressing corporate harm has the potential not only to erode profitability but also to raise questions about legitimacy that may threaten a corporation's ability to continue operating. Phase 1 is consequently the status quo for most corporations: the denial that serious problems exist as a means of avoiding the costs of externalities and the threat of decreased public legitimacy.

A key strategy of phase 1 corporate response to critics is the proliferation of doubt. This approach was pioneered by the tobacco industry, which set up its own research council to support its claim that the linkage between smoking and disease was not scientifically proven (Brandt 2007; Proctor 1996). The manufacture of uncertainty has become standard practice across a wide range of industries (Davis 2002; Michaels 2008). The promotion of doubt by corporations is a central influence in risk perception, and the resulting ambiguity is directly related to the structure of feeling that we call resignation. Ethnographers can track the ways that industry strategies of doubt and uncertainty are taken up in popular consciousness or challenged by social movements and consumer activists.

Phase 2 corporate response to critique involves the acknowledgment that a problem exists, that something is defective or harmful, and that the basis of critique has some scientific or ethical validity. However, phase 2 responses are primarily limited to symbolic gestures of recompense or ame-

lioration. Even while they continued to deny that health problems were caused by smoking, in the 1950s tobacco companies began introducing filtration technologies and using misleading product descriptors like "light" and "low tar" to allay consumer anxieties and pursue continued legitimacy (Fairchild and Colgrove 2004). The mining industry is only one of many industries that have paid compensation to legal plaintiffs without stopping or radically changing the industrial processes responsible for causing harm (Kirsch 1997). The core of phase 2 corporate responses to critique is the desire to avoid paying the full costs of solving the problems that corporations have caused.

Whereas in phase 2 the threats posed to the corporation are limited, a phase 3 corporate response entails crisis management. It is defined by the risk that the problems facing a particular corporation or industry will become financially and socially too great to manage. The threat of catastrophic loss, bankruptcy, industry collapse, or complete loss of legitimacy motivates corporations to shift to a phase 3 response. These problems force the corporation to actively engage with its critics and to participate in the shaping of politics that lead to the regulation and management of industry-related problems. For example, after it was established that asbestos caused lung cancer and other respiratory ailments, legal action against the industry led to bankruptcy proceedings. Paint manufacturers faced similarly catastrophic costs due to the effects of lead on children's nervous systems. However, the threat of financial insolvency posed by the costs of cleanup and compensation resulted in the negotiation of novel agreements that allowed the corporations to remain operating so that they could make partial restitution for the harms they had caused. Other costs from asbestos and lead were socialized by their transfer to the government or the individuals affected, including consumers made responsible for cleaning up properties affected by these toxic materials (Brodeur 1985; Warren 2001).

Phase 3 corporate response to critique takes many forms. It can involve the appropriation of the discourse and strategies of oppositional movements, such as the mining industry's use of the concept of sustainable development. It can include the development of certification programs that enshroud production and consumption processes with a stamp of public approval. We see this especially in strategic partnerships between industries and government regulatory authorities, as evidenced in the tobacco industry, the timber industry, and more recently the campaign against "blood diamonds" in the mining industry. Corporations may also assimilate their critics within corporate structures by forming partnerships or recruiting activists to join boards of directors or work as public relations advisors, reducing their ability and motivation to bring about radical restructuring and change. Phase 3 corporate response often involves the strategic promotion of an ideology of "harmony," including such values as compromise and responsibility, with the aim of portraying critics as inefficient troublemakers and justifying limited rather than

wholesale reforms (Nader 1997). Another form taken by phase 3 corporate response is the emergence of what has been called "audit culture" (Strathern 2002; see also Power 1997), the development of regimes of monitoring and accountability that fail to produce real change.

The core of phase 3 corporate response is strategic management of critical engagement and the establishment of a stopping point, a limit at which reform is presented as sensible and reasonable.[17] These limits are usually defined by the economic interests of industry and are safely governed by the rituals of audit culture, the regulations of certification programs, the values of harmonious compromise, and the appearance of benevolence when a corporation acknowledges some degree of risk or harm. Corporations may also envision the possibility for competitive gain and the achievement of a new kind of legitimacy through their participation in regulatory processes. We provide below evidence for one such case regarding the tobacco industry; similarly, support of the Kimberly process regarding restrictions on the trade of so-called blood diamonds from conflict zones was also of strategic value to De Beers, which controls the bulk of the world's diamond trade and benefits from restrictions on the supply of diamonds that keep prices high.

In sum, phase 1 is generally the most profitable position for corporations to occupy because it avoids financial liability for costly externalities. Corporations resist the move to phase 2 because of costs added by negotiation; however, in some circumstances, corporations may find it strategically advantageous to preemptively move to phase 2 in order to maintain control over their relationship to their critics. This process is promoted by industry consultants and the public relations industry; manuals about corporate public relations instruct companies to meet and educate their potential critics before there is conflict or even public recognition of a problem (e.g., Deegan 2001; Hance, Chess, and Sandman 1990). This enables corporations to valorize their status as responsible corporate citizens without engaging in interactions that might lead them to change production processes or reduce their economic profitability. Phase 3 corporate response to critique is generally a last resort for corporations for which the specter of collapse, bankruptcy, or illegitimacy threatens continued operation.[18]

Industries pass through these phases at different rates, competing corporations within a given industry may respond differently to critique and thus may be located at different phases, and all three phases coexist across capitalism at the same

17. For more on the stopping points of power, see Fischer and Benson (2006:18–19, 80–82).

18. The unfolding of the fiscal crisis of late 2008 and early 2009 shows how rapidly industries can move between phases of response: the financial industry has moved from phase 1 denial to phase 2 minimalist acceptance of regulations about transparency and accountability to phase 3 acknowledgement of the threat of catastrophic collapse and acceptance of government intervention and new forms of regulation all within a single fiscal cycle.

moment. For example, in mid-2008, the bisphenol plastics industry was located in phase 1 denial (Layton 2008; see Bisphenol A Organization 2008). However, we predict that in the near future the plastics industry will move to phase 2 by engaging with its critics. Indeed, many companies that once used plastics as components of their products have already recognized the inevitability of a phase 3 crisis, leading them to shift to nonplastic alternatives, for example, coffee shops that have switched to cups made from recyclable corn starch.

Our two case studies show how production strategies in particular industries are predicated on human suffering and environmental degradation. These are harm industries. Tobacco companies manufacture and market a consumer product, cigarettes, responsible for more deaths by far than any other. The mining industry moves a greater volume of earth than any other human activity, often discharging its waste products into rivers and oceans and sometimes producing acid mine drainage that will persist almost in perpetuity. However, we also suggest that the circumscription of particular industries is ultimately artificial; most, if not all, corporations are to some extent implicated in harm. In Deleuzian terminology, harm can be understood as both "actual," effects that can be specified and directly attributed to a particular source, and "virtual," in the sense that harm is a relationship that cuts across industries and is central to capitalist modes of production (Deleuze 1990, 1995; Massumi 1992:36–37; see also Beck 1992; Massumi 2002). These virtual forms of harm are no less real or concrete, even though causal relationships are less directly specifiable. In the case of the mining industry, the metals it produces are used throughout other industries that may not appear to be harmful themselves. Tobacco products are a key item for convenience stores and gas stations, while financial sponsorship by the tobacco industry has long benefited various institutions and organizations, including professional sports organizations and major research universities.

The study of harm industries and the three phases of corporate response to critique that we have just outlined should not be limited, therefore, to only the most extreme examples. Rather, the concept of harm industry pushes us to look for similar harm effects, corporate responses, and profit-seeking strategies across the capitalist system. We also suggest that a harm industry should be defined not just in terms of the negative externalities it yields but also in terms of its relationships to critique and the politics of resignation.

The Politics of Resignation

Research and writing on capitalism often entail an assessment of its cultural corollaries, the structures of feeling, hegemonies, and ideologies that accompany and sustain its functioning (Williams 1977). The basic assumption is that there is a superstructure or mediating process that inhibits the formation of critique and continuously sutures, or rearticulates, structural contradictions, social conflict, and alienated subjectiv-

ities (Hall 1986). What Fredric Jameson (1984) and David Harvey (1992) refer to as postmodernism is said to be a condition of social fragmentation that destabilizes the metanarratives of modernity, undercuts class solidarities, and allows for increasingly flexible modes of capitalist accumulation in a climate of limited political critique.

Žižek (1989) makes a similar argument in insisting that cynicism is capital's counterpart and the reigning ideology of postmodern times.[19] Žižek goes beyond the traditional Marxist definition of ideology as false consciousness, the antimony between social reality and its distorted representation. His concept of "cynical distance" argues that subjects consciously profess disbelief about the legitimacy of the status quo, distrusting the illusory images and ideas that are said to explain realities while nonetheless continuing to act as though the illusions were real (Johnston 2004; Žižek 1989:33).[20] Cynical distance is not about recognizing hidden truths or seeing through the illusions that prop up capitalism. However, it is based on misrecognition because the subject mistakes his or her own critical sensibilities (e.g., irony) for a standpoint that exists outside of capitalism. Consequently, such acts of critical awareness actually help to maintain the fundamental structures of capitalism because they limit critique to the personal space of political resignation. The subject who knows better remains the subject who continues to behave according to a status quo.

A helpful example of cynical distance is Žižek's discussion of canned laughter in television sitcoms. He argues that such laughter relieves "us even of our duty to laugh.. . . [Even] if, tired from a hard day's stupid work, all evening we did nothing but gaze drowsily into the television screen, we can say afterward that objectively, through the medium of the other [i.e., the capitalist system], we had a really good time" (Žižek 1989:35). In a similar way, headlines about corporate malfeasance should call into question fundamental truths about capitalism, but they convey news that is not really surprising. People roll their eyes and ask, What did we expect? This response would seem to derive ironic pleasure from the experience of having the world fulfill one's expectations. Just as canned laughter relieves people of the need to laugh, negative headlines relieve subjects of the burden of political critique. Here the misrecognition is the view that critical awareness is a sufficient response to the circumstances described by the mass media. People take an ironic distance, even shrugging their shoulders and laughing, separating them from a politics that recognizes the serious nature of the indictments

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19. Žižek distinguishes between cynicism and "kynicism," the latter referring to popular forms of irony and sarcasm by which ordinary people reject the official culture or social order. In contrast, cynical distance and resigned politics generally uphold the social order by acknowledging the illusory claims of power but ultimately retaining the status quo (Žižek 1989:28–30).

20. In other words, the "cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but nonetheless still insists upon the mask" (Žižek 1989:29).

in the newspapers and the gravity of the harms caused by corporate capitalism.

We find Žižek's notion of cynicism helpful in understanding how corporate power largely goes unchallenged. Ordinary affects such as cynicism, irony, sarcasm, and resignation about the political state of affairs may be the primary resource available to people under repressive political conditions (Boyer and Yurchak 2008; Fischer and Benson 2005; Yurchak 2003).[21] The American term "whatever" similarly conveys political frustration that has nowhere to go and leaves one with few alternatives. Its popularity provides evidence of the normative status of the politics of resignation in the United States. However, we also suggest that cynicism is not just evidence of compliance and conformity. In this vein, Thomas Dumm (1998) insists that resignation is not always disempowering. He distinguishes between a passive state of being resigned to fate and a form of defiance that registers feelings of discontent. Deliberate acts of resignation are "as far from the terms of consent" as possible (Dumm 1998:74). Even though people seem to accept the way corporations operate, this does not necessarily mean that they have given their consent; political resignation indexes discontent even if such sentiments do not spill over into more active forms of opposition. Resignation indicates that expectations about a positive future have been abrogated and that their repair is beyond the capacity or control of the resigned subject (see Dumm 1998:71). The everyday politics of resignation implies recognition not only that have things gone awry but also that one is practically unable to do anything about it. Resignation can also index acknowledgement that structural limitations impede one's ability to bring about change. What is particularly interesting about a politics of resignation is that it negotiates between, to borrow Scott's (1992) terms, public and hidden transcripts; it expresses a critique that is powerfully constrained. In other words, we present a more optimistic reading of Žižek's work by suggesting that resignation is a mass feeling that provides evidence of widespread discontent with capital rather than acceptance of its monolithic victory.

In the case studies that follow, we highlight how corporations seek to produce resignation and stifle critique. In particular, we show how the different phases of corporate response to critique articulate with the politics of resignation. At the same time, the persistence of resignation reveals discontent with the status quo rather than a conformity that is duped by the rhetoric of corporate social responsibility.

Tobacco

Tobacco is an exemplary case of what we mean by a harm industry. Smoking is the leading preventable cause of disease in the United States and internationally. In the twentieth cen-

tury, there were 100 million tobacco-related deaths, and it is anticipated that as many as 1 billion people will die from tobacco in the current century. The majority of these deaths will be in the developing world, where tobacco companies work hard to limit controls on tobacco sales, surround smoking with images of glamour and modernity, and target youth (Brandt 2007; Proctor 2001; World Health Organization 2008). To date, U.S. antitobacco movements have focused primarily on consumer health issues, but there are also significant social and health problems associated with tobacco agriculture, including pesticide exposure among farmers and farmworkers (Arcury and Quandt 2006; Benson 2008*b*). Benson (2008*a*, 2008*b*) has studied the linkage between the problems that affect tobacco farmers and farmworkers and the industry's reorganization in an era of antismoking fervor.

The tobacco industry is indicative of how corporations and industries effectively engage with criticism or public awareness about harms in order to sustain marketability, limit government intervention, and maintain a modicum of legitimacy. One way to understand tobacco as a harm industry is to analyze the series of shifting justifications or rationales that the industry has presented for why tobacco products ought to remain not only legal but relatively underregulated, compared to other harmful products. The cycle of tobacco company responses to criticism began in earnest in the 1950s, when the social meaning of smoking was suddenly reversed in the wake of new scientific evidence linking smoking to cancer.[22] The 1964 Surgeon General's report codified a broad scientific and medical consensus about smoking and health, leading to new government interventions designed to regulate cigarette sales, such as warning labels. However, through a variety of shrewd responses, the tobacco industry was able to raise doubts about the relationship between smoking and disease, reassuring smokers and sustaining tobacco consumption.

The first phase of corporate response to the new science of smoking was denial. The industry sponsored its own scientific studies and funded NGOs (most infamously the Tobacco Institute) to disseminate favorable reports presented as though they were the product of neutral scientific research. Until the 1990s, the industry publicly denied the harms of smoking and disputed the fact that nicotine is a powerfully addictive drug. The industry has also used marketing campaigns to discourage smokers from being concerned about health issues, most notably in Philip Morris's Marlboro Man campaign, which "promised control and autonomy in a world where these were slipping away" (Brandt 2007:263–264).

This phase 1 response overlapped with phase 2 efforts to

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21. In the socialist context, Alexi Yurchak (2003) argues that the irony indexing the gap between semantic and pragmatic reproduction of socialist forms made the collapse of the Soviet Union possible.

22. Admittedly, tobacco industry responses to consumer anxieties about smoking and health predate the epidemiological discoveries of the 1950s and 1960s. One classic example was the use of physicians in cigarette advertisements in the prewar decades; the endorsement of physicians was a strategic way to market products said to be less "irritating" to consumers who were concerned about the impact of smoking on their health (Gardner and Brandt 2006).

address specific concerns about risk and harm (Benson 2010). During the 1950s and 1960s, the tobacco industry introduced a series of products, such as filtered cigarettes, that were purported to be safer than conventional cigarettes. These new products were marketed as a form of what one company called "health protection." These marketing campaigns implicitly acknowledged that tobacco products were causing harm. Subsequent advertising, which continued into the 1980s, indirectly suggested that "light" or "low-tar" cigarettes were a safer product (Pollay and Dewhirst 2002). However, it was well known within the industry that these new products provided a false sense of security. Tobacco companies chose not to divulge their knowledge that these products delivered as much tar and nicotine as unfiltered cigarettes. Aggressive marketing of these new products perpetuated dependence on tobacco as smokers switched to the new products en masse in the mistaken belief that they were less risky (Fairchild and Colgrove 2004).[23] Remarkably, in the 1970s, despite overwhelming evidence about smoking-related risks, nearly half of all adult Americans were still regular smokers (Brandt 2007:4–5), a testament to the power of the phase 2 response of the tobacco industry.

Another core element of the industry's phase 2 response was a protectionist economic argument. The industry and its political supporters in tobacco-farming states claimed that tobacco ought to remain legal and that tobacco control measures ought to be restrained because rural farming communities and tobacco-manufacturing towns were dependent on tobacco revenues. The use of this justification intensified during the 1980s and 1990s as the industry faced increasing scrutiny from the national antitobacco movement and extensive litigation. Although tobacco has long provided an important source of livelihood in the American South—in the 1960s, there were nearly half a million tobacco farm families spread across more than a dozen states—this justification of the industry was strategically misleading. The appeal on behalf of Southern farmers ignored the mass exodus of farmers from tobacco agriculture in the 1980s and 1990s due to economic hardships associated with the globalization of tobacco production, which undermined the small-scale family farm units promoted as the rationale for protecting the tobacco industry. The romanticized image of the threatened family farm also covered over the realities of race and class differentiation within rural communities and of these communities' relations with migrant farm laborers (Benson 2008b; White 1988). The tobacco industry used support for tobacco farmers as a way to secure its own legitimacy, discounting the fact that government programs could have reduced tobacco use while assisting farmers to transition away from their dependency on tobacco revenues.

23. The market share for light cigarettes increased from 4% in 1970 to 50% in 1990 and, with aggressive advertising campaigns, to 80% in 1998. People "believed, and still do, that these products pose less risk to health than other cigarettes" (Institute of Medicine 2001:26).

Since the 1990s, the threat of litigation against the tobacco industry in the United States has intensified. These lawsuits are indicative of what we have referred to as a tipping point, when the problems faced by an industry become potentially unmanageable, raising questions about its continued existence. The cost of defending themselves against simultaneous class action lawsuits in multiple municipalities in the United States would cripple tobacco companies. At the same time, their chances of success in court have been greatly diminished by the public disclosure in previous lawsuits of internal industry documents that reveal a history of deception about the dangers of smoking. These factors combined to push the industry into phase 3, in which denial is no longer a feasible response to criticism and corporations must actively engage their critics and often find it productive to participate in the shaping of politics related to their products. In the early 1990s, Philip Morris considered quitting the cigarette business because mounting legal pressures threatened the company's food and beverage subsidiaries (e.g., Kraft Foods). Instead, the company decided to engage with public-health communities and has subsequently created a legal shelter by incorporating its tobacco businesses as separate entities (Smith and Malone 2003a, 2003b).

Although tobacco companies continue to recruit smokers internationally in underregulated markets, at home they are shifting strategies by explicitly acknowledging that they are a harm industry. This transition is most evident in Philip Morris's current makeover as a "responsible corporate citizen," as depicted on its Web site, where the company brashly proclaims, "There is no safe cigarette." This corporate Web site is one of the most comprehensive sources of information on smoking-related health issues available. The company's broader media campaign also includes television and print ads that publicize information about smoking risks. These are not only image-enhancement strategies intended to counteract decades of delegitimization that have made the tobacco industry an icon of corporate wrongdoing. They are also part of an overarching strategy of safeguarding the industry from litigation by achieving a partnership with the federal government (Benson 2008b).

Philip Morris historically opposed the possibility of U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulation of tobacco products and used litigation to block the FDA's 1996 attempt to regulate nicotine as a drug. More recently, however, the tobacco company reversed its position by supporting what it calls "meaningful tobacco regulation." It argues that regulation produces more informed consumers because of ingredient disclosures, enables the development of safer cigarettes, and strengthens age limits on cigarette purchases (McDaniel and Malone 2005; Philip Morris USA 2008). Beginning in 2000, several unsuccessful attempts were made to pass FDA legislation in Congress. Philip Morris was actively involved in crafting the language of these bills and managing the public debate. Whereas the Bush administration had always indicated its opposition to the FDA bill, claiming, along with many

tobacco companies, that it would overburden the FDA and would be difficult to implement, the recent power shift at the federal level made its passage possible. The legislation passed overwhelmingly in the Congress in June 2009, a decision trumpeted by public-health groups and Philip Morris. It empowered the FDA to ban the sale of any tobacco product not approved by the agency and to curtail tobacco marketing in important ways. The positive trade-offs for Philip Morris are that the legislation may limit its liability from legal claims and forbids the FDA from banning tobacco sales to adults or requiring that nicotine levels be reduced to zero. The bill's language may also make it difficult for the FDA to substantially reduce nicotine levels at all (Siegel 2004:440). These legislative provisions effectively ensure an adult's "right" to smoke addictive cigarettes (Givel 2007; McDaniel and Malone 2005). The bill will benefit Philip Morris economically because new marketing restrictions will limit competition and thereby guarantee the continued dominance of its Marlboro brand in the domestic market. Hence, other cigarette companies have referred to the bill as the "Marlboro Monopoly Act" (Hsu 2001).

One of the most important public-health critiques of the new FDA regulation concerns harm reduction. Interestingly, the FDA had already been regulating nicotine since the mid-1980s, when nicotine gum and other medicinal therapies were approved as short-term treatments for nicotine dependence. FDA approval of such products for over-the-counter sale in 1996 signaled a shift in the medical meaning of nicotine dependence. The first clinical-care guidelines, developed the same year, classified nicotine dependence and withdrawal as disorders and included the use of medicinal nicotine as recommended treatment. Then, in 2000, a Public Health Service report framed tobacco dependence as a "chronic condition that warrants repeated treatment until long-term or permanent abstinence is achieved," equating nicotine dependence with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and major depression (Fairchild and Colgrove 2004:198–199). A report by the Institute of Medicine (2001) found no scientific basis for reduced health risk in modified tobacco products but endorsed such products as a "feasible" part of a harm-reduction strategy. The report was refuted by the National Cancer Institute, which raised serious questions about the appropriateness of harm reduction, given the industry's history of deception and its continued strategic engagement with the policy environments that surround the production of an inherently harmful product (Fairchild and Colgrove 2004:192).

The clinical and personal use of medicinal-nicotine products as a harm reduction or smoking cessation strategy (Hatsukami, Henningfield, and Kotlyar 2004) has been taken by the tobacco industry as an opportunity to extend safe cigarette myths (Pierce 2002). Whereas medicinal devices deliver controlled levels of nicotine, tobacco companies have introduced a spate of new tobacco products, such as smokeless cigarettes, that claim to reduce harm for consumers who do not want

to or cannot quit. Medicinal nicotine products can potentially benefit large numbers of smokers. But harm reduction remains a controversial concept in public-health and medical communities because "the tobacco industry would like the public health tobacco control movement to adopt a harm reduction strategy so that the industry could use it to promote its alternate nicotine delivery systems that include tobacco" (Pierce 2002:S53). In fact, there have been very few verified or replicated scientific data about the new tobacco products (Shiffman et al. 2002:121–122).

While the FDA bill grants federal regulators new powers to control the tobacco industry's pattern of deceptive marketing, it remains unclear exactly how the agency will regulate harm reduction claims for modified tobacco products. Public-health critics worry that tobacco companies will be able to legitimately market products that make assertions about reduced toxicity, even though such products may not reduce health risks (Givel 2007). As Philip Morris recently commented, the bill will "create a framework for the pursuit of tobacco products that are less harmful than conventional cigarettes" (Montopoli 2009). It is possible that tobacco companies will be able to continue to treat risk as a selling point by promoting improved product design, using anxiety about health risks to enhance the marketability of their products and increase their share of the nicotine dependence market.

Phase 3 response in the tobacco industry illuminates the reliance of contemporary capitalism on a politics of resignation. One of the ways in which the tobacco industry continues to legitimize its operation is by promoting an ideology of individual risk assumption that dovetails with a broader acceptance of consumer choice. The idea that consumers choose to smoke permits an industry that causes extensive harm to continue to operate as long as it is regulated. "In a perfect world, we'd ban all cigarettes," acknowledged a congressperson. "But the hard fact of the matter is that there are a lot of jobs depending on this. And more importantly, there are a lot of people out there who are addicted to this and they've got to have their fix" (Saul 2008:C3). Nonetheless, the only reform that makes sense from a public-health perspective and lives up to the federal government's constitutional mandate to protect the general welfare is prohibition. The cigarette is the first product to be approved for use by the FDA that is deadly when used as intended. What prevents effective resistance to tobacco and the imposition of phased prohibition is that the tobacco industry has transitioned into phase 3 corporate response. In order to preempt a calamitous new wave of litigation, Philip Morris now participates in formulating regulations intended to prevent youths from starting to smoke, although only in the United States. However, FDA regulation does nothing to address the worldwide smoking epidemic, and by reducing the serious threat of litigation against the industry, it may actually help sustain the international market (Givel 2007; Siegel 2004). In effect, Philip Morris is pursuing a strategic trade-off, accepting regulations at home in order to limit liability and ensure the company's

long-term profitability and survival. These paradoxes are not news to the public-health community. The bill is largely a case of pragmatic resignation: antitobacco groups were willing to broker the best deal possible, given the tacit acceptance of tobacco's legality, an outcome of decades of industry influence in the culture. The *Wall Street Journal* (2009) went so far as to describe the bill as pure cynicism: "It lets the politicians claim to be punishing Big Tobacco while further cementing their financial partnership."

The government's own dependency on tobacco revenues is also a powerful factor constraining the political impetus to prohibit tobacco products. The Master Settlement Agreement of 1998 settled a large number of class action lawsuits brought by individual states against the industry to recoup public medical expenditures. It was the largest civil settlement in U.S. history, with the industry agreeing to pay more than $200 billion to cover medical costs and public-health initiatives over a 25-year period in return for protection from future litigation brought by public entities, although it did not affect the rights of private citizens to pursue their own legal claims. The settlement was controversial: much of the public-health community was opposed to it because it included only modest restrictions on cigarette marketing and would not be sufficient to cover the full cost to the public of smoking-related disease. The money from the settlement has rarely been used by states as intended (Brandt 2007:420–434). Many states even sold bonds against future funds from the settlement, creating an immediate cash flow that discounted the overall value of the tobacco payments and was easily diverted to unrelated projects. Consequently, states have a vested interest in protecting the tobacco industry. Some states have even sought to set caps on pending tort claims, since unrestricted payments to individuals would also threaten public spending. In what Alan M. Brandt calls a "remarkable turnabout," some state governments are now "*defending* the industry and its economic well-being." Far from toppling tobacco, the settlement has proven to be "one of the industry's most surprising victories in its long history of combat with the public health forces" (Brandt 2007:435–436).

FDA regulation is a convenient way to reconcile the fact that tobacco ought to be banned with recognition of widespread nicotine dependence and the need to balance state budgets with proceeds from litigation against the tobacco industry. We can understand why large segments of the public-health community support FDA regulation, even though Philip Morris does, too. Yet FDA regulation of tobacco products also institutionalizes an ideology that smoking is a choice made by an "informed adult," an ideology that has long benefited the tobacco industry and spans all three phases of corporate response. Cynicism and resignation about smoking are evident among addicted smokers, who readily acknowledge the harms of their habit but talk constantly about a desire to quit. However, this substrate of resigned attitudes never emerges as a broad-scale political force that would prevent the FDA from legitimizing an inherently harmful product and

would demand immediate and effective intervention to assist smokers in quitting. The everyday politics of resignation that is so much a part of the smoking habit has not become the basis for an alternative politics that would address the cause of the problem. So smokers and the public are left with acceptance of tobacco's legality, which guides public policy and reproduces an obviously problematic status quo. Tobacco companies are not innocent in this state of affairs; rather, they continue to profit from it by effectively shaping politics and public attitudes even as the industry has become increasingly delegitimized.

Mining

Mining is another obvious example of a harm industry, both in its destructive transformation of the environment and in the toxic exposure of workers and other people living nearby to health threats from the minerals themselves, such as lead, asbestos, and uranium, or the chemicals used to process minerals, including cyanide and mercury. A long-term industry consultant noted that "it is hard to identify any industry sector . . . that features such low levels of trust and such a history of division, strife, and anger as the extractive industries" and that "some polls showed the [mining] industry as being held in lower public esteem than the tobacco industry" (Danielson 2006:26, 52). Much as the continued operation of the tobacco industry has been justified through a series of shifting rationales and claims to legitimacy, the mining industry is defended on both economic grounds, in terms of the creation of wealth and employment, and technological grounds, in terms of the widespread use of and need for metals. Mining projects are also promoted as a mode of development that contributes to poverty alleviation, even though mining companies often operate as economic enclaves that return very little to state or local communities (Ferguson 2006). The World Bank continues to support new mining projects despite the negative assessment given by its own review of extractive industries (Moody 2007), in part because it regards mining as a vehicle for promoting foreign direct investment, a key component of neoliberal economic policy (Danielson 2006: 16). The most recent justification of the mining industry is its claim to contribute to sustainable development, which has been redefined in terms of the potential for continued economic benefit rather than in terms of limiting the impacts of development on the environment (Kirsch 2010*b*).

In the past two decades, the mining industry has faced increased resistance from people living in the catchment areas of existing mines and proposed projects. These groups frequently align themselves with broader networks of NGOs and other people affected by mining (Kirsch 2007). The reactions of the mining industry and particular corporations to these developments follow the three phases of corporate response we have identified here. For the past two decades, Kirsch has studied the problems downstream from the Ok Tedi copper and gold mine in Papua New Guinea and collaborated with

groups challenging the mine's environmental impacts (Kirsch 2002). Although the original environmental-impact assessment for the Ok Tedi mine called for a tailings dam, the structure was never built because of a landslide at the construction site. Consequently, since the mid-1980s the mine has discharged more than 1 billion metric tons of waste rock and tailings, the finely ground material that remains after the valuable ore has been extracted, into the Ok Tedi and Fly rivers, causing massive environmental degradation downstream.

Despite early warnings about the disastrous environmental consequences of riverine tailings disposal (Hyndman 1988; Kirsch 1989; Townsend 1988), from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s Ok Tedi Mining continued to deny that the project would have significant impacts, so as to minimize their expenditure on environmental controls. For example, a poster distributed by the company's Department of Environment and Public Relations in 1991 depicted a blue sky over mountains and green grass, a red flower, and an orange butterfly. In Melanesian Tok Pisin, the poster reads: "Environment: the company protects the river, forest, and wildlife. You will not be harmed by the pollution from the gold and copper that is released into the river."[24] At the time, the mining company argued that "both its own and independent environmental studies have shown there will be little real impact on a river system which already carries vast amounts of sediment" (*Mining Journal* 1989). The mining company established a state-of-the-art scientific laboratory in the mountain township of Tabubil and monitored the project's impacts on the river downstream; it was later alleged that the resulting studies were altered by mining company personnel before their publication, leading several of the scientists employed by the project to resign their positions. These acts of corporate denial that the mine was causing environmental problems can be understood as a response to the concerns of the people living downstream along the Ok Tedi and Fly rivers, who were becoming increasingly vocal about deforestation, the loss of garden land due to the deposition of tailings along the river banks, and reduced fish catches (Kirsch 1995). They are an example of phase 1 corporate response, in which the key strategy is to deny the existence of a problem and consequently to avoid the full costs of externalities, in this case the mining project's impacts on the environment and the subsistence practices of the people living downstream.

In 1994, the Australian legal firm Slater & Gordon filed suit on behalf of 30,000 people affected by the Ok Tedi mine against Broken Hill Proprietary (BHP), the Australian mining company that was the majority shareholder and managing partner of the Ok Tedi mine. During the ensuing two years of litigation, BHP attempted to break up the coalition of plaintiffs by using a variety of bullying tactics, including legal

24. The original text in Tok Pisin reads "Environment: Kampani lukautim wara, bus, na abus. Nogen kisim bagarap taim pipia bilong gold na kopa go daun long wara."

threats, exposure to criminal charges, and offers of employment and compensation. Negative publicity from the case affected BHP's public image, contributed to the cancellation of its proposed copper project in the Caribbean, and jeopardized a billion-dollar diamond concession in Canada (Kirsch 2007; Nader 1996). The escalating costs of defending its position on the Ok Tedi mine eventually pushed BHP into a phase 3 corporate response, leading to an out-of-court settlement for an estimated US$500 million in commitments to compensation and tailings containment (Banks and Ballard 1997), one of the largest settlements of an environmental tort claim at the time.

However, several years after the settlement, the mining company reverted to a phase 2 response by claiming that none of the proposed means of limiting pollution from the mine were cost-effective. Media and NGO attention to the mine had waned, and the state was not interested in paying for its share of environmental mitigation, which enabled BHP to avoid fulfilling the terms of the settlement. Instead, the mining company installed a dredge in the lower Ok Tedi River that lowers the riverbed and reduces flooding and deforestation but removes only half of the tailings produced by the mine and 20% of the total volume of waste material discharged into the river system. This phase 2 response acknowledged that the project had caused serious environmental problems downstream and that the external critique of its operations had scientific and moral validity. However, a phase 2 corporate response is primarily limited to symbolic gestures of recompense and amelioration, as opposed to committing the resources necessary to solve the problem, in this case the already substantial environmental damage caused by the mine and the threat of compounding that damage should the mine continue to operate without implementing a less harmful way of disposing of tailings and other mine wastes.

In 1999, Ok Tedi Mining released the results of environmental studies required by the earlier settlement, reporting that the effects of the mine would be "far greater and more damaging than predicted" (OTML 1999). The specter of renewed public criticism forced the parent company BHP back into a phase 3 response, in which it announced that the project was "not compatible with our environmental values" (*Economist* 1999:58). The pressure continued to ratchet up as the World Bank, which provided financial support to the project during the construction phase, called for early mine closure (World Bank 2000). A second lawsuit was filed in 2000, charging the company with abrogating the 1996 settlement agreement by its failure to stop polluting the Ok Tedi and Fly rivers. The 2001 merger of BHP and Billiton produced the world's largest mining company, which was eager to settle the lawsuit and put the problems of the Ok Tedi mine behind it (see Gilbertson 2002).

When the other partners in the Ok Tedi mine, including the government of Papua New Guinea, decided to continue operating the mine, BHP Billiton made arrangements for its own exit. In return for legal indemnity for future environ-

mental impacts, BHP Billiton transferred its 52% stake in the project to a trust fund in Singapore, which will allocate its share of the mine's profits to development projects in Papua New Guinea.[25] BHP Billiton's departure from the Ok Tedi project eventually ended the lawsuit pending in the Australian courts, resulting in the loss to the company of approximately US$1 billion in profits over the final years of the mine's operation. This lost revenue was the opportunity cost to BHP Billiton of continuing to operate elsewhere.

However, for the people living downstream from the mine to benefit from increased compensation payments and investments in development, the Ok Tedi mine must continue to operate and pollute the Ok Tedi and Fly rivers. Recent estimates from the mining company suggest that more than 3,000 km^2 of rain forest will be affected by pollution from the mine and that the damage will last for at least 60 years along the Ok Tedi River and for several hundred years along parts of the middle and lower Fly River (OTML 2005:12). The people who live downstream from the mine see no hope for their survival in this degraded environment unless they accept the economic benefits promised by the mining company (Kirsch 2007). They have become resigned to their fate, which is to say that their acceptance of compensation implicates them in further destruction of the environment, compromises the lives of their descendants, and increases their dependency on the project responsible for these problems (Kirsch 2008). The Ok Tedi mine is a poisoned chalice, an appropriate metaphor for capitalism in an era of resigned politics.

For BHP Billiton, ridding itself of the Ok Tedi mine was a process of purification. Divestment from projects gone awry has become a common strategy of the mining industry, as when Placer Dome disposed of its interests in the disastrous Marcopper mine in the Philippines, which accidentally discharged more than 20 million tons of mine wastes into local waters (Coumans and Nettleton 2002). By severing its relationship with the problematic Ok Tedi mine, BHP Billiton strategically relocated itself in phase 2 corporate response, in which the acknowledgement that problems exist is accompanied by the assurance that the company is working hard to overcome them. Speaking at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa, the CEO of BHP Billiton claimed that the company had learned important lessons from its experiences at the Ok Tedi mine and pledged that it would "no longer invest in any new mining projects that use riverine tailing disposal" (Gilbertson 2002). By moving back into a phase 2 response, BHP Billiton protected its operations from potentially destabilizing forms of criticism.

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25. The Australian public relations firm hired by BHP Billiton to mitigate negative publicity associated with its departure from the Ok Tedi mine described the strategic advantage of working in an environment in which the "complexity of the issues meant few critics were prepared to provide media comment" (Offor Sharp 2006).

As the loss of a billion-dollar revenue stream suggests, the costs of a phase 3 response to critique can be substantial.

The Ok Tedi court case and several other high-profile conflicts between mining companies and indigenous communities that occurred about the same time can be seen as tipping points in the larger relationship between the mining industry and the public (Ballard and Banks 2003). Western Mining and Placer Dome responded to the general mining industry "crisis in confidence" (Danielson 2006:7) by producing literature that redefines mining as a form of "sustainable development" because revenues from mining projects can be used to create business opportunities that provide jobs and income even after the mining project is closed (Danielson 2002). However, mining industry use of the term "sustainability" completely elides the concept's original reference to the environment. For the mining industry, sustainability is a purely economic concept, although it misleadingly conveys a sense of environmental responsibility.

The mining industry subsequently established a new organization to represent their interests, the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), and sponsored a US$10-million research project to analyze the problems facing the industry (Danielson 2002). These institutions keep the industry in a phase 2 response, allowing it to better manage public debates on mining. In contrast to the situation of Philip Morris, which was forced to acknowledge that there is no such thing as a safe cigarette, the mining industry has been willing to admit to causing harm only on a project-by-project basis. The rhetoric of sustainable mining helps to gloss over the industry's true environmental impacts and to prevent more robust forms of governmental regulation from emerging (Szablowski 2007). Industry claims regarding environmental responsibility have also yielded symbolic capital in the form of strategic alliances with several of the larger and more influential environmental NGOs, including the World Wide Fund for Nature and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

The mining industry has also pursued symbolic capital through alliances with the academy. Despite its responsibility for the environmental disaster at the Ok Tedi mine, BHP Billiton was recently appointed to the external board of advisors at the Graham Environmental Sustainability Institute at the University of Michigan. When the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported on this turn of events, the interim director of the institute, a professor of business administration, defended his rationale for selecting BHP Billiton in the following terms:

> There's no pure company out there. . . . I have no reason to doubt that this company has really screwed a lot of people, just as nearly every other company is "unjust to people" at one point or another. . . . These organizations are part of the problem, and they're also part of the solution. (Brian Talbot, quoted in Blumenstyk 2007)

These comments express what might be called pragmatic res-ignation. However, such strategies of accommodation require further analysis that specifies that specifies how they benefit corporations. Institutions like the new center for environ-mental sustainability at the University of Michigan provide safe havens for corporations seeking to institutionalize phase 2 politics. By collaborating with these institutions, corpora-tions can be seen as responding to societal concerns even as they work to limit real accountability and influence public debates in ways that are amenable to the sustainability of profits rather than the protection of the environment and human life.

It is especially striking to see how the politics of resignation simultaneously affects people from the rain forests of Papua New Guinea and one of the leading programs in business administration in the United States. People who occupy what are ordinarily seen as completely different structural positions in relation to multinational capital—indigenous peoples and business professors—find themselves resigned to corporate harms even when they oppose them, as in the case of the people living downstream from the Ok Tedi mine, or want to remake corporate capitalism in a greener form, as in the case of the institute for environmental sustainability. However, a key difference between the two positions is that after years of political opposition, the people affected by the mine are now largely resigned to the harm that BHP Billiton has done to them, because it is too late to save the river and the sur-rounding forests. In contrast, the professor is resigned to the harms BHP Billiton has caused others and, more generally, to the harm that all corporations do and can conceive of attempting to change the status quo only by entering into a collaborative relationship with the mining company. Both po-sitions are powerfully constrained by the politics of resigna-tion.

Conclusion

The defining feature of contemporary capitalism is the cor-porate response to critique. Capital manages critique in such a way that recognition of and discontent about harm are converted into structures of feeling that promote cynicism about the ability to alter social structures and makes resig-nation a dominant mode of political action. Industries con-sistently manage to weather crises, litigation that threatens their ability to continue operating, and the mobilization of their opponents by strategically acknowledging some degree of risk, partnering with governments or NGOs, and coopting the language of critique. Even one of the defining social move-ments of our time, the response to the contemporary envi-ronmental crisis, has been converted into an opportunity to earn more money.[26] The environmental movement has been recast as a form of green consumerism that is not only ame-

nable to but substantially benefits corporate capitalism.[27] Al-though green consumerism enables subjects to make specific demands on corporations and register discontent through practices of consumption, such activities generally come at the expense of a larger consideration of how industry is re-sponsible for the current state of the environment.[28] The source of popular discontent prevalent in everyday life—what we have called the politics of resignation—may be not the recognition that capitalism operates like a casino that creates ever-widening gaps between winners and losers but rather the pervasive sense that no form of critique has traction. However, the recent crisis on Wall Street, which may well be the last nail in the coffin of neoliberalism, shows once again that capitalism sows the seeds of its own demise.

In an earlier era, Stuart Hall (1986) called for a form of critique that he dubbed Marxism "without guarantees." Hall was centrally concerned with a conventional Marxist problem: how social ideas arise and become gripping for populations and how these ideas are connected to structures of material production—in short, the problem of ideology. But Hall was also interested in going beyond the deterministic aspects of Marxist critique. By using the term "without guarantees," Hall emphasized that the hegemonic power of social systems does not guarantee their stability. As in our focus on actually ex-isting capitalism, Hall encouraged scholars to address the con-crete workings of economic processes and structures. This perspective provides an "open horizon" of critical theorizing, an honest acknowledgement of the overriding and determi-native power of social forces without the fatalism (or resig-nation) of immutability (Hall 1986:43). Hall's account leads to a pragmatic politics that differs from the resigned prag-matism that can benefit corporations: prohibiting rather than regulating commercial tobacco products, or opposing rather than collaborating with mining companies. Hall's insistence that political struggle and discontent are inherent in even the most stable social order is a useful antidote to the cynicism actively promoted by corporate responses to criticism.

Following Hall, we propose an approach that might be called an anthropology of capitalism without guarantees. By

26. As Beck (1992:46) notes, "risks are no longer the dark side of opportunities, they are also *market opportunities*."

27. One member of the environmental establishment describes green consumerism as a fundamental shift in how capital operates, from an era of legislative regulation to an era of consumer regulation, although he simultaneously mythologizes the former while valorizing and simpli-fying the latter: "In the old days, the model was simple: government regulated, corporations complied. Now there are multiple stakeholder pressures on the corporation. They open up a range of better outcomes beyond simple compliance, including fewer problems requiring regula-tion, new products for sustainability markets and better corporate be-havior in policy and political arenas" (Speth 2008:176).

28. Along these lines, Foster (2008:236) asks, "Can there be a consumer politics that begins with social relations rather than isolated individuals and that champions mutual cooperation and care rather than freedom of choice?" He suggests that the "goal of a product-centered politics of knowledge" should be to establish a kind of ethic of caring between "fellow participants in a geographically far-flung but shared moral econ-omy" (240).

this we mean that the transitions between the phases of cor-
porate response to critique that we have outlined are by no
means guaranteed or certain. Examination of how corpora-
tions move to achieve legitimacy and contain liability reveals
a degree of vulnerability and contingency that is open to
contestation.[29] Tracking corporate responses to critique high-
lights strategic opportunities for bringing corporations to ac-
countability, mobilizing political discontent around the eva-
sion of corporate responsibility, and forging new standards
for legitimacy. Our focus on the dialectic of capitalist pro-
duction and social critique also complements both the tra-
ditional Marxist focus on production and alienation and an-
thropological attention to the links between production and
consumption. This allows us to bring together different
schools of thought—those focused on the materiality of pro-
duction and those focused on the cultural dimensions of the
economy—into new debates about actually existing capital-
ism.

An anthropology of capitalism without guarantees also ac-
knowledges that the academy no longer occupies a privileged
position in relation to critique. In recent decades, capital has
shown surprising adeptness in appropriating and adapting to
the critical perspectives that emerge from scholarship. Capital
now proceeds by means of many of the same analytic strat-
egies that once defined the academy and set it apart. Bruno
Latour (2004) has identified a similar problem in the rela-
tionship of critique to science. By denaturalizing the as-
sumptions of science and showing how scientific knowledge
is constructed, the sociology of science has inadvertently called
into question the notion that there are truths about the world
that we can come progressively closer to understanding. Cap-
italism can benefit from such challenges to positivism, as when
the artificial proliferation of doubt surrounding global warm-
ing legitimizes government inaction. As long as the threat of
global warming remained controversial, oil companies and
automobile manufacturers do not need to alter their practices.
Latour's answer to the hijacking of critique is to produce new
social and institutional structures rather than simply to un-
pack, scrutinize, or deconstruct existing structures. He writes,
"the critic is . . . the one who assembles[,] . . . the one who
offers the participants arenas in which to gather" (Latour
2004:246). Academic work can offer social movements a bet-
ter understanding of what they are working against, both
corporate responses to critique and the "corporate effects" of
political resignation in the wider society. Because corporate
strategies are always shifting and because corporations actively
appropriate oppositional tactics, we are unable to specify
which strategies of advocacy and opposition will be most

29. The current financial crisis may yet be a tipping point for a critical
rethinking of the profit motive, neoliberalism, and market deregulation.
However, corporations will inevitably engage with whatever forms of
critique emerge from the crisis, and this interaction, rather than gov-
ernment actions or populist criticism of financial systems, will ultimately
define structural outcomes.

efficacious, but understanding how corporate power operates
offers a promising starting point for political engagement.

By focusing on corporate strategies, we also reorient our
analysis away from suffering and toward harm. One pillar of
the structural violence perspective is the intentional elision
of the particular agent accountable for harm in favor of an
approach that socializes suffering to such a degree that an
entire social structure or historical trajectory can be described
as the responsible agent (Farmer 2004). This approach is a
useful corrective to ethical frameworks bent on attributing
praise or blame for social, health, or environmental problems
to individual actors. As we have suggested, the ideology of
individual responsibility has long benefited the tobacco in-
dustry and other harm industries. The structural violence
approach, however, downplays the role of particular corpo-
rations as agents that create health risks, inequalities, and
environmental hazards. Much more than the notion of suf-
fering, the term "harm" captures the agentive quality of how
corporations impact populations and environments. Atten-
tion to harm is also more amenable to a politics that seeks
to redress problems caused by industry, because it brings into
relief how particular agents have sought to escape account-
ability. Historical awareness about the deep origins of social
problems is valuable (Farmer 2004), but so is a perspective
that does not view outcomes as historically guaranteed, how-
ever powerful long-term forces may be. Our approach em-
phasizes the possibility of change by revealing moments of
potential vulnerability in which corporations seek to conceal
their strategic interests in their responses to critique.

Amidst a politics of resignation, we need a new starting
point. How do we unlock the folded arms of cynicism? We
suggest that an answer can be found in a critique of capital
that focuses on industry's avoidance of ethical responsibility
for the harms caused to humans and environments. In a world
in which corporations so effectively manage critique, it may
not be enough to provide additional information about in-
dustrial harm. The project of changing social structures re-
quires new tools of analysis, such as the model of corporate
response to critique that we present here, which shows how
harm is not inevitable but is nonetheless a fundamental part
of how capital operates today. Focusing on circumscribed
problems and answers—for example, just tobacco, or just
mining—while ignoring the overlapping strategies across in-
dustries that make these problems seem so intractable and
make restricted solutions appear acceptable is the kind of
politics that corporations hope for because they are so adept
at the appropriate strategies of management. Showing how
political resignation is produced and operates creates an op-
portunity for people to rethink their relationship to capital
and inhabit new structures of feeling. Understanding how
corporations produce harm and manage critique can make
resignation a more positive political force. The failure to make
explicit how corporations manage critique results in an an-
thropology without friction, purchase, or traction and, most
importantly, a discipline lacking the gravitas necessary to ac-

count for how the celebration of victorious capitalism ignores the harms it causes.

Acknowledgments

Comments

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Benson and Kirsch's article analyzes corporate responses to critique on the basis of solid empirical evidence. The authors focus our attention on the companies' role in creating serious social and environmental problems, but their research goes beyond much existing research by linking the visible corporate actions to underlying political and social structures. The current literature on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) movement and companies themselves tend to portray CSR as apolitical. Benson and Kirsch demonstrate that even benign-looking sustainability or socially responsible corporate initiatives have a broader political agenda. Whether or not one agrees with the analysis of "the politics of resignation," Benson and Kirsch rightly point to the danger that the corporate discourse around micro-level CSR-related initiatives can curb both government regulation and debates around macro-level solutions to complex society-wide problems.

To put this into context, private investment has become immensely important for many developing countries and poor communities. Foreign direct investment reportedly outpaces official development assistance by a factor of three. Corporations are often welcome as sources of jobs, investment, and taxes. For example, BHP Billiton paid almost US$8 billion in taxes and royalties to governments and almost US$24 billion to contractors and suppliers in 2008. Therefore, the study of corporations is not just of academic interest but is of immense importance for communities, countries, and the entire international community.

An important contribution of the article is to review the existing and potential contributions of anthropology to the study of corporations and the global economic order. Benson and Kirsch's review of the literature demonstrates that many interesting studies have already been conducted on specific companies, processes of consumption, or "structural violence." Even more importantly, they demonstrate that anthropology still has a lot to offer.

The article's focus on "harm industries" is methodologically helpful in terms of clearly delineating the boundaries of the investigation, but it also introduces methodological bias. Tobacco and mining are arguably among the most harmful industries. One wonders how different this analysis would have looked for industries with a more ambiguous impact, such as food processing or electronics. At the other end of the spectrum, anthropology could equally contribute to the study of social entrepreneurship—companies created with a specific social purpose (e.g., the Fairtrade Foundation). Rather than focusing on harm from the outset, it would be more useful to understand under what circumstances companies can have different types of impacts.

The case studies in the article and the use of the concept of the "three phases of corporate response" lead to the flawed assumption that company executives are always cynical in pursuing social causes and that corporate actions are always a reaction to external social and political pressures or "crises." Previous studies suggest that companies may equally pursue social causes as a result of internal pressures (social and environmental initiatives being used to motivate employees), a process of osmosis (certain social and environmental practices become institutionalized and widely accepted as norms within a country, an industry, or a specific issue area), or a genuine desire to do the right thing. Benson and Kirsch make certain assumptions about corporate motives, but they do not seem to be particularly interested in investigating internal decision-making processes among corporate executives. While it is important to study local communities affected by corporations, anthropologists could equally play a leading role in studying the motives of corporate executives and the norms prevalent within their business communities.

Whatever limitations this article may have, Benson and Kirsch rightly point to the importance of bringing corporations to the forefront of anthropological research. If we want to understand the modern world, corporations must be treated as important ethnographic subjects.

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It would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of capitalist corporations in the contemporary world. Why has "one of the most consequential forms of power in our time" attracted

relatively little anthropological attention, especially in comparison with the state? In addition to their striking case materials, the various theories discussed by Benson and Kirsch stimulate reflection on the nature of our discipline and its subdivisions as well as on global political economy. They plead for moving beyond "governmentality," reinvigorating materialist approaches, privileging harm over suffering, and identifying causal links to particular corporations rather than vague assertions of "structural violence." This is all very attractive and convincing, but I also have some criticisms.

First (reflecting my own special interests), I was interested in the authors' occasional references to the world of Soviet socialism, as a foil to their focus on the "resignation" of capitalist subjects. They cite Bahro's concept of the 1970s and Yurchak's recent study of the late socialist era. Indeed, the citizens of the GDR (East Germany) and the USSR faced power holders with aspirations far more sweeping than those of any capitalist corporation. Were they disabled by a similar "dominant structure of feeling"? If so, how are we to explain the brave actions of certain groups in the *perestroika* years and in the GDR in 1989? What new forms of resignation are found in these countries today? In 2008, Barack Obama was elected to succeed George W. Bush, just as Mikhail Gorbachev and then Boris Yeltsin replaced the old guard in the Kremlin. There has been no revolution in Washington, but normal electoral politics has brought a change of climate, especially toward high finance. For all their insistence at the end that resignation can harbor new agentive forces, it seems to me that Benson and Kirsch offer an overly pessimistic, pre-*perestroika* account.

But of course Obama has hardly touched the working of the capitalist corporation, the focus of this article. Here I have a number of more specific criticisms. Can the specific problems of nicotine addicts be equated with the grievances of indigenous groups in Papua New Guinea? How far can these two sectors of the "harm industry" stand for capitalist corporations in general? Would there be room in their "anthropology of capitalism" for analysis of, say, The Body Shop and Reed Elsevier? The authors' typology of corporation responses to criticism seems admirable, but I missed any attempt to pursue the search for agency inside the corporation itself. Who are the actors? We know, not only from sociology and management studies but also from an established genre of "organizational anthropology," that capitalist firms resemble other organizations in being characterized by tensions and conflicts at multiple levels. Some employees (or "stakeholders") are likely to have a moral compass that is not so different from that of Benson and Kirsch. Under what circumstances do they, too, succumb to resignation? The authors call for multisited fieldwork and textual analysis, and that is what they offer in this article, but I think that a stronger emphasis on corporate ethnography should remain the hallmark of an anthropological approach.

Finally, I am puzzled that the authors see their article as a contribution to the rejuvenation of economic anthropology.

In terms of our current demarcation lines, I would see them rather as seeking to extend the domain of modified Foucauldian approaches that have become dominant within *political* anthropology. Moreover, economic anthropology has not disappeared during the decades in which authors such as Žižek, Hall, Latour, and Deleuze have been so influential in Anglophone anthropology. For example, there is an aggressive paradigm of similar vintage, known as the "new institutionalism," that claims to have a lot to say about how capitalist corporations work. Unfortunately, it does so by drawing on such notions as "rational choice" and "evolution." Benson and Kirsch have several opportunities to engage with these theories, for example, when they refer to the internalizing of externalities and tipping games, but they refrain from doing so. I think that this is a pity, because the issues of power and domination raised in this article are indeed important for any imaginable contemporary economic anthropology, including organizational ethnography. Ultimately, a rejuvenated political economy would have to transcend the boundary between the political and the economic and encompass states as well as corporations. This synthesis would proceed beyond radical *Kapitalismuskritik* to an intellectual rebuttal of contemporary scholars (including recent Nobel Prize winners) who deserve to be taken as seriously as the Western Marxists who provide most of the inspiration this article.

Should economic anthropologists accept with resignation the authors' claim that "the defining feature of contemporary capitalism is the corporate response to critique"? Or can we do better? My answer is "Yes, we can!"

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This is a welcome contribution to contemporary Marxist critical anthropology. The model of corporate response to critique is particularly useful. However, there are several issues that must be raised. I turn to them immediately not because I do not recognize the many qualities in the article but out of lack of space.

The article has a rather common stylistic characteristic: it is written as if "anthropology" really means North Atlantic anthropology. The review and critique of anthropology presented by Benson and Kirsch express the production, positions, and perspectives of the hegemonic centers in anthropology, as if there were no communities of scholars elsewhere in the world doing research and publishing on related issues. The use of the unmarked term "anthropology," rather than "American anthropology," by authors who, I suppose, are sympathetic to the world anthropologies project (see Ribeiro and Escobar 2006) is an indication that the struggle for open-

ing anthropological discourse to a much larger and more diverse set of authors and perspectives still has a long way to go.

The next argument is partially derived from the previous one. The assumption that the "politics of resignation" is a "dominant structure of feeling in our time" is problematic. Without entering into details, I can say that the politics of resignation is not a dominant structure in, for example, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Moreover, emphasis on the politics of resignation may reduce attention to movements of opposition and resistance that shape public policies, such as the indigenous movement in Andean countries and the landless movement in Brazil, or alter-native transnational political agents, such as those involved in the anti- and alter-globalization movements (Ribeiro 2009). On the theoretical level, overextending the capillarity of the politics of resignation may approximate it to such notions as hegemony. This point leads me to think that no attention was paid to Gramsci's concept of hegemony and common sense, which he developed to deal with similar issues.

Some passages overvalue what would be novel contributions and undervalue previous efforts, while others simplify the existing literature. The review of the anthropology of capitalism, even if dedicated to some of the most "popular and influential approaches to the study of capitalism," is a case in point. Marxism in international anthropology—in such fields as the anthropology of labor, the anthropology of globalization, and economic anthropology—has produced many more critiques than the authors acknowledge. I missed, for instance, a strong engagement with the anthropological critique of development. As we know, "development"—capitalist expansion's fantasy name—has been the cause of harm for many millions of people in the past five or six decades (see, for instance, Escobar 1995). A related problem is that the interpretation of Wolf's (1982) book as focused on "splits" is debatable. It explicitly is a work on interconnections. Furthermore, the assumption that structural adjustments "were accompanied by transformations in subjective experience and the nature of citizenship" exaggerates the power of economic policies in determining subjectivities, reflects some unchallenged, fashionable premises of U.S. anthropology, and must be relativized, because it can hardly be deemed to be universal. The same is true for statements such as "the defining feature of contemporary capitalism is the corporate response to critique" or the final sentence that ties the future of critical anthropology to its capacity for making "explicit how corporations manage critique."

Benson and Kirsch acknowledge Nader's (1969) call to study up, but still their article conveys a sense that doing fieldwork in corporate offices is a novelty. At the same time, they point out "risks of cooptation, because the tendency of ethnographers to empathize and identify with their subjects may limit their findings or critical stance." Having myself done field research in corporate offices a few times—for instance, to understand the conceptions and networkings of powerful agents involved in a major harm industry, dam building (Ribeiro 1994), and to understand the cultural politics of the Mecca of development, the World Bank's headquarters in Washington (Ribeiro 2002)—I think that what is at stake here are other ethical and political positionings seldom discussed by anthropologists rather than a sort of automatic empathy with the subjects we study.

Finally, I would like to contribute to a wider definition of harm industry by including the civil-engineering industry and its large-scale infrastructure projects. In this connection, it would be interesting to look at the anthropological literature on forced resettlement and environmental and social impacts, especially works independently written in defense of local populations, in which one will find a critique of corporations, state agencies, and the relationships among them. I would also like to suggest consideration of the invention and dissemination of "social responsibility" as one of the widest and most effective corporate tactics to deal with critics.

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It seems to me that there are two further lines of analysis to be brought into play here, despite the already multilayered approach offered by Benson and Kirsch. The first is competition, and the second is lobbying. I hope to connect the two in exploring antidotes to the politics of resignation.

Although people generally focus on production, labor, and class in Marxist analysis, competition is what drives the system, for Marx as for Darwin. Competition is what forces capitalists to invest without regard to the market, it is what impels bankers to lend where no lending is justified, and it is what turns individually rational decisions into collective disasters. Competition also pushes rather ordinary people into positions of great power to do harm.

Marx has many negative things to say about capitalists, but his analysis does not depend on their being evil persons. Part of his genius is to show that the system produces injustice even when it is working well. Further, he recognizes that the system does not produce *only* harm. Competition promotes the technological dynamism and enormous productivity gains that could underwrite a more just and sustainable society.

Corporate ethnography needs to get at how corporations think, how they strategize, and how they understand their competitive terrain. The people who run corporations have histories and identities connected with who and what they think their particular firm is, and these shape what they understand to be acceptable behavior. The corporate ethnographer needs to get at these underlying dynamics and needs to be there well before the decisions that result in harm are

made. These decisions are not discrete, and they are not voted on in boardrooms—they are produced out of a long and complex history and an intricate set of relationships and understandings. Corporate ethnography is exactly what is needed to get at these tangles.

If we accept, however, that even enraged citizens are not about to abolish capitalism any time soon, we have to tackle the question of whether we can channel competition in ways that reduce the corporation's need and ability to do harm. Effective regulation on a national and supranational scale is plainly part of the answer, and this is where the ethnography of lobbying comes in.

I suspect that the politics of resignation has as much to do with people's feeling that they have no meaningful political voice as with the perception that corporations are simply unreachable, but it is a muddled kind of resignation. People sort of know that politics is bought and paid for, but they also sort of believe that principled ideologies are involved. An ethnography of lobbying that follows the lobbyists and their money into congressional offices and shows in detail how absolutely money is the only political voice that counts and how absolutely pervasive this is might make a difference. It might lead, for example, to public funding of political campaigns. This, in turn, might produce the conditions that allow for meaningful regulation of the system, the kind of regulation that would inhibit the propensity to harmful behavior and encourage competition on more desirable grounds: cutting costs to the bone less by destroying environments and employing child labor than on the basis of product innovation, product quality, and reputational assets.

Will the corporations just go somewhere else? Surprisingly, no. Most foreign direct investment in manufacturing circulates within the advanced industrial nations rather than streaming from there to the global South. Being in the market matters to an extraordinary degree, and given a reasonably equivalent set of regulatory standards and costs—even just for North America and the European Union—there is no great incentive to move. In the mining sector geology matters, so the regulations would have to be structured to follow the firms rather than being tied to specific jurisdictions. The international trade regime would have to permit discrimination against goods produced under unacceptable conditions, no matter where they came from. I have no idea what to do about tobacco.

Benson and Kirsch's project of an anthropology that challenges the system is an admirable and aspirational one. It cannot, perhaps, ever be fully realized, but it can act as a powerful organizing principal for research and for bringing the academy and the "real world" together. I think that it must be broader than an ethnography of corporate harm and that it might require a shift in how a disciplinary and possibly interdisciplinary research agenda is developed and put into practice. One would need a way to connect the corporate ethnographies to each other and to the ethnography of lobbying, and this requires a way of bringing researchers into a kind of loose collaboration that has not been typical of anthropology. While we are at it, we may want to consider an ethnography of economists.

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The past decade has seen a flurry of anthropological writing on late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century capitalism. Important research has illuminated the formation of neoliberal subjects, the evisceration of the public sphere, and the adoption of statelike functions by transnational capital. Two main approaches stand out: the first equates capitalism with neoliberalism (e.g., Ong 2006; Rofel 2007), characterized as an epistemic condition that generates practices and sensibilities; the second sees capitalism as a political-economic formation that imposes social constraints (e.g., Ferguson 2006; Mbembe 2001). While the former is more concerned with the production of subjects and sentiments and the latter with structural mechanisms, both treat capitalism as a systemic logic. Both represent the shift away from considering agents and strategies and toward a focus on conditions and effects.

Benson and Kirsch's essay offers a way forward in the anthropological study of contemporary capitalism that is also a way back to agents and strategies. It is high time, they argue, that anthropologists train their critical lens on that crucial vehicle of capitalist transformation, the corporation, which throws the agentive maneuvers of capitalism into sharp relief. I will highlight several important interventions in their essay before turning to some suggestions.

First, the authors call for a move beyond governmentality to consider the "strong-arm tactics of corporate power" and the tensions between state and capital that might allow for the disciplining, not simply of citizens, but of corporations as well. By privileging enforcement over discipline, they help identify agents of social and environmental harm and the collaborations that sustain their practices.

Second, the authors propose that we attend to the dialectic between capitalist production and social critique. Rather than treating capitalist hegemony as a stable condition, they illuminate the strategies through which corporations manage public opinion in order to secure profits. Using their research on tobacco and mining, they outline a processual model of corporate response to social critique and the vigilance required to beat back unprofitable consumer boycott and governmental regulation. What we get is a picture of corporate maneuver that recasts a systemic force as a set of dynamic social relations and calls into question the perception of corporate power as unchecked and uncheckable.

Third, the authors call for scholarship that inhabits the middle ground between structural and cultural approaches to capitalism. Their focus on the corporation as an institutional agent scaled between system and subject offers a way of doing so. By helping us see the corporation's cultural work of image management as a necessary complement to the structural violence of industrial production, the authors argue for an understanding of capitalist culture as a hard-won product of corporate strategy and not an automatic effect of capitalist production.

I have two suggestions that are intended to strengthen the authors' project of corporate ethnography. The first concerns their treatment of the corporation as a unitary actor. While I appreciate the focus on corporate strategy, one comes away with the impression that the corporation is a seamless unity of intention and action. This may be true in law, where the corporation is accorded legal personhood, but ethnography calls for a different approach. Here, I would suggest turning back to work on the state that argues for its disaggregation (e.g., Abrams 1988 [1977]; Gupta 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 2002; Mbembe 1992; Mitchell 1991; Nugent 1997). One way to disaggregate the corporation would be to extend the dialectic of production and critique to include internal relations. In other words, we might illuminate this dialectic not simply in terms of the relationship between the corporation and its outsides but as intrinsic to relations between labor, management, and shareholders. While the authors deal with consumer critique and state regulation in the aftermath of corporate profiteering, one could push this dynamic back to reveal countercurrents from the first moment of, say, land expropriation. Applying Polanyi's double movement,[30] we would see this push-back as an attempt to reembed the corporation at every point where power is exercised. Such an extension of the dialectic would require synthesizing work on the corporation's relationship to land and labor (e.g., Striffler 2002, 2005) or on shareholder lawsuits, with work on corporate image management.

A second suggestion concerns the notion of resignation. The authors take care to distinguish resignation from belief, drawing on Žižek's work to argue for resignation as a kind of knowing consent. They further insist that resignation is inherently unstable and can become the basis of a transformative politics. When combined with their argument that social critique constitutes a state of permanent provocation that forces the corporation into a reactive posture, resignation seems to be more a *project* of corporate consolidation rather than its *accomplishment* (Li 2007). However, there is a tension in the essay between seeing resignation as an open-ended politics and seeing it as an epiphenomenal structure of feeling;

I believe that a political anthropology of the corporation would build more fruitfully on the former interpretation and be more consistent with Benson and Kirsch's important project. Work like theirs offers a nuanced understanding of capitalist restructuring that will hopefully enable a more robust oppositional politics.

Reply

We are pleased that the respondents to our paper support the call for greater attention to corporate strategies. We also acknowledge and endorse their desire to identify antidotes to resignation. However, we believe that to understand why efforts to reform corporate practices often fall short of their goals and why more people do not participate in social movements against harmful corporate practices requires more than the analysis of how corporations influence political systems. It also requires analysis of how corporations influence society through their engagement with critics, public relations campaigns, and strategic use of science.[31] Consequently, we argue that the dialectical relationship between critique and corporate response is a fundamental dynamic of contemporary capitalism.

Frynas makes the valuable point that corporations in the corporate social responsibility (CSR) movement generally represent their position as apolitical. We go farther by suggesting that corporations are "anti-politics machines" (Ferguson 1994). The case studies we present only scratch the surface of corporate efforts to contain social movements and reduce political interference. Consider the chemical industry's well-documented reaction against Rachel Carson's (1962) *Silent Spring*. The idea that civil society should have a say in fundamental environmental and health concerns is central to social movements that criticize corporations. The chemical industry and its counterparts now acknowledge having learned an important lesson from Carson and the environmental movement, yet this recognition is coupled with insistence that they have incorporated these lessons into their operating procedures and consequently no longer need input from civil society (Hoffman 1997). A central ingredient of the anthropology of capitalism must be historical and ethnographic analyses of corporate strategies to transform potential tipping points into regulatory frameworks or certification programs that support limitations on corporate liability and the containment of critique.

Like us, Schoenberger sees state regulation as a potential

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30. Benson and Kirsch interpret the notion of vernacular capitalism as an instantiation of Polanyi's double movement. For Polanyi, however, reembedding the market was less about recognizing its cultural specificity than about a countermovement to capitalist deregulation. Similarly, this essay seems ultimately to be about reembedding the corporation and not merely about seeing capital as culturally particular.

31. Elsewhere, we have described one of the techniques through which corporations effect resignation, the corporate oxymoron (Benson and Kirsch 2010), such as "safe cigarettes" (Benson 2010) and "sustainable mining" (Kirsch 2010b). Corporate oxymorons promote a politics of resignation by suggesting that some degree of corporate harm is ordinary, acceptable, and perhaps even necessary.

brake on corporate harm. Ethnographic study of lobbying would help us to understand the limits, gaps, and past failures of regulatory power and the political conditions that help to sustain weak forms of industrial regulation. However, we would also encourage a historical approach to understanding why lengthy social struggles have so frequently been required to implement regulation of scientifically known hazards (Davis 2002). In the case of tobacco, for example, a tenfold increase in tobacco-related mortality is anticipated internationally despite more than 50 years of solid epidemiological research documenting tobacco's lethal health consequences.

We acknowledge Frynas's observation that our focus on these particular examples of harm industries inflects our analysis. It is instructive, however, to look more closely at the examples he suggests as alternative starting points, the food processing and consumer electronics industries. The explosive growth of scholarship identifying the harms embedded in the foods we consume suggests that the food processing industry is not very different from the tobacco and mining industries. Recent work in medical anthropology addresses the impact of poor diets on escalating medical costs and the burden of disease in developed countries. In these examples, we also see familiar attempts by industry and government to shift responsibility for risk and harm onto individual consumers (Nichter 2008). In the case of consumer electronics, there are encouraging efforts to better manage waste streams, notably attention to designs that facilitate eventual recycling, but the industry remains based on a financial model of ever-diminishing cycles of replacement. The number of discarded cell phones, a relatively new mass-consumer product, must already number in the billions. Moreover, consumer electronics are explicitly linked to some of the worst mining conflicts, including extraction of coltan from the lawless territories of the Congo. Consumer electronics depend on "don't ask, don't tell" commodity chains in which manufacturers turn a blind eye to the source of their raw materials.

Implicit in Frynas's response is the concern that we overgeneralize the concept of "harm industry." Adam Smith's view that the market tends to promote the public good is challenged by the stunning range of commodities identified as harmful: asbestos, baby bottles, cars, diamonds from conflict zones, electric power lines, fish contaminated by mercury, lead paint, milk tinted by growth hormones, plastics, sunscreen, tobacco products, and so forth. The sheer volume of health and environmental hazards approaches the point of incapacitation. As Joe Jackson once sang, "Everything gives you cancer. There's no cure, there's no answer."[32] But resignation about the prevalence of corporate harms is the farthest thing from political disempowerment, as Subramanian points out; in fact, it is the necessary starting point for a critique of the corporation as the aggressive purveyor of utopian visions, including the claim that every industrial problem has an acceptable and affordable technical solution.

32. From the song "Cancer," on the album *Night and Day* (1982).

Both Frynas and Ribeiro write as though development and foreign direct investment are different domains. Yet public works are increasingly privatized, and many international investments receive support from state agencies designed to facilitate investment in developing countries and emerging markets, from loan guarantees to political risk insurance. The World Bank and other regional banks do the same. These agencies have played important roles in bringing about reforms, including restrictions on social and environmental impacts, requirements for transparency, and so on. However, in recent years investors have devised strategies intended to avoid these restrictions. Before the recent economic crisis, and possibly contributing to it, numerous private investment firms sought to gain an economic advantage by avoiding regulatory oversight from development banks and stock markets. A related trend has been the rise of state capital, or national sovereignty funds, most notably from China, which do not necessarily follow the guidelines on investments imposed by stock markets or banks. A generation of work by reformers that led to increased international regulation has been put in jeopardy by these new strategies of investment.

Although we are calling for greater ethnographic attention to corporate strategies rather than further ethnography of corporations, studying the internal dynamics of corporations will only increase understanding of corporate power. We endorse Subramanian's suggestion to draw from the literature on the state emphasizing disaggregation and consequently recognize the need to diagram relationships between labor, management, and shareholders. Such relationships can be quite sticky. For example, TIAA-CREF, the investment firm that manages the retirement funds for many U.S. academics, operates a social-choice fund that its own managers now use to discourage shareholder activism. Their argument is that if one objects to particular companies in which TIAA-CREF owns stock, one can invest in social-choice funds. So, for example, a shareholder initiative to force TIAA-CREF to divest its shares in Freeport-McMoRan, which owns and operates the Grasberg mining project in West Papua, Indonesia, which is widely criticized for its environmental impacts and its financial support of the Indonesian armed forces (Kirsch 2010*a*), was rebuffed by TIAA-CREF management.

Schoenberger astutely points out that the most important corporate decisions are not voted on in boardrooms but are the result of long, complex negotiations and relationships. Frynas makes a similar point about the agency of corporate employees, noting that they may favor going green but are often at the mercy of executive decisions aimed at bottom-line values and limited-liability goals. Indeed, we would argue that the presence of internal differentiation within the corporation does not necessarily correlate with external differentiation in terms of results. Good intentions may not be enough. One key to these questions is corporate culture, which has more often been studied by nonanthropologists focused on such topics as creativity in designing new products and organizational patterns of communication. What has not

been as carefully examined is how corporate cultures permit or facilitate harm, as Schoenberger suggests. We see corporate culture as a key site for how capitalism is reaffirmed in various forms, including the value of social responsibility as a covert kind of social movement and a form of identity politics.

We acknowledge the concern that our essay may be too cynical about the motives of corporate employees. We need more honest appraisals of what corporations want and the strategies they use to pursue those objectives. If this implicates people who work in corporations, it is because, like most of their contemporaries, the employees of corporations are obligated to sell their labor under conditions of constraint rather than acting as free agents who can express dissent and push for change at every turn. To put this more strongly, we are interested not in motives but in consequences and outcomes. We are concerned with the ways in which corporations discipline ideas and employees and consequently are intrigued by Hann's insightful question about the circumstances under which corporate employees succumb to resignation. We also suggest the need for additional research on how critical perspectives within corporations result in positive change.

Ribeiro's suggestion that we attend to global anthropologies can be productively harnessed to study the global corporation, including the different forms taken by corporations in different countries, and to examine how "don't ask, don't tell" supply chains mask processes and points of harm. We acknowledge his observation that governments have different relationships to corporations and popular movements in different regions of the world. Yet even though Bolivia and Ecuador make claims about being social-movement states, neither Evo Morales nor Rafael Correa are pursuing policies toward extractive industries that differ greatly from those of their neoliberal predecessors (Bebbington 2009). In addition to international collaborations, we also endorse Schoenberger's call for interdisciplinary collaboration. To understand corporate harm, anthropologists need to work with toxicologists, chemists, health professionals, and other scientists. In the United States, a reinvigorated four-field approach that brings ethnography and cultural analysis, linguistic work on textual and semiotic forms of corporate response, and medical, biological, and environmental anthropology together could produce a more holistic understanding of the production and costs of corporate harms.

Our notion of resignation was explicitly formulated with questions about social movements, which one of us studies, in mind. Our aim was not to discount or diminish the importance of the social and political movements sweeping Latin America but to question why participation in progressive movements is not more widespread. We remember Marc Edelman's (2001) admonition that anthropologists too frequently study progressive movements while ignoring right-wing political movements, but we want to push this insight further by arguing that if anthropologists study social movements, we must also inquire after those people who choose not to participate and the social forms, such as corporate

social responsibility, that function as proxy social movements in which key identities, loyalties, and values are reproduced.

There is some confusion about our notion of the politics of resignation. We were especially influenced by Thomas Dumm (1998), who argued that resignation does not always entail giving up. It can be a form of protest in itself, and he used the example of someone resigning from political office because she disagrees with the policies of the agency. We like this agentive reading of resignation and believe that it fits well with our understanding of contemporary politics. We also take seriously Ribeiro's concerns that a focus on resignation may reproduce hegemony. Here Subramanian's reading best sums up what we intended: "resignation is inherently unstable and can become the basis of a transformative politics," with the obvious question being what kind of politics or analysis can make this so. We embrace Subramanian's point that resignation should be seen as a project being continually reworked by corporations and their critics rather than as an accomplishment or a failure. This sense of an unfinished process reflects our understanding of the dialectical relationship between critique and corporate response and therefore the need for new kinds of analyses of corporations and capitalism.

—Peter Benson and Stuart Kirsch

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