

# **ETHICS INC.**

A Sociological Account of the Contemporary Market for  
Corporate Social Responsibility

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## Abstract

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In the contemporary corporate marketplace a novel ethical proposal is being formulated. This is manifest in the suggestion that it is desirable for companies to behave in a 'socially responsible' manner, or practice what is formally referred to as 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR). Distinct from conjunctions of 'business' and 'ethics' that have gone before, contemporary CSR proceeds on the basis of a unique claim – that it is possible for a corporation to 'do well, by doing good'. Known as the 'business case' for CSR, this proposal is of special sociological significance, this thesis argues, insofar as it understands 'marketability' to be an inhering aspect of the 'ethical' itself. Drawing on contemporary developments in the field of social studies of science (STS) and, relatedly, 'newer' economic sociology, this thesis attends to the question of what, in-practice and as-practice, this newly described market-ethics may be said to 'do.' This focus on 'doing' distinguishes the present work from prior sociological and economic accounts of the relationship between markets and ethics, which have been noticeably constrained by both historically conferred disciplinary restraints and by the tendency to preemptorily prescribe ethics within the narrow bounds of classical deontological or utilitarian moral theories. Methodologically, this inquiry proceeds by first observing the assembly of particular market spheres or market 'nexuses' of CSR practice, and secondly by investigating the ways in which the 'ethical' is variously enacted within these. Three interlinked but delineated 'nexuses' of CSR focus provide empirical substrate for discussion – the 'ethical corporation,' 'ethical consumer,' and 'ethical career.' Paying heed to the multiply-reflexive constitution of these differentially assembled markets, ensuing critical discussion finds the 'doing' of ethics therein to be largely constituent in contingently engaged affective and material practices. Against accounts then that de-cry the increasing 'marketisation' of ever more aspects of everyday life, (often seeking to indiscriminately discern in all market practice a totalising neo-liberalism on the march), the present thesis embodies an alternative theoretical approach wherein what it is possible to *do* in a market context is not prescriptively decreed or pre-maturely proscribed. In line with this emphasis, questions regarding the possibility of ethics, and finally, of effective alternative politics in market contexts are reexamined as part of the process of critically rethinking what present sociological understandings admit to and exclude from the designation of 'market' itself.

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## Introduction

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This thesis investigates how a concern with what is ‘ethical’ has become a significant feature of the twenty-first century landscape of global business. Manifest foremost in the suggestion that corporations should behave in a ‘socially responsible’ manner, or, as this set of socio-moral expectations has come to be formally denoted, practice ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’ (CSR), ‘ethics’ in this contemporary usage are recast as both an appropriate business consideration, but also and significantly, as that which make ‘good business sense.’ This suggestion is entailed in CSR’s structuring maxim – what is known as the ‘business case’ for CSR. This is the proposition that, in the contemporary corporate marketplace, financial gain has a relationship to ‘ethical’ corporate behaviour, or that a company can ‘*do well by doing good.*’

An alignment of corporate and ‘ethical’ interests that is validated by the suggestion of enhanced profitability appears *prima facie* to provide little opportunity for further elaboration beyond questions regarding the empirical veracity of this proposition, or the authenticity of corporate commitments to ethics. And primarily, these are the kind of questions that have been and are being asked: by businesses and in disciplines such as Management Studies (‘how can we prove that ethics is good business? What kinds of measurement tools are most effective in showing this?); and in media and popular discourse (‘is CSR ‘for real,’ or just another marketing ploy with no actual ethical substance?’). In the proceeding pages however, this thesis poses a different set of questions. The terms of debate that construct and characterise CSR are not treated as opposing sides between which it is necessary to choose. Instead, the content of such debates becomes a kind of analytical substrate. A ‘sociological’ account, suggests here a critical opportunity to come at the question of ‘ethics’ as they are constituted and practiced in market contexts from an alternative angle.

‘Doing well by good’ is understood as a significant proposal in the present context to the extent that this both recognises and inaugurates what I will call a

*'market ethics.'* This is a formulation with a number of different dimensions and levels of meaning. On the one hand, and most basically, 'market ethics' refers to the dual and co-implicating possibility that there is a 'market-for-ethics,' that 'ethics' may be 'marketable' or saleable – you may 'market' ethics. These suggestions though also operate on our understandings of 'markets' and 'ethics' at a more transformative and fundamental level. In this way, 'market ethics' speaks also of an emergent possibility or new kind of enactment, an *'ethics' done in 'market' mode.*

This proposal is, undoubtedly, a counter-intuitive one. Ethical problems, as Chapter Two in particular will discuss, have typically been understood as external to the market. Too complex to be addressed in a 'rationally self-interested' and 'reductive' market sphere, ethical problems are those that, by their very nature, need be resolved elsewhere, (politically for instance). 'Market ethics' however is, above all, an exploratory formulation. The tensions that inhere in the coupling of the 'market' and the 'ethical' function as a context through and against which this thesis organises its inquiry and seeks to pose a dual-pronged question. Taking 'ethics' as described by the CSR 'business case' as its object, the aim of this thesis is not to impose upon this a prior evaluative framework, or ask whether, for instance, such an 'ethics' lives up to the requirements of traditional moral philosophy. Instead, the thesis on the one hand investigates what is involved in the processes and practices of *'doing'* ethics as 'market ethics;' on the other hand it asks what an 'ethics,' so configured, might be said to *'do'* in terms of reorganising our conceptions of both 'ethics' and 'markets.'

The ethical obligation in the present work then, is not the resolution of the various tensions through and in which CSR is wrought, or the adjudication of debates regarding whether or not a 'market ethics' may be said to properly count as 'ethical' as such. The guiding obligation is instead to the productivity of this contemporary proposal. Given this enabling opportunity, the current thesis suggests, CSR might speak interestingly in creative and potentially unexpected ways.

To proceed along such lines however, it is necessary to begin with an understanding of both historical and contemporary theories of the relationships

between business and society, economics and sociology, and markets and morals – Chapters One and Two are devoted this task.

The significance and novelty of a ‘market ethics’ as this is designated by the CSR business case is established in Chapter One vis-à-vis previous configurations of the business-society relationship. This overview of major debates regarding the social responsibilities of business will demonstrate that while there are certain continuities of concern, contemporary CSR also marks a crucial departure in both theoretical and practical terms. As a *market* phenomenon, CSR defines a *self-interested ethical*, and on this basis is theoretically distinguishable from both deontologically centred ‘Business Ethics’ based approaches, and from the kind of shareholder-value-based neo-classical economics (propounded by figures such as Milton Friedman) that understand wealth creation, *a priori* and necessarily, to be ethical. This re-orientation is practically accompanied by a disciplinary shift in which more traditional Business Ethics departments are superseded by a commercially focussed Management Studies. Herein, abstract deontological ‘shoulds’ are replaced in academia by an empirical focus on establishing the veracity of the business-case claim, and commercially by a convergence of concern regarding how ethics may actually be practiced.

The sociological significance of these shifts in the business-society relationship are highlighted by a parallel reading of the relationship between the economic and social as theorised within Economic Sociology. In order to sociologically approach CSR as market-based, the need to examine what we permit to and exclude from our understandings of what is ‘market’ comes to the fore. Here, the relationship of ‘embeddedness’ between the economic and social, as elaborated by Mark Granovetter, will be introduced. To the extent however that this is committed primarily to establishing the relative position of the ‘economic’ vis-à-vis the ‘social’ this approach exhibits serious limitations in the present context and an evident need to consider other sociological approaches to markets emerges. Inasmuch as more recent ‘performativity’ accounts shift the focus from the relative

positioning of the ‘economic’ per se, to the function of particular concrete markets, these offer, in the present instance, a potentially more fruitful mode of inquiry, one however that, as I will discuss, is not entirely without its own problems and pitfalls, (also see Chapter Seven on this point).

From business and society, and economics and sociology, Chapter Two turns its attention to sociological discussions of the relationship between markets and morality. It is here that we encounter both the notion that, as I have already mentioned, ethical problems are external to the market, and, more extreme than this, the idea that markets are fundamentally detrimental to morality. An overview of historical and contemporary literature on this subject illustrates the continuing pervasiveness of these tendencies even in more recent and theoretically sophisticated approaches that seek to describe the contemporary era in terms ‘economisation,’ ‘marketisation,’ individual ‘responsibilisation’ and forth. Often attendant in descriptions along these lines, particularly as they are made within a Foucauldian governmentality framework, is a critique of markets on the basis of their definitive ‘neo-liberal’ function. Ostensibly a political criticism, this is also, frequently, a moral one. When ‘marketisation’ necessarily describes the progressive expansion of a ‘neo-liberal regime,’ description and critique are one and the same moment. For all the critical sophistication such an approach brings then to the understanding of markets as practical and reflexive endeavours, the ‘market’ and the ‘moral’ can remain distinct, a separation re-instantiated on the basis of a prevailing concern with ultimate ‘ends’ in which markets are approached simply as a symptom of something else.

The ‘means’ as it were, of ethics as *practiced in and as market*, require serious elaboration on their own terms. Where prevailing approaches persist in utilising a dualistic spatial metaphor in order describe the ‘economic’ and ‘social,’ ‘market’ and ‘moral’ however, the opportunities for any such elaboration are already curtailed. The problem of attending to *ethics-in/as-practice* then, becomes one of practice, or research practice to be more precise. As Chapter Three will suggest, in order to empirically research the ‘doing’ of market ethics, it is necessary first to identify the ‘sites’ in which this takes place. The question of ‘site’ in relation to the

‘market’ though is not a straightforward one. More than simply made up of ‘multiple-sites,’ markets are changing, evolving and dynamically self-reflexive mechanisms, and thus require a set of research methods able to sensitively attend to this constructive complexity.

To this problem, this research introduces the idea of the *nexus*. The ‘market,’ in the present thesis, refers flexibly at once to a number of possibilities. Most straightforwardly, markets are particular sites for the exchange goods. In economics parlance they are price setting mechanisms. Between the most concretely particular and abstractly general however, what is ‘market’ might be understood to be empirically manifest in patterns of attention and affect that give rise, variably, to profit, or, more accurately, to the potential to financially profit. These shifting, empirically observable constellations of attention, affect, and (potential) profitability are the kinds of market formation that this thesis describes using the term ‘nexus.’

To elaborate in relation to CSR, recall again the business case proposal that a company may ‘do well by doing good.’ Though not made exactly explicit in this suggestion, the ‘good,’ perceivably, from which profit might result is not a universal or unchanging one. Otherwise put, what is ‘good’ is, in this formulation at least, a very particular designation, one which is arrived at through the function of the temporal and situational, attentive and affective contingency of ‘goodness’ in relation to profitability.

An alternative and more straightforward way of saying this is to point out that CSR is not practiced for its own sake or abstractly in relation only to its own terms per se. Rather, CSR is always an address made to certain relevant ‘others,’ interlocutors if you like, through whom the possibility that a company may ‘do well by doing good’ is understood to be realisable. The business case for CSR, following this, might be understood to function as a kind of sales pitch – for the business case to be ‘true,’ ‘goodness’ must be bought by CSR’s addressees, and, crucially as I understand it, this means that it is these addressed ‘others’ who functionally and collectively discern what the ‘good’ is to be at any particular moment. Noticing and caring (attention and affect), to much simplify this suggestion, have to coincide in

relation to a given ‘good,’ before this can qualify to be such in a CSR that attaches potential profitability to what is ‘good.’

The matter of CSR's ‘addressees,’ and how the articulation of attention, affect and profit both identifies these groups, and gives rise to particular contemporary versions of the ‘good’ are, for this thesis, of themselves of major methodological importance inasmuch as they provide a direction, structure and rationale for the empirical work. Recalling the earlier description of the market as ‘nexus,’ I suggest that the methodological problem of ‘site’ becomes in this market context, a matter instead of firstly identifying CSR’s addressees or important ‘others,’ and secondly, attempting to empirically discern how, in practice, these collectivities may be said to ‘do’ ethics in this particular contemporary mode.

Where attention, affect, and profit coincide to form a nexus, this, broadly speaking, marks out a collectivity of ‘others’ to whom CSR makes an address. Methodologically speaking though, one further consideration is important – that of *intensity*. ‘Market’ as ‘nexus’ seeks to recast the methodological problem of site in terms of intensity such that the most intense co-articulations of attention, affect, and potential profitability signal which areas should become a focus for empirical inquiry, or as I will call it, become a ‘focal nexus’ for empirical research. Following this rationale, and as Chapter Three illustrates in greater depth, three distinct but interlinked focal nexuses on which the empirical chapters will be base may be discerned – the ‘Ethical Corporation,’ ‘Ethical Consumption,’ and ‘Ethical Career.’

The first of these, ‘Chapter Four – Ethics by Number?’ charts the academic and commercial consequences of the practical convergence around business case CSR described in Chapter One. ‘Doing well by doing good,’ functions in this arena as a kind of testable hypothesis in relation to the notion of the ethical corporation. This gives rise, in practice, to a proliferation of competing measurement techniques designed variously to correlate ‘ethics’ and ‘profit,’ rank companies on the basis of their quantitatively measured ethicality, and chart popular perceptions regarding the relative ethicality of particular companies, to name just a few of the numerous developments along these lines. Returning then to some of the earlier introduced tensions between what is rightfully non-economic versus economic, these are

elaborated with regard to sociological treatments of the quantitative versus qualitative. While notions such as ‘reductiveness’ tend to characterise the sociological responses to a ‘quantification ‘of the ‘qualitative,’ an ‘ethics by number’ suggests that these descriptions are never quite so ‘pure’ in practice. Number has its own texture, and it is herein that the boundary between the quantitative and qualitative, and the economic and the ethical becomes interestingly blurred.

Chapter Five, ‘Ethical Consumption,’ is in two parts. Both draw on the same set of empirical material – a year long collection of blog posts and user comments from *The Guardian Online’s ‘Ethical Living.’* The emphasis in Part I, in contrast to a discussed range of consumer culture literature, is on the material, practical aspects of *consumption as doing*, by comparison to *consumerism as having*. The overdeterminism that critiques of consumerism can manifest is tempered through an attention to how ethical consumptive practices work to invest the very substance or materiality of these practices with ethical significance. In full colour, sound, and (as will be discussed) furriness, the ‘ethical’ is manifest in a surprising range of material and affective consumptive relationships. It is not only the mere fact of this materiality itself that is critically important though, this frequently made observation requires some extension. Practically and affectively speaking, material things are differentially invested with potential. One material is not, in a relativist way, easily made ethically equivalent to another – the question is of what consumer practices and objects, on the basis of their particular materiality, may be made to *do*.

Part II, ‘Ethical Consumption as Market Practice,’ continues with the affective-material emphasis of Part I, but brings this to a discussion of the sociological critique of market ‘choice,’ especially where this is made through a contrast with apparently dissimilar ‘care.’ The notion of consumer choice is an important one for CSR, ‘doing well by doing good’ fundamentally understands a competitive marketplace in which consumers would prefer to make more ‘ethical’ choices, and in which these may even be priced at a premium. As the discussion in Part I will have already begun to suggest however, in the lives of the surveyed bloggers and commenters, ‘choice’ finds itself wrapped and riddled through with

‘care,’ each notion respectively neither as impoverished nor as sequestered as their typical description would suggest.

Chapter Six encounters a very new, but rapidly ascendant notion – ‘The Ethical Career.’ Utilising material gathered from graduate careers fairs, ethical careers presentations, interviews with careers advisors, and a year of participant observation with the London School of Economics and Politics Student CSR Society, this chapter begins by addressing the definitional problem that the notion of an ‘ethical career’ presents with regard to conventional understandings of employment. Here, the problem of ethical self-interest reoccurs, only in the context of the ‘ethical career’ another and further complicating dimension is added. The ‘ethics’ at stake, as well as being ‘self-interested’ are also largely ‘self-defined’ by ethical career aspirants themselves. Such an ‘ethics,’ while undoubtedly problematic in the traditionally definitive terms of moral philosophy, moves far away from such rule-bound descriptions, and works instead to reinvent ethics in the context of the job market as a type of future-orientated and innovatively generative potential concerned to push the boundaries of what markets themselves may actually do.

This analysis of the ‘ethical’ is, at the same time and almost inevitably, also a commentary on the political. Or, more specifically, on what types of ‘politics’ are generally seen fit to count as such. Question of politics are, very often, intimately tied to questions of ethics, and this is perhaps never more so than when the ‘ethics’ in question is ‘market’ one. Throughout the chapters of this thesis I devote various sections of discussion to making explicit the political overtones, constraints and potentialities that a market ethics, as this is variously manifest, engineers in the particular context of its emergence. In Chapter One, for instance, explicitly political debates about whether CSR should be legislated (as opposed to being, as per the business case, a market practice based on the voluntary, and hence competitively differentiating, nature of compliance) are addressed under the heading ‘Market Politics.’ The question here is whether the fact of a market is anti-political in consequence, signalling, as per the critiques of neo-liberalism discussed in Chapter Two, an end of political contestation in favour of the efficiency of markets, or, whether markets can functionally generate a politics worthy of this description in

their own right. Chapters Four, Five and Six also revisit this question with regard to their respective empirical focus. So, in Chapter Four, the issue of quantification is also a problem of the quality of human judgement versus the ‘anti-political’ calculativeness of number. In Chapter Five, the critique of ‘choice’ as a manifestation of individualising responsabilisation, as opposed to ‘caring’ non-market motivations, is encountered. And, in Chapter Six, an analogous question emerges around the re-invention of ethics as a property of the self.

The most thorough address this thesis makes however to the question of politics is to be found in the final chapter – ‘Reflexions on ‘Crisis.’’ Not addressed specifically until the last chapter, but implicitly at stake in the designation of ‘market ethics’ throughout, is the question of the *ethics of markets themselves*. Or even, as this might be more broadly construed, the ethics of capitalism itself. Following the financial crisis and subsequent ‘global’ recession of 2008-9, questions such as these have of course become pertinent in an unprecedented way. Financial crisis provides, in this regard, an opportune moment for reflexion across the time of the preceding finance-driven bull market, which, not so coincidentally, is also the time of the CSR boom that this research seeks to address.

The question of what will become of a market based CSR in the context of ‘failed’ markets is one that, especially in the immediate wake of crisis, many have sought to ask and answer. While I can not begin to respond to this directly, (it is, in the very least still at the end of 2009, too early to say), the presumption of *failure* and the declaration of *crisis* are themselves of much critical import in the present project, particularly with regard to the issue of effective alternative politics. Widely hailed as a great opportunity for Left politics, the so-called ‘crisis of capitalism’ begins to look already, as the British economy starts to find its way out of recession, much like an opportunity missed. It is the actual ascription of ‘crisis’ here however that needs to be critically addressed, especially in relation to the question of what such an ascription both begets and allows.

Picking up where Chapter One’s discussion of ‘performativity’ left off, the interpretive dynamic of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ is demonstrably in evidence not only in popular and economic accounts of crisis, but also in the performative demand that

things either work, or (counter-performatively) do not work. In this way, and problematically so in regard to the kind of political responses approaches along these line can generate in a market context, the character of 'success' versus 'failure' is left critically unquestioned. The polar linearity of 'success' and 'failure' actively conceals however, what I will suggest are a much more complex set of market dynamics at work in highly financialised economies. It is only in and through an attempt to think ethics as a functional potential of such dynamics, that the question of the possibilities entailed in the suggestion of a 'market ethics' might be adequately described, and the desire to contribute incisively in contemporary market politics critically realised.

## Chapter One

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### Corporate Social Responsibility – A *Market* Phenomenon

Commentators are often quick to point out that CSR is not a ‘new’ issue *per se*; questions of social responsibility, it is claimed, have long dominated both mainstream academic and public discussion of the relationship between business and society.<sup>1</sup> Without seeking to directly weigh into debates regarding the relative novelty of the ‘social responsibilities of business’ concept though, it is important to note that thinking on this topic has evolved significantly, and in discernable stages, over recent history, and particularly in the last ten or so years.

This chapter will begin with a historical overview of the main debates regarding the social responsibilities of business that have taken place over the years – from early concerns centred on employee well-being, through a period in which corporate philanthropy constituted the main means of societal contribution, to more academic debates that have polarised economists and business ethicists over the appropriate role for business in society. Moving though, from past to present, I will suggest that while contemporary CSR is of course contiguous in certain ways with those approaches that have preceded it, significantly, it also makes a crucial break with these.

It is widely proposed at present that there is a ‘business case’ for CSR – the suggestion here being that, in the contemporary marketplace, ‘ethics’ are in themselves big business – that it is possible for a company to do well by doing good.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, William C. Frederick, *Corporation Be Good: The Story of Corporate Social Responsibility* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2006). Writing which traces a history of CSR is reasonably commonplace. This may perhaps be due to a desire to give foundations to the practice which act to make it more legitimate in the present, or similarly, the allusion to a tradition may serve to better establish the practice amongst the ‘correct’ historical concerns of business. These suggestions are largely speculative, it should be noted though that where I seek to ‘trace a trajectory’ as it were, this is specifically with regard to the perceived relationship between ‘social responsibility’ and ‘profitability,’ and is undertaken so as to suggest that the current prevailing approach to CSR is distinctive in this regard.

This direct linkage of ‘virtue’ and ‘profit’ is unique with regard to previous perspectives on the social responsibilities of business, each of these proposing a much more obfuscated role for self-interest, if any at all. Thus, while on the face of things, it is hard to be critical of businesses seeking to act in a more ‘socially responsible way,’ the popular scepticism that palpably surrounds this contemporary suggestion is understandable nonetheless.

However, the *resolution* of this debate, so to speak, is not the intention of this chapter. Instead, the focus here will be on understanding the *significance* of this market basis for CSR, asking in particular how it might be possible to employ some of the insights provided by economic sociology to this end. Given the long history of discussion in economic sociology of the relationship between the ‘economic’ and ‘social,’ this field provides a wealth of resources with which to begin to think through this problem.

In an express attempt to avoid the pit-falls of an approach that would insist on thinking ‘markets’ and ‘ethics’ separately, the relationship of ‘embeddedness’ between the economic and social, as elaborated by Mark Granovetter,<sup>2</sup> will be introduced and considered. Contra the neo-classical economic insistence on a rational market actor, Granovetter and those writing after him usefully point out the degree to which market actions are always very much ‘embedded’ in the webs of social relations through which they are practically conducted. Applied to the question of a market-based ‘ethical’ however, this approach, as will be discussed, exhibits some serious limitations – in particular around its commitment to establishing the relative position of the ‘economic’ vis-à-vis the ‘social.’

An evident need to re-think sociological approaches to the market itself emerges from an engagement with the economic sociology literature on ‘embeddedness.’ However, by shifting the focus from the relative positioning of the ‘market’ per se, to the issue of what it is that *particular markets* might be said to *do*, much more recent work in the field of economic sociology, in particular, that of

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," *American Journal of Sociology* 91, no. 3 (1985).

Michel Callon,<sup>3</sup> offers a potentially more promising mode of inquiry in the present context.

Providing an account of the *performative* function of economics, Callon and others writing in this vein re-describe the economy-society relationship as a co-articulating and productive one. This, as will be shown, has certain advantages with regard to approaching the questions that the present thesis seeks to explore, especially with regards to recognising the dual and simultaneous nature of the ‘economic’ and ‘social’ as described in the business case proposition.

Furthermore, as I will discuss towards the end of the chapter, insofar as such an approach opens in novel ways onto the issue of politics, it can be usefully applied to rethinking certain apparently intractable debates that persist in CSR. Here, using this framework, I will examine one particular issue in CSR – that of the merits of voluntary corporate responsibility, versus formal state and legislative regulation. As will be seen, while it is tempting (and perhaps not entirely inaccurate) to account for the predominantly voluntary nature of CSR in terms of a ever-pervasive neo-liberalism and an inexorable growth of markets, this approach might also serve to misrecognise the significant types of newly configured forms of *market politics* that may otherwise be seen emerge and proliferate in debates such as this.

A discussion of some of the recent contestations of, and alternatives to, Callon’s approach however, will also serve to highlight the need to exercise some caution around the ascription of economic performativity. Laying the groundwork for a discussion to be taken up again in Chapter Seven, I will suggest that, to the extent that the *successful* function of economics, (in a broad sense), is implied by its description in terms of performativity, the critical acuity of such an approach may ultimately be delimited. This is especially evident following the 2008 financial crisis and ensuing recession which, in Chapter Seven, will provide a context for the further articulation of a critique along these lines.

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<sup>3</sup> See the collection, Michel Callon, ed., *The Laws of the Markets* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

## Once Upon a Time: From Paternalism to Philanthropy

Early accounts of the social responsibility of business can be seen to have emerged out of the changing relationships between economic classes, that themselves mark, in many respects, the origins of modern commerce. The advent of industrialisation, and its accompanying population moment, was perceived by some as a matter of moral and sometimes religious concern. Against rising urban crowding, squalor, and industrial pollution, many now famous industrialists sought to provide for and take care of their workforce.<sup>4</sup> George Cadbury's Bourneville workers village is a prominent example of this kind of paternalistic employer-employee relationship. Here, workers were provided with housing, sporting facilities, and, in line with Cadbury's Quaker religion, means of education such as adult schooling. "Why," Cadbury had famously asked, "should an industrial area be squalid and depressing? Why should not the industrial worker enjoy country air and occupations without being separated from his work?"<sup>5</sup> This form of hierarchical patronage, undoubtedly problematic today, attests nonetheless to a lengthy historical lineage of business responsibility beyond direct commitment to profit and compliance with the law.

While paternalism was most usually a function of the employer-employee relationship, corporate philanthropy extends to the wider community, and is frequently understood as motivated by a wealthy individual's desire to 'give something back.'<sup>6</sup> Corporate giving or corporate donation, more so historically than at present, was often a means of sponsoring a related field – a pharmaceutical company might donate to the local university's chemistry department for instance, perhaps in the hope that some of the department's graduating students may go on to approach the company for a job. The link between corporate philanthropy and self-interest here though, is at best a highly tentative one. Philanthropic giving is only

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Cannon, *Corporate Responsibility: A Text Book on Business Ethics, Governance, Environment, Roles and Responsibilities* (London: Pitman, 1994). p.5

<sup>5</sup> George Cadbury, quoted in. BBC News, "Workers' Village Idea Is Not New ", 20th February 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Malcolm Keay, "Briefing Paper: Towards Global Corporate Social Responsibility " *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, [http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/3105\\_towards\\_global\\_corp\\_resp.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/3105_towards_global_corp_resp.pdf) 2002.

very rarely understood to directly improve a company's worth; rather, these expenditures might only be understood as 'self-interested' (if it is possible to characterise them as such at all) in a very broad and indirect sense.

A particularly strong culture of corporate philanthropy can be seen to emerge in both Britain and the United States from 1950 or so, reaching its peak in the late 1960s to 1970s. So-called 'five per cent' clubs emerged in this period, populated by business leaders who committed to donating at least five per cent of their pre-tax company earnings to a variety of charitable causes.<sup>7</sup> In this corporate climate, peer pressure amongst companies to be more philanthropic was strong, however this competition can not be said to have arisen from any expectation that the most generous firms would consequently be more profitable than their competitors. The benefits derived from charitable donation, it was recognised, would accrue to society as a whole, not only to the particular firm that had enabled them. As summed up by the then Committee for Economic development in the United States, corporate giving took part in the "broad recognition that corporate self-interest is inexorably involved in the well being of the society of which business is an integral part."<sup>8</sup>

In positioning corporate paternalism and philanthropy 'historically' as it were, it is important here not to overstate the linearity of the proposed temporal trajectory. Of course, instances of corporate paternalism might still be pointed to today, in the provision of company health insurance for instance, even if these do manifest in slightly altered ways. Similarly, corporate philanthropy may still be readily observed, even if again the form of this has changed over time. The example of corporate sponsorship springs to mind here, sitting arguably as it does between advertisement and charity. What I am attempting to draw attention to in this overview is not the discrete stage-by-stage evolution of a concept that cumulates in the present with contemporary CSR, but instead, changing trends, especially with regard to the appropriateness of business self-interest in relation to its perceived social responsibilities. The particular moment in which certain business-society configurations emerge is of course significant in determining the nature of these.

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<sup>7</sup> David Vogel, *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility* (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2006). p.18

<sup>8</sup> Committee for Economic Development, quoted in Vogel, *Ibid.*, p.19

## **Business Ethics and the Academy vs. Economics**

The political climate of the 1970s, for instance, might be understood to have brought about something of a renewal of attention to issues of corporate social responsibility. Public protests and boycotts surrounding the use of Dow Chemical products in Vietnam are a notable example of the kind of political lobbying which many corporations during this period were subject to. The rise in public attention to corporate practices, and the explicit politicisation of corporate activities, resulted then in the emergence of a more regulatory culture around business in which 'Business Ethics' became a popular and widely offered academic subject.

Rapidly spreading through Business Schools and Philosophy departments (particularly in the US, but also in the UK), Business Ethics, as a discipline, was primarily concerned, in this particular political climate, to see that the power exerted by businesses was put to good use. Drawing on moral philosophy to make their case, this group of scholars, of which Archie Carroll is a well-known example, put forward what has come to be referred to as the 'ethical' model of CSR.<sup>9</sup> With regard to the question of self-interest and socially responsible behaviour, Carroll and his fellow ethicists suggest that it is the *moral duty* of business to be socially responsible, and that hence corporations *should* behave in this way without regard to the matter of self-interest. This normative prescription for corporate behaviour is most frequently articulated in theoretical terms by members of this discipline who develop schemes, models, and paradigms that employ various philosophical justifications for the approach to corporate ethics they propound.

At the same time that the academic study of Business Ethics was gaining in popularity however, over in the Economics department, a simultaneous, but contrary proposal regarding the social responsibilities of business was being formulated. It was from here, within the neo-classical economic framework built on John Stuart Mill's utilitarian account of ethical decision making, that the renowned economist

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<sup>9</sup> Archie B. Carroll, "Corporate Social Responsibility: Evolution of a Definitional Construct," *Business & Society* 38, no. 3 (1999).

Milton Friedman famously exclaimed, “[t]here is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits.”<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to the moral absolutism of the Business Ethicists, Friedman and his fellow economists reasoned that, given every economic agent acts rationally (in a market of free choices) so as always to maximise his own utility, and because any benefit to the individual also always simultaneously benefits the economic entity, then the pursuit of ones own interest is, by extension, also of benefit to society as a wider whole. Thus, even though a collective optimum is anticipated neither by planning nor by any intention on behalf of the participating individuals, this optimum is necessarily guaranteed in the eyes of neo-classical economists by the supposed ‘freedom’ of the underlying marketplace in which economic decisions are made.

So, while for these economists self-interest was conveniently coincident with social responsibility, the ethicists on the other hand, were left facing a somewhat more difficult dilemma, their advice inevitably to fall on the largely deaf ears of corporations that ultimately understand their operations to take place in the sort of free market economy propounded by the economists.<sup>11</sup> Suffice to say, insofar as these perspectives characterised the main modes of approach to the issue of corporate social responsibility in the thirty or so years following the early-1960s, little which was new or substantially progressive emerged in this field, and hence debate about corporate responsibly lay largely stagnant.

### **‘Not an Oxymoron’: The Business Case for CSR**

CSR is thriving. It is now an industry in itself, with a full-time staff, websites, newsletters, professional associations and massed armies of consultants ...

*The Economist*, 2004<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits," *The New York Times Magazine* 13 September, 1970. p.32; Originally published in Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962).

<sup>11</sup> Again, the past-tense of this statement is not intended to suggest that today work in these disciplines, or from these perspectives, has ceased. Today however these approaches are re-articulated in relation to the so-called ‘business case’ proposal.

<sup>12</sup> "Two-Faced Capitalism," *The Economist*, January 24, 2004.

Indeed, it is only recently that concerns about social responsibility have reappeared and become a matter of public debate. Now however, questions regarding the social responsibilities of business are most frequently encountered in the context of the very contemporary claim that there is what is referred to as a ‘*business case*’ for CSR. In the course of the preceding overview, I outlined a range of perspectives, practical and theoretical, that have attempted to approach, in one way or another, the question of the social responsibility of business. Focussing on the issue of ‘self-interest,’ it is possible to see that although each of these historical approaches has a unique relationship to this, all ultimately address it in the *abstract*. Corporate philanthropy recognises the benefits of contributing financially to the society in which business operates, but as I noted previously, giving is not undertaken in the expectation that the most generous will consequently be the most financially successful.

For the business ethicists, ‘self-interest’ undermines the moral imperative *tout court*, and is therefore summarily barred from playing any role as ‘incentive’ to responsible behaviour. While, for the economists, self-interest is the unwavering rule of human behaviour, and that which ensures economic and social prosperity, but only however, via an indirect and idealised notion of a ‘common good.’ It is on this note that the presently defined ‘business case’ differs significantly from those accounts of corporate social responsibility that have preceded it. This is succinctly captured by contemporary CSR’s structuring maxim – that it is possible to ‘*do well by doing good.*’<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See, [www.ethicalcorporation.com](http://www.ethicalcorporation.com).

<sup>14</sup> This term is ubiquitous in popular, commercial, and academic accounts of CSR. It is something of a slogan, or incantation, frequently repeated, and attested to from a variety of quarters. For usage see, Vogel, *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility*. Chapter Two.

Simply, in the current cultural and economic climate,<sup>15</sup> proponents claim that CSR makes good business sense. This sentiment is summed up by General Electric CEO and prominent corporate figure Jeffrey Immelt, when he notes: “The world has changed ... It’s up to us to use our platform to be a good citizen. Because not only is it a nice thing to do, it’s a *business imperative*.”<sup>16</sup> Likewise, the vast majority of contemporary business writing on the subject of CSR emphasises the dimension of financial profitability – here the titles of these popular recent publications speak for themselves: *Profits with Principles: Seven Strategies for Delivering Value with Values*;<sup>17</sup> *The Sustainability Advantage: Seven Business Case Benefits of a Triple Bottom Line*;<sup>18</sup> and, *Make Poverty Business: Increase Profits and Reduce Risks by Engaging With the Poor*.<sup>19</sup>

Significantly, the currency and influence of the ‘business case’ for CSR is also reflected in a changing academic research agenda in the field. Previously, research in this area was primarily conducted in Business Ethics departments, published in specialist journals, and, as already discussed, tended to be largely theoretical in nature. Following the proposed ‘business case’ however, a new focus for academic activity has emerged in the relatively recently assembled field of ‘Social Issues in Management.’ Here, the approach is overwhelming empirical in focus as the actual *veracity* of the ‘business case’ itself becomes the topic of examination. Proceeding mostly quantitatively, scholars in this field aim to establish, via a range of calculations, the exact extent of profitability that may be attributable to the practice of CSR.

Hence, in contrast to the business ethics approach, research in this field might be said to proceed via quantification, not just prescription, though both might

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter Seven for a discussion of how the economic downturn beginning in 2008 has effected the way in which claims in the ‘business case’ vein are being made. While these retain their ‘essence’ as it were, changing understandings about the efficacy of markets themselves inevitably leads to the evolution of an account that encompasses this shift in sentiment.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Immelt (added italics), in Marc Gunter, "Money and Morals at GE," *Fortune* 2004. p.176

<sup>17</sup> Ira Jackson and Jane Nelson, *Profits with Principles: Seven Strategies for Delivering Value with Values* (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Bob Willard, *The Sustainability Advantage: Seven Business Case Benefits of a Triple Bottom Line* (Gabriola Island, B.C: New Society, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Craig Wilson and Peter Wilson, *Make Poverty Business: Increase Profits and Reduce Risks by Engaging with the Poor* (Sheffield: Greenleaf, 2006).

arguably be said nonetheless to be normative in dimension. I will return to discuss this shift in empirical focus in more detail however in Chapter Four – there, the quantitative studies I have briefly mentioned here will constitute some of the empirical material for my own analysis of the function of measurement and number in the enactment of a market-specific ‘ethical.’

Returning for the moment though to the ‘business case’ for CSR, and re-approaching this again from the point of view of ‘self-interest’ that I have discussed already in regard to historical accounts of social responsibility, a significant difference can now be seen to emerge. Insofar as contemporary CSR creates and is participant in a ‘market for virtue,’<sup>20</sup> ‘ethics’ is understood as a market value to the extent that it constitutes a differentiated selling point or lends competitive advantage. ‘Self-interest,’ in the form of profitability, is thus, in this account, not abstractly conceived to contribute to a general social good, or disqualified as the very thing that undermines the possibility of ‘ethics’ itself. Rather, ‘social responsibility’ as a particular and differentiated practice, is understood to be a channel through which profit may resultantly flow.

This flow, moreover, is thought to take specific and very practically conceived paths, clear statements of which can be readily found in the ever-growing Management literature on the topic. Under the heading “Public and consumer relations,” in one account for instance, it is clearly stated that, “a responsible image can be helpful (and profitable) to a company. Other things being equal, customers will prefer to take their business to a company with whose activities they feel comfortable.” Similarly, under the title, “Reputation and brand management: ... many companies increasingly see their reputation as one of their key assets. Reputation can be damaged overnight by charges of malpractice or irresponsible behaviour, for example, sweatshop practices in the supply chain.”<sup>21</sup> Financial benefits in CSR are also readily perceived to accrue through better “[s]taff recruitment and motivation,”<sup>22</sup> or, at the more negative end of the spectrum, CSR might even be reckoned as a means of ‘risk management,’ lessening potential

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<sup>20</sup> Vogel, *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility*.

<sup>21</sup> Key, "Briefing Paper: Towards Global Corporate Social Responsibility."

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

‘exposure to liability.’<sup>23</sup> As summed up in a recent CSR manual, the “[f]ocus is on practical action rather than theoretical discussion for companies taking steps to achieve effective corporate responsibility.” A kind of convergence *on and in practice* may therefore be said to be taking place.<sup>24</sup>

As per the previous Jeffrey Immelt quote, there is a pervasive sense that CSR has differently re-emerged in the present because the ‘world has changed.’ Indeed, many ‘reasons’ are supplied in answer to the question ‘why has CSR come to matter now?’ most of which seek recourse to some version of a changed or changing world. In the same way that ‘paths to profit’ can be seen to proliferate in the commercial literature on CSR, so do explanations of the reasons as to why this is the case. A starting list of these would include the apparent “expansion of global and national markets,” relatedly, the “growth of world trade and investment,” “globalisation” (in the many ways in which this is manifest), “increasing privatisation and economic deregulation,”<sup>25</sup> as well as the “massive disparity between huge [corporate] profits ... against instances of dire poverty [in the developing world],”<sup>26</sup> and, perhaps less over-archingly, the notion that we are presently in the throes of a “lifestyle revolution,” fuelled by companies that compete on terms of innovation and “progressive trendsetting.”<sup>27</sup>

Whatever the particular details of the manifold means by which CSR might be understood to equate to profit, or, by which its contemporary emergence might be accounted for, it is not my intention to fully document or enter into these debates here. Equally, the preceding ‘list’ is not compiled with an eye to judging the veracity, or relative plausibility of the various scenarios offered. Instead, the point which I understand to be particularly significant is the constitution in itself of CSR as ‘*market.*’

This rendition of social responsibility is marked in its departure from the historical accounts that were the subject of preceding discussion. While it is possible

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<sup>23</sup> Sumi Dhanarajan, "Managing Ethical Standards: When Rhetoric Meets Reality," *Development in Practice* 15, no. 3&4 (2005). p.529

<sup>24</sup> Roger Cowe, *The Corporate Social Responsibility Manual: A Practical Approach to Sustainable Business Success* (London: Spiro Press, 2002). (book jacket).

<sup>25</sup> Vogel, *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility*. p.8

<sup>26</sup> Dhanarajan, "Managing Ethical Standards: When Rhetoric Meets Reality." p.530-1

<sup>27</sup> Vogel, *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility*. p.ix

to trace a history of corporate social responsibility as I have done here, it is important to re-iterate that the ‘business case’ for CSR should not be read as a sort of end-point, or natural resolution of the preceding perspectives. Nor, significantly, does it represent any ‘synthesis’ or ‘integration’ of the preceding approaches. Though some commentators have called for greater co-operation between practitioners in the field of CSR, and theoreticians working in Business Ethics departments,<sup>28</sup> conversely, the significant divergence that this ‘shift to market’ may be said to represent might alternatively be underscored.

If Friedman were alive to survey contemporary developments in CSR there is no doubt he would find himself significantly less troubled today than on his first foray into this field in 1962. There are indeed parallels between the original accounts of social responsibility provided by neo-classical economists and the market-based account that is pervasive today – ‘profit’ for instance, still occupies pride of place in the contemporary agenda. However, the central tenet of current CSR, that it be voluntarily adopted such that it might constitute a profitable or distinguishing edge in the competitive marketplace, is entirely novel with regard to prior accounts. The corporate address to ethical issues in the form of contemporary CSR with which this thesis is concerned is not, I might re-iterate, governmentally demanded or legally regulated. Although debates concerning the merit of legally regulated CSR compliance do occur with frequency (and will be discussed in some detail towards the end of this chapter), it is arguable that these are sidelined by an increasing practical convergence around voluntarism, especially when this is coupled with a consideration of the unwillingness demonstrated by governments to legislate this field.<sup>29</sup>

‘Ethics,’ in a voluntary compliance context, might be significantly understood to be involved in a kind of ‘becoming’ market, whereby the relative position of this (internal/external to the market itself), is undergoing constant re-negotiation. By contrast, previous accounts of the social responsibility of business

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<sup>28</sup> See, Diane L. Swanson, "Towards an Integrative Theory of Business and Society," *Academy of Management Review* 24, no. 3 (1999).

<sup>29</sup> "Corporate Social Responsibility: A Government Update," in *Department of Trade and Industry* ([www.csr.gov.uk](http://www.csr.gov.uk), 2004). This is elaborated upon in a latter section of the chapter under the heading ‘The Market vs. the State?’

have largely understood the ‘ethical’ to be external to the market in which business operates, or, as in Friedman’s utilitarian reckoning, understood it to be the constant and inevitable outcome of any economic action. In either case, these approaches, have, differentially, re-inscribed relatively static, standard, and incontestable accounts of the ‘ethical’ as either finite moral absolute or generalised ‘common good.’ Given, however, that ethics in contemporary CSR is that which simultaneously is made possible and constrained by the market, an interesting set of questions emerge at this particular moment around the suitability of our conventional understandings of the ‘economic’ and ‘social,’ ‘ethical,’ and as I will go on to discuss later in this chapter, ‘political,’ in this context.<sup>30</sup>

Where preceding discussion sought to describe the development of contemporary CSR in relation to previously prevalent accounts of the relationship between business and society, in what proceeds the focus will be on beginning to understand the sociological significance of CSR’s ‘becoming’ market. A proposition that is simultaneously economic, social, and ethical, business case CSR describes two interrelated tensions that are both inherent in, and potentially illuminated by, a turn to certain sociological literatures. Firstly, the suggestion of a ‘market for ethics,’ seems to present something of a paradox in terms of conventional sociological approaches to the description of ‘ethics’ and ‘markets.’ There is a long history of inquiry into the ‘morality of markets,’ as it is often phrased, and, in sociology at least, this has usually centred on a description of ‘self-interest’ as ethical anathema. An engagement with this literature though will be the task in Chapter Two, as in the present chapter it is the second emergent tension that I wish to address.

Brought to the fore via a conjunction of ‘corporate profitability’ and ‘social responsibility’ are a number of problems surrounding the sociological description of ‘economic’ phenomena. What CSR usefully highlights here, I would suggest, is

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<sup>30</sup> My proposal that the advent of a market-based CSR provides a fruitful ground from which to re-approach conventional sociological notions of the economic vis-à-vis the social and so forth, need be distinguished from the notion that these have ever represented different logics which now are in the process of empirically converging. At stake is not a spuriously defined ‘convergence,’ instead the present description seeks to highlight, through attention to contemporary CSR, the intricacies of mutual implication and reflexive co-articulation between conventionally distinct conceptual fields. See, for discussion, Don Slater, "Capturing Markets from the Economists," in *Cultural Economy*, ed. Paul Du Gay and Michael Pryke (London: Sage, 2002). p.60

certain impoverishment prevalent in conventional sociological approaches to markets specifically, and economics more broadly. The ‘sociological’ and ‘economic’ come into contact most explicitly in the field of Economic Sociology, so it is here I will begin, and in particular with Mark Granovetter’s account of economic ‘embeddedness.’<sup>31</sup> This notion, and the literature that develops from it, generates a series of significant questions and elaborations regarding the relationship between what is ‘economic’ and what is ‘social.’ As will be seen however, it also remains in many ways inadequately equipped to address the kind of market relations that can presently be seen to characterise CSR.

### **The ‘Embedded’ Economy of Economic Sociology**

Max Weber’s writings on the relationship between religious doctrines and economic life is a classic source of the observation that the ‘social’ has an independent effect on the economic.<sup>32</sup> Subsequent to this though, and against which more contemporary economic sociology has articulated its aims, the structural-functional school of the 1950s, led by Talcott Parsons,<sup>33</sup> sought to complement mainstream economics by primarily examining what were understood to be the *sociological aspects of economic phenomena*.<sup>34</sup> In instituting this approach, structural functionalism effectively established a tacit division between the economic and the social, which mapped easily onto a disciplinary and intellectual division of labour between Economics and Sociology – a situation sometimes referred to as ‘Parson’s Pact.’<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness."

<sup>32</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin University Books, 1971 [1930]).

<sup>33</sup> See; Talcott Parsons and Neil J. Smelser, *Economy and Society: A Study in the Integration of Economic and Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1956).

<sup>34</sup> Richard Swedberg, Goran Brulin, and Ulf Himmelstrand, "The Paradigm of Economic Sociology: Premises and Promises," *Theory and Society* 16 (1987). p.206

<sup>35</sup> See, David Stark, quoted in, Donald MacKenzie, "Long-Term Capital Management and the Sociology of Arbitrage," *Economy and Society* 32, no. 3 (2003). p.350

More recently however, a ‘new’<sup>36</sup> economic sociology has emerged, calling off Parson’s peace with economists and seeking to challenge this spurious division of labour by proposing that social processes be understood as absolutely core to economic life, (as opposed to mere ‘accompaniments’ to it per se). The relative positioning of economic sociology as discipline vis-à-vis neo-classical economics is made very explicit by those who undertook some of the earlier work in this field.

By and large, the intention of this revived economic sociology, spearheaded by figures such as Mark Granovetter, Harrison White, and Viviana Zelizer,<sup>37</sup> has been to contest and radically amend (in differing ways) the analysis of markets and economic action provided by neo-classical economics. Importantly, this purpose is frequently cited by economic sociologists as being motivated by the perceived encroachment of economics onto disciplinary ‘turf’ thought to rightfully belong to sociology. The Nobel Prize winning economist Gary Becker (who is well known for his application of economic models to the understanding of family life),<sup>38</sup> is frequently described in economic sociology texts as pioneer of this perceived economic ‘invasion’ of the social.<sup>39</sup>

It is against a neo-classical economics understood to be ill-equipped to deal with questions of the social that Granovetter introduces his seminal important interpretation of ‘embeddedness.’ He states, “I concentrate here on economic

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<sup>36</sup> I include ‘new’ in inverted commas here to indicate that although this field is indeed often referred to in this way, much economic sociology in the ‘embeddedness’ vein is no longer especially new, and, in British and European economic sociology at least, ‘newer’ approaches have since emerged, in particular a group of Actor Network Theory (ANT) derived approaches, (as I go to discuss later in this chapter).

<sup>37</sup> American sociologists, Granovetter, White, and Zelizer are understood to have pioneered the ‘new’ economic sociology which, generally speaking, has drawn upon network theory in various ways to demonstrate, using Granovetter’s terminology, how markets are socially embedded. White develops perhaps the most advanced social network theory of markets, applying this to economic sociology by demonstrating how production markets consist of firms settled into so-called market profiles, which, maintained via the signalling of intentions, confer protection from unnecessary competition and limit uncertainty. See; Harrison C. White, *Markets from Networks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).; Viviana A. Zelizer, *The Social Meaning of Money* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).; For further discussion see; Jakob Arnoldi, "Introduction: The Richness of Markets," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 7-8 (2007).

<sup>38</sup> Gary S. Becker, *A Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).; see also, Gary S. Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behaviour* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Bernard Barber, "All Economies Are 'Embedded': The Career of a Concept and Beyond," *Social Research* 62, no. 2 (1995). p.407, also, Ben Fine, "The Triumph of Economics," in *Virtualism: A New Political Economy*, ed. James G. Carrier and Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 1998).

behaviour for two reasons: (i) it is the type-case of behaviour inadequately interpreted because those who study it professionally are so strongly committed to atomized theories of action; and (ii) with few exceptions, sociologists have refrained from serious study of any subject already claimed by neoclassical economics.”<sup>40</sup>

Originally introduced by the substantivist economist Karl Polanyi, the notion of embeddedness, as particularly redefined in Granovetter’s 1985 account, suggests that all forms of economic interaction are embedded in social relations.<sup>41</sup>

For Granovetter, relations between actors in the economy form something of a structural web of social connections. This is in stark contrast to the “*social atomization*” famously claimed by Adam Smith to be the “*prerequisite to perfect competition*.”<sup>42</sup> As the economist Alan Hirshman elaborates, in the ideal free-market: “large numbers of price-taking anonymous buyers and sellers [are] supplied with perfect information ... [and] function without any prolonged human or social contract between parties.”<sup>43</sup> In economics therefore, it is observably the case that “the fact that actors may have social relations with one another has been treated, if at all, as a fictional drag that impedes competitive markets.”<sup>44</sup>

The rational, self-interested, and utility maximising actor, or famous *homo economicus*<sup>45</sup> of neo-classical economics, is thus superseded in Granovetter’s

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<sup>40</sup> Mark Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness," in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, ed. Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992). p.73

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.68 Granovetter’s ‘embeddedness’ unlike that of Polyani, does not assume the existence of an institutional framework in which the economy is constituted. See, Karl Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and in Theory*, ed. Karl Polanyi, Conrad Arensberg, and Harry Pearson (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957). It is worth noting that, even further than this distinction, ‘embeddedness’ has multiple and different meanings in the work of other economic sociologists depending on the kind of sociological framework that they seek to employ. Both, Fligstein and DiMaggio, for instance, provide differing accounts from a ‘new institutionalist’ perspective. Herein the focus is on the operation of economic institutions via scripts, routines, classification and other forms of ‘unreflective activity.’ See; Paul DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48 (1983).; Neil Fligstein, *The Transformation of Corporate Control* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Adam Smith (1776), quoted in, Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." p.56 (original italics).

<sup>43</sup> Alan Hirschman, quoted in, Ibid., p.55

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.56

<sup>45</sup> Thorstein Veblen provides a classic description of *homo economicus* in an 1898 article: The human material with which the inquiry is concerned is conceived in hedonistic terms; that is to say, in terms of a passive and substantially inert and immutably given human nature ... The hedonistic conception

account by an emphasis on the social and relational ties that economists do not admit to their analysis of market behaviour. Summarising the economic sociology critique of mainstream economics Marion Fourcade writes:

Economists get it wrong because they do not pay attention to social connections among market actors; to the power dynamics, institutional context, and cultural rules that underlie market organisation; or to the habitus and practical skills of the individuals involved in the market game. In short, economists get it wrong because their theory of society (utilitarianism) is simplistic, reduced to a theory of rational action.<sup>46</sup>

The ‘embeddedness’ of economic action, by contrast, draws specific attention to the quality and type of ties between actors, as well as the shape and position of social networks – which are understood to be determining of both individual and collective market outcomes.<sup>47</sup> Any suggestion of the independence of economic actions from social relations is thus characterised in Granovetter’s account as a “grievous misunderstanding,”<sup>48</sup> (in the case of which ‘embeddedness’ might be usefully introduced as a corrective and reminder of the “extent to which business relations are mixed up with social ones”).<sup>49</sup>

The appeal of Granovetter’s embeddedness as a rejoinder to totalising and overly rational economic accounts of market behaviour is clear. Recall the problem of accounting for CSR as a market practice, but simultaneously, being wary to avoid equating this recognition with the economic reduction whereby ‘market practice’ can only ever amount to financially motivated self-interest. Indeed, the very ‘career’ of the concept of embeddedness,<sup>50</sup> as Bernard Barber points out, may be understood as a continuing struggle against this tendency towards the “absolutization of the

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of man is that of a lightning calculator of pleasure and pains, who oscillates like a homogeneous globule of desire and happiness under the impulse of stimuli that shift him about the area but leave him intact. He has neither antecedent nor consequent. He is an isolated definitive human datum.” Thorstein Veblen, "Why Is Economics Not an Evolutionary Science?," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 12 (1898). p.373

<sup>46</sup> Marion Fourcade, "Theories of Markets and Theories of Society," *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 8 (2007). p.18

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1017

<sup>48</sup> Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." p.53

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65

<sup>50</sup> Barber, "All Economies Are 'Embedded': The Career of a Concept and Beyond." p.388

market.”<sup>51</sup> An absolutisation which, based on “implicit reductionism, leads on to the analytical and concrete errors of seeing the market and its close theoretical companion, rational choice, as the sole explanations of social behaviour.”<sup>52</sup>

Writing from a sociological perspective, a certain scepticism or wariness of the term ‘market’ is almost second nature. The phrase ‘reductionism’ tends to present itself, as though via intuition, at the very mention of market transaction (especially as this may be explained by an economist). A precautionary ‘reminder’ of the social in the form of the embeddedness argument, does, in this context, seem sensible to say the very least. Yet, given that our present concern is with the issue of corporate *social* responsibility, one can not help but wonder if, in this matter, to insist on embeddedness is essentially to preach to the converted?

The problem is a reasonably complex one that can be approached in two ways. On the one hand, applying an economic reading to the CSR market, we might conclude that the practice and popularisation of CSR may be entirely rationally accounted for – ‘business is happy to practice social (or any other kind) of responsibility insofar as this action is in the best interest of improving the bottom line.’ In this scenario, the ‘economic’ is firmly disembedded from the ‘social,’ yet still capable of making an address to it, in line with financial interests. On the other hand though, it is possible that CSR is not a business add-on, but rather, in its contemporary incarnation, that which ‘resides at the very core of business practice.’ In this account, commonly proposed by CSR practitioners themselves, ‘embeddedness’ is the very basis of possibility for CSR itself – the term ‘corporate social responsibility’ semantically recognising the kind of interdependence of the economic and social that economic sociology is keen to underscore.

Within the confines of the economics versus sociology debate as I have set it out here, this problem is in the first case largely intractable, and in the second class, essentially moot. On the one hand, CSR may be totally accounted for within an economic framework, and on the other, the economic and social are self-evidently recognised to be part and parcel, (however, very little more can be analytically

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<sup>51</sup> Barber (1977), in *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.401

ascertained from this latter point in itself about the nature of this relation). Given that CSR is at once both a market-based phenomena and a practice that deals explicitly in both the ‘economic’ and ‘social,’ the question, in light of the problems outlined here, necessarily becomes: How otherwise might markets be analytically approached?

### **‘Shadow-Boxing with *Homo Economicus*’?**<sup>53</sup>

Insofar as ‘new’ economic sociology wields ‘embeddedness’ as both a means of denouncing and enriching neo-classical economic approaches, it finds itself in something of double bind. Economic theory is at once in need of *replacement*, (charged with reductionism and social impoverishment), and *enhancement*, (economic agents need ‘a bit more soul,’ in the form of ‘culture, values, or passions’).<sup>54</sup> However, to the extent that economic sociologists spend their time either ministering to or critiquing *homo economicus*, they are inevitably confined to operate within the invisible grip of economics.<sup>55</sup> The import of social relations in economic life is not asserted as starting premise or point of departure, instead, for economic sociology, it is as though the burden of proof of the ‘social’ were the main disciplinary task: that all markets are “economic, until proven social.”<sup>56</sup>

Like the economists it criticises, economic sociology assumes, within the scheme of enrichment/denunciation it operates, that the economy is indeed both amoral and asocial.<sup>57</sup> Given the stress on anti-reductionism, some commentators have keenly pointed out that a humanistic moral agenda can be discerned here,<sup>58</sup> one that, I would suggest, in some ways parallels that of the business ethicists discussed earlier in this chapter. While both groups are keen to prescribe the betterment of economic life (at the same time pointing out why this is so desperately necessary),

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<sup>53</sup> Daniel Thomas Cook, "The Problem of Consumption and the Ghost of *Homo Economicus*," *Accounts: ASA Economy Sociology Section Newsletter* 6, no. 1 (2006). p.6

<sup>54</sup> Michel Callon, "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics," in *The Laws of the Markets*, ed. Michel Callon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). pp.50-1

<sup>55</sup> Cook, "The Problem of Consumption and the Ghost of *Homo Economicus*." p.6

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Callon, "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics." p.51

<sup>58</sup> Don Slater, in Michel Callon, Andrew Barry, and Don Slater, "Technology, Politics and the Market: An Interview with Michel Callon," in *The Technological Economy*, ed. Andrew Barry and Don Slater (London: Routledge, 2005). p.107

each manages to fall prey to making the very assumption that they seek to critique economics or business on the basis on – effecting a division of the economic from the social or moral.

Neo-classical economics may provide a less than adequate account of market behaviour, but in describing the ‘social’ with reference to the perceived impoverishment of this in economic accounts, ‘embeddedness’ may do to social relations a similar disservice. As the French sociologist Michel Callon points out, when understood as that in which economic relations are ‘embedded,’ “society is imagined as a context.”<sup>59</sup> By intervening in the situation as though it were a matter of the economic and social jostling for relative position, economic sociology stakes ‘society’ as its ground and, as Callon describes it, subsequently proceeds to imagine “how to put this strange beast, the market, in this frame.”<sup>60</sup>

Configured as ‘sparring partner’ to mainstream economics, economic sociology has thus had little room in which to move, and as such, has largely been confined to a rather repetitive insistence on the primacy of the social in the economic – in the process of which however, sufficient justice is done to neither. More particularly though, as one commentator has suggested, the apparent showdown between economics and sociology is perhaps more a case of shadow-boxing<sup>61</sup> than live combat – sociology may emerge from the scuffle unscathed, but equally what has been learnt about what is ‘economic’? Dissolving the economic into the social, ‘embeddedness’ tells us more, ultimately, about traditional sociological concepts – networks, relationality, kinship, and so forth, than it can about specific markets, and the kinds of practices that constitute their function.<sup>62</sup>

In the context of the present inquiry, the relative disciplinary positionings of economics and sociology are not foremost at stake. The challenge, almost in contradistinction to this, is to preserve both the ‘economic’ and ‘social,’ and describe these together in the development of particular ‘markets-for-ethics’ and in the

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<sup>59</sup> Callon, Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Callon, Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Cook, "The Problem of Consumption and the Ghost of *Homo Economicus*." p.6

<sup>62</sup> Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger, "Traders' Engagement with Markets: A Postsocial Relationship," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, no. 5/6 (2002). p.162

practice of a market-based ‘ethical’ or ‘market ethics.’<sup>63</sup> This much is, as I have previously described, actually suggested by the business case proposition itself through the linking of profitability and social responsibility. The practical aim then, in seeking to ask questions of a market-based phenomenon as I am doing here, is not, as I understand it, to formulate a pre-emptive critique of the ‘economic,’ rather, the stated question at hand regards ‘what the CSR market may be said to *do*?’ And, asks more practically, as to the particularities of ‘*doing ethics*’ in specific market contexts.

This desire to address markets and market practices in their specificity and without dissolving the economic altogether has elsewhere already functioned as a significant impetus towards the development of new approaches within economic sociology. Of particular note herein, (and especially in relation to the preceding questions), is a re-conceived role for both ‘economics’ (as a discipline) and ‘the economic’ (as a categorisation). In the following section I will begin to describe some of the developments along these lines in current economic sociology, beginning with Callon’s seminal re-description of economics in terms of ‘performativity.’

Before continuing with this however, I want briefly to note that to begin with Callon is not to imply by corollary that contemporary debate in economic sociology is predominately structured around this particular approach. Rather, as I will aim to describe in the course of ensuing discussion, recent work in economic sociology extends out in number of directions and into new fields of inquiry. So much so that, arguably, the continued use of the umbrella term ‘economic sociology’ itself becomes problematic inasmuch as this may refer to work that focuses on significantly different objects, and proceeds also on differing and sometimes strongly opposed theoretical and methodological grounds.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The term ‘market ethics’ is however designed to recognise both that there is a ‘market-for-ethics’ and emphasise the practical ‘doing’ of ethics as market/in markets as per the description in the Introduction. The specificity of particular ‘markets-for-ethics’ will be addressed in Chapter Three as an empirical and methodological issue.

<sup>64</sup> Karin Knorr Cetina, "Economic Sociology and the Sociology of Finance: Four Distinctions, Two Developments, One Field?," *Economic Sociology - The European Electronic Newsletter* 8, no. 3 (2007). p.5

## *Performing the Markets*

In his 1998 collection *The Laws of the Markets*, Callon addresses ‘new’ economic sociology’s problematic relationship with economics by proposing alternatively that the “economy is embedded not in society but in economics.”<sup>65</sup> For Callon, it is meaningless to make a distinction between the economy as “existing reality,” and economics as an “analytical discourse”<sup>66</sup> that explains this. Instead, employing the term ‘economics’ in a much broader sense than discussions of embeddedness allow, Callon says his position “consists in maintaining that economics ... performs, shapes and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions.”<sup>67</sup>

This notion of a ‘broadened’ sense of what ‘economics’ includes is an important one. As Don Slater notes, Callon treats ‘economics’ in much the same way that Foucauldian perspectives understand ‘government.’<sup>68</sup> ‘Economics’ in this reading is not only an academic theory, it is this in addition to also being a set of various, but linked, ideologies, practices, logics, techniques, and discourses, from the most oblique to the most mundane.

Central to Callon’s thesis is the notion that economics actively ‘performs’ and configures the markets it claims otherwise only to describe. Contributing to a tradition started elsewhere in the social sciences,<sup>69</sup> Callon applies J.L. Austin’s

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Knorr Cetina makes this argument with regard to distinguishing ‘economic sociology’ specifically from the recent ‘sociology of finance.’ While significant overlaps do exist in contemporary work in these fields, Knorr Cetina notes in particular how the recent interest in financial markets (or exchange markets) marks a significant shift from the traditional economic sociology focus on producer markets (i.e. White), and the central role designated by this focus to intra-firm organisation, (i.e. Swedberg). See; Richard Swedberg, "Major Traditions in Economic Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991).

<sup>65</sup> Callon, "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics." p.30

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.29

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.2; See also, Michel Callon, "Four Models for the Dynamics of Science," in *Handbook of Science and Technology Studies*, ed. Sheila Jasanoff, et al. (London: Sage, 1994).

<sup>68</sup> Don Slater, "From Calculation to Alienation: Disentangling Economic Abstractions," *Economy and Society* 31, no. 2 (2002). p.245

<sup>69</sup> Callon acknowledges that his description of ‘performativity’ has antecedents in other areas social science. Notably, Judith Butler employed this term in her 1990 book ‘Gender Trouble’ in order to understand gender as a kind of re-iterative performance and thus denaturalise the presumed co-

understanding of ‘performativity’<sup>70</sup> to economic theory, knowledge, and practice, in order to highlight the productive, as opposed to merely ‘representational’ function of economics. On this reading, the ‘enhancement and/or replacement’ couplet promulgated through embeddedness is abandoned, and ‘economics’ itself comes instead to occupy a leading role in the study of economic phenomena.

Callon’s ‘performativity programme’ (as this has now come to be known), operating under the banner “no economy without economics,”<sup>71</sup> works to resuscitate the rational and calculative market actor of neo-classical economics by controversially suggesting that this account is not just a fiction that it is necessary to debunk. In *The Laws of the Markets*, Callon writes:

Yes, *homo economicus* really does exist. Of course, he exists in the form of many species and his lineage is multiple and ramified. But if he exists he is obviously not to be found in a natural state – this expression has little meaning. He is formatted, framed and equipped with prostheses which help him in his calculations and which are, for the most part, produced by economics.<sup>72</sup>

In this much quoted passage, the actual ‘existence’ of *homo economicus* is crucially qualified on the basis that he is neither simply ‘natural,’ nor understood to act alone. Rooted in the earlier ‘actor-network theory’ (ANT) that Callon was involved in developing alongside Bruno Latour and others,<sup>73</sup> a distinctive feature of the ‘performativity’ approach is a certain agnosticism about the nature of actors (which may also be collective and/or non-human entities), as well as a lack of interest in prior theories of ‘social structure.’ Instead, as Callon suggests, it is the task of the social scientist to follow the linkages between actors (human and

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incidence of sex and gender. See, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>70</sup> John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

<sup>71</sup> Koray Çalişkan and Michel Callon, "Economization, Part 1: Shifting Attention from the Economy Towards Processes of Economization," *Economy and Society* 38, no. 3 (2009). p.370

<sup>72</sup> Callon, "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics." p.51 (original italics)

<sup>73</sup> Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, "Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macro-Structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So," in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology. Towards an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologies*, ed. Karin Knorr Cetina and Aaron V. Cicourel (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).; See also, Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay," in *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. John Law (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

otherwise) as these are formed in activities and practices.<sup>74</sup> ‘Social structure,’ following this and again contra ‘new’ economic sociology, is understood to exist only to the extent that it is manifest via these coalesced linkages.<sup>75</sup>

The foregrounding of discursive and material practice over a pre-determined ‘social,’ provides a useful point of re-entry through which CSR’s previously described ‘practical convergence’ might be sociologically illuminated. Recall, from earlier in this chapter, the way in which prior theoretical reckonings of the business-society relationship are largely superseded by contemporary business case CSR in both the academy, (through the ascendancy of quantitative Management perspectives), and commercially, where CSR, as I have argued, is a ‘market practice.’ The requirement for attention shifts, in such a situation (as I have already gone some way to suggesting via the structuring emphasis on ‘doing’), towards the theoretical means through which *practice* may be approached in an open-ended and critically astute way. The question that remains though is whether a Callonistic approach focused on neo-classical economics and seeking to analytically proceed through the ascription of performativity provides sufficient enough scope in this regard.

### **The ‘Socio-Technical’ as a Problem of Scope**

For Callon and his colleagues, following the central role accorded to neo-classical economics, the focus on market practice to emerge from this approach has been overwhelmingly concerned with *calculative* practices, and in particular, what are described as the “*socio-technical*”<sup>76</sup> aspects of these. In this vein, the term “agencement”<sup>77</sup> is introduced in order to re-locate or re-distribute the calculative agency typically ascribed to human actors, across the various metrological tools, prostheses, equipment, models, and so forth that are involved in the achievement of

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<sup>74</sup> For example; Michel Callon, "Can Methods for Analyzing Large Numbers Organize a Productive Dialogue with the Actors They Study?," *European Management Review* 3, no. 1 (2006).

<sup>75</sup> Callon, Barry, and Slater, "Technology, Politics and the Market: An Interview with Michel Callon."

<sup>76</sup> Michel Callon, "Why Virtualism Paves the Way to Political Impotence: Callon Replies to Miller," *Economic Sociology - The European Electronic Newsletter* 6, no. 2 (2005). p.13 (added italics)

<sup>77</sup> Fabian Muniesa, Yuval Millo, and Michel Callon, "An Introduction to Market Devices," in *Market Devices*, ed. Michel Callon, Yuval Millo, and Fabian Muniesa (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). p.4

calculation and measure in market contexts. In its practical and functioning aspects, the “agencement” is described by Fabian Muniesa, Yuval Millo and Callon as a ‘market device,’ a notion that seeks again to underscore the performative relation between objects and agency: devices *work*, they do things, “they act or make others act.”<sup>78</sup>

Broadly following this emphasis on market materiality, a burgeoning literature, most notably focussed on financial markets, has sought to examine the performative function of economic models.<sup>79</sup> Donald MacKenzie and Yuval Millo’s study of how the Black-Scholes Merton pricing formula operated on the Chicago options market is exemplary in this regard.<sup>80</sup> To the extent that the Black-Scholes Merton formula provided a means through which an unambiguous figure for option value could be derived, MacKenzie and Millo describe a transactional logic that converges on numerical calculation and formulae (and, as a consequence, away from interpersonal relations). In this technical convergence, what is most significantly discerned is a performative relationship between formula and option prices: the more traders that adopted the formula, MacKenzie and Millo suggest, the more option prices conformed to the expectations of the model.

Elsewhere in the sociology of finance however, accounts that describe the performativity of economic practice have been challenged on the basis that a “model is not a market.”<sup>81</sup> While maintaining an emphasis on the materiality of market practice, a number of recent ethnographic studies of financial markets have achieved

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.2

<sup>79</sup> See the collection; Donald MacKenzie, Fabian Muniesa, and Lucia Siu, "Do Economists Make Markets?," ed. Donald MacKenzie, Fabian Muniesa, and Lucia Siu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).; also, Donald MacKenzie, *Material Markets: How Economic Agents Are Constructed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).; Donald MacKenzie, "An Equation and Its Worlds: Bricolage, Exemplars, Disunity and Performativity in Financial Economics," *Social Studies of Science* 33, no. 6 (2003).; Donald MacKenzie, *An Engine, Not a Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>80</sup> Donald MacKenzie and Yuval Millo, "Constructing a Market, Performing Theory: The Historical Sociology of a Financial Derivatives Exchange," *American Journal of Sociology* 109, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>81</sup> Daniel Beunza, "A Model Is Not a Market: Promises and Pitfalls of Quantitative Finance" (Ross School of Business, 24th October 2008).

greater flexibility and broadened the scope of this observation, even while largely still concerned with market practices of a ‘socio-technical’ nature.<sup>82</sup>

The requirement for ‘flexibility’ and ‘scope’ derive, with regard to the research problem at hand, from the original co-implication made in the business case proposition itself. ‘Doing well’ is clearly an economic imperative. To the extent though that this meets, in CSR, ‘doing good,’ a proposition made in a *social, ethical* and (as I will go on to elaborate further in Chapter Three) *affective* register, a overly technical interpretation of what counts as economic practice may function to *a priori* delimit analytical scope in the present case. As Chapter Four will discuss, CSR is undoubtedly a calculative and technical achievement in some areas of its practice; further attention though to what I describe as the ‘texture of the quantitative’ will suggest even here the need to rethink the supposed coherence of the technical. Less obviously ‘technical,’ but thoroughly ‘material,’ consumer and labour markets also come up for analysis in the latter chapters, and, as such, some breadth and open-endedness around the kind of practices that the term ‘market’ might describe is required from the outset.

In this regard, ethnographic accounts that describe processes of ‘technocratic unwinding’<sup>83</sup> and the undermining of technological rationality in market contexts<sup>84</sup> function as a useful counterpoint to the ‘faithfulness’ that Callonistic accounts necessarily imply via the original proposition that economics ‘works.’ Similarly important are accounts that have pointed beyond the limited technically-derived agency with which objects and practices are imbued through the notion of ‘market device,’ to understand the way in which some objects, as ‘doers of things,’ may related to as “experiencing, feeling, reflexive and remembering beings – as bearers of the sort of experiences we tend to reserve for the sphere of intersubjective relations.”<sup>85</sup> Observing this object-relationality with regard to the screens via which

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<sup>82</sup> See, for instance; Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger, "Global Microstructures: The Virtual Societies of Financial Markets," *American Journal of Sociology* 107, no. 4 (2002).; Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, "Traders' Engagement with Markets: A Postsocial Relationship."

<sup>83</sup> Annelise Riles, "Real Time: Unwinding Technocratic and Anthropological Knowledge," *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>84</sup> Caitlin Zaloom, "Ambiguous Numbers: Trading Technologies and Interpretation in Financial Markets," *American Ethnologist* 30, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>85</sup> Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, "Traders' Engagement with Markets: A Postsocial Relationship." p.163

currency traders experience, act in, and become part of the market, Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger coin the term 'post-social' to describe "new kinds of bonds such as those constructed between humans and objects."<sup>86</sup> Elsewhere, and also described on the basis of ethnographic observation of traders, the same authors describe how an object-inclusive intersubjectivity underlies "the reflexive coordination of contemporary markets that while "global in scope [are] microsocial in character."<sup>87</sup>

The question of market coordination is an important one in the context of the present research and I return to address this in more depth in Chapter Three where 'markets,' as a research object, will be understood to present a empirical challenge to conventional sociological methods. Equally, given that the nature of the practices inaugurated via the suggestion of a 'market ethics' is a central concern of the present work, the practical ethical and relational potentialities produced in specific market contexts is also an enduring concern, and an issue that requires further attention. The section entitled 'Making Means Mean More – Towards Ethics as Practice' in the following chapter will thus continue where this very brief discussion of the 'materiality of markets,' has left off.

For now though, and to conclude the discussion with which the latter half of this chapter has been concerned, I want to turn to another body of ethnographic work, one that has very explicitly staked its claim in economic sociology against the Callonistic emphasis on calculative "disentanglement."<sup>88</sup> The primary source of disagreement here though, I suggest, is political, and as such provides an opportunity to discuss in this final section the implications that ensue in the adoption of one theoretical perspective here over another. At stake, as I will demonstrate with reference to the on-going 'regulation' versus 'voluntarism' debate in CSR, is our critical ability to effectively describe, and hence potentially intervene in debates that emerge in contemporary market contexts.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.162

<sup>87</sup> Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, "Global Microstructures: The Virtual Societies of Financial Markets." p.905

<sup>88</sup> Michel Callon, "An Essay on Framing and Overflowing: Economic Externalities Revisited by Sociology," in *The Laws of the Markets*, ed. Michel Callon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). p.253

## Market Politics

Callon's emphasis on 'disentanglement' from the social as a supposed precondition for calculation has met with much resistance in the form of ethnographic work that has alternatively demonstrated the 'entangled' character of market transactions.<sup>89</sup> Daniel Miller, whose 1998 ethnography of shopping practices sought to underscore the socially contingent nature of consumption, has been especially vocal in his critique, suggesting that Callon aligns himself with economists in "mistaking a representation of economic life for its practice."<sup>90</sup> The abstracted market of the economists, for Miller, is simply not empirically in evidence in instances of 'real' market transaction, which, by contrast, he characterises as culturally constituted in nature. In order to articulate this, Miller develops a theory of 'virtualism,'<sup>91</sup> which, while recognisant of the 'performative' power of economics in a manner not dissimilar to Callon, suggests that this creates a kind of ideological 'virtual' reality as opposed to describing an empirical core of economic activity.<sup>92</sup>

To describe this further, 'virtualism,' Miller explains, occurs as a function of the extraordinary power of economics to "reconstitute the world in its image."<sup>93</sup> Where market models come to organise exchange, what occurs might be described as a case of 'mistaken' reality, and as such it necessary for sociologists and anthropologists of markets to contest this. Miller notes of the key argument in his book on virtualism: "what needed to be emphasized was the degree to which economics and other abstract models were managing to accrue such power that they

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<sup>89</sup> Roy Dilley, ed., *Contesting Markets: Analyses of Ideology, Discourse and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).; James G. Carrier, ed., *Meanings of the Market: The Free Market in Western Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

<sup>90</sup> Daniel Miller, "Turning Callon the Right Way Up," *Economy and Society* 31, no. 2 (2002). p.219; See also, for a critique of Callon on the basis of a supposed uncritical alliance with economists, Phillip Mirowski and Edward Nik-Khah, "Markets Made Flesh" (paper presented at the 4S-EASST Conference, Paris, 27th August 2004).

<sup>91</sup> Edited with James G. Carrier; James G. Carrier and Daniel Miller, eds., *Virtualism: A New Political Economy* (Oxford: Berg, 1998).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

were able to transform actual economic practices, making them accord more with these same models.”<sup>94</sup>

It is Callon’s perceived complicity with a powerful, and for this reason, dangerous, neo-classical economic world-view that lies at the heart of Miller’s critique. At stake here, in the emphasis on false ideologies and duplicitous power, is the kind of politics that is enabled, or disabled, via the suggestion that economics might actually function to produce economic life in its image. Or, more precisely than this, what is most significantly at stake is what is to count as the *right* kind of politics.

In his political objection to Callon’s approach, Miller is certainly by no means alone. Departing from the political ‘heartlands’<sup>95</sup> of sociological critique, Callon pays little heed to traditional concerns regarding capital and class. Lacking a general political economy, Callon’s work is charged by critics with apoliticism – thought to be symptomatically reproductive of the broader agnosticism with which the ‘cultural turn’ is often more generally charged.<sup>96</sup> According to critics such as Ben Fine, the emphasis on description via which an account in terms of performativity proceeds, results in a kind of circularity or tautology whereby that which is simply asserted, is in fact that which needs to be explained. Moreover, the idea that economists constitute markets re-doubles the “economics imperialism”<sup>97</sup> instated by figures such as Becker (against whom, as was discussed earlier, ‘embeddedness’ was conceived). Only, for Fine, this ‘new phase’ of imperialism is even more virulent to the extent that possibilities for effective political contestation are negated in the same moment that an economic macro-structure is denied. The result, as Fine recounts it, is a situation wherein “[c]apitalism is an invention of anticapitalists.”<sup>98</sup>

Against the perceived apoliticism of Callon’s approach, Miller’s politics are of a pronounced and familiar emancipatory variety. The ‘virtual’ recreates a critical

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.229

<sup>95</sup> Liz McFall, "Devices and Desires: How Useful Is the 'New' New Economic Sociology for Understanding Market Attachment," *Sociology Compass* 3, no. 2 (2009). p.275

<sup>96</sup> See, for instance, Chris Rojek and Bryan Turner, "Decorative Sociology: Towards a Critique of the Cultural Turn," *The Sociological Review* 48, no. 4 (2000).; Andrea Whitle and André Spicer, "Is Actor-Network Theory Critique?," *Organization Studies* 29, no. 4 (2008).

<sup>97</sup> Ben Fine, "Callonistics: A Disentanglement," *Economy and Society* 33, no. 3 (2003). p.482

<sup>98</sup> Barry, Slater, and Callon (2002), quoted in Ibid., p.481

space wherein sociology may politically intervene in the traditional way by means of normative assessment, while at the same time paying heed to observable instances of economic performativity. With regard to the present research however, an *a priori* understanding of what constitutes ‘political’ engagement is highly problematic. The ‘political’ question, as it were, is an open one – the content of this that which stands to be articulated through the course of engagement with CSR as it is empirically manifest. In this way, the ‘truth’ versus ‘falsity’ implied in Miller’s formulation of the virtual, imposes a restriction from the outset on the possibilities entailed in the process of ‘becoming market.’

The problem I am describing here may be elaborated through the oft-occurring spatial metaphor whereby markets are understood to have ‘outsides’ and ‘insides.’ For the economic sociologists of embeddedness with which this discussion began, market ‘outsides’ are taken for granted. The social is the larger structure inside which economics subsists and is contained. This understanding, insofar as ‘new’ economic sociologists are concerned, is significant because, otherwise lacking in such an appreciation, neo-classical economics is a hopelessly reductive ideology, and one which furthermore threatens to encroach the domain of sociology in its purview.

Miller extends this account by recognising the productive power of economics, (such that things may be made economic) – but this process is a dangerous ‘false’ one, constitute in unequal power, and capable of obscuring a cultural realm of a more ‘true’ nature. The ‘virtual’ is imposed from above, from on top of or outside of the erstwhile ‘real,’ but capable of exerting negative effects nonetheless.

For Callon however, that which is ‘external’ to the market is very different from a social context, or ‘virtual reality’ per se. In order to understand the dynamics of what can count as ‘market,’ Callon turns to the notion of ‘externality’ as deployed within conventional economics. Here, he explains, “[e]conomists invented the notion of externality to denote all the connections, relations and effects which agents do not take into account in their calculations when entering into a market transaction.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Callon, "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics." p.16

This is illustrated with the example of a chemical plant that, when discharging its toxic waste, pollutes the local river, and hence produces a *negative externality* for those parties that would otherwise seek to use or enjoy the river, whether these be fisher-people, bathers, or other river users.<sup>100</sup> The chemical factory in question, in taking the decision to dump toxic waste, does so without taking into account the possible effects on river users, and thus constitutes them as extra-market or, ‘externality.’ So simply, and in other words, an externality is that which the market does not *count*.

As Callon points out, this notion is of importance for economic theory as it marks the limits of effectiveness of any given market.<sup>101</sup> In terms of the present discussion though, it is more usefully drawn upon insofar as it illustrates certain dynamics of market ‘construction.’<sup>102</sup> Another way that the effects of externalities may be illustrated is through evoking the metaphors of ‘frame’ and ‘overflow.’ Here, the toxic waste (overflow) is external to the ‘frame’ of economic relationships in which the company makes its decisions.<sup>103</sup> As ‘negative externality’ the ill-effects experienced by river users are not taken into account by the polluting company.<sup>104</sup> However, ‘overflows,’ as Callon notes, only remain devoid of significance to the extent that they do not give rise to being noticed, or becoming significant.

The point at which the overflow is noticed, or identified, its source and targets recognised, its effects described, measured, quantified and compared, the ‘externality’ is no longer strictly such, and a re-framing of relations may occur whereby it becomes “meaningful to assert that X, Y, and Z should be allowed to participate in negotiations concerning contracts between A, B and C from which they were formerly excluded.’ That which is ‘external’ to the market therefore, is not permanently or incontestably so. The option of “internalizing the externalities” may

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp.16-17

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.17

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Callon, "An Essay on Framing and Overflowing: Economic Externalities Revisited by Sociology." p.259

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.248

exist – the “reframing [of] hitherto uncontained overflows”<sup>105</sup> becomes, essentially, a *political* matter.

Here, it is worth distinguishing the process of framing and re-framing, from that of embedding and disembedding. The ‘re-framing’ of culturally meaningful processes as ‘market’ does not constitute a ‘disembedding,’ as is Miller’s concern. It is important to note, as a rejoinder to claims regarding the supposed separation of the economic from the social, that any item or relation, in the process of becoming economically significant, does not simply shed its ‘prior’ or ‘external’ meanings or significances. As I hope to explore in the course of this research, the process whereby ‘ethics’ are involved in a ‘becoming market’ is a more complex one than such a reading would give credit to. The way in which ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’ emerge, shift, and change, is subject to a highly contingent set of processes that partake not only of the ‘economic,’ but, as is especially evident in the case of CSR, the ‘political’ and of course ‘ethical’ as well.

### The Market vs. the State?

The political contestability of the ‘becoming market’ I describe is especially evident in a particular and recurring CSR debate. Although the account of CSR put forward and popularised in terms of a ‘business case’ holds, by definition, that only ‘socially responsible’ corporate actions which go above and beyond what is legally required can be said to count as CSR per se (because it is the competitive advantage conferred by voluntarism that constitutes the ‘business case’ itself), calls continue to arise from some quarters (notably from activists and the NGO sector) for the state to regulate and legislate CSR activities. Corporations, so those calling for regulation contend, cannot be relied upon to act responsibly of their own accord. On the other hand, as those within business and much of the CSR industry itself point out, it is the very fact of a *market* for CSR that has driven its re-emergence, and acted to build the strength of the movement. As such, any government invention would undermine the possibility of CSR itself, and therefore, so the ‘business case’ holds, business (via the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.259

mechanism of the 'market') is best left in this regard to its own devices. As summed up by John Elkington, founder of London-based CSR "strategy consultancy"<sup>106</sup> SustainAbility: "As we move into the third millennium, we are embarking on a global cultural revolution. [And] [b]usiness, much more than governments or non-governmental organisations, will be in the driving seat."<sup>107</sup>

Interestingly, in the United Kingdom at least, the national government strongly echoes these sentiments, the CSR Minister Stephen Timms stating in a 2004 government report:

I am well aware of the many and increasing calls for more regulation of company behaviour. And I agree that Government has a responsibility to ensure minimum legal standards. I remain convinced [though] that the main focus of CSR should continue to be a voluntary one ... CSR should continue to take compliance with legal requirements as base and go beyond that in the interests of business and the rest of society.<sup>108</sup>

It would seem, from one perspective, very difficult to defend or describe this scenario in terms of 'increasing political contestation.' The un-holy alliance of business and government described here could, on one understanding, be read as the cumulative result of twenty years of the kind of neo-liberalism that some claim has worked to produce "the most de-politicised period in the history of the market."<sup>109</sup> As is illustrated by the present example, the idea that there are 'markets' on the one hand, and 'government invention,' on the other, is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain.

Within such a scenario though, the question becomes whether it is possible (or, latterly, desirable) to develop an account of *markets as themselves political in organisation*. In the present example, I think is possible to say that far from

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<sup>106</sup> John Elkington, *Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business* (Oxford: Capstone, 1997). (backcover). See, [www.sustainability.com](http://www.sustainability.com). According to the SustainAbility website the company, "[e]stablished in 1987 ... advises clients on the risks and opportunities associated with corporate responsibility and sustainable development. Working at the interface between market forces and societal expectations, we seek solutions to social and environmental challenges that deliver long term value. We understand business and what society expects of it."

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.3

<sup>108</sup> Stephen Timms, "Corporate Social Responsibility: A Government Update."

<sup>109</sup> Don Slater, in, Callon, Barry, and Slater, "Technology, Politics and the Market: An Interview with Michel Callon." p.106

restricting the space of political debate, the fact of a market for CSR opens up a space of political possibility that may not otherwise have appeared – one in which traditional means of politics may function as hindrance, not aid. Along similar lines, Callon comments that “it is a mistake to describe capitalism as homogenous and, being homogenous ... not concerned with questions which are termed usually as political, ethical and so on. If you accept the diversity of what is usually called capitalism, you are led to recognise that in some markets you have constant discussions or negotiations about ethical or political questions.”<sup>110</sup>

Andrew Barry’s distinction between *politics* “as a set of technical practices, forms of knowledge and institutions,” and the *political* “as an index of the space of disagreement,” proves useful in this context.<sup>111</sup> As he points out, “what is commonly termed politics is not necessarily – or generally – political in its consequences,”<sup>112</sup> as such, the call for CSR to be regulated by the government, insofar as this would reduce the amount of contestation around this topic, might be understood to have unintended ‘anti-political’ effects. The process therefore, whereby ‘ethics’ becomes ‘market’ in the practice of CSR is, significantly, a political one. In addition then to considering the apparent de-regulation and de-politicisation that might be said to characterise neo-liberalism and the supposed ‘growth’ of markets, it is also necessary to note the concomitant re-regulations to which an account of ‘market politics,’ such as that which has been briefly elaborated here, may seek to attend. In this emphasis and understanding, the matter of how market functions become political, but also, may be prevented from being so, comes to the fore.<sup>113</sup> As the following chapters seek to explore, in the so-called ‘market for ethics,’ what possibilities and circumscriptions otherwise emerge for the ‘political’?

Once again though, where questions are of a political nature, the largely intractable problem of what is to count as the ‘right’ kind of politics remains. That

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.113

<sup>111</sup> Andrew Barry, “The Anti-Political Economy,” *Economy and Society* 31, no. 2 (2002). p.270

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Barry, “The Anti-Political Economy.” p.279

debate over the relationship between sociology and economics endures so vehemently still in relation to Callon's work is more than a little ironic given Callon's own original insistence that the key task for economic sociology was neither to enhance nor replace the economic agent, but understand instead how he has come to be so.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps though, the very *endurance* of the debates I have described in this chapter, might itself be understood to highlight a continuing constraining logic at work here vis-à-vis sociological encounters with the 'economic.' That, for all its supposed emphasis on 'practice,' performativity continues to reproduce traditional divisions and bi-polar outcomes, suggests to me finally, that despite protestations to the contrary, (and as Chapter Seven will elaborate) it may also find itself bound and delimited in familiar ways.

As my discussion of 'market politics' sought to suggest, 'truth' and 'falsity' are precepts inadequately equipped to sensitively deal in the changing possibilities and potentialities generated in the kind of contemporary market contexts to which this thesis addresses itself. And yet, in the performative demand that economics 'works,' we might begin to wonder whether a not dissimilar problematic effectively emerges. 'Performativity,' seems to provide a means of exploring what is achieved practically and processually. That such a description may result however in the conclusion that something 'works,' is at once entailed in the proposal that something be 'performative' in the first place, and yet it is also necessary that in describing what 'becomes' any such conclusiveness is finally denied. This problematic becomes particularly pertinent in light of the 2008 financial crisis and the developments that ensue from this, (as Chapter Seven will discuss). The suggestion that economics 'works' is not, as I understand it, primarily to be avoided on the basis of any undesirable or apolitical alignment with neo-classical economics that this may or may not confer. Rather, if it is to be approached with caution, this is on the basis that 'working' and 'not working' (or as per Chapter Seven, 'success' and 'failure'), are only two potential outcomes amidst the myriad of otherwise 'becomings' that are of

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<sup>114</sup> McFall, "Devices and Desires: How Useful Is the 'New' New Economic Sociology for Understanding Market Attachment." p.270

social, ethical, and political significance in the reflexive contemporary contexts that this thesis seeks to describe.

It is for this reason that, although business case CSR presents itself in the form of a hypothesis which, being so, begs to be proved or disproved, my critical concern is with the rather less definitive ‘doings’ that this proposal brings to life and the variety of different forms that these may take.<sup>115</sup> The encounter between CSR and economic sociology to which this chapter has played host, reveals a missed opportunity of sorts – the unearthing of a critical space otherwise largely obscured by the countervailing demand that markets are soluble in the social, or else uniquely and uniformly ‘economic’ to the exclusion of all else.

To recap the discussion that has preceded: I have proposed that given contemporary CSR is market-based in practice and business case by definition, contemporary sociological treatments of markets may be approached in order that the specificities and limitations of these with regard to the present problem might be highlighted. Where sociological perspectives have sought primarily to note the ‘embeddedness’ of economic accounts, the possibilities for productive critique, I have claimed, become limited. Seeking to develop a critical space that is ‘within’ the market, but not aligned with, or against ‘economics’ per se, this chapter has attempted to define an approach wherein the dynamic and reflexive contingency of ‘becoming market’ might be attended to with a degree of critical sensitivity. This suggestion does not amount to a coherent ‘sociology of markets,’ or any such thing – the enormity of such a task is well beyond the purview described by the present concern. Instead, the sociological encounter with what is ‘market’ that has begun here is carried through the chapters that follow, the tensions wrought in this encounter fashioning along the way various challenges of both a methodological and analytical nature.

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<sup>115</sup> And, in this respect, I agree with Miller’s suggestion that it is “enormously important to stick with the integrity of ethnographic observation.” See; Daniel Miller, "Reply to Michel Callon," *Economic Sociology - The European Electronic Newsletter* 6, no. 3 (2005). p.8

## Chapter Two

□

### Market Morality

‘I’ve always found ethics quite difficult to do in business – enlightened self-interest I understand!’

Lord Ronald Oxburgh, Ex-Chairman, Shell Transport and Trading<sup>116</sup>

The supposed impossibility of a ‘self-interested ethical,’ is widely attested to – the opening epigraph demonstrates this much. While such a comment derives its intelligibility from the perceived mutual exclusivity of ‘self-interest’ and ‘ethics’ however, the introduction of an enigmatic ‘enlightened self-interest’ of business case derivation hints at contemporary shifts occurring around this traditional incompatibility.

In the previous chapter, I briefly described the utilitarian coincidence via which neo-classical economics understands the relationship between markets and the creation of favourable social outcomes. Friedman’s suggestion that the only social responsibility of business is to be profitable exemplified this. The pursuit of ‘self-interest,’ therein and to recap, was understood to result ultimately in ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’ via a kind of wealth multiplication process proposed to act at the level of society as a whole. Against this, critics of the market have long presented radically opposing views with regard to the matter of morality. Sociology, in particular, has a significant historical legacy in this vein, built largely on Marx’s analysis of alienation and exploitation in the capitalist production process, but also, following others, (Veblen, for instance),<sup>117</sup> consumption too has been the subject of much criticism on moral grounds.

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<sup>116</sup> Lord Ron Oxburgh, speaking at *Energy, Politics and Survival*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2008, Hong Kong Lecture Theatre, The London School of Economics and Politics.

<sup>117</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899).

The present chapter will begin with a discussion and overview of some of the major moral critiques of markets to emerge within classical and more contemporary sociology.<sup>118</sup> Within this work, the specific nature of moral objection differs; however, as many contemporary observers have noted, certain orientations or styles of objection are typically encountered and, as such, approaches may be characterised on this basis. Hence, Alfred Hirschman has described a ‘self-destruction’ thesis wherein the self-interested nature of capitalist market exchange is proposed to undermine the very moral foundations of the society in which such exchange takes place.<sup>119</sup> Viviana Zelizer identifies a ‘boundless market’ model, wherein the market is understood to exert its powerfully morally destructive effect via ever increasing commoditization.<sup>120</sup> And, relatedly, Michael Sandel notes a ‘corruption’ argument in which certain moral goods are supposedly diminished if bought and sold – the suggestion being, in other words, that there are some things that money just can not buy.<sup>121</sup>

The intention in employing these different characterisations is not to compare and contrast between them,<sup>122</sup> rather these descriptions will be employed alongside

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<sup>118</sup> The focus on explicitly *moral* critiques of markets is what marks the literature reviewed in this chapter distinct from the previous. Having said this, and as per discussion in Chapter One, the extent to which some of the economic sociology approaches discussed in the present chapter are also moral critiques is certainly debateable (cf. footnote 58). Some earlier writing in economic sociology, such as Karl Polanyi’s *Great Transformations*, as will be briefly discussed in this chapter, is quite explicitly moralising in both intention and tone. Largely though, the kind of ‘new’ and ‘newer’ economic sociology introduced in the previous chapter has, it has been suggested, “consciously avoid[s] taking an *explicitly* normative position on the market as such.” Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy, “Moral Views of Market Society,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007). p.14 (added italics)  
The focus in this chapter on ‘sociological’ perspectives on markets and morality is not intended to suggest that it is only from within sociology that such work emerges. See, for example the classic *Social Limits of Growth*, by economist Fred Hirsch; Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

<sup>119</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, “Rival Interpretations of Market Society: Civilising, Destructive or Feeble?,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 20, no. 4 (1982).

<sup>120</sup> Viviana A. Zelizer, “Beyond the Polemics on the Market: Establishing a Theoretical and Empirical Agenda,” *Sociological Forum* 3, no. 4 (1988).

<sup>121</sup> Michael Sandel, “What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets,” in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000).

<sup>122</sup> It needs be noted that Hirschman, Zelizer and Sandel all write in different fields and provide their accounts at different times and with different purposes. Furthermore, the characterisations I discuss in the present chapter are not the only ones described by the authors. In addition to the ‘self-destruction’ thesis, Hirschman, an economist, notes a ‘*doux commerce*’ thesis (in which markets are understood to have a civilising effect), and a ‘feudal shackles’ thesis, (in which markets are thought to be too ‘feeble’ to completely throw off the ‘shackles’ of a feudal past, and as such are not actually the supposed ‘free’ markets they are purported to be). Zelizer, writing from an economic sociology

one another in order to highlight the extent to which sociological approaches have tended to posit a *causal* relationship between the market and moral order – one in which the market has typically been understood to have deleterious *effects* in the realm of morality. This traditional divisibility of the ‘market’ from the ‘moral’ is problematic however in the context of the present research.

Towards thinking markets and morals in the same space, this chapter turns subsequently to the sociological study of ‘Moral Economy.’ This proves useful insofar as it demonstrates a history of moral concerns in economics literature, as well as illustrating the ongoing and underlying importance of these in economic transaction. This literature, which will be typified here primarily by Amartya Sen’s classic work ‘On Ethics and Economics,’<sup>123</sup> in addition to more contemporary commentaries (such as those provided by Andrew Sayer),<sup>124</sup> is specifically attentive to the moral status accorded to self-interest, and as such, makes some in-roads towards a broadened conception of this. Here though, having proposed this necessity, it is worth noting upfront that it is specifically not my intention to philosophically recoup self-interest and, by bizarre contrast, subsequently offer this as some kind of universally laudable ethical foundation. Rather, my professed concern regarding the

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perspective, also describes a ‘subordinate market’ model in which the social, cultural, and structural restraints to the supposedly ‘autonomous’ market are highlighted, (this model being the most analogous to the ‘embeddedness’ perspectives popular in economic sociology and discussed in the previous chapter), in addition to a ‘multiple market’ model wherein the market is understood as an interaction of cultural, structural and economic factors. Sandel, a philosopher describes in addition to a ‘corruption’ argument, a ‘coercion’ one centred on the involuntary (and on this basis) morally problematic nature of some market exchanges, (however focuses overwhelming in his descriptions on the ‘corruption’ argument which he describes as prevalent and more important). Given that the present chapter seeks to review sociological perspectives specifically, and moreover only these with an explicit address to the morality of markets, the three characterisations that I focus on are chosen inasmuch as they are most representative of the orientations found in this work. Lastly, should be noted that each theorist has a different relationship to the orientations they describe – Hirschman is concerned positivistically with which account is ‘true,’ however concedes that each may be so in its own place or time; Zelizer is proposing a future empirical agenda against ‘boundless markets’ accounts and based on a ‘multiple markets’ approach, and Sandel is participant in endorsing the anti-market critique he identifies and describes. It is, as I say in the text, the way in which the highlighted orientations draw attention to the patterns in the sociological literature concerning the relationship between markets and morality that marks them out as useful for present purposes.

<sup>123</sup> Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>124</sup> Andrew Sayer, *Moral Economy and Political Economy* (Lancaster University, 2000 [cited 15th May 2008]); available from <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/sayer-moral-economy-political-economy.pdf>; Andrew Sayer, "(De)Commodification, Consumer Culture and Moral Economy," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 21 (2003).; Andrew Sayer, *Moral Economy* (Lancaster University, 2004 [cited 24 April 2008]); available from <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/sayer-moral-economy.pdf>.

ethical status of ‘self-interest’ is always in reference to the particular set of contemporary circumstances under study wherein it is commonplace to reconcile (not wholly unproblematically, as those involved in CSR themselves are of course the first to attest to) practices that are at once understood to be ‘ethical’ and profit maximising (and thus self-interested).

Given that this is the case, the insights accorded by the moral economy approach can stretch ultimately only so far. As will be shown, the field of moral economy, in a roughly analogous way to the ‘new’ economic sociology approaches to ‘embeddedness’ discussed in the previous chapter, falls short of any profound recognition of the reflexive interplay between, in this case, the economic and ethical as may be witnessed functioning in contemporary CSR. The morally staked ‘outside’ to markets characteristic of the previously discussed ‘corrupting/boundless’ market descriptions, is re-worked by a ‘moral economy’ understanding, and yet the status of this ‘moral’ remains problematic, as I will go on to explain, in both its prescriptive and proscriptive dimensions.

Following this, I turn to Foucauldian-inspired approaches that seek to understand markets as both moralised, but in addition, actively moralising entities. The problematic spatial imaginary of market ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’ is, in theory at least, superseded in such accounts in favour of an emphasis on the practical and reflexive making or constitution of markets. To the extent however that a ‘governmentality’ perspective seeks to describe market practices in terms of processes of ‘marketisation,’ ‘individual responsabilisation,’ ‘economisation,’ and so forth, the actual *practice* at stake risks, I will suggest, being overridingly cast as a mere symptom of something else – frequently a ‘pervasive neo-liberalism.’<sup>125</sup>

Against this tendency, in the final section of the chapter, I will begin to outline an approach wherein practice itself is foregrounded as that in and through which the ‘ethical’ and ‘market’ are reflexively enacted or performed – *ethics in/as (market) practice*. In order to do so, and beforehand, I will attempt to understand

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<sup>125</sup> Following from the comments in footnote 118; the distinction between ‘moral’ and ‘political’ critique is also one that is difficult to clearly or definitively establish. In some of the discussed governmentality approaches this is evident where the charge of ‘neo-liberalism’ is simultaneously a moral and political critique.

how CSR evolved ‘enlightened self-interest’ as an organising ‘ethic’ through a change in emphasis from ‘responsibility’ (as obligation), to the more contemporaneous orientation towards ‘responsiveness,’ (a capacity and set of techniques), as elaborated by William Frederick and others.<sup>126</sup> This will lead, latterly, to a description of Bruno Latour’s treatment of ‘ends’ and ‘means,’ or the problematics of ‘intentionality’ in ethical practice. It is by ‘making means mean more,’ or taking ‘means’ seriously as ethical practice, I will suggest, that a description of contemporary market ethics, as these are instantiated in CSR, stands to open-endedly emerge.

## **Separable Spheres – Markets *versus* Morals**

### The Self-Destructing Market

It is back to Marx’s writings on the generally corrosive nature of capitalism that many sociological critiques of the relationship between markets and morality, both classical and contemporary, may be traced. The alienation of human labour (and resulting commodity fetishism) that Marx describes find expression, in the *Communist Manifesto*, as concerns about the breakdown of traditional values and institutions. Love, family, patriotism – with their passing into commerce these morally cherished social relationships become, for Marx and Engels, distorted and overridden by the power of money.<sup>127</sup> Characteristically though, for Marx this process is a dialectical one. Social relationships between persons and material relations between things become inverted as a function of capitalism, perceived as social relationships between things, and material relationships between people.<sup>128</sup>

The alienation to derive from commercial exchange is also a concern for Georg Simmel in *The Philosophy of Money*. Where money becomes the primary link

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<sup>126</sup> William C. Frederick, "From CSR1 to CSR2," *Business & Society* 33, no. 2 (1994 [1978]).; also; Robert W. Ackerman and Raymond A. Bauer, eds., *Corporate Social Responsiveness: The Modern Dilemma* (Reston, VA: Reston, 1976).

<sup>127</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Penguin, 1998 [1848]).

<sup>128</sup> Marx, K. *Capital*, in Fourcade and Healy, "Moral Views of Market Society." p.10

between people, Simmel suggests, inter-personal bonds of kinship, blood, loyalty and so forth are replaced by an impersonal and calculative logic of rationality.<sup>129</sup> The pervasiveness of monetary exchange then, sees extended into areas of social, aesthetic, and moral life, a quantitative and abstracting spirit that prevails over the traditional primacy of ‘unquantifiable’ qualities – qualities that are rightfully of another, morally superior, realm.

Writing in the tradition of Marx and Simmel, the Frankfurt school scholar Max Horkheimer provides an account of the deleterious transformation of reason in line with self-interested capitalism. In the *Eclipse of Reason*, Horkheimer suggests that the moral function of reason is diminished to the extent that it becomes an instrument for deciding only *means* and can say nothing of *ends* as a function of capitalism. Where previously, Horkheimer suggests, reason was called upon to simultaneously define both the means and ends of human action, and credited with a privileged position in matters of liberty and justice, the agnosticism of self-interest sees reason demoted, and stripped of clout with regard to matters of moral concern.<sup>130</sup> Thus, for Horkheimer as for Marx and Simmel, the pursuit of economic self-interest largely results in the undermining of the traditional moral values and bonds thought to hold society together.<sup>131</sup>

Émile Durkheim seems to go some way towards resisting this classic analytical trend via his emphasis on the mutual obligations that arise from the division of labour and the moral underpinnings of contractual relations. In small part at least, the division of labour on which modern society rests recalls for Durkheim the kind of “common consciousness”<sup>132</sup> then attributed to proposedly socially cohesive pre-market societies. Contractual commitments, in order to hold, likewise

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<sup>129</sup> Elsewhere however, Simmel’s approach to the question of the morality of market exchange is more ambivalent. In *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations*, Simmel understands competition, via the figure of the consumer, to approximate on occasion a relation akin to love. See, Georg Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations*, trans. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964 [1908]). pp. 61-3. For further discussion of this point see; Hirschman, "Rival Interpretations of Market Society: Civilising, Destructive or Feeble?." p.1472

<sup>130</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). p.34

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.36

<sup>132</sup> Émile Durkheim, *Division of Labour in Society*, trans. George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1964 [1893]). p.148. In terms of Durkheim’s enduring contribution to social theory this emphasis is a minor one. More usually associated with Durkheim is the breakdown or confusion of social and moral norms captured by the term ‘anomie.’

rest upon a set of indispensable moral relationships. Truth-telling, trust, keeping-one's-word – while these bonds may be unintended by the contract, nonetheless, in order for it to function, they need be in place. These instances of social cohesion and moral necessity in the realm of market practice are for Durkheim however, only “superficial” and interest can “bring people closer together ... [for] a few moments only; it can only create an external tie among them.”<sup>133</sup>

Moreover though, and more problematically, to the extent that such ‘superficial’ moral bonds may themselves come to mistaken for true, un-self-interested morality, replacing, in the process, any countervailing ‘authentic’ morality, then the entire system on which market exchange rests threatens to undermine itself by eroding the moral basis of its own function. This internal problematic is what Alfred Hirschman describes as the ‘self-destruction thesis,’<sup>134</sup> and is a commonly identifiable feature of the kind of classical sociological approaches to market capitalism that I have discussed here. This is most obviously so perhaps in relation to Marxist thought where the notion that capitalism carries within itself the “seed of its own destruction”<sup>135</sup> is the basis upon which socialist revolution is both predicated and predicted.

The notion that market society functions in a self-destructive and morally self-undermining way is not however restricted only to historical accounts. So widespread is this idea, it frequently forms the basis of popular moral criticisms of market function. Here, the financial crisis of 2008 provides a case in point. Self-interest, graphically depicted in the popular imaginary in the form of greedy and immoral bankers, is widely understood to have been the actual cause of what many have claimed was an entire meltdown of the financial system. Whether or not an understanding of this event in terms of ‘crisis’ or ‘systemic meltdown’ is accurate or critically desirable is an important question (and one that I return to discuss in Chapter Seven); for now though, to two other related variants of moral critique via which both historical and contemporary sociological accounts have addressed markets.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.176

<sup>134</sup> Hirschman, "Rival Interpretations of Market Society: Civilising, Destructive or Feeble?." p.1466

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p.1467

## The Corrupting and Boundless Market

It is arguably in relation to commodification and consumption that moralistic critiques of markets are most frequently and enduringly assembled. Veblen's famous "conspicuous consumption"<sup>136</sup> suggested long ago that moral and aesthetic degradation result in the competitive process of purchasing. People do not consume in order satisfy needs, Veblen suggested, they consume instead as a means of demonstrating wealth and acquiring respect on this basis. As such, traditional ethical concerns are purportedly eclipsed by a drive for wealth and admiration of wasteful and greedy excess.

At the heart still of many contemporary sociological accounts of commodification is the moral proposition that some things lie rightfully outside the market sphere. Markets are not only morally 'corrupting' in influence, as Michael Sandel suggests, but also voracious in appetite and thus, as Viviana Zelizer notes, understood as liable to break their 'bounds.' Common to both 'corrupting' and 'boundless' critiques of markets is the intrinsic assumption that some goods, on the basis of their very nature, should simply not be bought and sold. This suggestion is of course most intuitively and obviously appealing in relation to the most morally significant and irreplaceable of 'goods.'

Robert Titmuss's well-known book on the blood donor system in Britain is something of a contemporary classic in this vein.<sup>137</sup> Comparing voluntary and commercial systems of blood donation, Titmuss argues that it morally detrimental to the social order to turn blood into a commercial commodity. When *even* human tissue is saleable, the "possessive egoism of the marketplace"<sup>138</sup> threatens, according to Titmuss, to usurp the erstwhile moral foundations on which social order otherwise rests. Moral objections along these lines have been similarly made in relation to

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<sup>136</sup> Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*.

<sup>137</sup> Richard M. Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13

prostitution,<sup>139</sup> marriage for money,<sup>140</sup> surrogate motherhood,<sup>141</sup> as well in relation to the more general commodification of ‘bodies’<sup>142</sup> and ‘feeling.’<sup>143</sup>

In the context of such accounts, the market threatens dangerously to become “a sphere without boundaries, an unzoned city – for money is insidious, and market relations are expansive.”<sup>144</sup> On this basis therefore, and in response, it becomes necessary, as Michael Walzer argues in *Spheres of Justice*, to actively “block”<sup>145</sup> certain goods and values from market exchange in order to protect their integrity. Goods and services in society, Walzer argues, have social meanings closely related to the culture of that society, and it is these meanings that should be influential in deciding how goods are to be distributed, whether voluntarily, by the market, or by the state.<sup>146</sup>

In many critiques of commodification, a spatial metaphor reoccurs – the intra- and extra- market – coupled with a notion of ethical integrity. Some things are ‘marketable,’ but others are not. That which is ‘not’ needs be maintained as ‘outside’ on the basis of its ethical integrity; some things, as it is frequently expressed in an alternative way, are simply ‘priceless.’<sup>147</sup> Following such critiques however, if certain ‘ethical’ goods should not be economically valued, if they can only authentically exist ‘outside’ of markets, (because to be subject to market exchange would be to degrade their moral quality), what is to be made of the proposition that ‘ethics’ themselves be marketable?

For those writing in the tradition of ethicists such as Levinas and Løgstrup, this question entails from the outset a complete paradox or total impossibility. As

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<sup>139</sup> Sandel, "What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets." p.95

<sup>140</sup> Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 2004 [1900]).

<sup>141</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, "Is Women's Labour a Commodity?," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19, no. 1 (1990).

<sup>142</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Loic Wacquant, eds., *Commodifying Bodies* (London: Sage, 2002).

<sup>143</sup> Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). See also, for general representation of this style of argument; Margaret Jane Radin, *Contested Commodities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>144</sup> Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (Oxford: Robertson, 1983). p.119

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Reasoning such as this might be understood to broadly underlie debates around CSR, such as that introduced in the previous chapter, whereby the relative merits of voluntary versus state-backed legislative compliance are at stake.

<sup>147</sup> This notion is revisited in Chapter Four where discussion will centre on commercial attempts to quantitatively correlate CSR and corporate profitability.

Zygmunt Bauman notes in a recent book on ethics and consumerism: while “[i]t is true that objectively good – helpful and useful – deeds have been time and again performed out of the actor's calculation of gain, be it Divine grace, public esteem, or absolution from mercilessness shown on other occasions,” such deeds “cannot be classified as genuinely moral acts precisely because of having been so motivated.” For Bauman, and following in a long tradition of such definition, ethical-self-interest is an anathema – it is necessary that “[i]n moral acts, ‘ulterior motive is ruled out.’”<sup>148</sup>

Writing under the heading, “What Chance of Ethics in a Globalized World of Consumers?”<sup>149</sup> Bauman can then only conclude that, in contemporary consumerist society, ethical possibilities are necessarily curtailed. Where “more and more areas of contemporary society have become assimilated to a ‘consumer model,’”<sup>150</sup> relations of an ethical nature, so Bauman’s reasoning goes, are threatened and become increasingly rare given that ethics can, definitionally, “not serve any ‘purpose’ and most surely [can] not [be] guided by the expectation of profit, comfort, glory, or self-enhancement.”<sup>151</sup>

Strongly implicit here, and equally so in all the literature I have discussed thus far, is the idea that there exists between markets and morals a relationship that is *causal* in nature. Whether self-destructive, boundless, corrupting, or, (as is possible), all three at once, markets are understood to exert powerful *effects* on the moral. Morality, on the other hand, only very occasionally ‘speaks back,’ as it were, and when it does, as in Durkheim’s work, this is often only in a hollow or ultimately *ineffectual* way.

The problem of course that such accounts present in the present context is an inability to contend meaningfully with the proposition that markets and morality may be co-constituting, or occupy the same space. While such work serves usefully to highlight the particularity and indeed the theoretical difficulty of CSR’s business case suggestion – that is possible to ‘*do well by doing good*’ – the ‘good’ proposed

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<sup>148</sup> Løgstrup, in, Zygmunt Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). p.31

<sup>149</sup> Bauman, *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Colin Campbell, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.59

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62

here, following the preceding discussion, could only ever be an ‘inauthentic’ one, a marauding ‘good,’ unfit on this basis to qualify as ‘ethical’ at all.

Thus, in much the same way that, in the previous chapter, ‘business’ was separable from ‘ethics’ in the study of business ethics, and ‘philanthropy’ separable from ‘core business practice,’ the supposed divisibility between markets and morality can not predict or respond to the development of a conjunction between the two beyond dismissing this as inauthentic or impossible. Here though, at this apparent impasse, two alternative possibilities may be pursued in order to create greater critical space around the problem that CSR presents. Firstly, that ‘self-interest’ might itself have more ethical potentiality than is typically supposed, and secondly, that markets themselves may be understood as normative structures. Both of these suggestions are taken up in the contemporary study of ‘moral economy,’ a field in which classical economic doctrine is critically re-approached in order to demonstrate that morality does indeed have a place in economic practice.

### **‘Moral Economy’ – Integrating the Moral and Economic?**

The term ‘moral economy’ seeks to simultaneously designate under this title both an object of study and kind or style of inquiry.<sup>152</sup> While today ‘moral economy’ refers primarily to a contemporary field of critical inquiry, this term has evolved significantly over time. Now classical accounts of ‘moral economies’ offered by writers such as Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi focused on pre-market societies, and sought to demonstrate morality in community bonds and the corresponding sense of economic justice that these were understood to impart.<sup>153</sup> Contrasting these human interdependencies with a modern ‘atomised’ marketplace, these theorists provide an account of what we supposedly have lost in “the substitution of a rational economic system for a system in which the exchange of goods was not a mechanical but a

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<sup>152</sup> Sayer, *Moral Economy*. p.2

<sup>153</sup> See, Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967).; Karl Polanyi. *The Livelihood of Man* (New York: Academic, 1977). See also, James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).; E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (1971).

moral transaction.”<sup>154</sup> Morality itself, for these writers, may therefore be understood as a function of the presumed ‘embeddedness’ of the economic in the social in pre-market societies.<sup>155</sup> Forms of protective legislation and other externally derived instruments for intervening in markets are, for Polanyi, subsequently understood to be morally-agentic counter-measures against the “deleterious action of the market.”<sup>156</sup>

Insofar however as all forms of economic activity might be understood to be influenced by and depend on certain underlying moral norms, sentiments, dispositions and behaviours (both internally emergent and externally implied), it is not just pre-market economies that qualify as ‘moral,’ but, as contemporary moral economy approaches suggest, this designation may be applied usefully to the study of advanced capitalist market economies as well.<sup>157</sup> Working on this basis, theorists of moral economy propose a two-pronged aim to their inquiry.

On the one hand, ‘the moral economy’ denotes, as I have already noted, an object of study. Here attention is drawn to the various structuring moralities understood to subsist within all forms of economic transaction, but additionally, to the supposed ‘compromise’ of these norms by economic forces.<sup>158</sup> In this sense, moral economy provides, as explained by Andrew Sayer (a prominent proponent of this approach), a “positive” or analytical contribution to social science.<sup>159</sup> By proposing that moral considerations influence our economic behaviour at every stage, moral economy acts as a counterpoint to neo-classical economic approaches that insist on a wholly rational economic actor who calculatedly transacts on the ‘self-interested’ basis of preference or ‘utility maximisation.’

Equally important for Sayer though, is a second possibility that emerges from the designation of ‘moral economies’ – the potential that, given the ethical implications of economic transactions, a normative moral economy might be

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<sup>154</sup> E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Introduction to the Gift, by Marcel Mauss* (New York: Norton, 1967). p.ix

<sup>155</sup> William James Booth, "On the Idea of the Moral Economy," *The American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (1994). p.656

<sup>156</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957). p.132

<sup>157</sup> Booth, "On the Idea of the Moral Economy." p.658

<sup>158</sup> Sayer, *Moral Economy and Political Economy*. p.2

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

developed to evaluate them.<sup>160</sup> The concept of moral economy thus operates as both means through which normative issues in contemporary economies may be brought into focus, but also as a vehicle through which the functioning of ‘moral economies’ might be commented upon or regulated.

Moral economy thus marks out the ‘proper’ role of self-interest in economic transactions as an issue of particular interest. If morality is understood in general to serve as a kind of constraint on self-interest, and, given moral concerns can be seen to actively underlie all economic transaction,<sup>161</sup> then, so the reasoning goes, the dominance of self-interest as a singular economic rationale need also be re-considered.

A rough parallel may be provisionally drawn here between the suggestion of ‘enlightened self-interest’ as an ethical basis for CSR, and the occupation by ‘self-interest’ of explanatory ground within neo-classical economic theory that moral economists would populate instead with underlying moral norms and influences. Although these concerns are not identically coincidental, the problematisation I am attempting here and the moral economist’s desire to see ethical considerations in economic transactions taken into account, both bump up against a ‘self-interest’ that appears to stolidly resist colonisation by anything other than the most calculative reasoning.

Amartya Sen’s distinction between ‘ethical’ and ‘engineering’ approaches to economic questions is illuminating in this regard inasmuch as this demonstrates the perspectival gap between moral economy approaches on the one hand, and neo-classical economics on the other.<sup>162</sup> Drawing on Aristotle’s *The Nicomeachean Ethics*, Sen recalls an economic tradition in which it is impossible to dissociate the study of the economic and ethical. Herein, wealth is not understood to be an end in itself; instead, “[t]he life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful for the sake of

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> There are many different philosophical defenses and interpretations of this view, it is widely held across various moral theories however – Kantian, Rawlsian, and Utilitarian approaches all having this notion at base. See, Eric H. Beversluis, "Is There 'No Such Thing as Business Ethics'?", *Journal of Business Ethics* 6 (1987). p.87

<sup>162</sup> Sen, *On Ethics and Economics*. p.3

something else.”<sup>163</sup> Sen denotes this the ‘ethical’ approach. In contrast to this tradition in economic thought on the other hand, Sen also describes an ‘engineering’ approach characterised “by being concerned with primarily logistic issues rather than with ultimate ends and such questions as what may foster ‘the good of man.’”<sup>164</sup> Here, “ends are taken as fairly straightforwardly given, and ... [h]uman behaviour is typically seen as being based on simple and easily characterisable motives.”<sup>165</sup>

The predominance of the latter ‘engineering’ understanding in contemporary mainstream economics is indicative, for Sen, of a neglect, or narrow reading of classical accounts of the ‘self-interested’ motivations behind economic behaviour. In particular, Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* is singled out insofar as this is understood to develop a much more complex perspective on the role of self-interest than is borne out in the ubiquitous contemporary references made by neo-classical economists to its supposed championing of self-interested motivation.<sup>166</sup> Much time is devoted in this way, by Sen and others working in a moral economy framework, to recouping Smith’s works from the purportedly neglectful clutches of these neo-classical economists. Close attention to *The Wealth of Nations* reveals by contrast, it is claimed, a careful and considered account of self-interest as only one economic motivation amongst others, including a wide range of what are understood as moral emotions or sentiments.<sup>167</sup>

While the particular issue of Smith’s legacy in neo-classical economics is beyond the scope of this chapter, what does usefully emerge herein is an interesting critique of the possibility of ‘pure’ self-interest in economic transaction. As Sen convincingly points out: “The self-interest view of rationality involves *inter alia* a firm rejection of the ‘ethics-related’ view of motivation ... To see any departure from self-interest maximization as evidence of irrationality must imply a rejection of the role of ethics in actual decision taking.”<sup>168</sup> This claim is not designed to refute that self-interest plays a substantive role in motivating economic behaviour, but

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<sup>163</sup> Aristotle, in *Ibid.*, p.3

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21

<sup>167</sup> Sayer, *Moral Economy*. p.7

<sup>168</sup> Sen, *On Ethics and Economics*.p.15

rather draw attention to the “plurality of motivations”<sup>169</sup> that might be unearthed from beneath a crushing logic of ‘rational self-interest.’ As Sayer concurs, “the pursuit of self-interest is common enough in economic activities [however], there is no reason for accepting the dogma that it is the only motivation involved.”<sup>170</sup>

More interesting though than simply ‘a number of competing motivations in addition to self-interest,’ is the further suggestion that the “contrast is not necessarily between self-interest, on the one hand, and some kind of a general concern for all, on the other.”<sup>171</sup> Instead, as Sen points out, “[t]he traditional dichotomy between ‘egoism’ and ‘utilitarianism’ is misleading in several respects, including the fact that groups intermediate between oneself and all – such as class, community or occupation groups – provide the focus of many actions involving committed behaviour.”<sup>172</sup>

Sen’s address to the neglects of neo-classical economics is notable for its attempt to describe morality and self-interest together, especially given that, in doing so, it does not posit a singular or entirely predictable relationship between the two. Moral economy approaches therefore, as I have attempted to illustrate, are interesting in the present context insofar as they introduce ethical considerations in order to critique ‘self-interest’ as a single and ‘pure’ motivation for economic activity. As Sen points out though, the issue ultimately at stake is not the ‘choosing’ of one approach over the other, the ‘ethical’ over the ‘engineering,’ rather “it is a question of balance of the two approaches to economics.”<sup>173</sup>

This address to, or attempted additive ‘correction’ of, neo-classical economic assumptions is however reminiscent, in some regards, of the issue of ‘embeddedness’ in the field of economic sociology, described in the previous chapter. Here, it is worth following this comparison through briefly as, where economic sociology, I suggested, ran into problems regarding the relative positioning of the ‘social’ and ‘economic,’ ‘moral economy’ offers a similarly problematic situating of the ‘moral’ and ‘economic.’

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p.19

<sup>170</sup> Sayer, *Moral Economy and Political Economy*. p.2

<sup>171</sup> Sen, *On Ethics and Economics*. p.19

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., pp.19-20

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p.6

Recall, from the previous chapter, Mark Granovetter's characterisation of the supposed independence of economic relations from social ones as a "grievous misunderstanding."<sup>174</sup> 'New' economic sociology, as per the previous chapter, aims to demonstrate that the economy (contra neo-classical economic approaches) is, as Granovetter denotes it, 'embedded' in a dense network of social concerns and relations that in turn are crucial to understanding the function of this. Similarly, for moral economists, what is at stake is a 'misunderstanding,' a problematic neglect or refusal on behalf of neo-classical economic approaches – only this time normative issues are highlighted for attention. Economists need to "re-establish moral considerations as a proper part of the understanding and evaluation of economies,"<sup>175</sup> it is claimed.

What a moral economy approach, in both its analytical and normative aspects, aims essentially to achieve then is a 'humanising' of economics, a re-insertion of the supposedly forgotten 'person' into a realm of rationality and calculation.<sup>176</sup> This proposal however encapsulates a difficult contradiction. Morality suffuses markets, the contemporary economy is, on the one hand, 'internally' a moral one in so far as such concerns may be identified to influence behaviour. The extent to which this is supposedly 'forgotten' though necessitates, on the other hand, an 'external' ministering and evaluation of this same 'morality' in an attempt to make it both more evident (the analytic aspect), and more virtuous (the normative aspect).

This 'contradiction' is probably not problematically so should one's aim in discussing moral economy be the revival of humanism in the economy. 'Self-interest,' in such an account, while undesirable as a singular motivator of economic behaviour, need not be much further interrogated insofar as its ethical status is concerned. The return to Smith in moral economy, the attempt to rescue his writing from too faithful an account of self-interest, while interesting from a historical perspective, does very little ultimately in the way of thinking through the

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<sup>174</sup> Granovetter, "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." p.53

<sup>175</sup> [Paraphrasing Geoffrey Hodgson] Sayer, *Moral Economy and Political Economy*. p.1

<sup>176</sup> Also see on this topic, Mark A. Lutz, "Centering Economics on Human Dignity," *Review of Social Economy* 53, no. 2 (1995).

contemporary complexities that complicate any account of ‘self-interest’ as largely antithetical to ‘morality’ as it were.

The present problem of describing a ‘market ethics’ offers a case in point. In common with the designation ‘moral economy,’ the ‘market ethics’ which emerges from the prevalent business case rendition of CSR, holds that it is possible for the ‘ethical’ to have an ‘economic’ value. This recognition however, for moral economy approaches, is itself the achievement, so to speak. Pitted against mainstream economics, moral economists work to find the supposedly ‘forgotten’ ethical, and reinsert this as a counter to what is perceived as an overly reductive account of economic life. The relationship that the term ‘market ethics’ describes between its objects differs significantly on this point though. The ‘achievement’ of speaking the ethical and economic together is not the outcome – the kind of market ethics that I am suggesting characterises the contemporary practice of CSR takes this relationship, this potential implication, as given, as a sort of working assumption.

The protestations offered by moral economists in this context, though interesting for their attempt to recognise and discuss the ethical and economic together, can finally only go so far. The business case makes both an implicit and explicit recognition of the implication of the ethical and the economic, this recognition being the very basis for the practice of CSR itself. Or, more accurately – the *potential* of this implication is what specifically becomes appealing. What a CSR ‘market ethics’ draws attention to that is specifically not intended by a moral economy account is the potential to *make market* (for lack of a better phrase) the recognised overlap between the economic and ethical. Simply, this very space is that in which CSR operates and seeks to expand and market.

A proposition such as this is liable however to be dismissed from a moral economy perspective as a reduction of morality to ‘market choice’ or “mere individual preference.”<sup>177</sup> This supposed ‘reduction’ is identified by Sayer as one of the “main sources of misunderstanding ... in neoclassical economics.”<sup>178</sup> Values, he holds, can not be re-cast in terms of a preferential ‘freedom-of-choice’ model,

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<sup>177</sup> Sayer, *Moral Economy and Political Economy*. p.4

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

whereby what counts as ‘moral’ lies outside the scope of public justification. Rather, “justifications have to do more than appeal to mere convention – to ‘what we do round here;’ they must show how they are not arbitrary but have some normative force, for example by demonstrating how they produce beneficial consequences.”<sup>179</sup> As Sayer seeks to point out, morality is socially embedded; it is not down to individuals to unilaterally decide what is moral.<sup>180</sup>

The tension described here, between ‘individual choice’ and ‘embedded morality,’ is one that again works to replicate a distinction between ‘markets’ and ‘morality.’ The ‘choices’ made in markets, such an account suggests, are necessarily ethically impoverished ones in as much as these amount only to ‘individual preferences,’ and are therefore without relation to a publically justifiable good. Held up against contemporary CSR practice though, we might begin to inquire as to the descriptive accuracy of this conclusion. How accurate is it, for instance, given the identifiable ‘market for ethics’ that the business case suggests, to conclude that this marketability must divorce these ‘ethics’ from public justification and re-invent the ‘ethical’ as merely a matter of individual or, more accurately, consumer choice?

Chapter Five will take up this question in an empirical context by looking at the consumptive choices made by ethical consumers. There I will suggest that any such division between markets and morals is complicated by close attention to the material and affective content and circumstance of ‘choice,’ which, in daily practice, is rarely so one dimensional and abstract as the reduction to ‘preference’ implies. For now though, in order to further explore the proposal that ‘public justification’ is a normative requirement lacking in a market context, I want to turn to CSR’s own derivation of the ‘ethical’ in order to note how this differs from those accounts discussed thus far.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p.10

## From Responsibility to Responsiveness

Although I hope to avoid repetition here, it is worth recalling for a moment what I described in the previous chapter as the convergence in academic CSR literature around the empirical attempt to correlate ethical and financial performance. This, I suggested, marks a distinct move away from the more traditional business ethics focus on the suggestion of particular ethical models that might be proffered in order to answer the structuring question: ‘What ought I do in my business relationships?’<sup>181</sup> Reliant on moral philosophy, and applying the dictates that this generates however, business ethics as a discipline becomes marginalised – isolated both from the business world to which its recommendations seek to apply, and from an rapidly emergent CSR movement which, while ostensibly seeking to address similar concerns, in fact takes the whole question of business and ethics in a markedly different direction.

For the purposes of this chapter however, this story might be re-told, with a slightly different emphasis, as one that demonstrates the shift from *ethical principle* to *ethical practice*. Or, as William Frederick, a CSR commentator prominent for over thirty years originally characterised it – the shift from ‘responsibility’ to ‘responsiveness.’<sup>182</sup> The reorientation that this shift implies is, as Frederick emphasises, quite profound. While ‘responsibility’ deals in “obligation,” the “action oriented” concept of ‘responsiveness’ deals “in the maximization of potential.”<sup>183</sup> Renaming the responsibility-centred approach ‘CSR sub 1,’ and the newer responsiveness orientation ‘CSR sub 2,’ Frederick illustrates precisely the fate to which ‘principles’ are condemned by the practical evolution of CSR:

While the debate over the merits of CSR sub 1 has always carried heavy philosophic overtones, CSR sub 2 shuns philosophy in favor of a managerial approach. The abstract and often highly elusive principles governing CSR sub 1 are replaced by CSR sub 2's focus on the practical aspects of making organizations more socially responsive to tangible forces in the surrounding environment. The often speculative

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<sup>181</sup> Beversluis, "Is There 'No Such Thing as Business Ethics'?" p.223

<sup>182</sup> Frederick, "From CSR1 to CSR2." See also; Raymond A. Bauer and Robert W. Ackerman. See; Ackerman and Bauer, eds., *Corporate Social Responsiveness: The Modern Dilemma*.

<sup>183</sup> Frederick, "From CSR1 to CSR2." p.150

generalities that becloud the debate about CSR sub 1 yield to the analytic posture and methods of CSR sub 2 scholars and business practitioners who seek to understand the problems and prospects of making specific organizations socially responsive.<sup>184</sup>

This clearly laid out evolution reinforces a number of the points that this chapter has attempted to draw attention to. Firstly, with regard to defining the relationship between morality and the economy, as is evident from the preceding quote, the contemporary ‘responsiveness’ orientation (from which the business case for CSR derives) is already recognisant of the through-going relation between these spheres. This, as Frederick again notes, is a working assumption: “CSR sub 2 assumes that CSR sub 1’s central question of whether companies should respond to social pressures has already been answered affirmatively by general public opinion and a host of government social regulations and that the important task for business now is to learn how to respond in fruitful, humane, and practical ways.”<sup>185</sup>

Secondly, as the term ‘responsiveness’ serves to make clear, what counts as ethical practice in the context of CSR is determined both by specific concerned ‘publics’ and as a function of society-wide conceptions of what ‘ethically’ matters in the given contemporary moment. The concern then that ethics become ‘mere’ preference, not subject to “public justification”<sup>186</sup> as a market choice, is not straightforwardly borne out in CSR to the extent ‘responsiveness’ identifies external social and moral pressures as the drivers of ethical corporate action.<sup>187</sup>

However, ‘responsiveness’ is also a somewhat misleading term in this regard. While Frederick is keen to underscore the receptive orientation of the ‘responsive’ organisation, this characterisation is apt to overly emphasise external demands, and needs to be tempered by a reminder of the constructive nature of the various ethical practices that might be deployed in this context. To this end, Chapter Three develops an account of markets that emphasises their constitutive ‘reflexivity.’ There, this will be encountered as a methodological consideration necessary to contend in order to

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p.155

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Sayer, *Moral Economy and Political Economy*. p.4

<sup>187</sup> This point is taken up again in Chapter Three in the course of discussion regarding the performative and reflexive function of public or popular attention.

empirically approach CSR as a market practice. It is not simply a matter of ‘responding’ to pressure by taking action, I will claim, or even of pre-empting this pressure, and in either case reaping any potential financial reward. Rather, as the following chapter will suggest, a significant re-framing of how what is ‘ethical’ comes to count as such within the market economy is occurring.

Before this discussion can take place however, and on the basis of the ‘responsiveness’ orientation just described, it is first necessary to turn our attention to a body of sociological literature that presents a third possibility for thinking markets and morality. Where the previously discussed approaches have maintained that these, to varying degrees, constitute different and separable spheres, in the following section I will review one particular theoretical perspective through which markets and morality are thought together in contemporary sociology. Specifically, this entails the suggestion that markets are actively moralised and moralising entities that function to encourage certain forms of *self-regulatory governance*.

### **Moralising Markets: The New Economy and Governmentality Approaches**

‘Responsiveness’ as a corporate posture, recalls sociological descriptions of the so-called ‘new economy.’<sup>188</sup> This term aims to describe a set of developments in Western capitalism most frequently associated with the late 1990s, though some features of which continue through to the present.<sup>189</sup> According to theorists of the ‘new economy,’ what characterises this development are a series of transformations in economic life: the dematerialisation of economic processes and production, the centrality of knowledge and culture (hence branding and so forth), as well as the advent and import of processes such as globalisation and privatisation. Though variously described, appearing also for instance as the ‘Information Society,’<sup>190</sup> or

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<sup>188</sup> See, for instance, Nigel Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism* (London: Sage, 2005). Manuel Castells, *The Rise of Network Society. The Information Age: Economy, Science and Culture*. 2 ed., vol. 1 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).; Scott Lash, *Critique of Information* (London: Sage, 2002).; Andreas Wittel, "Towards a Network Sociality," *Theory, Culture & Society* 18, no. 6 (2001).

<sup>189</sup> See, for instance, Nigel Thrift, "It's the Romance, Not the Finance, That Makes the Business Worth Pursuing": Disclosing a New Market Culture," *Economy and Society* 30, no. 4 (2001).

<sup>190</sup> Castells, *The Rise of Network Society. The Information Age: Economy, Science and Culture*.

‘Knowledge Economy,’<sup>191</sup> and despite each description having a slightly different emphasis, common threads are a focus on the advent and effect of new media and communication technologies, and the supposedly subsequent transition to an increasingly service-based economy in which economic products become intangible in nature.<sup>192</sup> Herein, what have traditionally been understood as ‘soft’ forms of business knowledge become paramount, leading to growth in sectors such as human resources, advertising and branding, and management disciplines.<sup>193</sup>

To this list, in line with new economy approaches, CSR might also be quite reasonably added. As the ‘responsiveness’ discussion sought to demonstrate, those working within CSR and the discipline of management understand the potential economic benefits of CSR to lie in the kind of adaptive flexibility it may lend a corporation in what are characterised as rapidly changing social circumstances. It is not though my current aim to establish the accuracy (or otherwise) of claims regarding the new economy using the advent of a market-based CSR as evidence. Rather, I have introduced this concept here primarily for the reason that it has provided a backdrop for the widespread adoption and application of Foucauldian-inspired governmentality approaches to the study of the economy.

What the suggestion of a “governmentalized economy”<sup>194</sup> allows, in contrast to approaches previously discussed in this chapter, is that markets themselves be actively moralising entities. Regulation in markets need not be enforced, in such a reading, by external means or coercion; instead it is through the practices and techniques characteristic in particular of the ‘new economy’ that self-regulating and self-monitoring actors are produced. In this way, ‘governmentality’ links processes such as globalisation, privatisation, and deregulation, to the predominance and increasing pervasiveness of neo-liberal ideology. This trend, often concomitantly entailed in sociological descriptions of ‘marketisation’ and ‘economisation,’<sup>195</sup> is

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<sup>191</sup> Peter Drucker, *Post-Capitalist Society* (Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 1993).

<sup>192</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>193</sup> The growth of so-called ‘ethical careers’ is examined in these terms in Chapter Six.

<sup>194</sup> Michel Foucault, "On Governmentality," *Ideology & Consciousness* 6 (1979).; Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, "Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government," *British Journal of Sociology* 43 (1992).

<sup>195</sup> See, for instance, James G. Carrier, "Introduction," in *Meanings of the Market: The Free Market in Western Culture*, ed. James G. Carrier (Oxford: Berg, 1997). p.50

widely critiqued, using the language of governmentality, insofar as it has been understood to represent the incursion of the economic in the political, or an “economization of the political.”<sup>196</sup> And, while a great deal of attention has been directed towards this topic in terms of the consequences for state and civil society institutions,<sup>197</sup> this is only just now beginning to be paralleled by a focus on the ‘marketisation’ of morality.

Here, for the most part, ‘morality’ has been broadly defined and discussed in governmentality terms in relation to practices such as accounting,<sup>198</sup> individual credit reporting,<sup>199</sup> and the new politics of transparency.<sup>200</sup> Most notable though, for present purposes, is a 2008 article by Ronen Shamir in which a governmentality perspective is specifically adopted with regard to CSR.<sup>201</sup> In this article, entitled ‘The Age of Responsibilization’ Shamir links the economisation of public domains to moves to moralise markets and business through CSR. “[C]ommercial enterprises,” Shamir notes, “increasingly perform tasks that were once within the civil domain of moral entrepreneurship and the political domain of the caring welfare state, dispensing social goods other than profits to constituencies other than their shareholders.”<sup>202</sup> In this account, ‘moralisation’ and individual ‘responsibilisation’ are, importantly, processes internal to the ‘economisation’ that Shamir describes:

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<sup>196</sup> Ronen Shamir, "The Age of Responsibilization: On Market-Embedded Morality," *Economy and Society* 37, no. 1 (2008). p.1

<sup>197</sup> See, for instance; Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).; Thomas Lemke, "The Birth of Bio-Politics: Michel Foucault's Lecture at the College de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality," *Economy and Society* 30, no. 2 (2001).; Bob Jessop, "Capitalism and Its Future: Remarks on Regulation, Government and Governance," *Review of International Political Economy* 4, no. 3 (1997).; Graham Burchell, "Peculiar Interests: Civil Society and "Governing the System of Natural Liberty."" in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

<sup>198</sup> Peter Miller, "Governing by Numbers: Why Calculative Practices Matter," *Social Research* 68, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>199</sup> Alya Guseva and Akos Rona-Tas, "Uncertainty, Risk and Trust: Russian and American Credit Card Markets Compared," *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 5 (2001).

<sup>200</sup> Jacqueline Best, *The Limits of Transparency: Ambiguity and the History of International Finance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005). See also, for more a more general discussion of market moralities in governmentality terms; also see; Ronnie Lipshutz, *Regulation for the Rest of Us? Globalization, Governmentality and Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>201</sup> Shamir, "The Age of Responsibilization: On Market-Embedded Morality."

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p.2

“moralization is not an ‘external’ force bearing on and ‘correcting’ the process of economization.”<sup>203</sup>

The replacing of laws with guidelines, and the reliance on self-reflexive regulation that Foucault identified to be among the techniques of a governmentality reliant on “behaviouristically manipulable being[s],”<sup>204</sup> are described by Shamir in relation to CSR and understood to form an enabling ground for its very development. Here, Shamir isolates ‘responsibilisation’ as the primarily relevant ‘tool’ or “technique of government” insofar as it acts to sediment “a reflexive subjectivity deemed suitable to partake in the deployment of horizontal authority.”<sup>205</sup> While the type of power deployed via ‘responsibilisation’ is subtle, it nonetheless has a particular rationality which, as Foucauldian scholars are quick to point out, “defines the telos of action or the adequate means to achieve it.”<sup>206</sup>

As functions internal to the ‘marketisation’ process, ‘responsibilisation’ and ‘moralisation,’ are subject to the same critiques typically levelled in governmentality terms against this. Moralisation, as Shamir concludes along these lines, is a product of “neo-liberal epistemology” inasmuch as it amounts to a “set of practices that contribute to a constantly evolving and adapting neo-liberal imagination ... that [work] to ground and reframe socio-moral concerns from *within* the instrumental rationality of capitalist markets.”<sup>207</sup>

While then, on the one hand, this reading provides, through its engagement with governmentality, a means of sociologically addressing markets as moralising entities and the possibility that morality can have a market basis (both as suggested by CSR), on the other hand, given that no distinction is made between the practices entailed in moralisation processes and the blanket outcome of these – ‘neo-liberalism’ – the critique becomes a overly totalising and largely tautological one.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p.3

<sup>204</sup> Foucault, Michel (1979) in, Lemke, "The Birth of Bio-Politics: Michel Foucault's Lecture at the College de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality." p.200

<sup>205</sup> Shamir, "The Age of Responsibilization: On Market-Embedded Morality." p.4

<sup>206</sup> Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique," *Rethinking Marxism* 14, no. 3 (2002).

p.5

<sup>207</sup> Shamir, "The Age of Responsibilization: On Market-Embedded Morality." p.3 (original italics)

CSR, Shamir suggests elsewhere, is ‘de-radicalized’<sup>208</sup> on account of its being a market-based practice, and yet, when description and criticism are, from the outset and *a priori* rolled into one, as in ascriptions of governmentality that seek to catalogue ‘ever more pervasive’ neoliberalism, the very point of asking the initial question, appears to me to get hopelessly lost.

Though a more sophisticated critical approach than the ‘boundless market’ critiques discussed earlier, when applied as both question and answer to the complex of proposition of a market-based CSR, ‘governmentality,’ I am suggesting, can nonetheless easily segue into similarly inadequate conclusions. Like the ‘boundless markets’ concerns, the charge of ‘neo-liberalism’ is not made only on a political basis – but also on a moral one. The spatial metaphor at work, although incorporating an understanding of markets as productive, practical, and reflexive achievements, maintains, in much the same way as prior models, a proper outside, a sphere rightfully distinct from the market and in need of protection from this ever advancing threat. As Foucauldian scholar Paul Rabinow writes: “no one can doubt that capitalism is more expansive, destructive, and productive than ever before. No one can doubt the growing scope and scale of market relations and the concomitant commodification of an ever greater range of things previously held to be external to the realm of monetary value.”<sup>209</sup>

Shamir’s suggestion, that “the moralization of markets has become an important part of the neo-liberal global social order, one which not only neatly fits the principle of self-regulation, but moreover, one which essentially grounds the very notion of moral duty within the rationality of the market,”<sup>210</sup> entails, as I understand it, a kind analysis and politics by *symptomology*. What I mean to draw attention to by this suggestion (and this is often particularly observable in relation to the charge of neo-liberalism, though equally may also be observed elsewhere),<sup>211</sup> is the tendency wherein objects, practices, and processes of sociological interest are critically encountered not on the basis, as it were, of their own merits, but rather pre-emptorily

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<sup>208</sup> Ronen Shamir, "The De-Radicalization of Corporate Social Responsibility," *Critical Sociology* 30, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>209</sup> Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). pp.14-15

<sup>210</sup> Shamir, "The Age of Responsibilization: On Market-Embedded Morality." p.4

<sup>211</sup> Here, possibly in relation to some accounts of ‘globalisation’ for instance.

understood as mere ‘symptom’ of something else. In the present instance, this is demonstrable in the initial approach to CSR as ‘responsibilisation’ technique, and predictably borne out in the subsequent suggestion that any market-based ethics is simply a symptom of something else, in this case, a global “regime”<sup>212</sup> of neo-liberal governmentality.

The following and final section of this chapter represents an effort to redress the tendency I have just described by manoeuvring some critical space wherein it is possible to take seriously the actual content of processes and practices themselves without the pre-empting jump to symptomological condemnation. Latour’s discussion the ‘means’ and ‘ends’ here will function as an alternative route of entry to the question of market morality, one that, as I will go on to suggest, can be utilised in defining a theoretical approach that leaves the content of the ‘ethical’ open to empirical description as opposed ideologically pre-proscribed.

### **Making Means Mean More – Towards Ethics as Practice**

Moral philosophy has traditionally been characterised by a concerns with *ends* – the consequences or outcomes of a decision or action. This teleology is immediately evident, for instance, in the utilitarian concern with an outcome that confers the greatest good for the greatest number. Equally though, deontological theories, despite the apparent lack of concern for ends professed by the designation of an action as always right or wrong (e.g. thou shalt not kill), have already in making this designation, decreed the consequence to be that which is morally unacceptable. If morality belongs to the realm of ends though, what may be said for instrumentality – in particular the kind of instrumentality that attempts to achieve ‘self-interested’ ends? This is not easily accommodated in either a utilitarian or deontological moral schema, (as the moral economy approaches described earlier already went some way to suggest). Instrumentality, evidently, is not neutral from an

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<sup>212</sup> James Crotty, "The Structural Contradictions of the Global Neoliberal Regime," *Review of Radical Political Economies* 32, no. 3 (2000).

ethical standpoint, the question therefore of how we might begin to discuss the morality of 'means' themselves becomes pressing.

Latour usefully addresses this issue through his examination of the moral status of technology.<sup>213</sup> Cast as 'mere' instrument, he notes the way in which technologies themselves are divested of moral significance, understood only "to give a more durable shape to schemes, forms, and relations which are already present in another form and in other materials."<sup>214</sup> This hygienic separation of means from ends however, as Latour demonstrates, is not only difficult to maintain, but also problematic insofar as attention is diverted away from the intermingling of morality and technology.<sup>215</sup> Means, to put it simply, are, for Latour, not simply a tool for the achievement of ends. Rather, our efforts must be directed towards noticing the way in which intention and ends are themselves changed, or displaced, in line with the practical form taken by a particular technique or means.<sup>216</sup>

As Latour notes, if "you want to keep your intentions straight, your plans inflexible, your programmes of action rigid, then do not pass through any form of technological life. The detour will translate, will betray, your most imperious desires."<sup>217</sup> 'Instrumentality,' in such a reading, is polluted, so to speak, with 'ends' from the very beginning. Importantly, what this indissoluble overlay of ends and means marks out as worthy of sustained critical attention is actual *practices* themselves. If morality occupies, in moral philosophy, the realm of ends, then the market-based re-inception of ethics which this thesis attempts to describe highlights instead the potentially productive meaningfulness of means.

Latour's perspective emerges within STS and is part of the broader ANT concern, already discussed in previous chapter, with "objectivism"<sup>218</sup> or the recognition that humans are not the only beings that can occupy the role of agent. In

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<sup>213</sup> Bruno Latour, "Morality and Technology: The End of the Means," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, no. 4 (2002). p.247

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p.250

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p.248

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p.252

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Theodore R. Schatzki, "Introduction: Practice Theory," in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, ed. Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny (London: Routledge, 2001). p.10

what has been described as “the practice turn in contemporary theory,”<sup>219</sup> the empirical description of activities, objects, and things, takes precedent over analysis at the level of the individual or, at the other end of the spectrum, the overarching social structure. In relation to ethics then, and again following Latour, such an approach begins from the premise that “[m]orality is no more human than technology,”<sup>220</sup> and hence ‘dignity,’ as it were, is re-proportioned equally between morality and the practices in which it is bound.<sup>221</sup>

While it is the task of the empirical chapters to examine the situated ‘doing’ of ethics in detail, suffice to say for now that the practices entailed in measuring ethics (Chapter Four), consuming ethically (Chapter Five), and aspiring to work ethically (Chapter Six), may be understood to function as concrete demands for what Latour has called the “describability” and “evaluation”<sup>222</sup> of options. What I take this to mean in the present context is that ethical demands might be said to inhere not only in the practices that newly bear the prefix ‘ethical’ (‘ethical consumption,’ and so forth), but also in the actual proliferation of attempts to *describe* how any given practice may become ‘ethical’ in the first place, as well as the equally ubiquitous means of *evaluating* these practices. Ethics then, to return to the terminology of ends and means, are also, in this context, far from a sole concern with ends, the very proliferations of ‘means-of-ethics’ themselves.

What makes ‘practice’ a critically advantageous focus with regard to the problem of markets and morality as it has been understood in this chapter is that unlike other approaches discussed, the content of what is ‘ethical’ stands to be empirically elaborated, both *in-practice*, and *as-practice*. A privileged sociological relationship to ethical ‘truth’ is eschewed in this way in favour of an emphasis on the possibilities rendered in ‘doing’ and ‘becoming’ that I have described elsewhere. It is, I would suggest, neither possible nor desirable to evaluate CSR through recourse to any ‘authentic’ ethics, whether this suggestion entails insisting on a moral sphere wholly separable from the ‘market,’ or whether this achieved through a theoretical

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<sup>219</sup> Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny, eds., *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>220</sup> Latour, “Morality and Technology: The End of the Means.” p.254

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p.248

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, p.258

sleight of hand in which ‘market ethics’ are, from the outset, already not this, but really just symptomatic of something else. The further development of an approach along these lines however is not a task towards which I can continue by means of literature review. The problem of how, in practice, to approach the doing of ethics-as-practice is a methodological one, and as such, it is to the description of a methodology suitable in this regard that the following chapter will turn.

If, presently, and in conclusion to this section and chapter, I appear uncommitted to any theoretical position beyond seeking to approach ‘ethics’ as that which is formed in practice, and as practice in contemporary CSR, and seeing where this will lead, it is, I hope, clear that this is not through indecision, or through lack of compelling framework. At this point, my primary goal in relation to what is ‘ethical’ has been to avoid pre-emption or prescription, and in doing so I have aimed to create a space in which an encounter with something as potentially absurd as a ‘market ethics’ might be fully articulated without a premature move towards critique.

In closing, I would like finally to add that if this chapter has seemed to make ethics do a lot of work,<sup>223</sup> then I feel somewhat confident that it has at least partially succeeded in the aims originally laid out. What I mean by this is not that I have attempted to somehow overburden ethics, or encourage it to take on that which by rights does not belong, but rather a newly functional and increasingly ubiquitous ethical is the very result of the kind of re-framing undergone in the process of its becoming market practice. This ‘un-fixed’ market-based ethical, I hope, having come to the end of this chapter, is not necessarily the uncomfortable compromise it may have seemed at the beginning.

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<sup>223</sup> Cf. Thomas Osborne, *Aspects of Enlightenment: Social Theory and the Ethics of Truth* (London: UCL Press, 1998). p. xiii

## Chapter Three

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### From 'Site' to 'Nexus': Research Practice and Methodology

The term 'empirical work,' or 'fieldwork,' implies a locatable site, or 'field' into which a researcher may venture in order to observe or collect data on a particular object of interest. To begin to think about 'field' in relation to Corporate Social Responsibility though is to immediately bump up against the question 'where is CSR?' and although it is tempting to be guided by the acronym itself and quickly answer – 'in corporations of course,' this response, though not wholly inaccurate, only goes part of the way towards telling a potentially more complicated story.

That CSR is practiced by some corporations, and hence, may be observed to be taking place institutionally in the form of policies, protocols, agreements, targets, and so forth, is not up for dispute here. Indeed, the few sociological studies of which I am aware that approach the issue of CSR have feasibly done so by taking as their empirical focus one particular corporate setting wherein detailed data on institutional practice is collated – this is of course one approach.<sup>224</sup> If, however, as I proposed in Chapter One, CSR in its contemporary form is distinguishable from prior versions of business ethics due to it being 'marketable' or market-based in nature, then particular corporate practices must be examined within the context of the demand for them. Simply, CSR did not emerge from, and is not practised in, a vacuum – it is within the broader marketplace that its various discourses and practices make contact with their intended publics, and vie for economic attention. Importantly, it is in the market itself that the 'ethical' as it pertains to CSR is made manifest and becomes significant.

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<sup>224</sup> See, for a firm-level approach, Ronen Shamir, "Mind the Gap: The Commodification of Corporate Social Responsibility," *Symbolic Interaction* 28, no. 2 (2005).; Or, with reference to corporate citizenship at British Petroleum, Mark Glazebrook, "The Social Construction of Corporate Citizenship," *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, no. 17 (2005).

So, if we must now move out of the corporation and into the ‘market’ to find our ‘field,’ the problem becomes, ‘where does one *find* a thing like the market?’ Is it even possible to speak of a single ‘market’ for CSR, when this itself is composed of a number of smaller, distinct, and more specific markets? This methodology chapter begins in its task by taking up the none-to-easily resolved question of ‘where?’ Given that this research is concerned to explore broadly how ethics are *done* in CSR, and seeing that this ‘doing’ may be observed taking place in a proliferating variety of contexts, research ‘site(s)’ becomes an issue in need of a great deal of attention.

Specifically, what I will be doing here in order to begin to generate means of empirical engagement with the ‘ethical’ through CSR, is developing a critique of the notion of ‘site’ or ‘field’ as it is conventionally understood in social research, asking such questions as: Can empirical focus justifiably be restricted to a singular site, or does the nature of the question at hand demand simultaneous attention to a multitude of significant sites? How does one go about choosing or organising ‘sites’? What if it is necessary to adapt research methods across sites? What are the practical difficulties of this, and how might these be managed?

Without wishing to pre-empt the following discussion, I think it is important to say to begin that in the course of analysis ‘site’ itself will come to have a different significance in the context of this particular research project. Simply put, I will emphasise the contingency of the research ‘sites’ in question in both time and space, and suggest that, as it constitutes, emerges, stabilises and demarks particular sites as zones of empirical inquiry, the methodological mode of focus itself need be subject to a certain degree of scrutiny. On the basis of these discussions, I will attempt to develop a rationale for the choice of ‘field sites’ in this research, as well as the methods engaged within these. Now though, in order to begin to explore the previously posed questions in greater detail, I will start my discussion by drawing upon some recent work in anthropology that seeks to problematise the traditional notion of the single ‘field,’ and introduce research methodologies specifically aimed at dealing with ‘multi-sitedness.’

## The Question of 'Site'

A great deal of critical attention within the discipline of anthropology has been focussed on the methodological problems encountered in designating or approaching a particular 'field' or 'site' as the setting for empirical research. A discipline whose authority has historically been founded on the supposed integrity of long ethnographic engagements in the 'field,' anthropology has, in light of postmodern concerns around the reflexivity of research practice, been necessary host to this series of re-thinks regarding the 'field.' Importantly, these present, in this particular context, a challenge that is methodological in nature.

In the classic anthropological tradition, 'site' or locale is paramount, but also taken for granted, or at least not subject to sustained critical inquiry. Herein, the question of what constitutes an adequate 'field' for research had fallen by the wayside. The classically propounded 'single-tribe, single scribe'<sup>225</sup> approach has however come under increasing criticism in light of the theoretical and critical developments of the last twenty-five years. Questions primarily concerning representation and power have made the ethnographic proposition of a 'spatio-temporal isolate'<sup>226</sup> increasingly untenable, also making problematic any account of the field as it is simply 'found.'

Even in research situations that previously might have seemed most straightforward, the issue of field 'construction' now unavoidably comes to the fore. If we recognise the role of the researcher themselves in the designation and construction of a supposedly 'native' or 'real-world' field, the boundedness, coherence, and 'naturalness' of the 'field' can no longer be uncritically posited. This is even more so for objects of study that may be understood from the outset to be mobile and multiply situated.

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<sup>225</sup> Eva Nadai and Christoph Maeder, "Fuzzy Fields: Multi-Sited Ethnography in Social Research," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 6, no. 3 (2005). p.10

<sup>226</sup> George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). p.178. Post-colonial studies, (following pioneering work by figures such as Edward Said), has been particularly important in drawing attention to problematic anthropological ascriptions of 'nativeness,' 'foreignness' and 'Otherness.'

Responding to these issues, the American anthropologist George Marcus has called extensively for the self-conscious embedding of ethnography in its contemporary surrounds such that it must move “out from single sites and local situations ... to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space.”<sup>227</sup> Coining the term ‘multi-sited ethnography’ to describe this methodological approach, Marcus crucially recognises that where our research objects are not singular in themselves, but instead multiply fragmented, our methodological approach to them can not justifiably or usefully remain focussed on a single site of investigation.<sup>228</sup>

Marcus’s suggestion of multi-sitedness is intuitively appealing in relation to CSR. As I have briefly mentioned already, an exclusive focus on the ethical practices of one particular corporation (popular in most qualitative studies of CSR)<sup>229</sup> is a means of approach not apt to respond to the particular breadth of practices that the research at hand aims to explore via the dual emphases (introduced in the preceding chapters) on ‘doing’ ethics and ‘becoming market.’

In addition to, and in line with, these concerns though, ‘site’ is also readily recognised as a practical problem for CSR by those who work in the industry. Location is, very literally, an openly contentious question here – for one, the problem of where within a company CSR should be situated. Should it be interspersed throughout and across divisions and levels so that all employees are responsible for it, and involved in its practice? Or, alternatively, should CSR be the sole preserve of a special division who oversee it?<sup>230</sup> Perhaps, it should be integrated into the Human Resources division, or maybe it instead warrants seclusion in a not-for-profit arm, or special company division? Furthermore, these apparent divisions, even once decided, are not permanent, but subject to constant change. New projects may emerge, inaugurating new sites, or leading to the abandonment old ones, departments may quickly be assembled, re-named, re-ordered, and/or decommissioned.

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<sup>227</sup> George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995). p.96

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. See also, Ulf Hannerz, "Being There... And There...And There!: Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography," *Ethnography* 4, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>229</sup> Whether these be sociological studies or those from a business ethics or management perspective.

<sup>230</sup> See Chapter Six for a specific discussion of this question as it arises in the empirical context of ethical employment.

Outside of the corporation, CSR is similarly migratory and mutable. Many of the literal sites at which CSR might be said to ‘occur’ are short lived and sometimes fleeting phenomena. Here one might think of conferences, meetings, workshops, or conventions – all assembled at a particular point in time, and then rapidly disassembled, perhaps never to occur again, or at least not in exactly the same way. Even more fleetingly than this, one might count the point of purchase, or the point of decision to purchase, as a ‘site’ of CSR, and, in a similar vein, a whole host of other instances might be claimed as sites where CSR is significantly enacted, structuring instances market and of socio-cultural exchange.

So, it is possible to observe CSR ‘happening’ in a number of settings, professional and popular, corporate and non-corporate. It is certainly a ‘multi-sited’ phenomenon, (or, perhaps more accurately, a collection of multi-sited phenomena). Beyond this recognition in itself though – that CSR does take place, and hence may need to be researched, across a variety of sites – what further methodological assistance can an emphasis on multi-sitedness lend?

While the apparent multi-sitedness of CSR is, I believe, a significant point, this acknowledgment in itself does not offer a great deal of insight into how one might go about organising a coherent programme of empirical research that takes place across a number of sites. Furthermore, it seems to me that ‘multi-sitedness’ may have more methodological significance than a presentation of this state of affairs as ‘obvious fact’ is able to recognise. What I mean by this specifically is that, beyond the initial observation that CSR takes place in a number of different places, and that, hence, in order to pose questions to it as a complex and differentiated phenomenon, an examination of more than one of its ‘sites’ might be preferable, important questions remain about the emergence, organisation, constitution, temporality and distribution of these sites.

As I have previously emphasised, CSR cannot be taken as distinct from the markets in which it occurs and is sustained. Bound up in/as market practice and ‘marketable’ by definition, the modes and patterns of function of these markets are of great significance in determining the spatial and temporal appearance and distribution of CSR. What I am trying to draw attention to in making this observation

is that, although the term ‘multi-sited’ accurately observes that CSR occurs in a number of different places, it can not tell us much more than this without simultaneous attention to the form of the markets in which CSR exists. Yes, it is possible to witness practical and discursive enactments of CSR in innumerable locales – but the specificity of these locales should not be ignored, overlooked, or replaced by the simple observation of their multitude.

Importantly, markets consist in/of very distinct *patterns* of temporal and spatial distribution. If, as I have suggested, ‘sites’ of CSR are constantly re-organising, changing, appearing and disappearing, it is important to note that these processes do not occur at random or accidentally. The action of highly *reflexive* markets sees CSR distributed and enacted in the particular patterns in which it may be observed. These markets themselves therefore, the forms which they take, and the nature of their function, are, as I understand it, of particular methodological significance in the context of this research.

To this end, in the following section I will develop an account that emphasises the ‘reflexivity’ of markets as a *dimension of method* itself. In their reflexive function, markets, I will go on to suggest, work to generate and are constituted in particular patterns of *attention, affect and (potential) profitability*, which may be seen to cohere into collections of interconnected sites in which empirical research can meaningfully be based.

## **Reflexive Markets**

In recent sociological work on markets the neo-classical economic depiction of an atomised and rational market actor is supplanted by an alternative emphasis on the reflexive and heterogeneous organisation of market activity. From a methodological perspective, and following such an emphasis, reflexivity and heterogeneity are important considerations to the extent these suggest the need for an empirical expansion of attention around questions regarding market-based practices. Markets, as an account in terms of reflexivity would suggest, are not sequestered and well-defined spheres of purely economic rationality. Rather, and this is especially

evident in the case of CSR, the organisation and function of markets is often subject to intense and ongoing debate between various ‘invested’ or otherwise interested parties. The constellation of actors then that together constitute a particular market may likely come from a number of different locations, and hence expectations and actions in the marketplace can be extremely heterogeneous.

To demonstrate this taking CSR as example: herein there exists a number of market actors, each with independent, though sometimes overlapping motivations, who all, together in the space within and around the market, constitute and evolve it. The market for CSR may, for instance, find corporate executives interacting with scholars, members of the media speaking with management consultants, NGOs convening with governments, or, tellingly, all these actions may happen in reverse, or altogether, or criss-crossed, or not at all, depending on the particular demands in the marketplace at any given time.

Callon, Meadel, and Rabeharisoa have usefully developed a term that seeks to capture some of the complexity of organisation that occurs in and around markets and wherein the functioning and organisation of these markets is up for debate.<sup>231</sup> The situation that I described above in relation to CSR may, following these authors, be characterised as a ‘hybrid forum.’<sup>232</sup> This account seeks to highlight a number of features about the space of the market itself, as well as the broader environment which enables it to emerge.

Firstly, and as the term ‘forum’ is intended to illustrate, the marketplace is decidedly *public* in nature. While the phrase ‘CSR market’ may conjure an imaginary of specialist knowledges and professional monopolisation, the market as ‘forum’ underscores the importance of public opinion for the function of such a market. Significantly, this recognition signals something of a “redistribution of competencies”<sup>233</sup> – a variety of specialist knowledges may come together here along

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<sup>231</sup>Michel Callon, Cecile Meadel, and Vololona Rabeharisoa, "The Economy of Qualities," *Economy and Society* 31, no. 2 (2002). p.194

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p.195

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

with relevant forms of lay knowledge, potentially resulting in amended or new paths of action.<sup>234</sup>

Secondly, the ‘hybrid’ nature of the forum attests to both the heterogeneity of participants, and the nature of the questions raised within this space.<sup>235</sup> Within the entangled space of the forum, it is impossible to neatly delineate the multiple competing issues and interests, hence, in the mutually informing and reflexive marketplace the boundaries between economics, politics, and ethics can be seen to be in continual flux.<sup>236</sup>

The hybrid and publically contentious nature of the various markets for CSR is both a general point, one that elaborates on the discussion in previous chapters, but also a specific one that, in the present context, suggests the need for an alternatively construed methodological approach. From within the reflexive entanglement described here, it is, I would suggest, problematic to resuscitate ‘site’ as it has conventionally been understood in social research. The various ‘sites’ in the CSR marketplace emerge in the course of engagements in which they are mutually articulated, and hence, a focus on any single site in its supposed isolation would ultimately prove to be of little use in answering questions posed to CSR as a larger ‘whole.’ Rather, what this account of market reflexivity motions towards with regard to methodology, is an emphasis on simultaneous and particular processes of ‘doing-in-conjunction’ and/or ‘doing-in-disjunction.’ In the context of theoretically informed research, it is not only that field sites are many, or multiple, it is also that they are complexly and dynamically connected. This is to add the matter of ‘trans-sited-ness’ to that of ‘multi-sited-ness,’ and this, practically speaking, means that the actions of market participants need to be considered across, as well as within, their spatial groupings.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> This is particularly evident in the practice of ethical consumption, as discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>235</sup> Callon, Meadel, and Rabeharisoa, "The Economy of Qualities." p.195

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> I will go on to elaborate this point later in this chapter with reference to the specific ‘nexuses’ of focal attention the proceedingly described methodology designates.

Additionally here, given the emphasis on reflexive hybridity, attention to instances of unexpected (or usually un-examined) complicity is warranted.<sup>238</sup> Given the high level of reflexivity that I have suggested characterises the market-place for CSR, traditionally upheld boundaries between the ‘business-world,’ ‘academy,’ ‘media,’ ‘public’ and so forth can not be relied upon to be faithfully articulated. The role of ‘researcher’ in such an environment is also open to some re-definition – the ground of scholarly detachment or neutrality proving to be increasingly slippery underfoot. I will return to elaborate further on these discussions later in the chapter though as presently the topic of market reflexivity presents some further issues of methodological significance.

I have already touched on the complex relations between sites as they emerge in a marketplace that is understood as reflexively constituted, the question of how particular sites form, cohere, and come to be significant however, is one that, thus far, has not received the requisite attention. Here though, given the context of a reflexive market, ‘site’ becomes, as I have suggested, an increasingly difficult notion to define and sustain. Given the dynamic proliferation of sites in the marketplace, how is one to know which are the most significant? How are sites organised? Can smaller specific sites of market transaction be stacked together meaningfully under an umbrella classification, or does this not capture the density and complexity of relation between sites that may not be finitely ‘categorised’? The question of the emergence, significance, and relations between ‘sites’ is one of acute methodological importance in the context of this research, given that, as previously discussed, a simultaneous focus on multiple instances of empirical ‘doing’ within CSR is required.

To this end, in the proceeding sections, I will attempt to define a methodological approach to market practice that re-describes the notion of field-site via attention to what I will understand to be the reflexive constitution of markets through circulations of *attention, affect, and profit*. This discussion will draw on accounts from within economics and sociology that enable, to varying degrees, a

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<sup>238</sup> George E. Marcus, "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scène of Anthropological Fieldwork," in *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

reflexive understanding of market practice. What I will be aiming to do through this discussion is to re-think ‘multi-sitedness’ through changing, reflexively constituted and materially assembled markets. Ultimately here, I will suggest that, in the context of this research, ‘multi-site’ is usefully succeeded by a methodological understanding of site(s) as a kind of ‘focal nexus.’ In the course of discussion I will articulate exactly what I mean by this, suffice to say for now though that what the formulation of ‘site’ as ‘nexus’ seeks to capture is the how particular and patterned condensations of attention, affect, and (potential) profitability in the marketplace produce individual sites of significance, and inaugurate the types of practice and discourse that are relevant in these sites.

### **Attention-Affect-Profit**

The kind of market reflexivity that this chapter has begun to describe provides a way into an alternative approach to studying markets. Recall, from the preceding chapters, what I suggested were a series of problematically rendered spatial conceptions – business and society, economics and sociology, markets and morality. There, terms such as ‘marketisation,’ were understood to participate in this is spatialisation via their suggestion of a ‘non-market’ that might be expanded into or encroached upon. A methodological encounter with ‘ethics’ as these are practiced in reflexive market contexts however demands that a means of describing markets dynamically, as these are in process, need be developed.

Here, the notion of ‘becoming’ market (as was introduced in Chapter One), can work to draw our attention to the highly contingent nature of market practices that might otherwise be described in an over-determined and over-determining way. From this perspective, it is necessary to ask the question of how it is that a market ‘becomes.’ The marketability of ethics that the CSR business case suggests is not derived abstractly and nor it is it sufficient to suggest that this is achieved entirely by the suggestion itself, through a function of (performative) rhetorical force. Instead, it

is necessary to understand how profitability, or more specifically, the *potential for profitability*<sup>239</sup> emerges in this instance and is sustained.

The economist André Orléan addresses this question through a discussion of what he terms ‘social beliefs.’<sup>240</sup> In market contexts, as Orléan recognises, individual beliefs are formed not only in reference to themselves, but also in reference to the perceived beliefs of others. The term ‘social belief’ is intended specifically to refer to individually held beliefs regarding what a group believes: “individual *i* believes that ‘the group believes that proposition *P* is true,’ in other words, beliefs about the beliefs of the group itself.”<sup>241</sup>

This kind of belief is readily observable in the popular discussion of market ‘mood.’ The ‘market,’ we frequently say, is ‘depressed,’ or ‘elated,’ ‘tense,’ or ‘confident,’ ‘bearish’ or ‘bullish.’ Alternatively, we may attribute belief to the market even more directly, for example, phrases such as, “the market believes that this currency is undervalued.”<sup>242</sup> Importantly, these beliefs are not just arbitrary, nor are they simply a reflection of market ‘reality’ per se. ‘Social beliefs,’ as Orléan designates them, are the very thing that make an impact on the market. Large numbers of beliefs, representations or expectations, when shared by the group of agents operating in the process of exchange, operate in a self-fulfilling way to bring about and perpetuate the ‘reality’ that they expect or perceive.<sup>243</sup>

Profitability then, following such an account, is a possibility that has a relationship to collectively held beliefs. Or more accurately, as Orléan explains, “[i]n a market, agents make a profit when they succeed in correctly predicting the evolution of the opinion of the group.”<sup>244</sup> In this way, such an account suggests, what people are attending to (what people believe others in the market are attending to), is

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<sup>239</sup> Where I refer from here on to ‘profit,’ unless otherwise specified this is to the potential for profitability, not certifiable or calculable profitability. Equally, this is designed to entail the recognition that where there is opportunity for profit, there is also, often, the danger of loss. In CSR, such an eventuality might be understood as a kind of observe to the business case suggestion of ‘doing well.’ As encapsulated in ideas such as ‘reputational risk,’ it is recognised that not ‘doing good,’ can have a negative impact on the bottom line.

<sup>240</sup> André Orléan, “The Cognitive Turning Point in Economics: Social Beliefs and Conventions,” (Paris-Jourdan Sciences Economiques, 2006).

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p.6

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p.14

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p.5

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p.24

connected to beliefs about the particular opinionative orientation of the market, which, resultantly, operates in a self-fulfilling way to produce profitability.

Economic sociology has also highlighted the importance of an awareness of both others and self in market contexts. Callon, Meadel, and Rabeharisoa, for instance, emphasise that market actors are self-aware and alert to their role in the organisation of the market. Involved in a constant analysis of market function, actors, according to these authors, actively seek to conceive and establish new parameters for action and new opportunities for profit with the market sphere.<sup>245</sup> Moreover, as Knorr Cetina and Bruegger observe, the signals of others' involvement in the marketplace are noted and subsequently affect the strategies and attitudes of other market participants.<sup>246</sup> Writing with reference to currency traders, these authors describe how individual trades are noticed by others and may function directly to "trigger trading responses,"<sup>247</sup> or indirectly to shape the attitudes of market participants more generally. Profit making activities then, are undertaken by a large and diverse group of knowing actors who are involved in a continuous conscious reflection on their own actions in relation to the actions of others, and in relation to the constellation of the market as a whole.

Put simply, what people think, but more importantly, what people think that others (or 'the market') thinks, is significantly constitutive of any given market. Hence, the phenomenon of *attention* itself becomes an important factor. What do people think, that others think is worth thinking about? And, in a much more general sense, what is being 'attended to' at a society-wide level at any given moment? What is important, or worthy of attention?

Orléan's term, 'social belief' here however, is potentially too narrow to sufficiently appreciate the role for attention I am attempting to designate in the present context. As Knorr Cetina and Bruegger emphasise in their account, attention and awareness in markets is not only a cognitive process, but that which is

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<sup>245</sup> Callon, Meadel, and Rabeharisoa, "The Economy of Qualities." p.194

<sup>246</sup> Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, "Global Microstructures: The Virtual Societies of Financial Markets." p.927

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

technologically engineered and materially constituted.<sup>248</sup> ‘Attention,’ more than just noticing and noting what others are noting, actually assembles and constructs practices, contexts, events and other happenings. What literally comes to *matter* is, in this way, a function of attention in a market context where this has a relationship, in a broad sense, to profitability.

With regard to the market ethics that this thesis describes however, a third consideration need be added in addition to attention and profit – affect. Fundamental in CSR, as the business case describes, is a relationship between what is ‘good’ and what is ‘profitable.’ The ‘ethical,’ as the following chapters will demonstrate, is primarily enacted in the examined market contexts in an affective mode, (as opposed to consisting in an abstract collection of rules or principles for instance). What this requires in the present discussion then, simply and in other words, is that a means of methodologically noticing the co-articulated and co-articulating functions of affect alongside and together with those of attention and profitability be described.

Here, my use of the term affect is not intended to reference individual emotions or feelings as per a psychological emphasis,<sup>249</sup> but broad structures of feeling as motions or “lines of force.”<sup>250</sup> Equally, affect as motion (the capacity to be affected or moved), is not intended as a pre-social designation, rather, following Brian Massumi, affect is “open-endedly social,” or “social in a manner ‘prior to’ the separating out of individuals.”<sup>251</sup>

Attention-affect-profit, conjoined in this way, draw our attention to the interdependence of the three terms in actually constituting the various markets for ethics that this chapter seeks to methodologically define. The definitely bounded

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<sup>248</sup> In another article, Knorr Cetina and Bruegger approach the computerised trading ‘screen’ as an ‘appresentational device’ through which ‘postsocial’ relationships are organised. Herein, things themselves are understood to be possessed of the sort of intersubjective qualities typically reserved for human relationships. Hence, some objects are related to as “experiencing, feeling, reflexive and remembering beings.” p.163 Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, "Traders' Engagement with Markets: A Postsocial Relationship."

<sup>249</sup> This is not to suggest that individual feelings have no constitutive role in more broadly conceived affects, just to specify a different level of analysis. In this way, my interest in affect in markets might also be distinguished from behavioural economics approaches that seek to demonstrate the ‘disruptive’ or ‘irrational’ effect of individual emotions in economic decision making.

<sup>250</sup> Nigel Thrift, "Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect," *Geografiska Annaler* 86, no. 1 (2004). p.60

<sup>251</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002). p.9

spatiality of approaches that separate the market from the non-market, gives way, through an account of the materially productive constellation of attention-affect-profit, and is replaced by an alternative emphasis on movement and change.

This co-articulated and changing relationship between attention, affect and profit has perhaps never been more evident than it is now, in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis which, for a time at least, turned us all very obviously into attentively beholden, affectively engaged and economically imperilled market-watchers/market participants.<sup>252</sup> Within the intersubjective planes of reflexive activity in which markets are constituted, it is clear that nothing remains static. Feelings change, attention shifts focus, and new areas of concern open up, giving rise to new or different opportunities for profit (or, as has lately been the case, risk of loss). In place of static or unidirectional linear metaphors of market expansion then, it is necessary to address the dynamically constitutive role that circulating co-articulations of attention-affect-profit play in materially organising particular markets.<sup>253</sup>

Following this, and on the topic of space (and 'site'), while it remains correct to say that CSR is variously practiced and made manifest in a number of different locales, it is also pertinent to note the specificity of these spaces and how it is that they come to be significant 'sites' for CSR. The reflexively brought about circulations of attention-affect-profit in the CSR market do not occur equally across it, so to speak, as though the 'market' were an undifferentiated plane. Rather these circulations themselves act to *form* the market, assembling and dispersing more or less *intense* or concentrated points of practice, discourse, people, goods, materials, and services. What *intensity* contributes to the process of research design will be

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<sup>252</sup> This is not to suggest that under 'normal' economic circumstances, the function of attention-affect-profit in designating and constituting markets is less important, only that it is less clearly obvious than in 'crisis' conditions. For more on this point, see Chapter Seven.

<sup>253</sup> Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma make an argument along these lines when they suggest that circulation is more than the simple movement of commodities, people, and ideas. Conventional notions that posit circulation and exchange as processes of meaning transmission, these authors contend, fail to recognise the substantive and constructive role that circulation plays in bringing about certain phenomena. See; Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002). p.192

detailed in the following discussion. Before going on to this though, the current description of attention-affect-profit need also be articulated in temporal dimension.

Recall here, for a moment, Orléan's observation that profit may result from 'correctly predicting the evolution of group opinion.' In this vein, CSR provides us with a particularly clear demonstration of the importance of 'time' as a market dimension, both as it confers novelty and creates expectation. Temporally, CSR may be distinguished from its predecessors as 'novel' and 'contemporary.' Part of its very marketability (conferred as a function of attention-affect) may even stem from this apparent newness insofar as it functions as a competitive differentiator. Additionally, CSR might also be said to trade in expectation – what CSR sells is the expectation of a different (more ethical) future.

Here, an examination of a particular mode of circulatory attention may prove illuminating – that of *hype*. Self-perpetuating, and frequently triggered by the suggestion of novelty, hype effectively highlights the temporal specificity of the circuitous co-articulations of attention-affect-profit that this section has sought to describe. Although 'hype' is often prefaced with the term 'mere' so as to dismissively imply its lack of productivity, in the context of this discussion of reflexive market phenomena, it is important to understand hype to be actually "indicative of the emergence of new networks and activities."<sup>254</sup> Understood to be a constitutive mode of attention, hype is not something that might be 'factored out,'<sup>255</sup> as it were, in order to expose an 'authentic' reality, rather, in market contexts, hype itself accumulates value but can also quickly lose this again.<sup>256</sup>

In an investment context, hype is encountered via the roughly analogous concept of market 'noise.' This phrase refers, in investment parlance, to all the 'extras' that are thought not count as "true investment information."<sup>257</sup> A book on this topic designed to help investors steer a path through the 'noise,' worriedly claims that "[r]umor, innuendo, chat rooms ... and stock price momentum have replaced

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<sup>254</sup> Nik Brown and Mike Michael, "A Sociology of Expectations: Retrospecting Prospects and Prospecting Retrospects," *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management* 15, no. 1 (2003). p.16

<sup>255</sup> Franklin, S., 2001, in, Nik Brown, "Hope against Hype - Accountability in Biopasts, Presents, and Futures," *Science Studies* 16, no. 2 (2003). p.17

<sup>256</sup> Brown, Ibid., p.18 This is what Nik Brown refers to as the 'hype dilemma.' p.17

<sup>257</sup> Richard Bernstein, *Navigate the Noise: Investing in the New Age of Media and Hype* (New York: Wiley, 2001). p.xv The author is a quantitative analyst at a Wall Street brokerage.

strategic planning, fundamental research, disciplined investment approaches, and risk analysis.”<sup>258</sup> Following the description developed over the course of the present discussion however, ‘market reality’ does not lay obscured beneath temporally contingent ‘noise’ in the form of attention (rumour for instance) and affect (entailed in market momentum), but instead is an active, moving, material, and constellatory articulation of these.

The emphasis I have placed here on the reflexive circulation of attention, affect, and profit within the marketplace should not be understood as an attempt to completely account for, or circumscribe, CSR within these dimensions. It is instead the spatial and temporal flexibility and sensitivity that such an approach renders that make it useful in the present instance where, as I have previously stated and will now return to explain in more detail, the problem is to incorporate this understanding as a *dimension of methodology*.

### **Focal Nexuses**

Multi-sited methodologies, as has been noted previously, go so far as to recognise that many contemporary phenomena can not be meaningfully examined from within the confines of one particular site. In positing multiple sites of interest though, this methodological approach still needs to address the question of the connections between sites – how are they significantly related? Here, Marcus and others working in this area have proposed that multi-sited fieldwork takes shape via a number of “tracking”<sup>259</sup> strategies. This is the suggestion that the “connections, associations, and putative relationships,”<sup>260</sup> between sites might be followed, leading to the development of a series of threads, paths, patterns, conjunctions and

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. xii. For a sociological discussion of the momentum trading technique Bernstein mentions, see; Daniel Beunza and David Stark, "Tools of the Trade: The Socio-Technology of Arbitrage in a Wall Street Trading Room," *Industrial and Corporate Change* 13, no. 2 (2004).; Or, Alex Preda, "Where Do Analysts Come From? The Case of Financial Chartism," in *Market Devices*, ed. Michel Callon, Yuval Millo, and Fabian Muniesa (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

<sup>259</sup> Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." p.95

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p.97

juxtapositions.<sup>261</sup> However, an account of attentive and affective market reflexivity such as I have been developing over the preceding pages, adds some layers of complication to this notion of ‘tracking.’

While ‘multi-sitedness’ draws attention to the constellation of different locales that may be significantly involved in the constitution of any given research object and attempts to follow the connections between these, by subjecting ‘multi-sites’ to an understanding of reflexive and circuitous market action, I have attempted to suggest that this particular approach does not go far enough. As I wish to propose it, it is not only that the relationship between ‘sites’ is of importance, but how, where, and when, particular sites become established and significantly notable as ‘sites.’

It is to this end that the previously elaborated account proves useful. Patterns of attention, affect and profit can be seen to emerge in highly particularised ways, and with varying degrees of intensity. Importantly, these patternings are not ephemeral, not fleeting dashes across the market envisioned as a somehow intangible or imperceptible realm – they are, on the contrary, (and to re-iterate), material, discursive, and practical manifestation of reflexive market action.

Such an account suggests a different methodological approach to examining market phenomena. ‘Multi-site’ may be usefully re-worked in the present context (via attention-affect-profit) such that this respects the temporal and spatial contingency of the reflexive marketplace, giving rise to an alternative understanding in terms of *focal nexuses*. What this designation seeks to capture is the particularity of emergence of specific, and notably *intense* ‘nexuses’ of market activity. Significantly then, the term ‘nexus’ attempts to speak to a number of different matters of methodological import within the market setting.

Firstly, and as previously described, the ‘nexus’ is a constellation in which attention, affect, and profit, can readily be seen to function in mutually co-implicating, and co-articulated ways. As such, and secondly then, a ‘nexus’ is at once both a kind of trope (in the sense of the word as ‘concept,’ or even

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<sup>261</sup> Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." p.95, p.105

popular/public/familiar discourse), and a term that draws attention to specific sets of 'sites,' practices, materials, goods, that are organised within it. Thirdly, 'nexus,' as I am attempting to methodologically utilise it, is not that which can be considered in its singularity, or isolation. The plural configuration, 'nexuses,' attests to the lack of clear boundaries between what might be termed 'nexical fields.' Though the preface 'focal' distinguishes one nexus from the next, and indeed, each is important in its specific particularity, the matters of distinction and overlap, are always of simultaneous analytical concern.

The significance of the 'nexus' as I have attempted to describe it here, is however, perhaps much better demonstrated in context than explained in the abstract. To this end, in the following section, I will now attempt to employ the account that I have been developing as a response to some of the methodological questions around CSR and 'site' that were proposed to begin.

### The 'Focal Nexuses' of CSR

This chapter began with the simply configured question – where is CSR? Over the course of discussion, I have attempted to demonstrate that however simple this question may appear, to provide an answer to it in the form of a research methodology is necessarily to contend with a series of challenges around the issue of 'site.' Moving away from singular, or simply 'multiple' sites though, due heed to the reflexive constitution of CSR as market-based might become an empirical possibility.

Approaching the 'field' of CSR with the question of which site, or sites, in mind, leads, as we have seen, to a particularly unproductive engagement. CSR 'sites' are everywhere, and ethics is in ready play – practically and discursively – across the majority of them. The significance of 'sites' vis-à-vis each other is impossible to establish, the spatial and temporal specificity of sites is difficult to systematically address, even what constitutes a 'site' is readily and openly contentious.

If we enter the field not looking for sites to begin with though, but are attuned instead to varying intensities in the patterns of attention-affect-profit that make a

market (focal nexuses) – some semblance of order does begin to emerge. Culturally and economically significant by definition, the focal nexuses of CSR are discernable as those constellate co-articulations of attention-affect-profit that may be seen to emerge, and proliferate, large numbers of goods, services, practices, discourses and so forth in their name, in doing so, coming to occupy the something of the status of popular ‘trope.’ Following this understanding, three major ‘focal nexuses’ may be seen to significantly constitute the market for CSR at the time of writing – the ‘Ethical Corporation,’ ‘Ethical Consumption,’ and ‘The Ethical Career.’

Before I go on to discuss the specific research sites suggested by these nexuses, and the methods I will employ to explore them, some further explanation is in order regarding the designated nexuses of focus – their relationship to what might be termed the ‘entire field of CSR,’ and the relationship between them. Firstly, I am not making any claims about the size of the entire field of CSR in identifying these three nexuses within it. As Annemarie Mol has noted “the precise size of a field is of little importance to the theorist who does not try to map that field, but [instead] tries to discern patterns in it.”<sup>262</sup> Together, these nexuses of focal import do constitute part of the total ‘field’ of CSR, but they cannot be said to capture it, nor, specifically, am I claiming that they might be understood as some kind of ‘representative sample’ of it. ‘Representativeness’ per se is not at stake, though, arguably, this is bound up to an extent in the formulation of nexus as it pays heed to ‘attention’ itself.

Secondly, the so-called ‘designation of three focal nexuses,’ does overstate the boundedness and distinction of each. While it is the case that patterns discernibly cohere in the market through each of the suggested nexuses – these patterns are far from finitely distinct, and instead can be seen to significantly overlap with others. As such, what I am not aiming to achieve through the ‘nexuses’ methodology is a straightforward ‘compare and contrast’ set up. Rather, and to render things in a Foucauldian way for a moment here, each nexus might be said to function as a specific ‘surface of emergence’<sup>263</sup> for ethics within CSR. As such, it is not a matter of establishing equivalences between each (for a start ‘corporations,’ ‘consumption,’

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<sup>262</sup> Annemarie Mol, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002). p.181

<sup>263</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1994 [1969]). p.41

and ‘careers’ are not analogous or comparable in a straightforward way). Similarly though, nor is it a matter of seeking to discern a set of differences. These ‘focal nexuses’ serve a methodologically structuring function insofar as they mark out particular, socially contemporaneous zones where ‘ethics’ may be encountered as it is handled in *practice* within CSR.

This approach seeks to give an enlivened account of ‘ethics’ in CSR, and hence it is necessary to go beyond a straightforward focus on similarity and difference. Instances of disjuncture are as likely within, as between the focus nexuses, and as such the ‘nexus’ formulation itself demands a more nuanced attention of the role of the researcher themselves – an attention that can duly recognise instances of reflexive complicity, hanging together, and movements apart (a topic to which I return in a later section of this chapter).

No finite bounds ultimately exist between the various focal nexuses and the sites that they inaugurate. This is readily evident in the case of the CSR ‘events’ that I go on to discuss in the subsequent section. These might simultaneously be described as professional debates, company advertorials, recruitment drives, promotional exercises, and so on, and therefore simultaneously be of significance across nexuses – speaking at once of ‘ethical’ corporations, consumption, and careers. What is important so far as I am concerned though, is not the precise nature or purpose of a particular ‘site,’ but how it functions reflexively within the broader marketplace producing particular enactments and instantiations of the ‘ethical’ in the course of its occurrence.

Organising method through ‘nexuses’ is, admittedly, a somewhat ‘messy’ way forward. As John Law,<sup>264</sup> and others,<sup>265</sup> have suggested though – this is not necessarily a bad thing. If prevailing social science methodologies are ill-equipped to cope with the ‘messiness’ of the world, and even more worryingly might be said to “work with some success to repress the very possibility of mess,”<sup>266</sup> then perhaps

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<sup>264</sup> John Law, *Making a Mess with Method* (Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University, 2003 [cited 30th October 2006]); available from <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Law-Making-a-Mess-with-Method.pdf>.

<sup>265</sup> See, for example, Nigel Thrift, "Afterwords," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (2000).; Or, John Urry, "The Complexities of the Global," *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 5 (2005).

<sup>266</sup> Law, *Making a Mess with Method*. p. 3

there is something to be gained in an embrace of the ‘fuzzy,’<sup>267</sup> fluid, and changing. Insofar as I understand it, this ‘something’ at stake is a more contemporaneous and attentive mode of focus, worth perhaps, getting a little messy for.

### **‘Nexical Sites’ and Research Methods**

In this section I will describe how the designated focal nexuses – the ‘ethical corporation,’ ‘ethical consumption,’ and ‘ethical career’ – mark out particular materials and settings of empirical significance, and go on to outline which research methods I will adopt in relation to each of these. As will be demonstrated here, within the focal nexuses ‘nexical sites’<sup>268</sup> come in a variety of shapes and forms. Physical and virtual, permanent and fleeting, expert and lay, bounded and ‘fuzzy,’ these are just some of the differentiating terms that might be employed to capture the array of empirical materials and settings to which this project attends in the process of addressing the contemporary ‘doing’ of ethics in CSR.

#### The ‘Ethical Corporation’

The ‘ethical corporation’ is empirically manifest in a few key ‘nexical’ sites in the CSR marketplace. Broadly speaking these take two forms – meetings and events, and text-based materials.

London is host to many CSR conferences, meetings and events, some of which are free to attend, and many of which take place at institutions such as The London School of Politics and Economics.<sup>269</sup> These events are widely advertised,

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<sup>267</sup> Nadai and Maeder, "Fuzzy Fields: Multi-Sited Ethnography in Social Research."

<sup>268</sup> My prefacing of ‘sites’ with the term ‘nexical’ here is intended to recall previous discussions of market reflexivity, and continue to draw attention to the dynamic presentation of sites of interest as they open up, and may persist for sometime, or, just as easily, disperse again. This recognition is significant in that it makes particular demands on research practice – given the somewhat unstable nature of some of the ‘sites’ in question, ‘fieldwork’ must adapt to proceed at once in both pre-planned and opportunistic ways.

<sup>269</sup> See the last section of this chapter for a discussion of the significance of London itself as a setting for this research.

often, significantly, as ‘networking’ opportunities,<sup>270</sup> and usually bring together industry experts and consultants for the purpose of panel and public discussion. As a research site, they are particularly fruitful in that a number of representatives of the CSR industry, from a number of different firms are in attendance, conversing with each other as well as the assembled audience. As such, expert and lay opinions meet here – what Callon might call an instance of a ‘hybrid forum’ at work. Notes, recordings, and transcripts, from attendance at several of these events over the four year course of my research have been compiled.<sup>271</sup>

So-called ‘ethical ranks’ or ‘ethical ratings’ are a second site of key significance inaugurated within the ethical corporation nexus. These quantitative tabulations, published by a variety of sources, seek to rank corporations from most ethical to least, and, in performing this function, are intimately tied to the marketability of CSR itself. These ranks are widely available, and are published by many popular business, and consumer magazines and papers, but it is perhaps as they function to inform the ‘socially responsible investment’ (SRI) industry that these ranks have the most sway. As the name suggests, SRI is the practice of investing funds in companies deemed to be ‘socially responsible’ and is frequently offered as an investment option by pension and superannuation funds.

Here, I will look at how the ‘ethical’ is variously configured within a number of major ranks, compiled for the year 2007: The 100 Best Corporate Citizens List, The Accountability Rating, and the *EthicalScore* system published by Covalence. As will be discussed further in Chapter Four, competition between ranks and methods of measurement is intense, and little consensus exists on the question of ‘how best to measure?’ Quite the opposite in fact; as will be elaborated, the need to demonstrably, and often quantitatively, establish ethical corporate-hood both leads to and is caught up in the proliferation of differing measurement techniques in a highly competitive commercial measurement industry.

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<sup>270</sup> The significance of ‘networking’ as a kind of CSR work is taken up in the discussion of ethical careers in Chapter Six.

<sup>271</sup> I attended a number of these events through my connection with the LSE student CSR society. (with whom I also did a period of participant observation – as I mention go on to describe in the text). I have made transcripts of fifteen such events attended during the period 2005-2009.

Additionally, empirical research on CSR conducted in the field of Management Studies will be subject to analysis. Herein (and, as was described in Chapter One), CSR is empirically constituted as an object of quantitative inquiry, and the particular convergence that may be witnessed between scholarly approaches to CSR and those of a commercial nature is of note. Especially significant, and as will be further described in Chapter Four, is the statistical attempt to ‘prove’ or ‘disprove’ the business case as this is encountered as a hypothesis available for testing. Most frequently such ‘tests’ proceed by attempting to correlate the variables of ‘ethical’ and ‘financial’ performance, however, as with ethical ranks, little consensus emerges in this task beyond the consensus on widespread disagreement.

### ‘Ethical Consumption’

The market for ‘ethical’ consumer goods is highly visible and rapidly growing. ‘Ethical consumers’ are those who seek to buy products and use services offered by ‘ethical’ companies and organisations, and hence, the connections here between attention (in the form of media and advertising), affect (the suggestion that ethical consumption is a way of living the ‘good life’), and profit (in the form of purchases), are readily observable.

In order to explore ethical practice within ethical consumption, I will focus on a forum wherein this is actively constructed, articulated and contested – the *Guardian* Newspaper’s online *Ethical Living* blog. As Dhiraj Murthy notes, there has been some reluctance on the behalf of social researchers to fully utilise blogs and other online user-driven media as research ‘fields.’<sup>272</sup> The continuing methodological primacy of face-to-face interactions and observation however, fails to take note of the increasingly technologically mediated character of everyday life in many parts of the world.<sup>273</sup>

The extremely high volume of user responses on the *Ethical Living* blog very much attest to this movement online – over the course of the recorded year (2008),

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<sup>272</sup> Dhiraj Murthy, "Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research," *Sociology* 42, no. 5 (2008). p.839.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p.849

over one hundred and seventy thousand words of blogger and respondent content were generated on this website and collected for analysis. A number of structural features of the *Ethical Living* site, how this is organised, and the question of why it is more appropriate than other similar sites, all need to be addressed in some detail, especially in regard to Murthy's claims regarding digital neglect in social science methods. Given the space that such a discussion requires however, and the need to introduce a large amount of empirical material by means of demonstration, this conversation takes place closer to its object as it were, at the beginning of Chapter Five.

### The 'Ethical Career'

The burgeoning interest in so-called 'ethical careers' attests to the growth of CSR as an industry and job-market, as well as drawing attention to a sentiment within employment more broadly. Firms readily advertise their CSR credentials in the process of recruitment, and evidence that more people are looking to work in what is now being called the 'ethical sector' is provided by the proliferation in recruitment services aimed specifically at employment in CSR and related fields.

Here, empirical engagement takes a number of forms: Firstly, I attended four large graduate careers fairs held in London in 2007-8 (two specifically 'Ethical Careers' Fairs, one hosted by Imperial College, the other by Forum3, and two Careers Group Graduate Fairs);<sup>274</sup> secondly, I was member and participant observer for one year in the London School of Economics and Politics (LSE) Student Union CSR society which consists of graduate student members interested in careers in CSR;<sup>275</sup> thirdly, I conducted informal interviews with two ethical-careers advisors

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<sup>274</sup> Imperial College Ethical Careers Fair, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2007, Great Hall, Imperial College London; The London Graduate Summer Recruitment Fair, 19-20<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, Islington Business Design Centre, London; The London Graduate Autumn Recruitment Fair, 22 October, 2007, Islington Business Design Centre, London; The Guardian London Graduate Fair, 17-19<sup>th</sup> June, 2008, Islington Business Design Centre, London; and forum3, 10-11<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, Islington Business Design Centre, London.

<sup>275</sup> In academic year 2007-8, I attended all the meetings and events held by this society and in addition conducted informal interviews with the president and other board members. The society in 2007-8 consisted of approximately twenty active members.

and the editor of a leading guide to ethical careers;<sup>276</sup> and lastly, ethical recruitment websites and other similar sources of online data were also collected and are utilised in discussion in Chapter Six. As per the ‘Ethical Consumption’ section above, the specificities of these contexts require much further detailing and elaboration, which, again, will take place in context of discussion in the requisite empirical chapter.

### **‘Ethnographic’ Research and Polymorphous Engagements<sup>277</sup>**

The anthropological understanding of ‘field-site’ has, thus far in this chapter, received a great deal of attention. The practice of ethnography as research method though, while consistently present in the background, has yet to be explicitly discussed. ‘Ethnography’ inasmuch as this has traditionally referred to a long engagement in a foreign setting, has, in the past, been easily justified on the basis of this ‘foreignness’ of field in itself. Notably however, when the field becomes ‘multi-sited,’ or ‘nexical’ as I have characterised it, and the task is to address issues of contemporary concern in modern settings such as the City, the old justifications no longer hold, and new types of research relationship are entered into.

With regard to the present research, ‘ethnography’ (as this term as been recently re-understood by authors such as Marcus) does function usefully as a frame of reference through which to focus some of the methodological problems encountered when seeking to ask questions of a market-based object. Furthermore, insofar as it recognises that the practical demands of any given research site or situation requires flexibility in method – ethnographic research practice does give rise to the important possibility, following Hugh Gusterson, of ‘polymorphous engagements.’<sup>278</sup> The significance of this in the context of a research approach such as that which I have been developing here is that research method need not be

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<sup>276</sup> Gideon Burrows, editor of *The Ethical Careers Guide*, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2008; Judith Baines, ethical careers advisor at LSE, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2009; Laura Brammar, ethical careers advisor at UCL and C2, 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>277</sup> Hugh Gusterson, "Studying up Revisited," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 20, no. 1 (1997). p.119

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

finitely designated beforehand – prior to engaging specific ‘fields’ of concern.<sup>279</sup>

This leaves the researcher free to follow previously undesignated routes of significance that emerge in the course of empirical inquiry. In doing so however, in contexts as highly reflexive as those described here, unexpected affinities and complicities are also likely to emerge.

### Reflexive Affinities and Research Complicities

If, methodologically speaking, we are to take seriously the account of market reflexivity developed here – then a focus on the relationship between researcher and researched in the context of this study is also deserving of attention. As Callon notes, market actors “are now colleagues whom [scholars] have to take into consideration and who contribute in their own right to the production of knowledge and its transcription in reality.”<sup>280</sup> This is the inevitability that the previously discussed ‘hybrid forum’ attests to. Once the organisation of markets has become a collective and political issue that takes place in thoroughly hybridised spaces,<sup>281</sup> there can be no outside or elsewhere, no detached space from which to comment on this from.

Marcus suggests that in such research contexts “complicity”<sup>282</sup> requires special attention. “[I]n any contemporary field of work, there are” Marcus notes “always others within who know (or want to know) what the ethnographer knows, albeit from a different subject position, or who want to know what the ethnographer wants to know.”<sup>283</sup> Another indicator of this situation is the way in which critiques mobilised by social scientists are already anticipated and even elaborated by those who they are researching.<sup>284</sup>

Not solely the preserve of supposed ‘ivory towers’ intellectuals, reflexive ‘dismantling’ has been taking place in the international business community *as well*

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<sup>279</sup> Jack Katz, "Ethnography's Warrants," *Sociological Methods Research* 25, no. 4 (1997).

<sup>280</sup> Callon, Meadel, and Rabeharisoa, "The Economy of Qualities." p.195

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p.197

<sup>282</sup> Marcus, "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scène of Anthropological Fieldwork."

<sup>283</sup> Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." p.112

<sup>284</sup> Riles, "Real Time: Unwinding Technocratic and Anthropological Knowledge." pp.339-100

as the international academic community.<sup>285</sup> Nigel Thrift draws attention here to the recent growth of an independent “analytical capacity within business,”<sup>286</sup> and highlights the increasingly active role of the media as a facilitator and disseminator of ideas.<sup>287</sup> Recent concerns in managerial literature mirror those in the social sciences. As Thrift observes, “[t]he new managerialism depends on the notion that the world is uncertain, complex, paradoxical, even chaotic.”<sup>288</sup> Debates regarding the ‘messiness of method’ and the ‘complexity of social objects,’ can thus be observed occurring in settings far afield from the sociology department. Similarly, the present variety of business metaphor that utilises ideas of constant movement and adaptation – for instance, talk of ‘surfing,’ ‘flows,’ ‘tracing,’ and ‘networks,’<sup>289</sup> is mirrored by a sociological emphasis on these same ideas. The business imperative to ‘become more open to a changing world,’ echoes sociological endeavours to craft new research practices and methodologies that might be better equipped to ‘know’ this ‘ever-changing world.’

To the extent that sociological texts such as *Audit Society* recognise the process whereby business and management techniques come to operate in the university, we might recall that, this process being a two way street, sociology has a presence in business world also. Indeed, the density of this two way traffic has led one commentator to suggest that currently “[t]he university is more central to the operation of the City than it has been to any society in which it has existed.”<sup>290</sup> The emergence of corporate anthropology<sup>291</sup> and corporate sociology are telling in this regard. The commodification of these forms of knowledge certainly marks out ‘complicity’ and ‘reflexivity’ as deserving of attention, and, for this reason, I elaborate on this further in Chapter Six, where, as student, graduate, ‘networker,’ and

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<sup>285</sup> Nigel Thrift, "Shut up and Dance, or, Is the World Economy Knowable?," in *The Global Economy in Transition*, ed. William Lever and Peter Daniels (Harlow: Longman, 1996). p.12

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p.22

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p.22

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p.19

<sup>290</sup> Westbrook, in Douglas R. Holmes, George E. Marcus, and David A. Westbrook, "Intellectual Vocations in the *City of Gold*," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 29, no. 1 (2006). p.164

<sup>291</sup> See, Lucy Suchman, *Anthropology as 'Brand': Reflections on Corporate Anthropology*. (The Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University, 2000 [cited March 23rd 2007]); available from <http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Suchman-Anthropology-as-Brand.pdf>.

researcher of ethical careers, my own role as ‘researcher’ is frequently (mis)interpreted in the practice of research in a number of interesting ways.

It is important however, I think, that an account of researcher and researched in terms of complicity should not suggest ‘conspiracy,’ or characterise this ‘wanting to know’ as based on suspicion. It is not a case of being ‘duped’ into complicity with ‘them,’ the ‘researched,’ and hence failing to maintain an appropriate ‘critical distance.’ Instead, as the recognition of reflexivity comes to inevitably map the researcher onto the terrain that they are attempting to chart, objectivity and critical distance are called into question as straightforwardly desirable methodological objectives.

### **LONDON: ‘Global City’**

To this point I have attended to a series of methodological intricacies around the notion of ‘field,’ expanding this to ‘fields’ or ‘sites,’ then ‘nexuses’ to denote, among other things, a lack of permanence, indefinite boundaries, and multiple connections. Taking a step back from this specific focus however, a broader geographical bound or field that I have yet to discuss emerges – the City of London itself. Although I have not stated it explicitly to this point, the research for this thesis all took place in London. I spoke to people in London, who are based in companies, institutions, and organisations, that, even if multi-national in nature, have operations, or an office, here, in the capital. I attended events and careers fairs that occurred in London; joined a London university-based student society; and during the four years of this research lived and worked, here, in London.

What is the particular significance of this though? On the one hand the geographical definiteness of London seems to provide a convenient boundary for what is a large empirical undertaking. On the other hand though, is the ease with which it might simply be said that my research represents a London-specific account, not somewhat problematic or uneven potentially dismissive in a number of regards? The question of the significance of ‘London’ to CSR, points us towards a discussion of the general versus the particular, and the ‘global’ as opposed to ‘local.’ While

London is of course a finite place, a city of concrete, metal and stone, it is also an abstract or paradigmatic place, what might be referred to in contemporary parlance as a 'global city.'<sup>292</sup>

According to Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies*, 'it all comes together in Los Angeles.'<sup>293</sup> Or, in other words, anything and everything of significance to the geographer of postmodern times may be found in this 'prototypical' metropolis in which "the micro and macro ... [and] the concrete and the abstract, can be seen simultaneously in an articulated and interactive combination."<sup>294</sup> Similarly, but with regard to CSR, the City of London might be understood as one of those places where, to borrow Soja's phrase, 'it all comes together.' Importantly, my suggestion here is not that CSR 'originates' in London, and emanates outward to a peripheral 'elsewhere,' nor am I claiming that London is somehow the 'centre' or most crucial place in this movement. CSR happens in a large and varied number of locales, it is certainly not restricted to London. However, I would like to suggest that, in the absence of cities such as London, understood as a paradigmatic place of the 'global,' CSR might not emerge, come together, or 'exist' at all.

What I am attempting to draw attention to here is the concentration of 'globality' in geographically particular and highly important spaces such as London. When researching a phenomenon that might broadly be said to assemble under the mantra of the 'global,' such locales inevitably take on particular research significance. To evoke the 'nexus' once again, London is a hub of 'global' attention, activity, and innovation, to the point where it is feasible to suggest that all things I have understood to be of significance with regard to the 'global' phenomenon of CSR can be signalled here, in this single city.

In other words, London, one might say, is the big nexus, or even itself the paradigmatic nexus. And, if there was ever any doubt about this, the impact of the 2008 'global' financial crisis in/and on London should go some way towards suggesting otherwise. As has been the subject of much news coverage, London's

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<sup>292</sup> See, Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>293</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989). p.191

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

status and influence as a city/destination/global hub, derive in large part from financialisation or, as this is tellingly abbreviated, from the activities of The City.<sup>295</sup> Further, this situation is not only recently the case, instead, as some historical studies suggest, “the modern economic era began in Britain not with the emergence of industrial capitalism and the industrial proletariat, but with the arrival of financial capitalism and the financial bourgeoisie.”<sup>296</sup> The modern age, “dated not – as the Victorians had supposed – from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when England became the Workshop of the World, but from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when London became the world’s money market.”<sup>297</sup>

The ‘restricted’ locality of my research is thus not as straightforward in implication as it might seem, and to follow each statement I make with the qualifier, ‘in London,’ would be to miss the point. Yes, research will take place here, in this very particular space and time, but the ‘here and now’ in this case are both a focus in and of themselves, as well a sign of the system that produces them. This account may be mistaken as an attempt claim ‘generalisability of findings,’ however it is not possible or, as I see it, desirable to ‘generalise’ in this case from London to elsewhere. Rather than being a question of ‘generalisability’ per se, it is one of significant particularity and the importance of a specific place within CSR – one that is simultaneously situated, and unbound, necessarily local, but also constitutive of the ‘global’ itself.

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<sup>295</sup> Figures for 2007 show London as first on the Global Financial Centres Index. This is a bi-annually produced index of global competitiveness amongst forty-six financial centres. Closely following London on the 2007 Index was New York, and subsequently Hong Kong, Singapore, and Zurich. The forward to the report notes that, significantly distinct from the rest of the rated cities, London and New York are the only “true global financial centres.” See, <http://ukintaiwan.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/global-financial-centre-index>

<sup>296</sup> John Pemble, “Golden Dolly,” *London Review of Books* 24 (2009).

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Four

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### Ethics by Number?

This chapter turns an empirical eye to one manifestation of ‘ethicality’ that emerges within the business case for Corporate Social Responsibility. As was detailed in Chapter One, contemporary CSR is characterised by the business case proposition that it is possible for a corporation to ‘do well, by doing good.’ There, this understanding served as the basis for my claim as to the importance of approaching ‘ethics’ in this context as market-based in nature. Here, the business case will be understood to function in theory and practice as a ready-made question or hypothesis. Simply, ‘is CSR really good for business?’ And, ‘can the adoption of a socially responsibility actually be proven to have a positive effect on a corporation’s ‘bottom line?’’ Primarily in the field of Management, studies in this vein have proliferated and converged in their focus on establishing the ultimate profitability (or otherwise) of practicing CSR.

The desire to empirically test the veracity of the business case practically translates into the requirement that CSR be *measured*. Not confined to the academic ‘laboratory,’ this propensity to measurement is also readily observable in the commercial practice of compiling CSR rankings and ratings, as well as being foundationally evident in the oft-repeated call for better means of assessing the various loosely described ‘impacts’ of CSR itself. A market creation in a ‘market that calculates,’<sup>298</sup> CSR may be seen enacted and re-enacted in number of forms that are quantitative in nature. This chapter will attempt to elaborate these through a focus on three of the predominant ways in which CSR is quantitatively rendered, making inquires around the proposition of an ‘ethics done by number.’

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<sup>298</sup> Michel Callon and Fabian Muniesa, "Peripheral Vision: Economic Markets as Calculative Collective Devices," *Organization Studies* 26, no. 8 (2005). p.1229

As outlined in Chapter Three, the first source of empirical material on which this discussion will draw are a number of studies, primarily published in major Management journals, which attempt to empirically ascertain the relationship between CSR and company profitability. Commercially published ethical ranks and ratings will be introduced and examined as a second example of CSR measurement. And, lastly, excerpts of material gathered from a CSR forum featuring industry professionals will be brought to the discussion. Here, the particular analytical focus will be on the ubiquitously evoked, but enigmatically defined, ‘metric.’ ‘Measurement’ in these debates, though apparently unanimously agreed upon in principle, occupies in practice, as I will discuss, a position wrought by numerous tensions.

Importantly, in highlighting these three means by which CSR is made ‘quantifiable,’ I do not intend, a) to suggest that these are the only examples wherein this might be said to occur, or b) that CSR may be said to subsist entirely in quantitative forms. Rather, my contention in this chapter, is that owing to the business case formulation through which contemporary CSR is largely inaugurated as market-based, quantitative and calculative functions do proliferate and gain purchase, hence working, in a number of identifiable instances, to create aspects of CSR in their image. The examples I highlight here are those which may be seen most frequently, and which I found to have the most pertinence in the course of empirical enquiry.

Given the concentration of quantitative techniques which characterise CSR ‘measurement,’ subsequent questions arise regarding the kinds of relationship with number being enacted. This chapter will look to sociological treatments of number and calculation in order to engage these questions and explore the significance of quantification in this context. An emphasis on the productivity of calculation and continuities between ‘quality’ and ‘quantity,’ it will be suggested, is fruitful with regard to examining the multiple and complex manipulations in which numbers find themselves continually employed in the practice of CSR.

## Making Ethics Count

Recall, from Chapter One, the discussion of ‘self-interest’ as a motivation for ethical business behaviour. There, I suggested that differing relationships to the question of self-interest could be understood to splinter approaches to the question of responsible corporate behaviour. In one camp, self-interest was an anathema, undermining the possibility of ‘ethics,’ while in the other camp, self-interest as (at least partial) motivation for responsible corporate behaviour lay at the heart of the very proposition of a business case. What I did not emphasise in Chapter One however, is how the contemporary development of CSR around the latter account (as a set of market phenomena) is accompanied (or even one might say *achieved*) by the concomitant development of distinctive set of techniques for the empirical assessment of this. A burden of proof accompanies the proposal that it is possible to ‘do well by doing good.’ Within markets understood as devices for collective calculation, ‘doing well’ relative to ‘doing good’ is that which may be made quantifiable. This proposition, as I will presently go on to discuss, occupies the attention of both scholars and practitioners in the field.

### Management Studies & the Measurement of CSR

The increasing predominance of empirical research techniques applied to the investigation of CSR in the discipline of Management Studies is something which management scholars themselves have been concerned to investigate and document. In a 2006 article appearing in the *Journal of Management Studies* for instance, a group of scholars led by Andy Lockett conduct a statistical review of a broad range of CSR literature, finding that, across all relevant journals between the years 1992-2002, “empirical research has been overwhelmingly of a quantitative nature.”<sup>299</sup> Another similar review of changing trends in CSR research notes a significant move

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<sup>299</sup> Andy Lockett, Jeremy Moon, and Wayne Visser, "Corporate Social Responsibility in Management Research: Focus, Nature, Salience and Sources of Influence," *Journal of Management Studies* 43, no. 1 (2006). p.115. The exact percentage of quantitative empirical work that this research finds amongst the studies surveyed is 80%.

towards empirical approaches as of the 1990s.<sup>300</sup> A convergence of empirical concern is also noted by these researchers and others.<sup>301</sup> The field of CSR research, they suggest, has become increasingly specialised and methodologically confined to the examination of one particular kind of relationship – that between CSR and company profitability.<sup>302</sup> This concern with financial benefit of course follows from the definitional proposition that the business case supplies.

Important though, is the manner by which attempts to establish this relationship proceed. The chosen technique is statistical – an attempt to *correlate* ‘CSR’ and ‘profitability’ operationalising these two factors as *variables*. In this context, CSR is measured, and becomes calculable, as the variable ‘Corporate Social Performance’ (CSP), while profitability is calculable as overall company ‘Financial Performance’ (FP).<sup>303</sup>

By now, a truly extensive body of research has grown up in this vein. Despite the torrent of data however, the outcome of this work, as one major commentator in the field has put it, “can be easily summarized: at best, it is inconclusive.”<sup>304</sup> On the whole, it is widely acknowledged by those working in the field that any consensus on the CSP-FP relationship is yet to be reached. Data that confirm a positive relationship between CSP and FP is certainly plentiful. Similarly plentiful however are studies that contradict these findings by demonstrating no significant correlation.

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<sup>300</sup> Frank G. A. De Bakker, Peter Groenewegen, and Frank den Hond, "A Bibliometric Analysis of 30 Years of Research and Theory on Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Performance," *Business and Society* 44, no. 3 (2005). p.283

<sup>301</sup> See, *Ibid.*, and also, Lockett, Moon, and Visser, "Corporate Social Responsibility in Management Research: Focus, Nature, Salience and Sources of Influence."

<sup>302</sup> De Bakker, Groenewegen, and den Hond, "A Bibliometric Analysis of 30 Years of Research and Theory on Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Performance." See, for a critique of this development, Duane Winsor, "The Future of Corporate Social Responsibility," *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 9, no. 3 (2001).

<sup>303</sup> Tim Rowley and Shawn Berman, "A Brand New Brand of Corporate Social Performance," *Business & Society* 39, no. 4 (2000). Corporate Social Performance (CSP) is used to “test the social responsibility notion by outlining the various duties or constituency groups that corporations must honour.” p.397 Hence, it might be understood as a methodological operationalisation of the CSR construct in the form of a variable. However, so widespread now is the use of CSP as an analogy for (or replacement of) CSR, some researchers contend that there is no point in maintaining this distinction, and contend that they may be used interchangeably. See, De Bakker, Groenewegen, and den Hond, "A Bibliometric Analysis of 30 Years of Research and Theory on Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Performance."

<sup>304</sup> Vogel, *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility*. p.29

Overwhelmingly the case though are equivocal findings that, in their final analysis, are not able to provide a conclusion one way or the other.<sup>305</sup>

I will return toward the end of the chapter to discuss the significance of this calculative inconclusiveness further with regard to the ‘veracity’ of the CSR business case. While, on one level, this ambiguity seems to undermine the surety of the business case claim, in the course of discussion I hope to demonstrate how, in practice, such a claim functions to make problematic the possibility of its own ‘proof’ or ‘disproof.’ In the course of a market meeting between ‘value’ and ‘values,’ the lines that demark the ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ stand to be re-drawn, converting ‘veracity’ in the process into the wrong question. For now though, I want to continue on to explore the way in which equivocal expositions of the CSP-FP relationship frequently to give rise to the call for *better and more accurate measurement*.

Blame for the inconclusiveness of correlative studies has centred on the purported ‘definitional ambiguity’ of ‘Corporate Social Performance’ as a variable.<sup>306</sup> Given that both the definition and measurement of CSP are less than evident,<sup>307</sup> much debate in the field now focuses on how best to define CSP as a functioning variable, and subsequently, how best the accurate measurement of this may be achieved. As a result, empirical research is presently characterised by a fastidious focus on the technical aspects of ‘metric’ development and application – the organising question simply, ‘how best to measure?’ The minutiae and

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<sup>305</sup> For a positive correlation, see for example: Andrea Beltratti, "The Complementarity between Corporate Governance and Corporate Social Responsibility," *Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance - Issues and Practice* 30, no. 3 (2005). Neutral effect: Abigail McWilliams and Donald Siegel, "Corporate Social Responsibility and Financial Performance: Correlation or Misspecification?," *Strategic Management Journal* 21, no. 5 (2000). Inconclusive: "no studies have unambiguously established that socially responsible firms ensured a higher return on equity than other firms," See: Joshua Daniel Margolis and James P. Walsh, *People and Profits? The Search for a Link between a Company's Social and Financial Performance* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2001).; Ronald M. Roman, Sefa Hayibor, and Bradley R. Agle, "The Relationship between Social and Financial Performance: Repainting a Portrait.," *Business & Society* 38, no. 1 (1999).

<sup>306</sup> See, for example, M.B.E. Clarkson, "A Stakeholder Framework for Analyzing and Evaluating Corporate Social Performance," *Academy of Management Review* 20 (1995).; also, Rowley and Berman, "A Brand New Brand of Corporate Social Performance."

<sup>307</sup> Margolis and Walsh, *People and Profits? The Search for a Link between a Company's Social and Financial Performance*.

complexities of the quantitative manoeuvres that result in a CSP measure thus figure, in the academic sphere at least, as a major point of discussion.<sup>308</sup>

### The Commercial Measurement of CSR

Concern with the accurate measurement of CSR is no less salient in the commercial sphere of practice, only here it is often manifest in a less technical manner. The call for ‘better metrics,’ for more ‘widely accepted’ measurements of CSR, issues forth from numerous locations in the corporate world. It may for instance, often be found at the end of a report or survey of executive attitudes, characterised as CSR’s “biggest challenge.”<sup>309</sup> Or, as is also frequently the case, it may be heard from CSR professionals themselves as they address each other as well as various interested publics. I will go on to discuss these instances and others in greater empirical detail later in the chapter, suffice to note for now though, that the tone in which these calls may generally be observed to be made is at once effusive and aspirational, but also sometimes conflicted as to how practically to proceed.

The academic/commercial divide that I have been describing up until now, while worth introducing in order to demonstrate where different types of empirical research in CSR typically issue forth from, should not be left uncritically stated. Where I have been designating an ‘academy’ as distinct from an ‘industry’ it is important to note, as counterpoint, the extreme permeability of these designations in the present case. It is in fact possible to observe a high degree of reciprocity, and even convergence, between scholarly and commercial approaches to CSR. Both, in practice, feed off and into one another. To the extent that the business case maxim of ‘doing well by doing good’ acts to organise empirical engagement in particular ways,

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<sup>308</sup> See major debates over the best way to regress the variables, for instance; McWilliams and Siegel, "Corporate Social Responsibility and Financial Performance: Correlation or Misspecification?." Concentration of academic attention on the technicalities of CSP measurement can also be discerned in the profusion of conferences recently organised on this topic – for example a 2006 Melbourne University conference titled ‘How Best to Measure?’

<sup>309</sup> Oracle and The Economist Intelligence Unit survey of 136 executives and 65 institutional investors, October 2004. Participants were asked about “the influence of corporate responsibility on global business.” Reported in, Lisa Roner, "While 25% of Global Fortune 500 Companies Produce Ethical Reports, Investors Are Most Interested in Transparency." *Ethical Corporation Magazine*, 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2005.

it does so simultaneously in the numerous spheres of attention to CSR. If, as I have just claimed, it is possible to say that the commercial or 'public' face of CSR exhibits a less technical concern with CSR measurement, this is not to imply the irrelevance of technicality in this sphere, but rather just to observe the way in which this work is done elsewhere.

The following examples of quantifying practice in CSR provide an apt demonstration of this point. In the highly reflexive realm of the contemporary CSR market, the proliferation of ratings, ranks, indices and metrics for the measurement of relative ethical performance illustrate the (strange) meeting of calculative expertise, potential profitability, and demands for the increased visibility of corporate behaviour.

– Rating, Ranking, Measuring

Nowhere is the enormity of the market for CSR more evident than in the proliferation of practices, agencies, consultancies, ranks, funds, and indices, that have emerged very recently, (mostly in the last five years), in order to address the growing demand for information on responsible corporate behaviour and take advantage of the opportunities that this new market may have to offer. Here, I will attempt to describe only small slices of this considerable field – demonstrating with each example addressed the particular methods employed to render CSR calculable, paying particular attention to how these 'calculabilities' interface with, or lead on to, the issue of profitability. As will become evident, the examples that I have chosen to discuss in detail here have been chosen on the basis of their difference from one another, but also on the basis of their standing or general acceptability in the field as a whole.

### 'Best Corporate Citizens'

Firstly, the *100 Best Corporate Citizens*<sup>310</sup> list: In its 8<sup>th</sup> annual edition in 2007, this widely respected and popular measure ranks, from one to one hundred, major public companies on the basis of a “range of environmental, social, governance, and financial metrics.”<sup>311</sup> Presently published by *Corporate Responsibility Officer (The CRO)* magazine, this ranking was originally developed and published by its predecessor, *Business Ethics* magazine, (this name change is itself indicative of the shift in trend from ‘business ethics’ to CSR discussed at length in Chapter One). In order to begin to compile the list, first, and this practice is common to all methods of ethical ranking, what are referred to as ‘eligible universes’ have to be delineated. What this means simply is that companies considered eligible to be featured on the list are drawn from particular sources, most frequently, well recognised share indices. Importantly, each different ethical ranking system designates its own ‘eligible universes,’ (though frequently there is a great deal of overlap between these owing to the fact that there are a limited number of large and well-respected share indices). Alternatively, some ranking systems *a priori* eliminate companies on the basis of how they earn their revenue. As such, weapons manufacturers, tobacco companies and so forth may be excluded. This however is not the method employed by the *CRO*, the criteria for inclusion on their *100 Best* list is simply that the company be listed on one of three major share indices – the Russell 1000, S&P 500, or Domini Social 400 indices.

Inclusion and ranking in the list is determined by calculating company performance in eight categories: “shareholders, community, governance, diversity, employees, environment, human rights, and product.”<sup>312</sup> Scores in seven of these eight categories are based on data sourced from KLD Research & Analytics, (a large research provider, who, on their website, underscore their ‘independent’ status). The KLD database contains information from what is referred to on their website as

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<sup>310</sup> See, for 2007 list; <http://www.thecro.com/files/CRO100BestCorporateCitizensList2007.pdf>

<sup>311</sup> *The Methodology Behind the Rankings* (KLD, [www.kld.com](http://www.kld.com), 2007 [cited 30th November 2007]).

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

“multiple sources.”<sup>313</sup> Of these, data ‘acquired through direct communication with listed companies’ is marked out for special attention. Here, two points are worth noting – firstly, the distinction between an ‘independent research provider’ and a consultancy firm, and secondly, the significance in this context of KLD’s claim regarding their ‘direct communication with companies.’

The variety of existent methods for ranking CSR quite literally *compete* in the marketplace. Though each lays claim to objectivity and freedom from bias, ranks too, it should be emphasised, are market-objects.<sup>314</sup> By underscoring their status as ‘independent research provider,’ KLD draws attention to its supposed neutrality. Consultancy firms, by contrast it is implied, can not be similarly rigorous insofar as they are in the employ of particular firms that they may also take part in ranking. This claim to independent neutrality however, should not be mistaken for the suggestion that KLD has no relationship with the firms on which it collates data.

As the second point above draws attention to, KLD are keen to point out the ‘direct communications’ they undertake with the ranked companies. In a market whereby a number of ranks are compiled solely on the basis of publicly available information, ‘direct communication’ suggests that KLD are privy to information that is unavailable to most. Independence and the practice of ‘direct communication’ are thus advertised insofar as these, for KLD, are understood to provide their data with a competitive edge in a crowded marketplace. It is an obvious point, but the eventual *100 Best* list (compiled from data provided by KLD) operates, to the extent that the list is perceived to be reliable and is respected within the business community, to the financial benefit of both the listed companies and KLD themselves. ‘Objectivity’ is thus a highly tradable chip in the CSR ratings game.

A final point worth noting with regard to this particular ethical rank is the origin of the data that goes towards scoring the ‘eighth’ performance category. The ‘shareholder’ category of the *100 Best* list is a financial rating. Not based on the quantification and aggregation of information regarding social or environmental performance, it is purely a measure of financial return – specifically, a three-year

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid. [www.kld.com/research/socrates/businessethics100/2007/](http://www.kld.com/research/socrates/businessethics100/2007/)

<sup>314</sup> See, for a discussion of competition between environmental measurement firms in relation to governance; Barry, "The Anti-Political Economy."

average of total return to the shareholders (“stock price appreciation plus dividends”<sup>315</sup>) of each assessed company. Thus, notably, for the publishers of the *100 Best*, profitability is itself a requisite component of being one of the ‘Best Corporate Citizens.’

The inclusion of profitability data in the compilation of the rank itself is a clearly demonstrative instance of the business case in action. This is not to suggest that other CSR ranks which assess financial performance are any less complicit in this reasoning, just to note the explicitness of this particular example. Ethical ranks of all kinds in this context, whether or not they directly include data on company financial performance, recall an observation made by Fabian Muniesa, Millo Yuval, and Michel Callon – “being economic is not a qualification that comes from outside the agencement.”<sup>316</sup>

What I take to be the significance of this understanding is that market ‘devices’ (as Muniesa et al. would term them), such as the ethical rank, are not only ‘economic’ after the fact. It is not only that a high CSR rank may, for instance, subsequently see a company included in various ethical investment portfolios, in this way generating greater profits, or even that, it could be claimed, a high score may have positive reputation, brand, or employee motivation effects. While all these outcomes are of course a possibility, this is because the ‘market device,’ in this example, the CSR rank, has already worked to render ‘ethics,’ in this context, more ‘economic’ at the outset. Or, more accurately, following Muniesa et al., markets may be observed to contain devices that aim at “enacting particular versions of what it is to be economic.”<sup>317</sup>

### *EthicalQuote*

This is interestingly illustrated in a different way by the *EthicalQuote* system developed by Swiss company Covalence and first published in 2004. Unlike measures that seek to rank companies on the basis of their ‘actual’ socially

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<sup>315</sup> *The Methodology Behind the Rankings.*

<sup>316</sup> Muniesa, Millo, and Callon, "An Introduction to Market Devices." p.4

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

responsible behaviour, Covalence's *EthicalQuote* system functions to provide an "evolutionary picture"<sup>318</sup> of how companies are perceived with regard to their ethical *reputation*. Here, 'direct communication' with the company is neither prized nor necessary, and tricky judgements regarding what counts as 'ethical' are side-stepped to a degree. Where KLD proceed in their ranking by delineating eight realms of responsibility, hence entering into definitional debates as to what might be said to 'count' as ethical corporate behaviour, Covalence employ a technique that seeks to measure "ethical performance as it is perceived and communicated in society,"<sup>319</sup> employing 'reputation' as a barometer of this.

Methodologically speaking, Covalence's analysts monitor media (primarily using the internet) and, on this basis, constantly establish and re-establish an up-to-date norm of the expectations of 'society' as these pertain to corporate ethics. The practical task remains however, just as it is for KLD, to codify, or *quantify qualitative data*. In the case of the *EthicalQuote*, this is done by assigning a 'below expectation,' (-1), or an 'above expectation,' (+1), to various media and public documents concerning the surveyed companies, then aggregating these to give an idea of 'ethical reputation' as it is perceived at a given point in time.

Although this account does not do full justice to the intricacy of Covalence's method, for the purposes of this discussion, it illustrates the basic point concerning the creation of a market-ready variable. As Covalence's promotion material attests, *EthicalQuote* is a tool able to "help investors, enterprises themselves, and public interest organizations [in] analyzing the *ethical risks and opportunities* that come with multinational enterprises' operations."<sup>320</sup> Ethical reputation, even as that which may quite uncontroversially be said to have imaginable 'economic' consequences for a company, is arguably made 'more economic,' or may at least be said to partake in the performance a particular version of the economic, insofar as it is quantified and made calculable in a particular way through *EthicalQuote*.

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<sup>318</sup><http://www.covalence.ch/index.php/products/methodology/> [Accessed 30th November, 2007]  
Covalence's 'eligible universe' consists of 300 companies classified as large capitalisations in the Dow Jones World Index.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

To return quickly to a point I have been sketchily outlining through this section, ranking systems, ethical rating agencies, ethical investment screens and so forth, all compete, as market devices, on the basis of their particular distinctiveness. To survive, they must be perceived to be of use – to have a function. As such, it is possible to observe a multiplicity of techniques and methodologies for the measurement of CSR, each justified on the basis of the propounded merits of its particular approach. This is described by some commentators as leading to a problem of ‘balance’ between “standardization and differentiation,”<sup>321</sup> basically, the difficulty of establishing an agreed upon or ‘standard’ measure of CSR. Although many, including those who work in rating and ranking, may indeed agree in principle that a standard measure of CSR is desirable for the purposes of comparison, the proliferation of non-comparable measures may be understood to arise in a market context from the desire to competitively ‘differentiate one’s product.’

The ‘usefulness’ of such measurement systems extends beyond their marketability to particular companies. While the *EthicalQuote* system need be ‘bought’ by a company seeking to monitor its ethical reputation, a consultancy firm is in the employ of a commissioning company, and ‘independent’ research firm KLD advertises its ‘direct communication’ with analysed firms, the measurement of corporate ethics may also proceed, as Celia Lury and Liz Moor note, without the direct involvement of companies themselves.<sup>322</sup> Corporate critics, non-governmental organisations, and activist groups often utilise formats such as the rank, audit, and even corporate ‘annual report,’ to alternatively highlight perceived wrong-doings absent in official accounts.<sup>323</sup> An example of this is ‘Burning Capital,’ a performance of BP’s 2007 results by activist group PLATFORM staged on the day before BP’s official results announcement and press conference.<sup>324</sup> The annual report format was utilised by PLATFORM to call attention to the way in which BP’s investments of the

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<sup>321</sup> William Baue, *Corporate Social Responsibility Rating Agencies Balance Standardization and Differentiation* (www.socialfunds.com/news/, 2003 [cited 30th November 2007]).

<sup>322</sup> Celia Lury and Liz Moor, "Brand Valuation and Topological Culture," in *Blowing up the Brand*, ed. Melissa Aronczyk and Devon Powers (New York: Peter Lang, 2010). [forthcoming]

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> PLATFORM, Carbon Web, Burning Capital, A performance of BP’s fourth quarter and full year results, 2007, 4th Feb, 2008. <http://www.platformlondon.org/carbonweb/burning/>

past year might be measured alternatively against growing concern about climate change.

In addition to differentiation on the basis of methodology and intention, CSR rankings also differ notably with regard to the presentation of their output. Here, as I alluded to previously, the behind the scenes calculative detail and complexity is glossed by a user-friendly ‘public face.’ Very often, inquiries as to a company’s ‘ethical standing’ may not get any further than this. Distributed as press releases, quoted briefly in various surveys, or as an evening news sound-bite, the method behind the rank does not travel, its qualitative origins and calculative compilation stay mostly concealed.

The presentation of ranks, for instance, frequently sees these reduced to their barest components. In the case of the well-respected *AccountAbility*<sup>325</sup> rank a numbered list is simply offered. This is reproduced below:

Figure 1: *AccountAbility* Rating 2007<sup>326</sup>

1. BP
2. Barclays
3. ENI
4. HSBC Holdings
5. Vodafone
6. Royal Dutch Shell
7. Peugeot
8. HBOS
9. Chevron
10. DaimlerChrysler

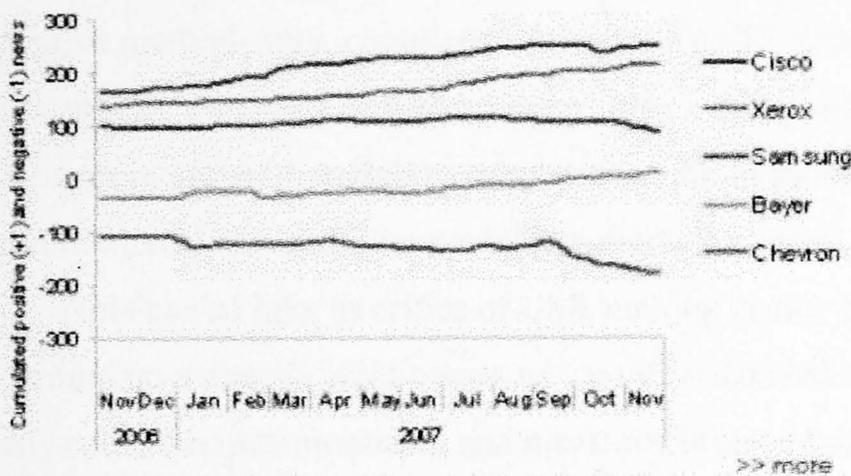
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<sup>325</sup> *AccountAbility* is a large, not-for-profit sustainability partnership founded in London in 1995, but now with a number of global offices. See; <http://www.accountability21.net/>

<sup>326</sup> <http://www.accountability21.net/default.aspx?id=1496> [Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2007]. Quickly looking over a rank such as this one, the companies that rank highly often come as something of a surprise, (particularly so in this case given the aforementioned concerns that activist groups such as PLATFORM have expressed about BP). This *AccountAbility* ranking is a case in point – headlined by two companies that of late have received considerable amount of bad press with regard to their ethical credentials. In other ranking systems BP may have been excluded *a priori* on the basis of being involved in an ‘extractive’ or polluting industry. What this ranking does go to show again though is the extent to which ranks themselves are ‘market-devices.’ A high ranking from *AccountAbility* might be achieved for instance, through large amounts of corporate spending on CSR advertising and publicity. Or, as was the case particularly when Lord Browne was BP CEO, a high profile management that is publicly committed to the CSR cause and hence draws attention to it. Also interesting to note is the large variations in rank outcomes. It is not uncommon to find the top companies in one account, either absent from, or very low scoring in another. Levels of consistency are extremely low.

This information is presented just as it is shown here on the company website, prefaced only by a brief introduction that notes how, in the 2007 ratings, “European companies ... lead the way.”<sup>327</sup> The *100 Best* provides slightly more detail than this, presenting a linear ranking of its one hundred companies alongside their raw numerical scores in each of the eight sectors, as well as the average of these on which the final ranking position is based.<sup>328</sup> By contrast to the relative simplicity of these presentations, Covalence’s *EthicalQuote* distinguishes itself by means of what their promotion material refers to as its “innovative graphical outcome.”<sup>329</sup> “Inspired,” as the company notes, “by stock quotes,”<sup>330</sup> *EthicalQuote*, is made available as a graph:

Figure 2: EthicalQuote Output Graph for the Week Preceding 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2007



PROGRESS	EthicalQuote	Change
Cisco	254	+13
Xerox	219	+12
Bayer	11	+10
Nokia	295	+8
Daimler	191	+8
<b>DEGRESSION</b>		
Samsung	87	-21
Chevron	-200	-12
Dow Chemicals	-32	-11
Gap Inc	159	-10
ExxonMobil	-487	-10

**EthicalQuote main progress and degression over current month.**

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> <http://www.thecro.com/files/CRO100BestCorporateCitizensList2007.pdf>

<sup>329</sup> <http://www.covalence.ch/index.php/products/methodology/#9> [Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2007]

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

Here, as with the *100 Best*, raw scores accompany the output ranking (or, in this case, graph). As is clear from the contrast between this and the previous example, rankings are also differentiated by timescale. While the *100 Best* and Accountability rating are published annually, *EthicalQuote* is 'live' so to speak, updated weekly, and graphically available in week, month, and year long views.

In researching and presenting this discussion of CSR ranking I have drawn only on publicly available information. Primarily, this information was sourced from the publishing or compiling company's website, and offered for no charge. To engage in a discussion of this level around CSR measurement is unproblematic in terms of access to information. The companies that compile the ranks I have discussed here offer obligingly to guide you through a user-friendly version of their calculative methodology, complete, often, with useful pictures and other aids to understanding. This may be said however, only insofar as these 'guides to method' serve as promotional materials to demonstrate, for instance, a particularly comprehensive database of source information, or a novel, 'innovative' approach.

Not entered into, as critics of CSR ranking keenly point out, are discussions concerning how exactly what comes to 'count' is decided to begin with, or how exactly codes become measures, and measures become subject to calculation and various forms of aggregation. These processes, critics claim with no slight measure of irony, while marauding under the banner of 'transparency,' frequently serve to confound this in their secrecy and complexity of function.<sup>331</sup> I will return to discuss this contradiction in further detail though towards the end of this chapter.

### **A Trust in Number?**

If the preceding discussion attempted to identify and illustrate just some of the modes in which CSR is commonly made calculable and rendered quantitative, we might continue to ask what may be said in a sociological vein regarding the

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<sup>331</sup> Roner, "While 25% of Global Fortune 500 Companies Produce Ethical Reports, Investors Are Most Interested in Transparency." p.2

significance of this numerical profusion. A notable approach to questions of quantitative predominance comes courtesy of Ted Porter and highlights ‘trust’ as a crucial analytical dimension. Numerical solutions, Porter suggests, tend to emerge in climates characterised by doubt and mistrust, the supposedly non-interpretative or ‘objective’ nature of numbers themselves giving rise to what is referred to as a widespread “trust in number.”<sup>332</sup>

As understood by Porter, but also similarly theorised by sociologists such as Michael Power and Mary Poovey, numbers can work to resolve doubt, confer certainty and universality, establish expertise and authority, and de-personalise, or ‘objectify’ knowledge.<sup>333</sup> To employ Poovey’s phrase, numbers perform ideally as representations of “non-interpretive facts.”<sup>334</sup> These, she contends, “have come to seem pre-interpretive or even somehow non-interpretive at the same time as they have become the bedrock of systematic knowledge.”<sup>335</sup> The quantitative aspect of the market context itself, might then, following this account, be understood to belie a desire for “correct representations”<sup>336</sup> of financial information. Crucially here, the numerical connotes a kind of informational transparency, suggesting freedom from distortion, and self-apparent ‘truth.’

Given the perceived ‘firmness’ or conferred ‘stability’ of number, Porter’s thesis regarding climates of mistrust is intuitively appealing. Where doubt prevails, a “calculative lingua franca”<sup>337</sup> promises impartiality and freedom from polluting bias.

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<sup>332</sup> Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). The ‘trust in number’ that Porter suggests appears in slightly different form in the work of many other scholars; Nigel Thrift speculates about a generalisation of what he calls “faith in number,” for instance. p.592. Nigel Thrift, "Movement-Space: The Changing Domain of Thinking Resulting from the Development of New Kinds of Spatial Awareness," *Economy and Society* 33, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>333</sup> Theodore M. Porter, "Making Things Quantitative," in *Accounting and Science, Natural Inquiry and Commercial Reason*, ed. Michael Power (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).; Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*.; Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).; Michael Power, *The Audit Explosion* (London: Demos, 1994).

<sup>334</sup> Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. p.xi

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xii

<sup>336</sup> Paul Rabinow, "Representations Are Social Facts," in *Essays in the Anthropology of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996 [1986]).

<sup>337</sup> Michel Callon and John Law, "Guest Editorial: Absence-Presence, Circulation, and Encountering in Complex Space," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 22 (2004). p.724

To employ this reasoning in the case of CSR, it might be claimed that where companies are called upon to ‘prove’ their ethical credentials, quantitative measurements may come to prevail as it is these that present data most ‘transparently.’ While this reasoning holds that quantitative methods emerge as the practice of choice in CSR simply because they are taken to be the ‘best’ or most accurate, it is perhaps more fruitful to approach this issue, to begin, in a slightly different way. Which forms of practice, we might ask, are the most *convincing* or *persuasive* in this particular context?<sup>338</sup>

This question may be interestingly explored by briefly recalling the study of ARESE (a French CSR ratings agency) conducted by Frederique Dejean, Jean-Pascal Gond and Bernard Leca.<sup>339</sup> In the preceding section, I drew attention to the way in which the techniques employed to assess CSR themselves have a market-value; in Dejean et al.’s account, this is explained, partially at least, with reference to various functions of ‘trust.’ In a series of interviews with ARESE analysts and executives, Dejean et al. learn that the CSP rating measures that the company design and operate are purposefully quantitative in nature not because quantitative measures are perceived to be the most effective, but because this methodology was understood to conform most closely to the expectations of the financial community regarding the derivation of ratings.<sup>340</sup> In selling their services to the financial community, the key features ARESE sought to stress were the quantitative, reliable, and complex nature of their metrics.<sup>341</sup> As one ARESE analyst is quoted by Dejean et al. as saying:

When investors came to see us looking for information about our ratings, we gave them a presentation of our methodology – we called it the ‘black box’ – it was a computerised presentation. We’d run it at least once for all our customers ... Sometimes we’d show it to prospective clients and they’d sign up straight away... That’s proof they were convinced by what they saw.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Marilyn Strathern, "New Accountabilities: Anthropological Studies in Audit, Ethics and the Academy," in *Audit Cultures*, ed. Marilyn Strathern (London: Routledge, 2000). p.1

<sup>339</sup> Frederique Dejean, Jean-Pascal Gond, and Bernard Leca, "Measuring the Unmeasured: An Institutional Entrepreneur Strategy in an Emerging Industry," *Human Relations* 57, no. 6 (2004).

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, p.752

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p.753

<sup>342</sup> ARESE analyst, in *Ibid.*, p.753

Conforming to the technical expectations of those who seek to use it, ARESE's 'black box' works, according to Dejean et al., via a kind of exploitation of the financial community's 'trust in number.' At once, quantitative techniques and outputs serve to legitimate the practice of social rating itself and function as a particular selling point. This again recalls Callon's previously quoted observation about 'becoming economic.' CSR does not become 'economic' by virtue of being measured. That it is already economic is reflected in the existence, form, and function of the measurement techniques themselves. ARESE's potential clients apparently seek to be convinced, thus, in financial markets that are themselves quantitative in content, Dejean et al. claim that persuasion comes in the form of calculability. Again, the ARESE analyst:

We'd use statistical and exploratory analysis ... to justify our seriousness, to say: 'Look, it's simply through analysis, we have a system of analysis – a complex black calculating box.'<sup>343</sup>

This explanation in terms of 'legitimacy' and trusted forms of output however, is also unsettling on a number of accounts. On the one hand, it is reasonable to expect that those who deal daily with numbers are comfortable with this form of output, and similarly, that a certain stock might be placed in the 'expert' status conferred by complex calculations. On the other hand however, 'trust' provides a very one dimensional account of the variety of relationships to number that are most likely being enacted here. Number may function to confer legitimacy, it may be on occasion be a trusted and convincing form of information. Equally though, instances of 'mistrust' in number,' it seems to me, might also simultaneously be observable alongside and in-conjunction.

More important than the relative balance of trust and mistrust though, is the sense in which this particular form of explanation makes a 'black box' of the question of quantification itself. Questions regarding the *processes* which work to derive quantity from social phenomena or '*quality*,' are sidelined by the focus on trust, and an interesting set of issues regarding practices of 'making quantitative' are

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<sup>343</sup> ARESE analyst, in Ibid.

thus left un-approached. Drawing, in the following section, on field work conducted at a London School of Economics CSR forum, while highlighting the ways in which the participant CSR professionals are involved in various relationships of trust (and mistrust) with number, I will also go beyond this to note the ways in which the complex relationships to quantification enacted recommend a closer attention to the actual creation of ‘number’ in this context.

### **‘The Floor and Not the Ceiling...’**

On the surface of it, that some form of quantitative measurement tends to be the foremost method of establishing the ‘ethicality’ of a corporation seems to lend support to claims regarding the ‘trustworthiness’ of number. However, while the ‘metric’ is rarely absent from discussions of CSR, its presence is neither uncontroversial, nor uncontested. Ubiquitous is the suggested need for the ‘right metrics,’ or ‘better metrics,’ yet these calls are frequently made as ‘answer,’ or posed as ‘solution,’ while a discussion of how these ‘better’ metrics might be arrived at, or what they may look like, is deferred, or shifted elsewhere. Even in discussions that purport to address the question of measurement explicitly, this deferral is readily identifiable; the ‘right metric’ often conjured as the property of an aspired-toward, but yet-to-be achieved future.

Responding to a question specifically addressing ‘how’ the positive impacts of CSR might be assessed, this tendency is discernable in responses given by the CSR professionals participant in the 2007 LSE forum *CSR at its Crossroads*.<sup>344</sup> For Gib Bulloch, Director of Accenture Development Partnerships (a not-for-profit arm of Accenture), the search for the right metric takes on something of a quest-like quality:

Well, the problem is knowing how to measure...we don't yet quite know how to measure employee satisfaction, uplift in attitudes towards the company, employee

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<sup>344</sup> ‘CSR at its Crossroads.’ 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2007. Event organised by the London School of Economics Student CSR Society. This event featured a panel of four CSR professionals – Gib Bulloch of Accenture, Dorian Emmett of AngloAmerican, Katie Stafford of Marks & Spencer, and Andrea Sullivan of Lehman Brothers.

hires... The question – how many people are we lifting out of poverty, how many people are we helping? It's the Holy Grail and I am not sure that anyone has got it right.<sup>345</sup>

'Not quite knowing how to measure' occupies a kind of double position in this discussion though. On the one hand, it is a critique of prevailing metrics, as well, potentially, of the possibility of 'measurement' at all, while on the other, it is also the driver of ever more extensive quantification. Here, the responses of Dorian Emmett, Head of Sustainable Development at AngloAmerican, demonstrates this latter tendency while surreptitiously recognising the problems of measurement to which Bulloch attests:

You have to be able to performance manage and therefore you have to have the right metrics and databases that can process non-financial metrics ... We do need to develop new metrics in these less-determinate areas.<sup>346</sup>

The term 'non-financial' is an interesting negation. That there is not a positive term in the language of metrics to refer to the "less determinate areas" of which Emmett speaks, demonstrates the difficulties that surround "knowing how to measure" with regard to CSR. Significantly though, for Emmett, these difficulties suggest the need for the development of "new" metrics. On this basis, any charge of technological determinism with regard to the measurement of CSR is somewhat ill-conceived. Organisational performance, as these examples attest, is always being imagined and re-imagined before, or irrespective of, the availability of measures that may be up to the task.<sup>347</sup>

Concomitantly though, sociologists have aptly noted the way in which, within technocratic measurement regimes, the very failures of the system may be transformed into opportunities for its further expansion. As Michael Power has observed, it is in response to difficulties regarding 'how to measure' that efforts emerge to develop measurement systems that are more attuned to complexity and sensitivity, but, in this moment, these same systems of measurement extend to

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<sup>345</sup> Gib Bulloch, 'CSR at is Crossroads.'

<sup>346</sup> Dorian Emmett, 'CSR at is Crossroads.'

<sup>347</sup> Michael Power, "Counting, Control and Calculation: Reflections on Measuring and Management," *Human Relations* 57, no. 6 (2004). p.768

address new domains and objects.<sup>348</sup> The ‘gaps’ created by technocratic failure, as Robert Castel has put it, serve as further “targets for intervention.”<sup>349</sup>

While this tendency is certainly observable in Emmett’s statement, excessive attention to moments of technocratic ‘expansion’ may bear insufficient witness to the converse – what Annelise Riles has called moments of “technocratic unwinding.”<sup>350</sup> The call for more and better measurement is indeed prevalent in CSR, (the earlier quote from Bulloch exhibits, in much the same mode as Emmett’s, a desire to see metrics develop and become more accurate in areas where they presently lag), and yet, as I have said, doubts as to the ultimate suitability of these persist. This is discernable in the following comment also made by Bulloch:

Metrics are the floor and not the ceiling of where CSR can go. We need to set the ceiling where we want it to be.<sup>351</sup>

Following from previous discussion, we might perceive in this statement an element of ‘distrust.’ The ‘metric’ is not unproblematically proposed as that through which a ‘sum CSR’ might be calculated. As the ‘floor’ and not the ‘ceiling,’ metrics and the quantitative techniques these entail are positioned as inferior in relation to something ‘other,’ which, in the present accounts at least, is not understood to be quantifiable. If this relationship to number may be said to be characterised even in part by trust, it is, as Callon and Law suggest, certainly a “dried up,”<sup>352</sup> or undermined kind of trust. Conversely, ‘real’ trust is alternatively positioned beyond the possibility of quantifiable accountability. A comment from Andrea Sullivan of Lehman Brothers echoes Bulloch’s sentiment:

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., p.775

<sup>349</sup> Robert Castel, "From Dangerousness to Risk," in *The Foucault Reader: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991). p.288

<sup>350</sup> Riles, "Real Time: Unwinding Technocratic and Anthropological Knowledge." p.398

<sup>351</sup> Gib Bulloch, ‘CSR at its Crossroads.’

<sup>352</sup> Michel Callon and John Law, "On Qualculation, Agency and Otherness," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (2005). p.724

We do measure and set goals, but we are also more *holistic* than that ... We look at investors and suppliers and when something is not ethically sound, we are not in it.<sup>353</sup>

Critiques of number and quantitative methodology are not only available to sociologists or those working outside what may be thought of as the economic realm. These critiques are similarly available and common to those in the business world and are employed not only in anticipation that they might otherwise be levelled from elsewhere. In this highly reflexive realm, they are also delivered ‘authentically’ (so to speak). The trust/distrust formula here becomes problematic and its analytic limitations evident. It is not possible, I would suggest, to dichotomise in this case, demarking those who may be said to ‘trust’ in number (‘economists,’ ‘business-people,’) from those who do not (‘sociologists,’ ‘critical thinkers’). In the final appraisal, ‘trust’ per se takes something of a back seat with regard to the more pertinent issue of noting the differences between that which is understood to be *calculable* as opposed to that which is characterised as *non-calculable*.<sup>354</sup>

The preceding examples might be alternatively approached, following this, through a consideration of what might be called the ‘moral economy of pricelessness.’ Although I do not wish to propose that pricelessness and non-calculability are exactly analogous, bear with me as I go on to discuss the two – and finally the parallels between CSR professionals and social scientists with regards to their critiques of number.

### **‘Some Things are Priceless’... (but for Everything Else Employ a Calculator?)**

Briefly, my claim here is that evocations of ‘immeasurability’ or ‘non-calculability,’ whether these hail from industry or academia, take part in an economy of quantification that is largely circular in nature, and that can function to obscure the possibility of a more nuanced account of calculation. To explain, as Callon and Law

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<sup>353</sup> Andrea Sullivan, ‘CSR at its Crossroads.’ Following Lehman’s 2008 bankruptcy through over-exposure in the sub-prime mortgage market, this statement takes on a certain measure of irony. See Chapter Seven for further discussion of ‘hindsight’ as conferred by the financial crisis.

<sup>354</sup> Recall along these lines Chapter Two’s review of ‘self-destructing/boundless/corrupting’ sociological approaches to markets.

have argued, “*incalculabilities*” are constructed, made, or enacted into being just as much as calculabilities are.<sup>355</sup> The calculable and incalculable are mutually constitutive and reinforcing – simply, the existence of one implies and depends on the other. Departing somewhat from Callon and Law’s account of the ‘incalculable,’<sup>356</sup> it is interesting to alternatively consider, in the context the previous empirical examples, the notion of ‘pricelessness,’ and specifically the way in which a certain moral economy may be seen to function around this.

The MasterCard slogan is an eloquent demonstration of the moral tone of incalculability that I am referring to here: “Some things are priceless, for everything else there’s MasterCard.”<sup>357</sup> The designation of ‘some things’ as beyond or ‘above’ the possibility of quantification suggests a certain immorality attached to number, not only in the designation of ‘price’ (‘money can’t buy love,’ and so forth), but also in the suggestion that the simplification, classification, and calculation that constitute quantification are no match for the messy ‘real world.’ Bulloch and Sullivan testify to the importance of CSR metrics, but significantly these are understood to only go part of the way towards constituting a CSR ‘whole.’

This moral economy of pricelessness though, overlaps interestingly with another. Where the CSR professional may be disposed to designate the priceless, for sociology, *judgement* has traditionally been that which is often counter-posed to calculation. Here, the expansion of quantitative techniques into areas “properly the domain of human judgement”<sup>358</sup> is frequently highlighted as a matter of critical concern. How, it is asked, may very complex things, such as human values and ethics, possibly be ‘measured,’ how can these simply be *reduced* to numerical

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid., p.718 (original italics)

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p.717. Specifically, and as opposed to ‘incalculability’ per se, Callon and Law identify two strategies to what they term ‘noncalculability,’ these are “rarefaction” and “proliferation.” Rarefaction is illustrated with reference to Quaker worship and selfless love or *agape*, and is characterized by the authors as proceeding via the withdrawal of all calculative resources. Proliferation, conversely, implies impeded calculation as a result of an overload of calculative resources, and is illustrated by the example of a telethon (televised fundraiser), p.717. My interest in noncalculability is more straightforward – simply put, I am using the term to introduce a focus on the construction of ‘pricelessness’ as a form of incalculability.

<sup>357</sup> Series of MasterCard advertisements, 1997-2007.

<sup>358</sup> For overview of debate, see, Power, "Counting, Control and Calculation: Reflections on Measuring and Management." p.772

scores?<sup>359</sup> Additionally though, and for others, the issue at stake is not so much moral as political and concerned with ‘expanding’ neo-liberal governance – if number works to stabilise, establishing agreement and reducing the space of contestation, are measurement regimes in fact ‘anti-political’ in nature?<sup>360</sup> A common starting point for both these modes of sociological critique is in the observation of a current ‘mania’ for measurement.<sup>361</sup> Porter, in particular, makes this observation, the present, for him, characterised by “promiscuous measuring”<sup>362</sup> extended to ever new domains and making ever more objects visible in terms of calculation.

The spread of this ‘measurement mania’ also produces new objects for sociology itself. Recent studies to have emerged address, for instance, audit,<sup>363</sup> public opinion,<sup>364</sup> accounting,<sup>365</sup> risk,<sup>366</sup> and various other contemporary practices whereby a ‘making quantitative’ may be observed. Given the claims regarding reductionism and de-politicisation that have arisen in from some of this work though, it is perhaps worth taking a closer look at how measurement functions, and in particular, at claims regarding the metrological transformation of *quality into quantity*. Can this process be demonstrated, in any convincing way, to reductively result in the abstraction of important meaning and the limitation of political opportunity, or, might it serve alternatively as an occasion for the rethinking of both

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<sup>359</sup> See, for instance, David Boyle, *The Tyranny of Numbers: Why Counting Cant Make Us Happy* (London: Harper-Collins, 2001).

<sup>360</sup> See, for critique and discussion of this perspective, Barry, "The Anti-Political Economy." Barry notes how, following Max Weber’s work on rationality, forms of measurement and calculation have been understood as ‘essentially anti-political instrument[s]’ To the extent that political questions are understood to be re-posed, via calculation, as technical problems that may be solved. Measurement thus, is ‘thought to reduce the space of the political and to limit the possibility for disagreement.’ p. 272.

<sup>361</sup> See, Power, "Counting, Control and Calculation: Reflections on Measuring and Management.", Thrift, "Movement-Space: The Changing Domain of Thinking Resulting from the Development of New Kinds of Spatial Awareness."; Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).; Porter, "Making Things Quantitative."

<sup>362</sup> Porter, "Making Things Quantitative." p.44

<sup>363</sup> See, Power, *The Audit Explosion.*; Marilyn Strathern, *Audit Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>364</sup> Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, "Do the Social Sciences Create Phenomena?: The Example of Public Opinion Research," *British Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 3 (1999).

<sup>365</sup> Miller, "Governing by Numbers: Why Calculative Practices Matter."

<sup>366</sup> Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*.

‘quality’ and ‘quantity’ in this context? The next section will address itself to these questions.

### **The Texture of the Quantitative**

Calculation, it is oft-noted within sociology, proceeds through a kind of double production of reality. As explained by Herbert Kalthoff, in order to quantitatively ‘show something,’ or to bring something into existence, something else must be made ‘disappear.’<sup>367</sup> This may be further elaborated by reference to Callon’s notion of framing (discussed previously in Chapter One). In order for calculation to begin, it is noted, “a clear and precise boundary must be drawn between the relations which agents will take into account and which will serve in their calculations and those which will be thrown out of the calculation as such.”<sup>368</sup> Entities thus, in order to be calculated or taken into account, must first be detached – ordered, moved, arranged and ‘framed’ in a single space.<sup>369</sup>

Objects, or dimensions of objects, that find themselves for whatever reason outside this frame will remain unquantified, and therefore, literally speaking, can be said *not to count*. The calculation process proceeds subsequently utilising only the framed entities. These, as a second step, are then associated with one another, subject to various transformations and manipulations, then, finally, calculated to extract a result. The resultant entity – whether it be a sum, list, rank, or so forth, is subsequently free to circulate, to move elsewhere unencumbered by its originating calculative apparatus.<sup>370</sup>

At the heart of critiques proposing the inherently reductive nature of calculation are concerns that the ‘unframed’ might be dismissed as an ‘externality,’ lost from view as a function of its ‘immeasurability,’<sup>371</sup> or simplified beyond meaningful recognition in the process of numerical classification. These concerns are

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<sup>367</sup> Herbert Kalthoff, "Figures, Writing and Calculation: Thoughts on the Representation of Economic Practices," *Economic Sociology - The European Electronic Newsletter* 3, no. 3 (2002). p.28

<sup>368</sup> Callon, "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics." p.16

<sup>369</sup> Callon and Muniesa, "Peripheral Vision: Economic Markets as Calculative Collective Devices." p.1231

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Power, "Counting, Control and Calculation: Reflections on Measuring and Management." p.775

particularly acute around the measurement of what have been termed “intangibles.”<sup>372</sup> Taking CSR measures as example here, the previously mentioned problematic of how something such as ‘ethical behaviour’ may be classified and then numerically scored weighs heavily on the minds of some critics. Systems for the translation of quality into quantity, for instance a scale from 1-10 that requires a business manager to enter a rating of environmental impact, are aggregated here together with other scores, thus resulting in what Power characterises as a situation where “technically meaningless” “proxy measures end up representing the thing itself.”<sup>373</sup> Noting the way in which these quantitative methodologies are informed by an empirically realist sensibility (wherein the measurement tool is claimed to render an accurate picture of real world variables), Kalthoff also critiques such practices on the basis of their self-referentiality: “The practice of representation is then not a mirroring activity anymore, but works on a non-identical replication – a replica which does not know an origin, but no final point, either, and which – entirely incomplete – only refers to itself.”<sup>374</sup>

However, the claim that number is ‘de-politicising,’ or even ‘anti-political,’ goes further than the charge of self-referentiality. Herein, measurement is crucially recognised to be *performative* in function – as such it is actually *productive* of certain realities, and not just a tool for description.<sup>375</sup> Number, it is proposed, via action on entities that have been made countable in the first place, acts to re-produce the world in its own image. Simply put, number is not merely descriptive, it acts to *construct* – “number performs number.”<sup>376</sup> As such, measurement tools, it is noted, do not merely ‘measure’ an independent reality, they actually contribute to the form and shape of the purportedly ‘measured’ reality.<sup>377</sup> Recalling for a moment earlier discussion surrounding the ‘firmness’ of number (establishment of expertise, portrayal of certainty, resolution of doubt, values of precision, representation of

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., p.775

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., p.775-776. Cf. Chapter Two’s discussion of ‘priceless’ ethcial goods – typified by, amongst others, Titmuss’s concerns regarding the commercialisation of blood donation for instance.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., p.31

<sup>375</sup> John Law and John Urry, "Enacting the Social," *Economy and Society* 33, no. 3 (2004). p.391

<sup>376</sup> Thrift, "Movement-Space: The Changing Domain of Thinking Resulting from the Development of New Kinds of Spatial Awareness." pp.580-90.

<sup>377</sup> Callon, ed., *The Laws of the Markets*. p.23

“non-interpretive facts”<sup>378</sup> and so forth), it is evident how quantitative processes might be proposed to stabilise debate, and hence close down space for contestation. Calculability itself here is taken as an indication that political debate has ceased and controversy settled – the calculated thing at this point is no longer debateable, but now ‘useful.’<sup>379</sup>

The question of the boundary between what is quantitative and qualitative becomes significant here. ‘Judgement’ might be posed as the opposite of quantitative calculation in critiques such as Porter’s, however, as Callon’s break down of the calculative process itself begins to suggest, these boundaries are more permeable than is typically perceived. Boundaries between the qualitative and quantitative may, in much the same way as number does, give the appearance of firmness. However, upon closer inspection the purity of these distinctions breaks down. This is particularly the case in light of the numerous and competing forms of CSR measurement with which I began this chapter.

Recalling Callon’s account of ‘framing,’ and the attendant steps of the calculation process, it is important to go on further and note, as Callon and Muniesa do, that the actual achievement of each step in the process is not always predictable or straightforward, instead it may take a variety of forms.<sup>380</sup> At one extreme, calculation may be a strictly algorithmic accomplishment, but, at the other it may more be more closely akin to judgement, or even intuition.<sup>381</sup> Essentially, the merit of this approach is that it recognises a continuum between ‘qualitative judgement’ and ‘numerical calculation,’ broadening the definition of calculation in the process. Usefully here, Callon and Law also fashion an analysis tool that may provide an insight into this contested borderland of ‘calculability’ by adapting Franck Cochoy’s neologism ‘qualculation.’<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society*. p.xi

<sup>379</sup> Osborne and Rose, "Do the Social Sciences Create Phenomena?: The Example of Public Opinion Research." p.372

<sup>380</sup> Callon and Muniesa, "Peripheral Vision: Economic Markets as Calculative Collective Devices." p.1231

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1232

<sup>382</sup> Callon and Law, "On Qualculation, Agency and Otherness." p.719

At its core, ‘qualculation’ attests to the need for any given thing to ‘qualify’ to be counted: “Qualculation implies qualification.”<sup>383</sup> In an increasingly service-based economy, processes of qualification, Callon contends, are on the rise, leading him to describe an ‘economy of qualities.’<sup>384</sup> Applying this observation to the instance of CSR measurement, the extent to which what ‘counts’ is always a matter of judgement is immediately obvious. In order to calculate, rank, tabulate or correlate a company’s social performance, it must first be decided what exactly is to count as ‘social performance.’ Moreover, before this move can even take place, ‘social performance’ has already been ‘qualified’ in so far as it has become something that we desire to count in the first place – it is understood, following various reasonings, and on the basis of contemporary patterns of attention-affect-profit (as described in Chapter Three), to be significant or worthwhile in some way.

In an ‘economy of qualities,’ the quality of a product itself, as well as contingent processes of qualification and re-qualification (vis-à-vis other products in the market), are of crucial significance. CSR metrics compete for precedence in a market that considers them on both these fronts – not only do individual rating agencies, rank compliers, social responsible investment indices and so forth, claim to offer the best *quality* analysis, they also seek to competitively differentiate (or *qualify*) themselves with regard to competitors on this basis. For firms – both those that practice CSR (and hence stand to be ranked poorly or positively, included in a Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) portfolio or not, gain a good ethical reputation or a bad one), and firms themselves involved in the measurement of CSR (ratings agencies, research firms, rank compliers, various consultancies), the ability to modify their list of qualities is always a strategic competitive resource.<sup>385</sup>

Given the market-basis of the measurement tools up for discussion here, it makes little sense to discuss calculation as it pertains to CSR as something discrete, something that has beginnings and ends. Insofar as markets might be most broadly characterised as arenas for the determination of ‘price,’ calculations are constant, endless, and not discernibly divisible into ‘pure judgement’ on the one hand, and

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., p.719

<sup>384</sup> Callon, Meadel, and Rabeharisoa, "The Economy of Qualities."

<sup>385</sup> See Perroux, in Ibid., p.200

‘pure calculation’ on the other. The *EthicalScore* ranking system that I introduced earlier provides a powerful illustration of this. Although it is graphically presented, and statistically complied, the thing that *EthicalScore* tracks is ‘ethical reputation,’ something we might say, that belongs to the ‘subjective’ realm of judgement. Furthermore, its calculation is quite literally continual. Unlike ranks or ratings which may be complied at one point in time, and then again later at another, the lines on the *EthicalScore* chart, as has already been noted, track upward and downward through the weeks, months, and years.

This example also demonstrates a third facet of ‘quality’ in this context. In addition to describing a class and situation or differentiating feature relative to others, quality can also show up as *intensity*. Although it is not, to my knowledge, directly presented in the *EthicalScore* output, it would be possible, on the basis of the data collected, to compile and chart the intensity of attention around the CSR practices of any followed company. This attention itself, in a market context, is reciprocally relevant to both previously described dimensions of quality insofar as these may be altered according to the nature of the attention received. New and altered qualities themselves evolve on the basis of changing trends and shifts in attention.

In the broadened sense of the term ‘calculation’ that Callon and Law’s qualification attempts to establish, the multitude of different (and differentiated) ‘quantitative’ means for the assessment of CSR that I have discussed here, exhibit various dimensions that I would describe as political in nature. Processes of qualification are themselves products of contestation. Debate about the best way to measure in a market context does not finally result in agreement on a standardised methodology. Although, as was previously noted, many in the CSR industry suggest that the lack of standardisation across ratings and measures is problematic for the purposes of cross-comparison, no movement towards the resolution of this issue is made, instead, ever more companies offering ‘better,’ ‘newer,’ and more ‘innovative’ strategies emerge.

Moreover, it is not only those in the industry, so to speak, who are involved in debates about how qualification occurs. As Andrew Barry and Don Slater note

with reference to the example of organic food, consumers themselves are becoming increasingly critical and reflexive regarding different contemporary qualifications and exactly what these imply.<sup>386</sup> Public concerns regarding corporate practices and the integrity of proclaimed 'ethical' behaviour are not absent from the 'expert' measures of CSR, rather, public attention and expectation are the very dimensions that work to shape the classificatory systems which form the basis for CSR measurement and rating.

The issue of 'expert' versus 'lay' opinion in CSR measurement does require more attention and will be picked up in the following section with regard to demands for 'transparency.' For now though, to conclude this discussion, I want to reflect quickly back on the issue of 'trust' in number. Earlier, I recalled Porter's claims regarding the 'firmness' of number – that its values of precision and resolution of doubt form the basis for a widespread 'trust' in number. An over-emphasis on the apparent 'firmness' of number though can mean that the uncertainties, flexibilities, and 'qualitative' intricacies that riddle calculative practices are overlooked. Numbers, while giving the appearance of accuracy, are increasingly derived in situations characterised by ambiguity. An "aura"<sup>387</sup> may surround numbers, however, perhaps particularly for those for whom acts of numerical contortion are regular practice, the finality and accuracy of these is not always a foregone conclusion.

For 'calculating professionals' involved in anything from CSR measurement to financial modelling, but also amongst the public more generally (the popular phrase 'lies, damn lies, and statistics' springs to mind here), number might be observed to occupy a state of useful malleability. This is not to suggest that a familiarity with the manipulability of numbers necessarily results in a subsequent lack of trust of numerical representations. Although I am suggesting here that numbers may be made talk, I do not wish to suggest that they may be made say absolutely anything one might want. Instead, the point is that the numerical is always dense

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<sup>386</sup> Andrew Barry and Don Slater, "Introduction: The Technological Economy," *Economy and Society* 31, no. 2 (2002). p.186; See also, for a governmentality perspective on consumer co-creation; Detlev Zwick, Samuel K. Bonsu, and Aron Darmody, "Putting Consumers to Work: 'Co-Creation' and New Marketing Govern-Mentality," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>387</sup> Strathern, "New Accountabilities: Anthropological Studies in Audit, Ethics and the Academy." p.8

with quality and can exhibit different textures. How these textural qualities may be combined or combed together, and with what result, is both the matter of expert attention and that which leads to further innovation.

It may be that I am now perhaps over-emphasising the claimed ‘malleability’ of number. It is not a case though of one reading or another. Certainly firmness and malleability are always co-present features of the numerical. Where presently I have chosen to emphasise the more flexible aspects of quantitative practices, this is primarily as counterpoint to previously discussed accounts that trade on an understanding of the stability and certainty that number confers. Significantly, the tendency towards numerical firmness and the tendency towards numerical malleability are always simultaneously at play in a strategic economy staked on the dynamics of accuracy and inaccuracy, belief and disbelief, trust and suspicion.

My emphasis here has been on the ways in this proposed ‘malleability’ of number might be understood to mitigate against the premature foreclosure of contestability in market spheres. However, this suggestion is not designed to undermine real concerns regarding the spread of quantitative technologies and the new opportunities for managerial and governmental intervention that can emerge in the process. The making visible of ‘social performance,’ ‘corporate ethical reputation,’ and so forth, inevitably does open these domains to a particular type of managerial scrutiny, one which, as has been discussed, often sees these placed correlatively alongside financial outputs. The sociological recourse to charges of ‘reductionism’ and ‘de-politicisation’ though, fails to address metrological practices in the richness and reflexivity of their current market deployment. In the context of the various empirical examples discussed here, it has, I hope, been possible to see the supposed monolith of measurement, give way, and in its place much more specific, strategic, and highly textured practices emerge.

As such, an ‘ethics by number’ need not necessarily be a hollow one. The measurement, in this instance, of both *value*, and *values*, is a productive process constitute in *texture*, *quality*, and *intensity*. That which is produced represents the pluralisation of ethical potentialities, and while this ‘pluralisation’ in and of itself is

not necessarily an ethical achievement simply on account of its praxis,<sup>388</sup> to the extent that the *actions* this propels may be understood to beckon possibilities of a previously unrealisable nature, the ‘ethical’ poverty of attempts to quantify the ‘unquantifiable’ is not guaranteed. In the following, and final section, this proposition is further explored via the tension between ‘practice’ (calculation) and ‘principle’ (transparency).

### **Black Boxes and Transparent Windows**

Lying beneath the proliferation of techniques for CSR measurement discussed here is what Marilyn Strathern has referred to as an “original ethical impulse.”<sup>389</sup> Insofar as these seek to make information public, measures of CSR enact *transparency* as a value. ‘Visibility’ is virtuous not only in principle (as that which is apparent opposite to the concealed or secret), but also in the sense that where information is openly available, public debate may occur.<sup>390</sup>

Having been concerned thus far with the explication of CSR’s calculative techniques themselves, the dimension of ‘visibility’ that these confer has not yet received sufficient emphasis. As has been made reference to throughout the chapter though, the final step in calculation is the detachment and circulation of the newly formulated object, where, at last, it comes into contact with its intended public.

We are all familiar with more conventional or routine measures of performance – reports of transport punctuality, average waiting times, and class sizes for instance,<sup>391</sup> these, we might say, embody a political culture of openness and accountability. In this way, these measures are ‘popular’ in nature, and, although rigidly quantitative in form, they are nonetheless decidedly public in character.<sup>392</sup> It is similarly so with CSR meta-measures. Social Responsibility reports are freely available and advertised on company websites, important ethical ranks are published

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<sup>388</sup> Mariam Fraser, "Facts, Ethics and Event," in *Deleuzian Intersections: Science, Technology and Anthropology*, ed. Casper Brunn Jensen and Kjetil Rødje (New York: Berghahn Press, 2009). p.74

<sup>389</sup> Strathern, "New Accountabilities: Anthropological Studies in Audit, Ethics and the Academy."

<sup>390</sup> Marilyn Strathern, "Externalities in Comparative Guise," *Economy and Society* 31, no. 2 (2002). p.254

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, p.773

<sup>392</sup> Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*. p.97

widely in the most popular business magazines and newspapers – *Business Week*, *The Economist*, *The Financial Times*, and compiled in conjunction with the most significantly invested and widely watched ethical share indices, (here the FTSE4Good and the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) come to mind). A comprehensive log of the variety of ways in which measures of CSR are publicly showcased is beyond the scope of my current intention, most broadly though it is possible to imagine that this would include an enormously diverse range of sites and forms of presentation – from the professional CSR conference at one extreme, to in-store signage, packaging, and so forth, at the other.

However, despite the indisputably ‘public’ orientation of CSR measures, the claim to ‘transparency’ is not as straightforward as it appears. Transparency, it might be said, is somewhat illusive – while appearing self-evident and natural, it is actually something that must be *achieved*. ‘Making visible’ suggests a revelation, the removal of barriers, an unfettered view. In the present case though, in place of these imaginaries, we have instead a very different figure to contend with – that of the ‘black box.’

Latour describes a ‘black-box’<sup>393</sup> as anything whose constitution or make-up can, for present purposes, be taken for granted. CSR measures, though employed in the name of informational transparency, achieve this visibility, somewhat paradoxically through a series of calculative processes which, for a number of reasons, remain inaccessible and opaque – ‘black boxed’ as per Dejean et al.’s earlier example. It is not only that expert statistical knowledge is required to understand the various manipulations through which, for instance, a CSR rating is arrived at. Moreover and more practically, the intricacies of calculative processes are often what, as I have already noted, competitively differentiates one service provider from another in the CSR marketplace. Insofar as your CSR measurement technique is also your unique selling point, the constitution and operation of this may be a secret closely guarded. Even this requirement for competitive secrecy though is not without

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<sup>393</sup> See Chapter One; Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987).

its qualifications – of course your differentiating methods must also be explicated to an extent if you intend to attract custom on the basis of these.

In making visible certain performances and not others, transparency acts as a frame, the shifting bounds of which can work to conceal or make invisible that which lies beyond, while making natural or highlighting that at the centre. The contradiction here, between, on the one hand, the ‘self-evident’ virtue of transparency, of ‘making visible,’ and on the other, the complex technical (or black-boxed) means through which this must be achieved, recalls a contrast between what we might say, following Strathern, are two different Western approaches to the question of ethics itself.<sup>394</sup>

To explain further – we might note that, on the one hand, information about the world exists which attempts to calculatively account for it, while on the other, some information functions precisely insofar as it remains at a remove, and does not proceed via calculation.<sup>395</sup> In the first mode it is possible to recognise a tendency towards ‘purification,’ here the world is described, broken into various dimensions, and subsequently calculated. ‘Knowledge’ is the tangible result or outcome of such processes, and this may be produced specifically with the intention of guiding or recommending certain actions.<sup>396</sup> Insofar as it usefully enables people to act on its recommendations, knowledge produced in this way must be as accurate as possible, and hence discussion revolves subsequently around the appropriateness of the instruments of description themselves – how accurate are these, how powerful?

Following from the previous discussion of ‘quality,’ CSR metrics might, in this vein, be characterised as having a ‘qualified quality’ – it is on the basis of their various qualifications, internally, and relative to other measures that they may be of use. The desire for better ‘metrics’ might be said to fall into this category of impulse, as, similarly, may debates in fields such as management that concern the accurate calculation of CSP and financial performance.

Secondly though, and on the other hand, some information might be said to be powerful for precisely the opposite reason, because it is “not contaminated with

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<sup>394</sup> Strathern, "Externalities in Comparative Guise." p.263

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Strathern, "Externalities in Comparative Guise."

the details.”<sup>397</sup> Measurement here is superseded by the kind of reasoning understood to be valuable “because it exists at a remove from the world.”<sup>398</sup> This kind of information commonly circulates in the form of principles or norms.<sup>399</sup> Transparency, following this characterisation, we might recognise as valued for its own sake. It has an ‘unqualified quality;’ as principle, it is difficult to refute its self-evident ‘good,’ and herein lies the power in its evocation. The tension around metrics experienced by those working in CSR speaks similarly to this second approach. Here, recall the unsayable ‘incalculabilities’ that are imagined to set the CSR ‘ceiling’ or make it ‘whole,’ the ‘non-financial’ or otherwise ‘priceless.’

Information importantly provides a basis upon which we can *act*, and here ‘ethical’ information is no different. This chapter has been concerned for the most part with the calculative establishment of ethical information. Ranks, ratings, metrics and so forth are a form of information about the world on the basis of which a number of different actions follow and decisions are made. To give just one example of the many forms that this action may take, a high ethical rank or rating may mean that a company is newly included in a Socially Responsible Investment portfolio, and this might subsequently result in new avenues for share trade and investment. This really is though just one of the multitude of foreseeable ‘actions’ that may follow from the production of this kind of information on corporate ethics. Equally, however, as the present section has sought to highlight, information is not the only route to action in CSR. Calls for transparency also find a route to action.

This is implied significantly in both ‘ethical’ approaches – in the first case, the produced knowledge itself provides a basis on which to act, and in the second, “the ethical principle has already jumped from description to action ... [t]he anticipation of action is as much a condition of the description, we might say, as a consequence of it.”<sup>400</sup> The issue of ethical action however, is a particularly complicated one with regard to CSR, and finally brings us back to the question of the business case with which this chapter began.

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

Considerable effort, as I have already noted, is expended debating the veracity of the business case model. David Vogel, an important CSR commentator, goes so far as to claim that “[v]irtually all contemporary writing on CSR emphasises its link to corporate profitability.”<sup>401</sup> Yet, the ‘evidence’ that we might imagine exists to back up this claim is, as was previously noted, at the very best inconclusive. To those tempted to inquire as to the continuing salience of the business case in the absence of any proof of its veracity, this chapter, though not directly addressing this question, does propose a set of unconventional perspectives on it. ‘Quality,’ in particular, works to provide a more textured account of CSR. Although measured, and measurable, CSR is not finally just ‘quantifiable.’ As in Strathern’s delineation – ethics may be, in some instances, by ‘calculation,’ but, simultaneously it is often also by ‘principle.’ Calculabilities produce, by corollary, incalculabilities. Given, however, that action is implied in both cases, we might also note the way in which, in practice, ‘motivation’ as such, rarely derives from only one or the other. The business case adheres, as it were, not only on the basis of business, but also on the basis of principle. Mutually and performatively articulated, action emerges, in this particular market context, through the strategic negotiation of the two.

The explorations undertaken in this chapter have primarily sought to inquire after the forms of practice that emerge within the contemporary market for corporate ethics. The predominance of quantitative approaches, I have claimed, should not be taken as a sign of the social ‘impoverishment’ of this field; rather it provides an occasion for a more careful attention to the subtleties of how and what number performs. Well informed and highly reflexive users – members of the public, the academy, and business – all skilfully trade in number in order to construct new arenas of accountability, change existing practices, and probe new avenues to profit and viability. The strict demarcation of quality from quantity ultimately overlooks the more interesting possibilities that inhabit the borderlands of the two.

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<sup>401</sup> Vogel, *The Market for Virtue: The Potential and Limits of Corporate Social Responsibility*. p.19

Importantly, no consensus emerges with regard to the measurement of CSR – there is no final yardstick and the “life of business organizations [proves] no less an arena of puzzlement and contention over issues of worth.”<sup>402</sup> Critical counter-discourses abound regarding the efficacy of CSR measurement, and the practice is continually subject to various forms of critique from observers within the industry and without. Debates over the ‘best’ way to measure CSP, though not often overtly political in intention, occupy a political space nonetheless, and from within it contribute to building a critical discourse around the ethical behaviour of business organisations. Grappling with new types of ambiguity, if quantification processes may still be said to be caught up in reductive attempts at purification, it is certainly “a messy kind of purity that is being produced, [and] of course, one which has to work hard to keep itself in place: we simply do not see the work going on.”<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Monique Girard and David Stark, "Heterarchies of Value in Manhattan-Based New Media Firms," *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 3 (2003). p.77

<sup>403</sup> Thrift, "Movement-Space: The Changing Domain of Thinking Resulting from the Development of New Kinds of Spatial Awareness." p.587

## Chapter Five

□

### Part I

#### **Ethical Consumption as Material Practice**

In a recent book entitled *The Ethical Consumer: Buying for a Better World*, author Melissa Corkhill celebrates the mainstreaming of ethical consumption – “gone are the days,” she writes, when consuming ethically was only of concern to “the granola fringe.”<sup>404</sup> The recent popularisation of ethical consumption however, has not been greeted with equal enthusiasm by all. Described by prominent environmentalist George Monbiot in his *Guardian* column as a “pox on the planet,” ethical consumerism, he suggests by contrast, amounts to nothing more than “buying bits of soap with leaves in it.”<sup>405</sup> In the first instance then, ethical consumption is a trivial ‘fringe’ concern before many people are doing it, whereas in the second, the very fact of its mainstreaming is what results in triviality.

What is certain is that with the advent of so-called ‘ethical consumption,’ consumptive practices have become morally problematised to unprecedented degree. Consumption is now a matter of widespread moral concern, and consumptive choices are frequently presented in ethical terms. However, as the opening example serves to demonstrate, much of the current focus on the ‘ethical’ dimensions of consumption proceeds along the lines of a peremptorily concluded defence or critique of its effectiveness in producing ‘change’ (as this is variously conceived). This chapter will seek to contribute differently to the discussion of ethical

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<sup>404</sup> Melissa Corkhill, *The Ethical Consumer: Buying for a Better World* (New York: Sterling, 2008). (Book jacket)

<sup>405</sup> George Monbiot, *Ethical Shopping Is Just Another Way of Showing How Rich Your Are* (2007 [cited 30th August 2008]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/jul/24/comment.businesscomment>.

consumption by aiming alternatively (and in line with previous chapters) to elaborate an account of ‘ethical consumption’ as the practice of a *market ethics*.<sup>406</sup>

The empirical setting for this task will be a blog series hosted by the *Guardian* newspaper online ([www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)). Entitled *Ethical Living*, the pages of this blog consist of posts made by a group of staff bloggers,<sup>407</sup> and are accompanied by a stream of comments in which a conversation builds up between readers online. On the blogsite, as will be demonstrated, consumer objects and consumer practices are understood to be primarily constituent in the attempt to lead an ‘ethical life.’ This chapter will therefore begin by describing the blogsite in some detail, in doing so also focusing on its utility as an empirical site for the observation of ‘market ethics in action.’

Following from this, the ways in which markets themselves function as settings for the emergence of particular modes of ‘doing’ ethics within the context of ethical consumption will be at the fore of consideration. What emerges from the blog content is how objects, materials, and practices come to consist, through affective investiture, a kind of consumptive ethics that is negotiated readily through the activities of daily life. It is not simply the ‘fact,’ of the affective materiality of this consumptive ethics that is of significance here however, it is that the mutability conferred in this process offers particularly engaging avenues for subsequent discussion. Stable, lasting, or agreed definitions of how one might consume ‘ethically’ are, following this, unlikely to be found, and, as such, the ethical potentials of the marketplace are not pre-determined, but precisely up for grabs.

Part Two of this chapter develops the themes of the first, and draws from the same set of empirical material, but also entails a slight shift of gear. The structuring focus there will be on the supposed exclusivity of ‘choice’ and ‘care.’ As suggested in a recent book by Annemarie Mol,<sup>408</sup> the proliferation of ‘choices’ in a market context might be understood to actively delimit the alternative possibility of a (less

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<sup>406</sup> See Chapter Two for an elaboration of this concept.

<sup>407</sup> See Appendix B for a table recording the names of contributing bloggers on *Ethical Living* in 2008, and the number of blog posts made by each. See, for further discussion of this topic, the chapter section entitled ‘blog.’

<sup>408</sup> Annemarie Mol, *The Logic of Care: Health and the Problem of Patient Choice* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

marketable) ‘care.’ Through an elaboration of how the notion of ‘choice’ functions in a market context to designate various modes and means of consuming ‘ethically’ however, I will emphasise an alternative possibility – that care, in the context of ethical consumption at least, is actually constituent in the very choices we make. This reformulation though will require an attendant reconsideration of what we take to be the bounds of ‘ethics’ and ‘markets’ both in this context.

### **blog**

“1998, short for weblog (which is attested from 1994, though not in the sense ‘online journal’), from (World Wide) Web + log”<sup>409</sup>

This opening discussion will suggest that blogs may be approached as a sociologically significant form of empirical practice inasmuch as they function as a contemporaneous, open, and continually updated forum for opinion and debate. When they first appeared in the late 1990s, blogs functioned primarily as online diaries, most frequently ‘owned’ by a single user who would typically add daily posts, usually regarding their own thoughts or feelings, and, as such, readership and participation mainly consisted of web-savvy individuals with a specific shared interest.

The mainstream media’s relatively recent embrace of this form of communication however, means that in some areas one may have expected to encounter traditional reporting, this has recently been replaced by ‘blogging.’ Those who read newspapers online will be familiar with the experience of clicking through to what appears to be a traditional journalistic article and being transported instead to the ‘blogs’ section of the news site, where, generally speaking, articles are less lengthy (typically in the region of five hundred words long) and are often posed in the form of a question or controversy in order to invite discussion and debate.

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<sup>409</sup> ‘blog.’ *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2008 [cited December 3rd 2008]); available from [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com).

The present chapter takes as its empirical focus a year of activity on the *Guardian.co.uk*'s *Ethical Living* blog.<sup>410</sup> Unlike more traditional single authored blogs, *Ethical Living* is a loosely configured, but on-going and frequently updated set of posts contributed by a varying set of reporters (referred to hereafter as 'staff bloggers') on any topic that might conceivably fall under its titled remit. Over the course of 2008, eighteen individual staff bloggers contributed to *Ethical Living*, the most posts made by a single blogger being twenty-three, with nine bloggers submitting only one post. For 2008 the total number of individual staff-contributed *Ethical Living* blog posts was one hundred and six, (106).<sup>411</sup> Blogs are posted by the staff bloggers with varying frequency (i.e. not on a fixed submission schedule), and these individuals may also publish elsewhere in the paper.<sup>412</sup>

Included in the 'Environment' section of the *Guardian* website,<sup>413</sup> and navigable either from here, or from the blogposts home,<sup>414</sup> *Ethical Living* is the newer of *Guardian.co.uk*'s two 'Environment' grouped blogs, the other simply entitled *Environment*. Started in July of 2007, *Ethical Living* spun off from the original *Environment* blog, both blogs presently co-existing and for the most part addressing distinct concerns.<sup>415</sup> Specifically, while *Environment* covers the concerns of the more 'traditional' environmentalist, typically reporting on deforestation, emissions targets, activism, conversation attempts and similar, *Ethical Living*, as its name suggests, takes as its main focus the kind of everyday practices and activities in which participants engage, addressing the ethical or unethical dimensions of these. This difference is captured visually in the respective graphics that accompany the two blogs.

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<sup>410</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog>. See Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of the number of blogposts and accompanying comments. The first blogpost submitted in 2008 (1<sup>st</sup> January) is where I begin my survey, observation ending with the last comment (2<sup>nd</sup> Jan, 2009) made to the final post submitted in 2008 (31<sup>st</sup> December, 2008). The blogs and comments for the year amount to a total of 178,834 words.

<sup>411</sup> See Appendix A for a graphical representation of blog statistics.

<sup>412</sup> See Appendix B for a tabulated summary of this information.

<sup>413</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment>. Other headings under which *Guardian.co.uk* publishes blog content are 'News & Sport,' 'Business,' 'Culture,' 'Life & Style,' 'Media,' 'Science & Technology,' and 'Other.'

<sup>414</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tone/blog>

<sup>415</sup> On rare occasion, a post may appear under both blog streams if its topic is sufficiently relevant to both.

Figure 3: *Environment* and *Ethical Living* Blog Header Graphics

# ENVIRONMENT BLOG



# ETHICAL LIVING BLOG



The concerns of the *Environment* blog are illustrated in the contrast between the natural environment in the foreground (depicted by flora and fauna) and the nuclear power station and chimney stacks silhouetted in the distance. Concerns that come under *Ethical Living*, by contrast, are depicted pictorially in the form of personal consumptive practices (recycling, driving), new technology (the fuel cell hexagons, ‘clean’ wind turbines, the car – perhaps alternatively fueled?), and calculability (the black ‘carbon footprint’ at the base of the picture). As such, *Ethical Living* seeks to address ethical concerns as they are encountered daily in these forms and others.

Something of the difference in spirit between the two related blogs is also captured by the first ever submission to *Ethical Living*, posted on Friday July 13th, 2007 by *Guardian* blogger Rebecca Smithers. Entitled ‘Animal Friendly Pizza?’ it poses such questions as, “Are your buying habits influenced by a company's animal-friendly credentials?” and “Can being kind to animals be good for a company's

bottom line?”<sup>416</sup> This post, and the many others that follow it and constitute the *Ethical Living* archive, all make, albeit in a variety of ways, a distinctive and explicit address to the ethical aspects of consumptive processes while also defining consumption itself very broadly.

Drawing attention to a certain breadth of definition with regard to consumption here, I am attempting to flag upfront a tension that I will go on to suggest becomes significant in the second section of this chapter – that of ‘consumerism’ in relation to ‘consumption.’ While the phrase ‘opposition’ here does no justice to the relationship between these two notions that I wish to develop and discuss in the course of this chapter, it is suffice to note for the moment that the ethical ‘living’ to which the blog title refers, is varyingly manifest in both pro-and anti-consumerist ways. The emphasis I employ on reading the blog content in terms of ‘consumption’ rather than ‘consumerism’ is designed to make room for these differing manifestations of ‘ethical living’ in my discussion, rather than excluding certain ‘non-consumerist,’ but nonetheless consumptive practices on the basis that money may not change hands.

I hope to make the significance of this tension clearer, as I mentioned, in due course. Presently though, to return to the suitability of *Ethical Living* content for analysis within the remit of this chapter and with regard to the project as a whole – it is the address to daily concerns, objects and practices insofar as they might be deemed ‘ethical,’ or conversely, ‘unethical,’ that makes this blog particularly relevant. Having suggested in Chapter Two that the advent of what I referred to as ‘market ethics’ – the process *doing* of ethics through the market – in turn necessitates an analytic approach that is sensitive to the varying kinds of material enactments that this ‘ethics’ might take (as opposed, conversely, to the contemplation of ethics in the abstract), the *Ethical Living* blog provides an empirical context in which precisely what is of concern is the stuff of everyday life – it is the daily praxical minutiae under examination that may or may not be understood to constitute modes of consumption that are ‘ethical.’

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<sup>416</sup>Rebecca Smithers, *Animal Friendly Pizza?* (July 13th, 2008 [cited September 15 2008]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2007/jul/13/animalfriendlybusiness>

Before I go on to examine more closely the specifics of how discussions taking place on *Ethical Living* function to establish the kind of ethics-in/as-practice I have just briefly described, further attention to the blogosphere as an empirical setting for contemporary sociological research is in order. To this end, the remainder of the present section will seek to provide such a description, in the process aiming additionally to give a sense of the pace, colour, and intensity of interaction as it takes place online.

### Researching in the Blogosphere

The fact of growing blog readership, and the sheer number of conversations now taking place online, highlights deficits in sociological notions of the 'field' that only stand to become more pressing. This problem, addressed already to an extent in the methodological discussions of Chapter Three, is worth re-visiting briefly here with regard to what Dhiraj Murthy has described as the "high level of invisibility of digital ethnography in sociological methods."<sup>417</sup>

With everyday life becoming increasingly technologically mediated, the 'field' of sociological interest can not afford to remain restricted to the type of face-to-face interaction in which sociality has typically been understood to subsist.<sup>418</sup> Blogs, and other forums of online interaction, offer to the sociologist a uniquely contemporaneous snapshot of current concerns and people's negotiations of these. Unlike traditional types of empirical inquiry, blogs are spontaneous and subject-led. Conceptualised as a kind of 'first draft,' or unfinished thought, blogs, and the ensuing online conversations that they entail, possess an immediacy that is attractive

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<sup>417</sup> Murthy, "Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research." p.848; See also, Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy, eds., *Mediaspace: Place, Scale, and Culture in a Media Age* (London: Routledge, 2004).; Bella Dicks, Bambo Soyinka, and Amanda Coffey, "Multimodal Ethnography," *Qualitative Research* 6, no. 1 (2006).; Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).; Stephen G. Jones, ed., *Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999).

<sup>418</sup> See, for instance Carol A. Bailey's recently published definition of 'field research': Field research is the systematic study, primarily through long-term, face-to-face interactions and observations, of everyday life. (Bailey, 2007: 2, original emphasis), in Murthy, "Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research." p.848

insomuch as it offers to the social researcher a particular, organically unfolding, handle on the contemporary.

A kind of finger-on-the-pulse, daily thoughts might be jotted down as they occur on a blog, your ‘story’ does not need to have been requested or commissioned, and your opinion, or position on the given issue does not need to be emphatic or final. Rather, blogging is a kind of co-construction, the interest does not so much lie in the original post that begins a conversation, it is the form, content, and tone of the entire participatory thread as it functions to record a set of feelings in present time that becomes significant.

On *Ethical Living*, blogs posts are open for user comments for seven days – this time restriction a factor in achieving the kind of contemporary ‘snapshot’ effect that distinctively characterises blogging. Moreover, this effect is fully intentional, not an accident born of practical concerns for instance. *Guardian.co.uk* note on the site that “[c]losing comment threads after they’ve been open for a while... means that the conversations [contained] are kept relatively fresh and contemporaneous.”<sup>419</sup>

Although invitations to leave comments online in response to any given issue or news item are now ubiquitous, blog posts often elicit particularly lively and involved discussion in comparison to standard news or commentary articles. While this is due in part to the nature of blogging itself (designed specifically to pose questions and invite debate on matters of contemporary importance, as indicated above), a shared sense of community amongst the bloggers on certain sites is also important.

Here, it is worth dwelling on how a notion of community functions and is structured in the blogosphere. There exists a *Guardian.co.uk* ‘Community and User Experience’ team to bring this into effect via the application of what is known as the Guardian ‘Talk Policy’<sup>420</sup> – a formal set of community standards and participation guidelines. These also seek to remind users that what they post is public, “[r]emember that this is a public forum, and your words will be archived on this site and available for anyone to find for a long time – the web has a very long

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<sup>419</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/communityfaqs/#q214>

<sup>420</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/talkpolicy>. This stipulates, amongst other things, that while “debate and dissent” are “welcome,” “obscenity and mindless abuse,” are “actively discouraged.”

memory.”<sup>421</sup> Forums, they state additionally, are intended to be “a welcoming space for intelligent discussion.”<sup>422</sup>

More interesting perhaps though, are what might be described as community-generated or community-enforced means of holding individual contributors to account. A not uncommon sequence of online events may unfold as per in the following example, part of the response to an original blog posted by Mark Lynas entitled ‘The Green Revolution Postponed’<sup>423</sup> and concerning the environmental impact of Chancellor Alistair Darling’s November 2008 pre-budget report:

R

Nov 25 08, 12:05pm

Green growth is a contradiction in terms

D

Nov 25 08, 12:21pm

R said

‘Green growth is a contradiction in terms.’

What do you mean by this? Are you for growth or against it? For green measures or against them? And in each instance why?

R

Nov 25 08, 2:07pm

...

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Mark Lynas, *Green Revolution Postponed* (2008 [cited November 25th 2008]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/nov/25/pre-budget-report-economics>.

I am very much for green measures (despite the naysayers, we've installed solar heating, and very efficient it is too), but the word "growth" is what worries me.

I've been saying for a long time that this country could, given its unsurpassed record in innovation, be at the forefront of developing and implementing less wasteful lifestyles. However we don't need to "grow" in the traditional economic sense – that's why we're in such a mess. ...

D

Nov 25 08, 2:56pm

R, thanks for the clarification. I was hoping you meant something like that and not say, *we need growth at all costs goddamnit and green measures ain't gonna cut it.*<sup>424</sup>

Here, R's initial ambiguous and apparently unyielding comment is not ignored or bypassed by subsequent commenters. Instead, demands for elaboration, clarification and further engagement are put to the initial contributor in order that he or she play a more constructive role in the blogged discussion.<sup>425</sup>

The previously quoted exchange is also demonstrative of another kind of community continuity and functioning internal accountability – blogging here is not simply a matter of giving one's two cents and logging off never to return. Rather, as is evident, those who have contributed to a stream continue to check it throughout the day, and sometimes over the course of multiple days, in order see if their response has elicited comment, read other's comments, add to the discussion further, or elaborate upon their initial position. The blogger D from the previous example made a total of eight comments in the discussion that ensued from Mark Lynas'

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<sup>424</sup> Exchange between R and D, (original emphasis and italics), in Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> This pattern is frequently encountered on the *Guardian.co.uk*'s blog streams, the questioning or enquiring comment made the subsequent blogger often gaining support from other users, either via the 'Recommend?' button, a tab that allows users to 'vote' for a particular comment (the vote numerically displayed beside the post, D in the previous example gathering three votes for his query, for instance), or simply through the supportive mention of a previous contributor's comment in one's own post.

original post over the course of the day. In this way, the commenters themselves as well as the blog form itself, can be seen to make certain demands on participants such that sustained engagement is encouraged.

Another noteworthy community-building feature of *Guardian.co.uk* is that you must be a registered user of the site and be logged in order to post comments. Upon registration, you choose a username that subsequently appears atop each comment that you submit. Usernames<sup>426</sup> actively link on the site to a profile page where, if the owner chooses, they may include any personal information about themselves (including their real name if they should so like).<sup>427</sup> Collected together on the profile page (whether or not the user has chosen to fill in additional information) are all the comments contributed by that particular user, across all commentable blogs or articles found on *Guardian.co.uk*. Access to a contributor's profile page is open to all (including non-registered users) and is achieved simply by clicking on their username. Thus, while on the surface of it, comments may be left 'anonymously' (insofar as you need not use your real name), as the sociologist John Quiggin has argued, given that, in practice, blogsites attract a group of "regular users," these people become effectively known to one another, and therefore accountable, through their "well-established identities within the group."<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Despite the public nature of the blog in question here, I have chosen not to use the real usernames of blog contributors in this chapter. Respondents will be referred to by the first letter of their username, or two letters should this name have more than one syllable. Though this (semi-)anonymity is not strictly necessary, I think it courteous nonetheless given that these individuals are not aware of their inclusion in this thesis. Staff bloggers however, given their identities are always known and attached to their blog posts in order to recognise authorship, will be referred to by name.

<sup>427</sup> Typically, those who do choose to complete their profile include information on their hobbies, whereabouts they live and similar. Via this mechanism it is also possible to observe which forums respondents typically post to, and any continuity between the posts. The type of familiarity between users born of this functionality (the ascription of a continuing username and logged archive of posts) also enables the observation of allegiances and even friendships between users, as well as long-running disagreements which may continue across a number of different streams, concerning a number of different issues. Another user's comments from previous streams may be re-introduced by a user in a new stream – frequently with the intention of demonstrating a contradiction in thinking – and in this way, further evidence of a kind of community investiture in particular blogospheres is made manifest.

<sup>428</sup> John Quiggin, "Blogs, Wikis and Creative Innovation," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9, no. 4 (2006), p.483. An interesting counter-point to earlier sociological approaches to online life is offered here. Contrary to the suggestion that online exchanges are 'anonymous' and 'disembodied' therefore allowing a kind of liberating flexibility of identity (see in particular 1990s cyberfeminist literature, i.e. Claudia Springer, *Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).). Quiggin's work and my observation here of the *Ethical Living*

User investiture is also made evident in a final observation I wish to make with regard to the empirically useful nature of *Guardian.co.uk's Ethical Living* blog. Simply, and unlike many of the other 'ethical living/ethical consumption' blogs I investigated in approaching this topic, *Ethical Living* is host to extremely lively discussion as attested to by response numbers. Over the course of 2008, of the one hundred and six posts made to the blog, a mere three elicited no comment at all, while, at the other end of the spectrum, a number of posts received more than twenty comments, with discussion extending over many days. The most comments received in response to any single *Ethical Living* post was seventy-seven (December, 2008),<sup>429</sup> seven other notable posts gathering upwards of thirty responses, (see Appendix A for a graphed record of response numbers).<sup>430</sup>

This is remarkable by contrast with the comparable *Ethical Consumer* magazine blogs for 2008 which, for instance, were typically entirely unresponded to.<sup>431</sup> This is despite the long established and highly respected nature of *Ethical Consumer* magazine itself. Another online site of potential note with regard to the present subject matter is the UK-based *Ethical Shopping Forum*.<sup>432</sup> This discussion site is still very much in a fledging stage however and critically suffers from low participation levels by comparison to *Ethical Living*.

My resultant choice to focus on the *Ethical Living* blog as opposed to those less generalist sites mentioned above, does nonetheless have a further empirical significance beyond typical comment numbers. The wider scope of *Guardian.co.uk* readership, as opposed to *Ethical Consumer Magazine* for instance, means that, rather than being largely pre-assumed amongst a group of readers who already identified as 'ethical consumers,' a broader interest in 'ethical living' amongst an

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blog, point instead towards the consistency and durability of online identity, (demonstrated by continuity and similarity between postings across time).

<sup>429</sup> Lucy Siegle on the ethics of buying fur. Lucy Siegle, *Is Fur Slowly Becoming Acceptable?* (December 16th, 2008 [cited 22nd December 2008]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/dec/16/fur-gwyneth-paltrow-ethical-living-fashion>.

<sup>430</sup> It has been suggested that a blog post attracting over 100 comments will typically have descended into repetitive 'flame war.' The term given to the exchange of slander online. See, Quiggin, "Blogs, Wikis and Creative Innovation." p.488

<sup>431</sup> <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/EthicalConsumerBlogs/tabid/62/ BlogID/13/Default.aspx>

<sup>432</sup> <http://forum.shop-ethical.co.uk/index.php> This discussion site has no affiliated print media and is funded instead by on-site advertising.

even broader readership means that, in the threads that amass in response to the *Guardian* blog posts, what is at stake is establishing the very terms of what 'ethical living' might constitute. How to consume ethically is, for the most part, not the subject of common understanding or prior agreement amongst respondents, by contrast it is the very substrate of daily discussion and contestation.

To the extent that a blog might be understood as a kind of public forum or public sphere,<sup>433</sup> the fact of its being online does of course not make it unproblematic with regard to 'offline' demographic concerns. Although some accounts of online life (and blogging in particular) place a great deal of emphasis on the potentially democratic and egalitarian forms of participatory culture the internet may foster,<sup>434</sup> a sociological approach to the question of online participation perhaps best proceed with some caution.

Just above, I suggest that the 'wide scope' of *Guardian.co.uk* readership (by comparison to specialist ethical consumer forums) is methodologically favourable with regard to the kind of analysis the present chapter aims to undertake. While this is so, a question that remains regards just who reads *Ethical Living*, or, more specifically, who contributes to the comment-streams that this chapter seeks to examine? In many ways there is of course no straightforward answer to this. Significant differences are easily pointed out between individuals who log on to *Guardian.co.uk* as a whole. Even just considering likely differences in web readership and browsing habits results in the necessary recognition of a plethora of potential usage variations. Some may log on to the same site frequently and with some loyalty, while others may browse multiple news sites without habitually returning to any single one. Of those who read the blogs, some (like myself) may be avid readers who have never left a comment, while for others commenting and being involved in the conversation may be one of the primary reasons for following the blog.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Murthy, "Digital Ethnography: An Examination of the Use of New Technologies for Social Research." p.839

<sup>434</sup> See, Hugh Hewitt, *Blog: Understanding the Information Reformation That's Changing Your World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005).

<sup>435</sup> This usage trend may be observed by using the profile function available on *Guardian.co.uk*. As I have mentioned in a previous footnote, it is possible via this to track the contributions of particular

Further, and perhaps more pertinent, methodological considerations additionally arise in response to the question of ‘who.’ Access to an internet connection, for a start, is of course not equally available across different income groups and social classes, nor even if internet access were equally available, would usage patterns, user skills or confidence levels be necessarily comparable or coincident. The relative novelty of blogging means also that a reasonable degree of media-savvy might generally be expected amongst those who become involved in its practice, and although blogging has become more accessible as it has become more widespread, this accessibility is very far from universal. This situation of stratified access however need not be understood to present a methodological hurdle or problem as such. Rather, as Saskia Sassen suggests, this only emphasises the need to develop our “analytic categories” carefully enough to “capture the complex imbrications of technology and society.”<sup>436</sup> Any empirical research in the blogosphere must recognise that while blogs may be said to confer a new type of public space, this space is certainly not utopian in nature.

The preceding observations are not only methodological in significance though. More fundamentally, they draw attention to the fact that the material resources that may be applied to making ‘ethical’ consumer choices varies greatly between individuals and across groups. It goes practically without saying that ethical consumption is, for the most part, a concern of the relatively affluent, yet at the same time, it is important that this statement not be made uncritically, or function too definitively as an exclusion of those who may be ethical consumers regardless, whether in ways that are the same or different.

Nonetheless, the question of social identity is one that it is impossible to begin a critical discussion of consumption without addressing in more depth. Traditionally, this issue has been a mainstay of sociological analysis and at present is most comprehensively attended to in work produced by researchers of ‘consumer culture.’ For this reason, the following section will begin with a brief review of some

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users. A number of commenters, this function reveals, are frequent users and discussants, who are likely to follow more than one of the *Guardian.co.uk*'s blogs.

<sup>436</sup> Saskia Sassen, "Towards a Sociology of Information Technology," *Current Sociology* 50, no. 3 (2002). p.365

of the relevant literature in this field, before turning to the blog material in order to elaborate upon how the practice of ethical consumption comes to bear on identity, transforming the ‘self’ into an object of reflection and scrutiny. However, even insofar as ethical consumption may (in a classical consumer culture reading) be understood as a socially distinguishing practice in terms of identity, I will suggest in response that an account overly emphatic in this particular vein risks providing an unjustly reductive account of ethical consumption, one that, most problematically, is ill-equipped to treat claims of an ethical nature with the seriousness they deserve.

### **Consumption, Distinction, and being a ‘*Guardian* Reader’**

As sociologists and anthropologists of consumption have long sought to point out, the classification of people occurs alongside and through the classification of consumer goods.<sup>437</sup> The breadth of choices that consumers navigate with every shopping trip can prompt a constant questioning of these choices in terms of the kinds of social identity that they imply. Even something as seemingly uncontroversial as a Sainsbury’s supermarket tomato addresses us with a variety of questions – would we like to ‘*taste the difference,*’ are we ‘*so organic,*’ or, alternatively, more concerned just to cover the ‘*basics*’?<sup>438</sup> That different levels of consumption are differently available on the basis of wealth is reasonably obvious, less so however is how different modes or styles of consumption also result broadly in line with differences in wealth and influence.

It is to various elaborations of this latter point that sociological studies of consumption have traditionally directed their attention. As Mary Douglas has suggested, goods function fundamentally on the basis of their meanings to differentiate people with respect to social hierarchy – social status is on display in one’s style of consumption and the very desire for goods themselves may be

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<sup>437</sup> See, Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899).; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984 [1979]).; Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 1996 [1979]).

<sup>438</sup> These are the names of three sub-brands into which one UK supermarket (Sainsbury’s) classify their own brand products, including meats, deli, fruit and vegetables and canned goods.

understood as a desire to emulate the consumption of groups of perceived higher social status.<sup>439</sup> Veblen's classic account of 'conspicuous consumption' makes a related observation, proposing that the consumption of certain goods is demonstrative of one's distance from the requirements of productive labour and hence an indicator of status in this way.<sup>440</sup> The extent to which consumptive choices operate as a resource for the establishment of social order is perhaps most thoroughly described though by Pierre Bourdieu's reckoning of taste in terms of 'distinction.'<sup>441</sup> Taste, for Bourdieu, is not individual, but cultural, a classifier that emerges from and functions to instantiate class distinctions.

'Ethical consumption,' as a proposal and a possibility, through its designation of a 'good' to be achieved through consumption, is undeniably caught up in the drawing of social distinctions. Where there is 'good' consumption, there must also be 'bad' consumption, and this distinction is sometimes made along the parameters of taste and class. Plastic shopping bags and excess packaging for instance have been subject to a certain 'vulgarification' of late, whereby more 'wholesome' cotton bags containing unpackaged products have been culturally and aesthetically elevated in terms of both 'ethics' and 'good taste.'<sup>442</sup>

In the blog material on which this chapter draws, class is continually manifest in discussion – sometimes the explicit topic of comment (for instance in the recognition that 'ethical' products may be more expensive and thus unattainable for some),<sup>443</sup> and popularly, (as was illustrated by my earlier reference to Monbiot's 'soap with bits of leaves in it' scepticism) – critique of ethical consumers may be articulated along the lines of perceived class affiliations and the varying styles of consumption with which these are associated. Yet, despite the various academic, empirical, and popular modes in which an argument along such lines might be mobilised, I think it important that, in the context of the present discussion, greater pause be lent to considering what is at stake in the variously employed practices of

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<sup>439</sup> Douglas and Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. p.36

<sup>440</sup> Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*.

<sup>441</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*.

<sup>442</sup> For a nuanced discussion of the social life of plastic bags see, Gay Hawkins, "Plastic Bags: Living with Rubbish," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>443</sup> See, in Part II of this chapter, discussion on this point in terms of an 'ethical premium' to be paid.

ethical consumption and, in particular, how exactly these may be understood to ‘do’ ethics.

My use of this particular terminology is significant here inasmuch as it captures important theoretical differences between classical approaches to consumption in which social identity is symbolic, something you may be said to ‘have,’ and more contemporaneous accounts of identity as something you are always ‘doing,’ that which is in-process and conferred in practice.<sup>444</sup> The problem, in the present context, with too heavy an emphasis on the symbolic, is that it functions to simply collapse ethical claims onto peremptorily-classified social identities. Ultimately therefore, it is impossible to take seriously the claims being empirically made by proponents of ethical consumption and those contributors to *Ethical Living*. The symbolic expression of identity through consumption, is of course not prima facie at odds with what is ‘ethical,’ (as is would be implied by over-emphasising the classed nature of ethical consumption). Rather, a carefully conducted exploration of how it is that the ethical is co-articulated with the self and the social through the medium of the market is required.

One social characterisation that is of course particularly notable given the empirical remit of the present chapter is that of ‘*Guardian* reader.’ Yet, a case in point, even this (definitional) social identity is remarkably unstable on the blogsite. Carrying with it notions of liberal-mindedness and middle-classness (the term often evoked as a popular critique of these attributes), *Guardian* readers themselves are of course readily aware of this characterisation and bring to it their own reflexive critiques and subversions.

In a discussion of ethical meat production for instance, one blog respondent comments that the types of (supposedly free-range) farming practices being lauded as ‘ethical’ in the blog post are in fact not so, and would instead “no doubt offend the average *Guardian* reader.”<sup>445</sup> The reflexive recognition of what is expected by the ‘average *Guardian* reader’ functions here to make problematic any easy recourse to

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<sup>444</sup> See for example, Lisa Adkins, *Revisions: Gender and Sexuality in Late Modernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002).

<sup>445</sup> DC, in Bibi van der Zee, *Cooking Pots Ready for a Return to Rabbit* (24th October, 2008 [cited January 27th 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/oct/20/week>

uncritical approaches to the question of to whom the right to determine what is finally 'ethical' might belong.

As our consumptive decisions become, increasingly, instances for self-scrutiny, the self is made an object of reflection in these terms, and thus more than just an instance for marking social distinction, the making of the entire 'self' is at stake in our changing ways of living.<sup>446</sup> As Gay Hawkins observes, '[t]o be a person now means cultivating particular modes of reflexivity. It means developing special ethical techniques and capacities.'<sup>447</sup> This is not to deny the ever-present "play of power in subjectivity,"<sup>448</sup> however it is to caution against an account of ethical consumption too over-determined by 'distinction.' The proposal that the choices of the less affluent are determined only by Bourdieu's "choice of the necessary"<sup>449</sup> (or by necessity) is, after all, ultimately a very problematic one with regard to the matter of policing participation in this contemporary market 'ethical.'

Consumers are, for the most part, remarkably adept at negotiating the many contradictions that consumption entails to the best of their inclinations and means. Take, by means of example, the following comment contributed in response to a blog post that specifically raises the question of privilege with regard to the purchase of organic food.<sup>450</sup>

Bw

Apr 24 08, 12:34pm

I prefer to get veg from the market when I have time, but they don't bother labelling it as organic or not, that's a supermarket thing. 'Organic' veg in the supermarket looks exactly the same as regular veg but costs about three times as much, so I'm not tempted, it looks like a marketing scam to me. Especially as I can make very nice meals with the normal stuff.

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<sup>446</sup> Hawkins, "Plastic Bags: Living with Rubbish." p.11

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., p.13

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., p.12

<sup>449</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*.

<sup>450</sup> Kevin Anderson, *Is Organic Food Only for the Privileged?* (23rd April, 2008 [cited 4th February 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicalivingblog/2008/apr/23/organicfoodonlyforthepriv>.

I know there's great local produce where my mum lives in Dorset, but you have to pay through the nose for it cos it's cool and trendy.<sup>451</sup>

Ascriptions of consumer 'knowingness and reflexive playfulness of course tread a dangerous line. It does not follow that you are 'free' to make any choice you like simply on the basis of not being entirely bewildered by the world of consumptive choices in which you may find yourself.<sup>452</sup> Uneven opportunities for participation in practices such as ethical consumption certainly exist, I am not attempting to deny this here. My point is only that this 'unevenness' is not always wholly predictable or subject to a rigidly pre-defined framework.

### **From Fluffy Bunnies to Dirty Nappies – What Counts as *Ethical Living*?**

An additional consideration that arises with regard to an overly-determined relationship between consumption and social identity is that in placing too much emphasis on the symbolic function of goods,<sup>453</sup> we may resultantly overlook the *material* nature of these. Much contemporary research on consumer culture has proposed a certain 'postmodern' dematerialisation of goods and a supposedly attendant aestheticisation of consumer life.<sup>454</sup> This suggestion is perhaps at its most extreme in Jean Baudrillard's claim that we no longer consume things, only signs.<sup>455</sup> By contrast however, as even the most cursory glance across the topics of discussion on *Ethical Living* reveals, things, objects, and material practices themselves are very much the daily matter of ethical consumption.

In order to further investigate this tension here, the present section will explore the way in which 'things' themselves are understood, deployed, and manipulated in the course of the blogged conversations. An emphasis on consumer

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<sup>451</sup> BW, in Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997). p.169

<sup>453</sup> Jean Baudrillard takes this emphasis on the symbolic function of goods to its most extreme, see, Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).

<sup>454</sup> Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991).

<sup>455</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulations*.

culture as *material* as opposed to dematerialised has, I will suggest, particularly important implications in the context of ethical consumption insofar as this generates certain tensions around the ethicality of consumption itself (and in particular proposed over-consumption) as a mode of acting-in and being-in the world.

As I will go on to explain however, it is not the fact of ‘materiality’ per se that warrants special sociological interest in the present context. Where anthropological accounts such as that of Douglas and Isherwood emphasise the materiality of all culture, and approach consumer culture as one form of material culture wherein, they observe, everyday objects carry cultural meanings,<sup>456</sup> the ensuing analysis of blogged ‘ethical life’ will suggest that herein ‘materiality’ is engaged very much in terms of potential. Or, in other words, in terms of what, practically and affectively speaking, things ‘do.’

Although this observation concurs with recent STS approaches to the discussion of objects which have variously sought to demonstrate their practical, technical, and social ‘entanglement,’ I am also attempting to go beyond the ‘fact’ of this observation in order to understand how new types of ethical relations coalesce and are practiced or ‘done.’ Practically speaking, in the following sections, this will entail attempting to detail how, on the *Ethical Living* blogsite, an array of objects, practices, techniques, and understandings are more (or less) coherently rendered under the rubric of the ‘ethical’ in the process of being introduced or implicated in online discussion. This will not entail the attempt to draw up an exhaustive catalogue of these things (this task of course would be extensive and well outside the remit of this chapter), rather the question can be approached in a way that seeks to enable a closer attention to how, within a consumptive context, different types of material ‘ethical’ relations come to be achieved.

### The Stuff of Ethics

In line with its difference from the *Environment* blog already detailed in a previous section, the *Ethical Living* posts submitted by staff bloggers, though wide

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<sup>456</sup> Douglas and Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. p. 51

ranging in actual topic, typically concern the kind of matters which are subject to daily domestic consideration. As such, food, transport, household consumables, and domestic energy technologies are topics of discussion that frequently reoccur. A parade of familiar and often very mundane household items and domestic practices become, in this way, contentious flashpoints around which impassioned debate often erupts.

Some of these, unsurprisingly, occupy almost by now, the status of 'usual suspect.' The relative merit of free-range and/or organic chicken, for instance, makes an appearance on multiple occasions on the blog and in the ensuing comments over the course of 2008. A January 10th, 2008 post is headlined, "Can meat ever be described as 'ethical' and would you pay extra for it? Alison Benjamin enters the free-range chicken debate,"<sup>457</sup> while a Christmas spin on the topic asks a similar question of turkey, "Will your turkey be organic this year? Are you saving money by cutting back on expensively reared meat this Christmas?"<sup>458</sup> On the transport front, car-share schemes<sup>459</sup> and cycling<sup>460</sup> are discussed in terms of their ethical credentials on more than one occasion. Highly energy consumptive household appliances, such as tumble dryers and boilers, also come in for their fair share of attention.<sup>461</sup>

Of significance here is that blog postings such as these make their address to ethics via the very material substrate of consumer objects and practices, and the attendant affective consequences of this. To elaborate, take by means of extended

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<sup>457</sup> Alison Benjamin, *Can Meat Ever Be Described as 'Ethical' and Would You Pay Extra for It?* (January 10th, 2008 [cited November 4th 2008]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/jan/07/week>.

<sup>458</sup> Bibi van der Zee, *Will Your Turkey Be Organic This Year?* (18th December, 2008 [cited 15th January 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/dec/15/week>.

<sup>459</sup> Adharanand Finn, *Green Worker: Give Your Colleagues a Lift* (2nd June, 2008 [cited 16th January 2009]); available from

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/jun/02/despitetherecentrisein.>; Nik Berg, *Petrolheads Take to Life in the Slow Lane* (1st July, 2008 [cited January 16th 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/jul/01/petrolheadstaketolifeinth>.

<sup>460</sup> Adharanand Finn, *Is a Motorised Bicycle Ethical?* (12th May, 2008 [cited 15th January 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/may/12/week>.

<sup>461</sup> See, Leo Hickman, *Ten Ways to Save Money by Going Green* (3rd June, 2008 [cited 18th January 2009]); available from

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/jun/03/tenwaystosavemoneybygoin.>, for a discussing of tumble dryers, for instance. Or, Carolyn Fry, *Tread Lightly: Install a Condenser Boiler* (23rd May, 2008 [cited January 15th 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/may/19/week>.

example, staff blogger Bibi van der Zee's consideration of rabbit as ethical food stuff. Initially proposed on the basis of its supposedly 'free-range' existence and "low-carbon footprint,"<sup>462</sup> van der Zee writes:

Rabbits live wild, spend their days bouncing happily around the hills, eating grass, discussing who'll play Bigwig in *Watership Down II*, and generally living life to the full until the rabbiters come out. Their carbon footprint? Just the farting and the exhaust fumes of their killers, I should think.<sup>463</sup>

Having begun the post thus, with some enthusiasm for the potential 'ethical materiality' of the rabbit, van der Zee subsequently sets off to the local butcher in order to investigate further. Once at the butcher however, the stuff of the rabbit itself presents to the author a new dimension of ethical quandary – the rabbit, very simply, is both too whole and too fluffy.

They sell them in my local butcher, hanging by their hind legs from a butcher's hook at the back, skin and bunny ears still on.

Look, I really wish that I was like Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Jamie Oliver and raised my own pigs and scratched their backs ... before slitting their throats, but the reality is that all the meat I've ever bought has been skinned and ready for the pot.

But not rabbit. This is how the buying bit unfolds: I ask for the rabbit, the butcher reaches it down and then grabs the cleaver to his right. Wham! Off comes the little bunny head. Wham! Wham! Off come the little bunny feet. Whuuzzt! Off comes - oh my god - the lovely soft bunny fur. Then chop, chop, chop, the whole bloody lot is swept into a bag and tied up and handed over the counter, the butcher still chatting away about how the rabbit market is moving as I try to keep a polite expression on my face.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> van der Zee, *Cooking Pots Ready for a Return to Rabbit*.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

The butcher's rapid, cleaver-wielding dispatch of an entire bunny into a bloody plastic bag is an ethically important moment here. It is the 'Wham, Wham, Wham, Whuuzzt,' of the butcher's knife on fur and bone that affectively confront the writer and offend her "disciplined forms of sensuousness"<sup>465</sup> – her sensibilities – in the process making problematic her initial suggestion that rabbit might be an 'ethical' meat. The physical actions of the butcher, the very 'stuff' of the rabbit itself, the process from whole to plastic bag, disqualifies, for the writer, the ethical relation otherwise materially conferred by free-range field living.

Van der Zee's ethics of 'furriness' do not go uncontested in the blog stream though. Evidently, this is only one means by which the material and affective stuff of the rabbit may come to matter ethically. One reader, for instance, comments: "It's never made much sense to me that some herbivores are okay to eat and other herbivores are not. The whole reaction to seeing it with the fur on is also mystifying."<sup>466</sup>

Other comments contribute in a different way by enthusiastically providing rabbit recipe ideas, "*Rabbit Dijonnaise*," from one reader, "delicious, it was, braised with a creamy mustard sauce and tender as a lover's kiss,"<sup>467</sup> and "rabbit curry"<sup>468</sup> from another. In this way, van der Zee's affective displeasure is ethically countered by the pleasure of others expressed in equally material terms. This example serves to highlight how the 'ethical' is imbricated with the affective and corporeal, as well as attesting to a certain ubiquity of ethical concern. The 'ethics' at play here are not overarching "command moralities,"<sup>469</sup> abstracted and finite dictates of moral right and wrong decreed from above or elsewhere. They emerge everyday *in practice and of material*, subsisting in disgust and pleasure, texture, colour, taste and sound.

This is not to claim that ethical consumption does not entail certain prohibitions, structured interdictions concerning what one should or should not do, should or should not buy. These, of course, proliferate, and spring easily to mind around issues such as sweat-shop labour to name just one, (the sections of Part II of

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<sup>465</sup> Hawkins, "Plastic Bags: Living with Rubbish." p.15

<sup>466</sup> A, in Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> CW, in Ibid.

<sup>468</sup> D, in Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Hawkins, "Plastic Bags: Living with Rubbish." p.8

this chapter entitled ‘Buying Right and not Buying Wrong,’ and ‘Negative Purchasing,’ discuss some of the formal strategies of ethical purchasing in some detail with regard to the notion of market ‘choice’). What I am attempting to draw attention to for now though is how, in the blog material at least, ethics does not substantially subsist in uncontraveneable commands or stringent doctrines; rather, it is that which is situationally construed and dynamically defined in practice.

Another way in which this is manifest in the blogstream is through unpredictability. Much of the life of the blogsite is to be found in the direction that the ensuing comment stream takes, and the often very intricate and involved conversations that develop. These conversations however, rarely unfold in straightforward or expected ways. The following section will examine in some detail a blog post and accompanying comment stream that is exemplary in this regard, further elaborating the account of a practical and material ethics of ‘doing’ that I have sought to build thus far.

### The Ethical Mutability of Things In-Use

As I have already mentioned in previously having described the form of the *Ethical Living* blog, it is frequently the case that the initial post contributed by the staff blogger is designed to provoke opinions, encouraging the reader to comment. The wide-ranging familiarity of some of the blog topics described above (consumables, domestic energy, and so forth) may therefore be understood to stem from the desire to ensure a mutual frame of reference between blogger and reader, starting a conversation that, for most, will have some resonance in their daily lives. This seeming conventionality of reference with regard to what are popularly considered to be the typical ‘topics’ and ‘objects’ of concern within ethical consumption is, however, frequently subverted and made highly unconventional in the course of often unpredictable discussion streams.

A notable example of this kind of unpredictability emerges in response to a (rather conventional) offering from staff blogger Leo Hickman entitled ‘Ten ways to

save money by going green.<sup>470</sup> True to its title, this blog post provides a catalogue of supposedly money saving 'green' tips, from using video-conferencing and car clubs, to joining a food co-operative, or swapping from disposable to cloth nappies for children. Accompanied by a picture of Hickman's cloth-nappied daughter (reproduced below), it is this last point that attracts the most amount of attention in the ensuing fifty-nine comments, and thus largely shapes the blogged discussion.

Figure 4: Header Photo accompanying June 3rd, 2008 *Ethical Living* post



Leo Hickman trials cloth nappies on his daughter. Photograph: Graham Turner

Discussion regarding the ethical merit of cloth versus disposable nappies does take some reasonably familiar forms in the ensuing comments – there is, on the one hand, the need to wash and dry cloth nappies, using therefore detergents and perhaps a tumble dryer (this being labour and resource intensive and therefore potentially expensive). Cotton cultivation, so some point out, also has attendant problems including high water and chemical use. On the other hand though, cloth nappies do not contribute to landfill, and they lack packaging and contaminating plastics.<sup>471</sup> Like in the preceding rabbit example, it is possible to see here how it is

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<sup>470</sup> Hickman, *Ten Ways to Save Money by Going Green*.

<sup>471</sup> See various contributors in blog stream, *Ibid*. Especially LW and S.

through the very ‘doings’ of the materiality of the nappy that claims to its ethicality (or otherwise) are staked – from the very cotton fibres of which it is woven, to the kinds of material practices (washing, drying, and so forth) that its use entails.

This particular conversation takes an interesting turn though when ethical attention shifts from the nappy on the baby’s bottom to unexpectedly focus on the material being of the baby itself. On the proffered basis that ‘existence’ necessarily involves depletive consumption and that the planet can only take so much of this, one contributor makes the following controversial observations:

Q

June 3 08, 10:13pm

An article bemoaning risks to the planet illustrated with a picture of the author's child has zero credibility.<sup>472</sup>

Q:

June 3 08, 1:57pm

Educated Westerners deciding to have fewer children would really be a good start, and would have an instantaneous effect of local and global consumption.<sup>473</sup>

These comments, perhaps unsurprisingly, provoke in the ensuing blog stream a protracted and at times quite heated debate in which not having children is lauded by some contributors as the only virtuous response to resource scarcity – the initial respondent further suggesting for instance that the accompanying discussion of cloth nappies is itself symptomatic of the need for “guilty breeders to find ecologically conscionable ways to justify their continuing over-consumption.”<sup>474</sup> Those rushing to agree with this stance proffer their own childlessness as evidence of a life-style that is ethical in terms of having a low impact: “I have less children [therefore] I have

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<sup>472</sup> Q, in Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Q, in Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Q, in Ibid.

done less damage than you.”<sup>475</sup> Equally however, the apparent absurdity of this stance is quickly highlighted by others, one pointing to the obvious by simply noting, “I’m a bit puzzled as to the sustainability of that as a solution. Probably good for the environment, not so good for humankind.”<sup>476</sup>

Elsewhere in this lengthy comment stream, observant readers shift their attention onto Hickman himself, commenting on the extent to which the blogger may be seen to practice what he preaches. Noticing the large stainless steel refrigerator in the background of the header photograph (above), one respondent offers up their own money-saving green recommendation, reflexively commenting: “Don’t buy a super-huge, energy guzzling, but oh so cool stainless steel fridge freezer (oops).”<sup>477</sup> Following this lead, another reader comments: “If Hickman really is using eco-nappies and isn’t using a tumble dryer, how come his kitchen isn’t hung with damp, steaming terry cotton?”<sup>478</sup> A further respondent adds to the (seemingly deepening) absurdity with the suggestion that “the nappies are probably drying over the back of the vast fridge-freezer. A green way of using the wasted heat given off ... unless it has escaped via the [open] back door in the photo.”<sup>479</sup>

Contentious objects proliferate in the preceding exchanges – what begins as a debate about nappies, becomes one about appliances, from the ‘cool’ materials from which they may be made, to the potentially useful heat-giving panels on their back, from the kitchen door (open or closed), to the crawling baby, metabolizing precious sugars and emitting noxious carbon dioxide with every breath. This example, while somewhat extreme with regard to content, is however not unusual with regards to the mutability of ‘ethics’ posited. Ethically speaking, ‘things’ are never only ‘things,’ they are the materials that they consist and the practices of which they are part or entail. ‘Doing,’ is paramount and, for this reason, ‘ethical consumption’ resists stable definition.

This is not to suggest, in the other extreme, that what falls under the banner of ‘ethical consumption’ is in any way random or indiscriminate. On the contrary,

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<sup>475</sup> C, in Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> R, in Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> LW, in Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> E, in Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Ro, in Ibid.

the blogsite itself here may actually be understood to function as a mechanism of definitional attention in many regards. *Ethical Living* does most often address topics around which a degree of ‘ethical’ awareness already exists – in this way ensuring, as I have mentioned, that the topics addressed ‘matter,’ so to speak, to the browsing readership.<sup>480</sup> Equally, however, the actual process of blogging about a particular issue under the heading ‘*Ethical Living*’ can act to recast the object or practice being discussed in ‘ethical’ terms in a way in which it may not previously have been.

Definitional finality is resisted though, and the boundaries of attention shifting, in the case the mutable, material, and practical consumer ethics that this section has described.<sup>481</sup> Drawing from the blogosphere a range of objects and practices both more and less familiar to us in terms of ethics (from rabbits to babies to fridge-freezers), I have attempted to illustrate here how materiality and material practices themselves are ethically imbued – the very ‘stuff’ of ethics as contemporarily enacted in the mode of consumption.

So, to return to the account of ‘material culture’ with which this discussion began, it is possible to see how, as a means via which to describe current practices of ethical consumption, this recognition simply does not go far enough. To the extent that *Ethical Living* is concerned with material relationships between people and things it does of course operationally evince the recognition that ours is a material culture. Critically however, this observation serves only as a starting point. As the

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<sup>480</sup> I think it worth emphasising that the blogsite in question (as do most) operates in a competitive market. The *Guardian* is a newspaper after all, and even in its online version aims to be ‘sold’ or subscribed. The amount of net traffic to traverse blogs such as *Ethical Living* function inevitably in this context as measure of relevance and interest, which subsequently translates into profits in the form of advertising revenue. This market-based dynamic of attention is dually reliant on ‘prior’ public attention (publicity) as it were, but also very much part of the mechanism of designating, and re-ordering the variety of attention that may be brought to bear on a given matter.

<sup>481</sup> As was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the aim here has of course never been to arrive at a final definition of what ethical consumption is, or even a definition of what it ‘is’ for this particular set of blog contributors. Rather, as I have hoped to demonstrate, this is precisely what is resisted by the mutability of ethics as/in material practices that I’ve attempted to elaborate. Even the blog form itself can be understood to functionally contribute to this definitional impossibility inasmuch as it works reflexively so as while, on the one hand, it is inevitably involved in a kind of continuing definitional activity, on the other, the impossibility of success is guaranteed as internal definitional tensions are repeatedly brought to the fore, acting as the main driver of continued blog responses.

blogged discussions introduced in this section have demonstrated, objects, things, and practices are mediators of social relationships; that this is the case though is not the end of the story. Further than this, it is the nature of any given object or materiality itself that comes, in the present case, to ethically matter in terms of the 'how' or what may be 'done.' It is the very matter of objects themselves, as well as the material relationships and forms of practice in which they are implicated and employed, which may function in ethical terms. The rabbit's habitation in a grassy field, to recall a preceding example, is important, so it's very 'rabbit-ness,' its wholeness, and fluffiness, the fact of its "little bunny head" and "little bunny feet."

Yet, in underscoring the importance of the 'object' so to speak, it is not towards any straightforward championing of this approach that I aim. In this regard, my point here need be distinguished from one being made with some frequency in STS concerning the sociological 'status' of objects. Herein, adopting an object-centred focus, much work has sought to underscore the material 'entanglement' of people, objects, technologies and so forth, presenting this as a research outcome or conclusion as it were. What then results is a normative sociological valorisation of entanglement and object-centeredness as something alternative, or subaltern, something that requires a sociologist to point it out inasmuch as this understanding is not thought to arise 'inside' public discourse.<sup>482</sup>

The story I am trying to tell, by contrast, does not aim to end with a description of the extent to which 'ethical consumption' is always a socio-material enterprise. Instead, this is exactly what is taken for granted at the outset. As has been evident in the examples taken from *Ethical Living*, the material nature of contributor's concerns are certainly not opaquely or obscurely so. This chapter's focus on the material practice of bloggers and respondents then, emerges not from any desire to specifically endorse or promote this as a style of critical engagement. Rather, inasmuch as 'stuff' (and what you can do with it) forms the substrate of 'ethical living,' it is through further attention to this that an exploration of the reconfigured 'ethical' of 'ethical consumption' must proceed.

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<sup>482</sup> See for elaboration along similar lines, Noortje Marres, "Testing Powers of Engagement: Green Living Experiments, the Ontological Turn and the Undoability of Involvement," *European Journal of Social Theory* 12 (2009).

Beyond acting as rejoinder to certain consumption literatures, the significance of this observation in the present context still requires much elaboration. To this end, the second part of this chapter will take the account of consumptive ethics as material 'doing' established thus far and explore this in its natural habitat so to speak – the competitive marketplace.

## Chapter Five

□

### Part II

#### **Ethical Consumption as Market Practice**

As the majority of our consumptive relationships are enacted in the mode of the *consumer* and in the context of *markets*, a pertinent question arises regarding how we may begin to treat the claim that an ethical relation may be established therein. ‘Consumption,’ as it is conjoined with an ‘ethical’ directive, immediately presents, both theoretically and practically speaking, a number of apparent problems and paradoxes. The (rationally-acting) individual consumer seems to bump up uncomfortably against a collectively construed ‘ethical’ that eschews self-interest as primary motivator. Similarly, the reigning supremacy of market ‘choice,’ appears to quash the possibility of an alternative ‘care.’ This second part of Chapter Five will seek to address tensions such as these, elaborating them through analysis of the blog material. What stands to be developed in the process is an alternative approach to understanding ‘markets,’ one which witnesses the instability of their supposed structuring dichotomies, and on the basis of this unravelling, may ultimately lead away from long-enduring abstractions and towards a more textured account of our consumptive lives.

Previous chapters of this thesis, in particular Chapter Two, have already touched on some of the theoretical paradoxes associated with the proposition that ethics might be ‘done’ through the market. The self-interested intent of market exchange has typically been understood to be anathematic to classical accounts of ethics which refuse to allow self-interest as a motivator.<sup>483</sup> Any market-ethics defined on the basis of this understanding is therefore a necessarily compromised one.

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<sup>483</sup> See, for discussion, Sen, *On Ethics and Economics*. p.81 Or discussion of Sen in my Chapter Two.

In the present context, the assumptions under which an address to ethics made through the market constitutes some sort of failure may be usefully re-examined via attention to Annemarie Mol's recently articulated distinction between 'choice' and 'care.' Contrasting what she terms a 'logic of choice' with that of 'care,' Mol suggests that there are certain fundamental incompatibilities between these.<sup>484</sup> 'Choice,' in its prevailing Western evocation, is a celebrated ideal of individual autonomy – it is apparently through our ability to choose (often from an array of choices offered in a competitive marketplace) that we may express our individuality, and even exercise our personal freedom. The demand that we make judgments, that we *choose* from a range of options, places emphasis on the fact that some choices are better than others, and as such, the ability to rationally adjudicate between these is of primary significance. Familiar from the discipline of economics, where this description is entailed in the previously introduced figure of *homo economicus* (the rationally calculating actor of economic decision making), choice appears to set us at a distance, cordoned off from, or 'outside' that thing which we are making a choice regarding.<sup>485</sup> In these ways, 'choice' may be understood to fundamentally underlie our notions of our own centred and agentic selfhood – that on the basis of which we understand the ways we may be-in, act-in, and effect the world.

As Mol seeks to demonstrate in the context of patient care, the flip side of the supposed autonomy of choice is that we may become increasingly governable via this conferral of individual responsibility. Choice, as been most thoroughly demonstrated utilising Foucault's notion of 'governmentality,'<sup>486</sup> is also an obligation which functionally operates to constitute us as particular kinds of governable subjects. The figure of the 'ethical' consumer, charged with the self-

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<sup>484</sup> It should be noted that Mol is writing in a different and specific context – that of health care provision for diabetic patients. In introducing her work here it is not my intention to undermine the strategic suitability of her conclusions in her chosen context. Moreover, Mol does specifically emphasise the non-generalisable and contingent character of her analysis, recognising that, elsewhere, the choice-care relationship may not necessarily be one of mutual exclusion. It is not specifically against Mol's thesis that this chapter presents its analysis, instead the 'paradigmatic' choice-care division, as clearly articulated in Mol's work in particular, is employed only as a structuring platform. Mol, *The Logic of Care: Health and the Problem of Patient Choice*. p.74.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., p.81

<sup>486</sup> See discussion of this in Chapter Two.

monitoring of their purchase decisions in line with this intent, is perhaps especially open to a reading in such terms – “people consume particular conceptions of what it is to be ethical – ones that turn upon notions of accepting one’s responsibilities and obligations,”<sup>487</sup> one study concludes in this vein.

The possibility of ‘true’ care, therefore, and according to Mol, is elided by the dominating logic of choice. ‘Care,’ she supposes, can not be achieved via choice, but grows instead out of sustained and collaborative efforts to “attune knowledge” to the everyday specificities of “complex lives.”<sup>488</sup> However, in the case of ethical consumption at least, this conclusion presents something of a conundrum. How can we take seriously here any ethical claims specifically articulated in a market context and supposedly enacted via a logic of choice? Can ethical relations (such as care) subsist in market-based practices, or does this suggestion mistake ‘responsibilisation’ for ‘ethicalisation?’ The following discussion will investigate these questions by introducing some of the formal strategies of ‘ethical’ choice-making discernable in the practice of ethical consumption. As will be seen however, in practice many difficulties in reliably demarking ‘choice’ and ‘care’ inevitably emerge.

### **Buying Right (and not Buying Wrong)**

By means of beginning this discussion, it is useful to recall the CSR business case reasoning – that a company may ‘do well by doing good.’ One of the ways in which this statement functions is on the basis of the understanding that consumers will actively choose to buy products that have been responsibly produced. For the consumer to uphold their end of the CSR bargain, it is required that they exercise their *choice* at the point of sale, opting to purchase one product over another on the basis of its understood ethical credentials.

In ethical consumption parlance though, this practice of ethics through the exercise of market choice is articulated using a different set of terms. Choosing to

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<sup>487</sup> Clive Barnett et al., "Consuming Ethics: Articulating the Subjects and Spaces of Ethical Consumption," *Antipode* 37, no. 1 (2005). p.42

<sup>488</sup> Mol, *The Logic of Care: Health and the Problem of Patient Choice*.

buy 'more ethical' products over 'less ethical' or 'unethical' ones is known to ethical consumers as 'positive buying,'<sup>489</sup> and understands money to function as a "vote"<sup>490</sup> which can be cast with every purchase decision or shopping trip. A series of *Ethical Living* blog posts are assembled explicitly around this very notion, urging readers to join an initiative to *Tread Lightly* (as it is titled on the site) by making "small" positive changes to their purchasing behaviour that "that added together will make a big difference."<sup>491</sup>

This strategy is also propounded in a June 6th, 2008 blogpost by Jessica Aldred entitled 'Is there any point in going green?' Accompanied by a photo of a poster that provocatively reads 'Why bother?', in this post Aldred quotes the writer and environmentalist Michael Pollan as he presents a case to why consumers should in fact bother to buy 'positively':

You will set an example to other people, and if enough people bother, they can influence behavioural change on a wider scale. Consciousness will be raised and may even change. Markets for consumers with these new values will expand and prosper. New moral imperatives will become established.<sup>492</sup>

This belief in the effectiveness of a market-moving consumer-led ethics is echoed by some in the comment stream. Notably one reader submits the following plea as an imperative to ethical consumerism via 'buying right':

EH

June 6 08 3:59pm

Why bother? Because it could be you. Yes, you could be the one whose small change finally removes the log jam; the straw that breaks the camel's back. Change

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<sup>489</sup> Ethical Consumer, 'Why buy ethically?' <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/ShoppingEthically/WhyBuyEthically.aspx> [assessed 13 January, 2008]

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

<sup>491</sup> Jessica Aldred, *Is There Any Point Going Green?* (6th June, 2008 [cited January 27th 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/jun/02/week>.

<sup>492</sup> Pollan, Michael, quoted in Ibid. Michael Pollan is the author of a 2008 book entitled 'In Defense of Food.', Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (Chicago: Thorndike Press, 2008).

does not occur in a linear fashion. It comes in a series of quantum leaps and tends to flip from one state to another when the critical point is reached. As I said, it could be you that finally flips the switch and that is why you should bother.<sup>493</sup>

The ‘logic of market choice’ approach to practicing ethical consumption reaches its fullest realisation though, not just in the suggestion that you must exercise your spending choice particularly and carefully in order to consume ethically – but that you must also spend more than you otherwise would in order to do so. Often implicit, and sometimes very explicit, within both business-case and ethical consumer understandings of ethical consumption is that ‘ethical’ goods may cost more than their (‘unethical’ or ‘less-ethical’?) equivalents. As such, in a straightforward reading at least, an *ethical premium* of sorts stands to be paid by so-inclined consumers.

In its most archetypal form, this notion is manifest in a question asked numerous times on *Ethical Living* of items such as organic chicken – “can it *really* cost £13?”<sup>494</sup> Inquiring as to why anyone would pay this much for a chicken, and answering this question for herself and others, staff blogger Alison Benjamin writes that, “[i]t’s not that I particularly care about chickens or get a warm glow knowing that my dinner once roamed semi-freely in the fields.”<sup>495</sup> Instead, for Benjamin, the justification of this extra ‘ethical’ expenditure comes in the form of knowledge regarding the types of farming practices to which what she refers to as “processed chickens”<sup>496</sup> are subject. “If people see what really constitutes their dinner,” she comments, “they may not be so willing to feed it to their children.”<sup>497</sup>

Here, as in the first part of this chapter, we can locate ethical significance in the actual materiality of the object in question and in the material practices through which it is constituted. Benjamin’s concern is with what actually ‘constitutes’ her

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<sup>493</sup> *EH*, in *Ibid.*

<sup>494</sup> Bibi van der Zee, *Open Season on Ethical Consumers* (24th July, 2007 [cited 3rd November 2008]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2007/jul/24/openseasononethicalconsume>. (Added italics)

<sup>495</sup> Benjamin, *Can Meat Ever Be Described as 'Ethical' and Would You Pay Extra for It?*

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*

dinner, as well as the various practices entailed in that constitution, referred to here as ‘processing.’ Interestingly and in addition, in this particular instance of ethical ‘mattering,’ a couple of other considerations are also brought explicitly to bear – firstly, the cost of the chicken, and secondly, who it is intended to feed.

The higher price of the chicken itself is understood to materially constitute its enhanced ‘ethicality’ via freedom from mass-processing, but this status is particularly significant, justified one might say, because the chicken is to be eaten by one’s children. *Care* for one’s children here hinges on the ethically constituted materiality of the chicken itself, yet this very thing is conferred as a function price via economically differentiated farming and processing practices.

Care, though, is not the only thing to be bound in a justificatory way to the paying of a higher purchase price for supposedly more ethical goods. Continuing down the comment stream stemming from Benjamin’s initial post, a range of differing and creative approaches to justifying the extra cost of ‘ethical’ foods may be observed:

M:

Jan 14 08, 11:48pm

It may be more expensive to buy an organic or free range chick, but if you use all the leftovers for (i) cold the next night, (ii) a chicken pesto pasta another night, and more importantly, (iii) use all the fridge leftovers, e.g. old carrots, onions etc to make a fantastic stock (and reduce wastage), then the extra meals it generates actually works out to be great value. A healthy bargain indeed!<sup>498</sup>

Greater financial outlay here prompts a more complete utilisation of the product than may have otherwise been made. The additional value theoretically reaped leads this reader (counter to expectations) to subsequently proclaim a bargain – and a ‘healthy’ one at that. Thus, in this comment, high cost is ethically linked to both the reduction of waste, (and therefore actually to the saving of money), and even to health (arguable a form of self-care).

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<sup>498</sup> M, in Ibid.

Another practical response frequently found in the *Ethical Living* blogstreams to the often higher price attached to ethical products entails a kind of strategic buying accomplished via a cost versus (ethical) benefit analysis. This well demonstrated in a contribution by staff blogger Kevin Anderson as he writes:

I couldn't always afford to buy organic. It easily doubled my food costs so I had to buy organic strategically. What would give the earth and family farmers the most bang for my buck?<sup>499</sup>

Respondents to this blogpost are quick to echo Anderson's sentiments, supplying their own strategies for consuming as ethically as possible but factoring in their own priorities, for example:

CC:

Apr 23 08, 11:05pm

As a recent convert to organic food, I buy strategically, and factor in how much it costs, how far it's travelled and most importantly – taste!<sup>500</sup>

In this way, the well-being of others (in the form of Anderson's 'family farmers'), and the well-being of the self (via the pleasure of taste), both come to ethically figure in terms of 'getting the most bang for one's buck.' The choice to buy a more highly priced but perceivably ethical product then, is one that, as the preceding examples demonstrate, may be arrived at in various ways. Others, the self, pleasure, care, value, health, the environment, and even the whole 'earth' may factor as simultaneously ethical and economic considerations in the situated, everyday consumptive decisions of individual ethical consumers.

Economic downturn late-2008 (a result of the so-called 'credit-crunch') registers interestingly on the blogsite in the form of concern regarding people's continued ability to buy ethically. In this way, (albeit less explicitly than in the

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<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> CC, in Ibid.

preceding examples), the price premium that may be borne by ethical consumers is also acknowledged and referred to. For proponents of ethical consumption, and in particular the *Ethical Living* staff bloggers themselves, the suggestion that one might abandon ethical consumption due to financial constraint is greeted with much concern. In the following December posting for instance, van der Zee worries:

Will all the years of effort getting the message across to the public turn out to have been in vain now that we're all trying to save money? Will people start sneakily buying a £2 supermarket chicken where previously they would have made the trip to their local organic butcher?<sup>501</sup>

The image of stealthily bought chicken, while on the one hand very humorous, on the other is indicative of the way in which, through positing a 'right' choice, positive buying, and in particular the idea of an 'ethical premium,' may be seen to functionally designate two competing varieties of consumption – good consumption, and bad consumption. Concerned with the propensity of 'others' to sneak back to the supermarket, van der Zee's statement supports the findings made by John Connolly and Andrea Prothero in a study of 'green' consumers that notes how a separation between one's own (good) consumption and others (bad) consumption is frequently made.<sup>502</sup> This primarily results, the researchers claim, from a failure to ascribe the same degree of meaning to the consumptive choices of others as you do to your own.<sup>503</sup>

Such a dynamic may be called upon to explain the lengthy justifications of personal consumptive choice that are often to be found on the blog comment stream, and frequently deployed in order to counteract negative assumptions made by others. This dynamic is evident, for instance, in the following exchange occurring on *Ethical Living* in December 2008. Here, the initial respondent's suggestion that she intends

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<sup>501</sup> Bibi van der Zee, *My Green New Year's Resolutions* (31st December, 2008 [cited 12th January 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2008/dec/31/green-new-year-resolutions>.

<sup>502</sup> John Connolly and Andrea Prothero, "Green Consumption: Life-Politics, Risk and Contradictions," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8, no. 1 (2008). p.128

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*

to go back to using her car more than she had been doing due to the dangers associated with cycling is met with subtle critique from a subsequent responder who offers up their own cycling practice as preferable:

W

01 Jan 09, 5:29pm

...

This year, after so many near misses on my bike due to people texting while driving ... I've resolved to use cars more.

Mo

01 Jan 09, 6:05pm

It sounds like you really tried hard to go green. I encourage you to keep trying, where and when you can. ... What helps me is not giving a damn whether drivers are inconvenienced by my presence on the road. I have every right to be there and in the age of global heating, ever more so.

W

01 Jan 09, 6:18pm

...

Am I worth more to the green cause as a dead or damaged rider/walker?

Mo

01 Jan 09, 9:29pm

In my experience, trying to 'make yourself small' by squeezing to the side of the road only encourages drivers to cut you off or overtake you in a dangerous manner. I am out there wide enough so they can't squeeze past. It works!

W

02 Jan 09, 9:56pm

[Mo], whatever made you think I ride my bike in a 'small' way? Would I really have survived biking to work every day for over 10 years that way? I'm plenty wide with two panniers full of shopping and I ride the middle of the lane. I AM traffic. I'm not riding alongside traffic.

And for the record, I've been a vegan for 21 years. I've always grown my own fruit and veg organically. I chose to foster rather than increase the population myself. I gave up flying two years ago. Anything else I'm supposed to do while the rest of the western world uses up the oil driving to get plastic consumer crap from shopping malls?<sup>504</sup>

The suggestion made by Mo that presumed W's cycling practice to be "small," (and hence less 'ethical' in as much as a weak, rather than strong claim for cycling against motoring was understood to have been staked), provokes an indignant response in which W takes pains to both vindicate the cycling practice under question and extol the virtues of her own consumptive choices.

This final comment in particular structurally reinforces the 'good' versus 'bad' consumption couplet and reminds us that that 'positive buying' has a sister practice, but also natural opposite, in what is formally referred to in ethical consumption parlance as 'negative purchasing.'<sup>505</sup> Following the 'your pound is your vote' reasoning, by 'negative purchasing' or not buying certain objectionable products or services ('plastic consumer crap' broadly defined in the preceding example), you may be said to be casting your vote via the pound withheld.

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<sup>504</sup> Exchange between Mo and W, in van der Zee, *My Green New Year's Resolutions*.

<sup>505</sup> Ethical Consumer, 'Why buy ethically?'

<http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/ShoppingEthically/WhyBuyEthically.aspx> [assessed 13 January, 2008]

Another instance of this, from the many possible examples on *Ethical Living*, is entailed in Leo Hickman's question, "Is buying Zimbabwe produce supporting farmers or an evil dictator?"<sup>506</sup> Although Hickman does concede that there is "no certain way of knowing" the answer to this question, the prospect of negative purchasing is nonetheless considered as a means by which consumers might exercise their individual *choice* towards the achievement of ethical consumption.

This example, the previous, and others discussed in this section unanimously ascribe to the logic that markets may be moved on the basis that consumers buy right (positively) and abstain from buying wrong (negatively). As is particularly evident in the above cycling example though, this strategy problematically appears to shift the onus of corporate responsibility onto the individual consumer. W's indignant final statement could be called upon to sum-up this situation – here she provides a catalogue of her life told as a series of individual consumptive choices, ending this by volleying rhetorically back to her respondent with the question "Anything else *I'm* supposed to do...?"<sup>507</sup>

The italics and trailing ellipsis added to this quote though perhaps render it somewhat misleadingly. Individual consumer responsibility in the practice of ethical consumption makes no sense in isolation without reference to an 'other' (animate or inanimate) towards whom we wish to behave ethically, and to a collectivity with whom we act in order to achieve this, (especially evident when described as a need to 'move markets'). The fundamental claim made by proponents of ethical consumption is, after all, that consumer choices might be made with the benefits to the collective (over, but sometimes as well as) the individual in mind. Car-pooling or buying a bike might therefore be suggested on this basis even if this is a more inconvenient or personally risky means by which to make one's way to work.

Distinct from accounts which posit an economically rational and self-maximising individual consumer, ethical consumption actually suggests two types of collectivity – a collective to be benefited, and also, the need for collective action.

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<sup>506</sup> Leo Hickman, *Is Buying Zimbabwe Produce Supporting Farmers or an Evil Dictator?* (15th May, 2008 [cited January 14th 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/may/15/ethicalliving.lifeandhealth>.

<sup>507</sup> W in, van der Zee, *My Green New Year's Resolutions*. (Added italics)

While one person can ‘make a difference,’ it is suggested, this difference is most substantial when the actions of this one person combine with the similar actions of others. Consider the following comment, made in response to an aforementioned June 2008 blog post that expressly debates whether there is “any point going green,” given, for example, that “reducing your carbon footprint is pointless when someone else is happy to increase theirs?”<sup>508</sup>

Z

June 6 08 2:22pm

...I just wanted to let y'all know what I witnessed in Tesco on Dean Street in Soho the other day. A woman, (50s?) had each item in her basket placed in the clear fruit and veggie bags. EVEN A MAGAZINE?! At first when I saw her put through a pack of bleeding meat in one of the fruit bags I thought fair enough, but when I saw the already packaged cherry tomatoes go through and then the bagged up Grazia, I was dumbfounded. She subsequently put one small basket's worth of shopping in 2 tesco carrier bags which she then put in a re-useable shopping bag she'd brought with her!!!! I am so angry at myself for not saying anything...

I then angrily carried all of my shopping home in my arms, pockets and down my trousers...<sup>509</sup>

A number of interesting things are going on in this comment, significantly, for instance, the ethically contentious plastic bag changes status dynamically as it is used, or in practice. Placing bleeding meat in one is ‘fair enough,’ but using it to contain a magazine provokes outrage. For the purposes of the present discussion though, what is most notable is the shopper’s solution to the problem of another’s perceived over use – going personally without. The pocketing of one’s groceries in this case may therefore be understood to suggest that ‘ethical living,’ for the sake of oneself and others, is something which may only be successfully achieved collectively and together.

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<sup>508</sup> Aldred, *Is There Any Point Going Green?*

<sup>509</sup> Z in, *Ibid.*

Yet, in many ways, the ‘buying right and not buying wrong’ based approaches to ethical consumption discussed here provide an overly simplistic account of ‘market-moving’ as that which results from the *summation* of individual choices. In turn, a narrow version of ‘markets’ as linked up chains of consumer choices emerges. As the following section will seek to elaborate however, ethical consumption practices are many and varied. While those discussed so far are explicitly articulated by their proponents as intra-market strategies, ethical consumption may also be performed as an outright rejection of market-based exchange, and sometimes directly formulated as an anti-capitalist critique. The demarcations of intra-market and extra-market, or pro-and anti-consumer however, do not, as I will go on suggest, prove feasible inasmuch as these mistakenly figure markets as external and bounded entities.

### ***The Joy of Thrift*<sup>510</sup> – An Anti-Consumptive Ethics?**

Where the previous section discussed what we might, for now at least, describe as an intra-market approach to ethical consumerism, the present section will demonstrate that contrasting anti-consumerist, sometimes anti-consumptive, and at other times explicitly anti-corporate and anti-capitalist strategies are equally apparent on the blog.<sup>511</sup> As much as these positions might appear, on the surface of it, to differ from those previously discussed (or even be their mutually exclusive opposite), it is important to underscore, as I will attempt to do in the ensuing discussion, that these seemingly conflicting approaches are most often articulated and enacted together in the attempt to consume ethically.

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<sup>510</sup> India Knight, "The Joy of Thrift," *Sunday Times*, November 2nd 2008. See also, India Knight, *The Thrift Book: Live Well and Spend Less* (London: Fig Tree, 2008). The author writes that the book is designed to “show you how to say no to waste, save pots of money, and look good while you are doing it.”

<sup>511</sup> It is interesting to note that a similar division of perspectives can be observed in academic literature that seeks to discuss the UK government policy on sustainable development. In a journal article on the topic, social economist Gill Seyfang for instance draws attention to, on the one hand, a “view prevalent in international policy discourse that green and ethical consumerism will be sufficient to transform markets,” and, on the other, the need for governments to “encourage less materialistic lifestyles based on new definitions of ‘wealth.’” (The latter perspective endorsed by Seyfang as preferable). See, Gill Seyfang, "Consuming Values and Contested Cultures: A Critical Analysis of the UK Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production," *Review of Social Economy* LXII, no. 3 (2004). p.323

For those concerned to promote an ‘ethical’ abstinence from consumption, the spectre of ‘over-consumption’ as moral ill looms large, with the much de-cried wastefulness of ‘consumer culture’ receiving a good deal of blame for this. These concerns are particularly acutely stated in the blog posts of late 2008 where the annual excesses of Christmas consumption coincide with deepening economic crisis to produce a particularly intense concentration of ethical concern about reductions in expenditure, excess, and waste.

In her blog post, “Ethical Shopping for a Thrifty Christmas”<sup>512</sup> for instance, Lucy Siegle weighs the virtues of frugality against ethically unpalatable Christmas spending:

Naturally I also know to avoid the "Shopocalypse", as termed by the reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping. I should probably take a leaf from Buy Nothing Day and have a Buy Nothing Christmas, but the thought of that is too grim.

So I have theoretically settled on a thrift Christmas – a blanket rule of £20 per person maximum, irrespective of family pecking order – and preferably from a charity shop.<sup>513</sup>

Not buying anything then, in this extract is, as Siegle understands it, the most ethical Christmas prospect (“grim” as it might be). In lieu of this though, the second most ‘ethical’ approach is to spend less money. This, however, does not subsequently entail the attempt to get as many ‘cheaper’ products as possible; rather the resolve to buy from a charity shop ‘ethically’ combines helping others and reducing waste (by having bought second hand).

The suggestion that virtue is inherent in frugality and thrift is not of course a new one, nor is it unique to ethical consumption. Veblen’s critique of leisure and conspicuous consumption, for instance, morally hinges on the virtue of a contrasting

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<sup>512</sup> Lucy Siegle, *Ethical Shopping for a Thrifty Christmas* (26th November, 2008 [cited 12th January 2009]); available from

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/nov/26/greenchristmas-ethicalliving>.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

notion of labour, and workmanship borne out of necessity.<sup>514</sup> The making and mending of useful things is, for Veblen, the mark of a kind of cognitive and moral purity that separates those who labour from those who leisure. This familiar sociological assumption can also be drawn from Bourdieu's account of 'distinction,' which concludes on a similarly problematic note. Compelled, according to Bourdieu, by 'actual necessity,' by a functional relationship to things, the working classes, unsullied by 'bourgeois' ideology, are consequently assumed to be more virtuous on the basis of this.<sup>515</sup>

Classically, the practice of religious asceticism has also long associated frugality with purity and moral virtue. 'Worldly' asceticism, the secular, capitalist and accumulative version of asceticism theorised by Max Weber in *The Protestant Work Ethic*,<sup>516</sup> is particularly resonate in approaches to ethical consumption that advocate abstaining from consumption to the largest degree possible. Some of the reflexive complexities of this practice are captured in the following *Ethical Living* exchange. Herein, the ideas for living ethically proffered by some contributors (for example, cutting down on meat, walking places, baking your own bread)<sup>517</sup> are derisively likened to the wearing of a 'hairshirt' (a religious device designed to cause the wearer some degree of discomfort or pain by means of repentance) by the quoted respondent:

C

June 3 08 2:18pm

...

Accept that technology will have to get us out of this mess. Not hair shirts and attempts to re-medievalise us...<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> See, Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*. p.163

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Strictly speaking, according to Weber, 'worldly asceticism' originating in the Protestant Reformation, later becomes secularised, and can subsequently be applied to both religious and secular ascetics. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

<sup>517</sup> G, in Hickman, *Ten Ways to Save Money by Going Green*.

<sup>518</sup> C, in Ibid.

Attracting a large degree of criticism on the basis of this comment in the form of accusations of ‘laziness,’ ‘selfishness,’<sup>519</sup> and ‘ignorance,’<sup>520</sup> C responds with the following post:

C

June 3 16:47

Alright people. Put your hair shirts down.

Here are some facts about me:

- 1) I own no car.
- 2) I travel on public transport everywhere.
- 3) I recycle (have to or they won't take it Lol)
- 4) I have, as mentioned HAVE NO CHILDREN ...

My life contains considerably less consumption than I imagine many of yours does.<sup>521</sup>

These comments demonstrate a certain continuity in the construal of virtue in terms of abstinence and recompense between historical accounts of asceticism and some contemporary practices of ethical consumption. For those who advocate consuming less, virtue lies not only in reducing one's use (or 'waste') of material goods, but also in the attendant saving of money. The price of a given thing may be understood, in this context, to have therefore become in itself a consideration of an ethical nature (inasmuch as use-reduction and cost reduction are understood to frequently coincide). As in the preceding 'thrifty Christmas' example, and in particular given the then situation of worsening economic downturn, monetary cost recurs in such way on a number of occasions in the blogstreams, where paying less is understood to represent having consumed less, and therefore having consumed more 'ethically' on this basis. The following blog post suggests that the benefits offered by

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<sup>519</sup> A, in Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> D, in Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> C, in Ibid.

a condensing boiler, a simultaneous saving of money and gas (and therefore carbon), represents the best (most ethical) consumptive solution to household water heating:

Staff blogger Carolyn Fry

May 23 08

In *How to Live a Low Carbon Life*, author Chris Goodall calculates that a large household using a boiler of mid-70s vintage to supply 15,000 usable kWh of energy to heat the property over a year, would save more than two-thirds of this by installing a condensing boiler. This equates to a whopping carbon saving of 1.92 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year.

Not surprisingly, there are also cost savings to be had by cutting energy use so significantly. At an average price of 3p per kilowatt, the savings for the same household would be £303 per year. This means that if they were to pay £3,000 for a new boiler and professional fitting, they would make their money back within 10 years.<sup>522</sup>

Fry's claims are followed by a debate in the blogstream questioning just how energy efficient, and therefore, how cost efficient condensing boilers are:

Th

May 27 08, 4:08pm

Unfortunately the main beneficiaries from condensing boilers are the makers of plumbing. The proponents tend to compare the theoretical efficiency of a condensing boiler with the typical efficiency of a noncondensing. I've seen suggestions that in reality the best condensing boilers are about 83% efficient, a gain of approx. 8%. Against that, you have to factor in the additional cost of the larger radiators you will need, because condensing boilers only save energy if the water is heated to a lower temperature than with your old boiler.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Fry, *Tread Lightly: Install a Condenser Boiler*.

<sup>523</sup> Th, in *Ibid*.

In exchanges such as this, a method for the *calculation of ethical value for money* is achieved. In the previous section, the premium to be paid for ethical goods was justified in itself or offset against other purchases, in the present, saving money coincides ethically with a saving in resources. In both though, 'ethical' consumption (even as the practice of consuming less) inevitably always proceeds via *market mechanisms*. The method is one of determining the best *value*. Only value is not a sole function of price, rather *ethical value for the price paid*. This coincidence of value and values demonstrates the extent to which 'ethics,' in the context of ethical consumerism, is fundamentally transformed. This transformation though does not just occur in a single direction – it is not simply the case that what we once took to be relations of an 'ethical' nature have been colonised by corruptive 'market forces.' Rather, an expansion in the types of practice that we understand to constitute markets themselves is necessary.

Furthermore, an augmentation in the boundaries of what we recognise to be 'market' as opposed by 'non-market' is suggested. Even where the ethical exhortation is, for instance, to abstain from buying things altogether, whether via near as possible self-sufficiency, or as articulated in the form of a critique of capitalism, a rendition of ethics in terms of market value is nonetheless finally achieved. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt, taken from staff blogger James Randerson's November 24th, 2008 post:

Staff blogger James Randerson

Nov 24 08

So in these chastened economic times, Alistair Darling is presumably even less impressed than usual with Buy Nothing Day an annual protest against consumerism and globalisation. Its organisers describe it thus:

"Buy Nothing Day (Saturday November 29), is a simple idea, which challenges consumer culture by asking us to switch off from shopping for a day. It's a global

stand off from consumerism ... Anyone can take part provided they spend a day without spending!"<sup>524</sup>

'Buy Nothing Day,' as a means of protest, is of course intended to have a symbolic and political function. Even understood thus however, (and not for instance as an anti-consumerist creed by which you must live your life), there is a certain irony inherent in its function. Abstaining from shopping, purposefully reducing consumption, ultimately, and in the same way as practices such as positive buying, operates to underscore the significance of consumer practices and re-situate the commodity itself as a proper site for the resolution of ethical problems.<sup>525</sup> The product, and the market for that product, becomes the very locus of intervention, thus, those who advocate consumptive reduction as a measure of independence from a maligned consumer market, end up themselves complementing the exact consumptive circle that they seek to critique. In this way, the apparently 'extra-market' is never exactly thus. A distinction between market and not-market becomes increasingly untenable and analytically dubious.

A critical difference between the terms 'consumerism' and 'consumption' may be usefully re-instantiated here. Where 'consumerism' is too easily critiqued and made the obvious target by those who would simply isolate 'buying stuff' itself as an ethical problem (a position adopting in varying degrees by bloggers and commenters discussed in this section), the term 'consumption,' on the other hand, is inherently recognisant of the expanded definition I am attempting to establish of the kinds of activities that may be said to partake in markets. 'Consumption' tacitly achieves an acknowledgment that there can be no easy separation of the intra-market from the extra-market. Not 'buying stuff' does not necessarily equate to the boycotting of the 'market.'

In a book entitled *Consumer Culture*, Celia Lury has suggested that we may manoeuvre a "critical distance from everyday understandings of consumption [by]

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<sup>524</sup> James Randerson, *Darling Wants 'Shopocalypse' Now, Pay Later* (24th November, 2008 [cited February 12th 2009]); available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/nov/24/week>.

<sup>525</sup> Paddy Dolan, "The Sustainability Of "Sustainable Consumption." *Journal of Macromarketing* 22, no. 2 (2002). p.171

shifting attention away from the use of things in the sense of consuming or ‘using up’, to *use* in a more general sense.”<sup>526</sup> This treatment of consumption in terms of ‘use’ offers a way of entering and expanding the terms of the consumerism/consumption debate inasmuch as the use of an object need not necessarily be equated only with its destruction. Instead, consumption may be understood as a simultaneously productive, or constructive process,<sup>527</sup> and, for this reason, one in which potentially unexpected ‘ethical’ consequences may nonetheless result. On the basis that ‘consumption’ may be broadly understood as ‘use,’ it is difficult to argue that ‘ethical consumption’ is a straight-out contradiction in terms. All life, after all, entails the use of some resources, and there is no necessary reason that these resource relations might not be understood as ‘ethical.’

In the present and preceding sections of this chapter, the contemporary inseparability of ‘ethics’ and ‘markets’ has been primarily established through an investigation of the various ways in which ethical consumption works via the establishment of ‘ethical value for money.’ This configuration, I have suggested, is observable in both the notion of an ethical premium, and in the discussed anti-consumptive approaches. If ‘ethical value for money’ still appears though to somehow undermine or impoverish ethical consumption as a sincerely ‘ethical’ undertaking, this is because an accompanying account of the underlying ‘ethical’ nature of consumption itself is yet to be developed alongside.

To this end, the final section of this chapter will return to the problem of ‘choice’ versus ‘care’ in order to explore the contrary possibility that ethical consumption may actually function as a market-based means of enacting certain practices of ethico-material ‘care.’ Attempting to do justice to practices of ethical consumption as they are lived by individuals, this account will understand how these are articulated within the broader desire to lead a ‘good life.’

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<sup>526</sup> Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). p.1

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

## Caring Choices and Markets Out of Bounds

Consumption, as Alan Warde points out, is not just one practice, it is instead a moment in almost every practice – “items consumed are put to use in the course of engaging in particular practices.”<sup>528</sup> As such, it is possible that we are simultaneously both caring and choosing selves. Acts of ‘choice’ do not necessarily exclude the dimension of care, and equally ‘care’ need not only be understood as such when it is entirely immured from ‘choice’ – even as this is conferred in the context of markets. Simply put, these are not dimensions of life that we necessarily engage in separately from one another.

When, as in the present case, claims about consumption are made under the rubric of the ethical, critically speaking it is only fair that these claims be addressed on the terms that they claim as opposed to pre-emptively undermining them on this very basis. The approach that I have taken throughout this chapter has attempted to see this through. Whereas Mol’s aforementioned choice/care division can work to reinstitute long-held distinctions about what constitutes ‘market’ as opposed to ‘non-market’ practice, this chapter has attempted to problematise any recourse to distinctions such as these.

In this final section then, it is worth briefly emphasising how, at a fundamental level, it is possible to claim that consumption is always already an ethical matter insomuch as it is a realm for the negotiation of how we want to live, and the establishment of what may be said to constitute the ‘good life.’<sup>529</sup> Care for familiar others and care for the self are as much a part of ethical consumption as more formally articulated concerns regarding care for distant others and for the wider environment.

Daniel Miller’s North London shopping ethnographies have sought to effectively illustrate this point. Purchasing, Miller observes, is primarily directed towards others, in particular one’s family members, and is influenced by moral

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<sup>528</sup> Alan Warde, "Consumption and Theories of Practice," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 2 (2005). p.145

<sup>529</sup> Barnett et al., "Consuming Ethics: Articulating the Subjects and Spaces of Ethical Consumption." p.26; Richard Wilk, "Consuming Morality," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 1, no. 2 (2001). p.246.

sentiments towards them and regarding how to live.<sup>530</sup> Similarly, and to draw from my own life as example, although not a self-identified ethical-shopper, the groceries to be found in my shopping basket on a Sunday may differ markedly in 'ethical' terms to those procured on a weekday. Sunday's carrots, for instance, might be purchased on a leisurely trip to the morning farmers market, they will be organic and local, their green tops still on, tied together rustically with string and deposited into a suitably organic bag (no point relying on them to supply plastic ones there!). Wednesday's carrots on the other hand, bought in a rush at the end of the day from the local supermarket and destined for a quick stir fry rather than an elaborate weekend roast, are likely to be a much more plasticky, high food-mile affair. Condensed into a single carrot therefore, (explicitly professed desire to shop ethically or not), are myriad of *cares*.

Between ostentatious asceticism, old-fashioned frugality, hairshirts, wholesomeness and thirteen pound chicken then, what is being worked out are particularly contemporary conceptions of 'goodness' and 'care.' Ethical consumers are always in the process of juggling multiple ethical 'choices,' these however are not abstractly construed; rather, making the 'ethical choice' is about enacting certain cares. As in the following example, care for one's family and the environment may be enacted through the medium of choice even where cost is an explicit consideration:

B

17 Jan 08, 9:23pm

Ethical dilemmas abound – should I buy the hideously expensive organic courgettes, nope, they've been flown in from Morocco, then there's the bog-standard ones grown in Spain, nope, they come in a tray and are wrapped in plastic film, so it's the sprayed and non-attributable loose ones that are probably the ones I should buy, except I don't want to poison my kids with sprays and pesticides and where have

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<sup>530</sup> Daniel Miller, *A Theory of Shopping* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

they come from and by which means of transport have they arrived on a shelf in Scotland?<sup>531</sup>

Returning to the ‘problem’ of underlying self-interest then – this is made dramatically more complex in the context of the moral imperative to lead a good life. There are affective and sensual pleasures attached to consuming differently,<sup>532</sup> and these are not ‘unethical’ even if considered only in their own regard. Material pleasure is not incompatible with ethical imperatives; they can be one and the same – for instance, the taking of pleasure-in-care.

Mol writes, “[i]n the logic of care ...[y]ou are inside your life, you live it.” Yet, this description might be applied just as aptly to the practice of ethical consumption as I have been describing it here. As a caring practice, consumption is not always based on rational decisions. Things are laid out, as in the previously quoted comment, we must choose one courgette over the other, and yet finally, this is not a choice abstractly arrived at, it is one that is made through various types of cares – self, family, others and environment. These caring choices moreover, as I have sought to emphasise, are mundane, material, practical, and thoroughly embedded in everyday life – an insistence on ‘distance’ and abstraction fails to adequately address the practices of ethical consumption as they are *lived*.

The conversations taken from *Ethical Living* and discussed in this chapter demonstrate that, when it comes to living ethically, ‘choice’ has no complete or decisive mastery over ‘care.’ What is ‘ethical’ is construed via a co-articulation of these logics, and the form that this takes is not pre-determined, nor is it fixed and unlikely to change. The most ‘ethical’ outcome in any consumptive context is contingent, established both personally and collectively, and thus always, imperfectly. This ‘imperfection’ however, need not be understood as a problem per se – within the reflexive context of the market, it is productive – it generates new types of ethical ‘things’ and reconfigured types of ethical relations, for ‘better’ and

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<sup>531</sup> B, in Environmental Editor, *What's the Point of Recycling If It Just Goes to Waste?* (15th January, 2008 [cited 12th November 2008]); available from

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/ethicallivingblog/2008/jan/14/week>.

<sup>532</sup> Kate Soper, "Re-Thinking the 'Good Life': The Citizenship Dimension of Consumer Disaffection with Consumerism," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7, no. 2 (2007). p.211

sometimes arguably for ‘worse.’ You may have thought that you were ticking all right ethical boxes in one moment, only to suddenly find the irreversible fact of your children to newly count against you like big ethical crosses in the next! Ethical ‘potential’ inheres in these shifts; praxical reformulations do not reproduce a ‘totalising’ or unchangingly ‘rational’ market logic, consumption itself materially re-organises markets – not just the other way around.

The ‘market’ itself, in the context of the foregoing account, becomes more definitionally unstable and unwieldy. Through the course of discussion, the term ‘market,’ at once pushed and pulled in opposing directions, reveals itself to be both more extensive than first imagined, but also more particular, compromised and conjoined – a proposition that, significantly, is never static, instead evolving rapidly and responsively.

Spread beyond their traditionally understood limits, markets proliferate, and thus consumers have more choices, consumption is more rational, more sophisticated and more reflexive. Yet, to the extent that these markets function as arenas for the actual business of living, and now even the very ‘doing’ of ethics, they become disaggregated, incorporated, and appropriated, slipped in where they do not belong – made at once more integral, but also less ‘true’ as it were, comprised and colonised all the while seeming to pursue their own logic and ambitions.

## Chapter Six

□

### ‘Ethical Careers’

From the back of a crowded room in late January of 2007 I witnessed something unexpected. A friend had organised for a number of CSR “industry professionals”<sup>533</sup> to give a panel discussion at the London School of Economics and Politics (LSE) and, knowing my interest in the topic, invited me to attend. For two hours and forty minutes discussion rolled back and forth across the panel without much incident or interest from the audience. In the overheated room, packed to the rafters with around two hundred people occupying seats, with others balanced on window ledgers and latecomers gathered in the doorway, everyone, by this late stage, was near fast asleep. Then, suddenly, the room was awake in an abrupt flurry of paper-shuffling, seat-shifting and pen-wielding. The panel had reached the last topic on their discussion agenda – how to get a job in CSR.

Until this point, that there was such an intensity of interest in CSR as an employment prospect had largely escaped my attention. In hindsight though, the text of the original event invitation did give something away – “The panel discussion will be followed by a networking reception,”<sup>534</sup> it read. And, by the end of the discussion, as I tried to head towards the door through a crowd moving forcefully in the other direction towards the assembled panel, it was obvious that this ‘networking reception’ was the reason that so many had gathered – something was undeniably afoot.

This chapter attempts to chart the recent rise in interest in what have now become known as ‘ethical careers.’ At the beginning of 2007, this phrase was only just starting to appear, notably with the publishing of a handbook called *The Ethical*

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<sup>533</sup> E-mail, LSE Corporate Responsibility Society 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2007. The event was ‘CSR at its Crossroads,’ 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2007, Clement House, London School of Economics and Politics, Aldwych, London.

<sup>534</sup> E-mail, LSE Corporate Responsibility Society 17<sup>th</sup> Jan.

*Careers Guide 2006-7*.<sup>535</sup> Now, two and a half years later in 2009, the term 'ethical careers' attracts in the order of seventy million hits on Google,<sup>536</sup> 'ethical careers' recruitment services are proliferating,<sup>537</sup> a number of UK university websites offer information under this title on their webpages,<sup>538</sup> and many have specifically assigned an 'ethical careers' advisor.<sup>539</sup> Equally, the recent appearance of a number of Masters degrees in CSR may be noted,<sup>540</sup> and, now running for the second year in a row, a formally compiled Acona 'CSR Salary Survey,' further attests to the emergence of a ethical jobs market.<sup>541</sup>

Engaging in a kind of ethnography of a market, and of a concept, this chapter unfolds chronologically, beginning by picking up where I left off above – at the start, as it were, of my own awareness that such thing as an 'ethical career' existed. Time, with reference to that which is emerging, is important. What appears when might be understood to depend on when the greatest impact of that appearance might be felt; what is it about the 'present' conditions that make such emergences possible?<sup>542</sup> Setting off on its trail through the time of the 'ethical career,' my own role as researcher is multiply and variously configured due, in part, to the very dynamics of 'emergence' themselves.

Through the empirical fields of inquiry, seeking to speak to people who 'know' about 'ethical careers,' I am variously (and often unwittingly) the 'expert,' or the 'job-seeker,' the 'adjudicator,' 'advice-giver,' 'student-colleague,' or 'contact.'

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<sup>535</sup> Gideon Burrows, ed., *The Ethical Careers Guide 2006-7* (London: ngo media, 2006).

<sup>536</sup> 69,400,000 to be precise. [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) [May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009]

<sup>537</sup> Life Worth – [www.lifeworth.com](http://www.lifeworth.com), Ethical-Jobs – [www.ethical-jobs.co.uk](http://www.ethical-jobs.co.uk), Ethical Jobs – [www.ethicaljobs.net](http://www.ethicaljobs.net), People & Planet – <http://peopleandplanet.org/ethicalcareers/>, Ethical Careers – [www.ethicalcareers.org](http://www.ethicalcareers.org), and many similar others.

<sup>538</sup> The University of London, Edinburgh University, Durham University, Bristol University, Nottingham University, London School of Economics and Politics, and Cambridge University, among others.

<sup>539</sup> Two of whom I met and interviewed for the current chapter, Laura Brammar of University College London and C2 Careers Service, and Judith Baines of the LSE.

<sup>540</sup> Birmingham Business School, Cambridge University Programme for Industry, Glasgow University Business School, Lancaster University Management School, London Business School, Nottingham University Business School, Oxford Said Business School, Royal Holloway, and Warwick Business School all offer, at the time of writing, MAs or MScs in CSR.

<sup>541</sup> *The CSR Salary Survey, 2008-9*, Acona, Acre, Ethical Performance. Available from, <http://www.csrsalarysurvey.com/>. This survey, perhaps unsurprisingly, reveals a massive concentration of CSR jobs in London (64%) and the South East (14%).

<sup>542</sup> Alex Wilkie and Mike Michael, "Expectation and Mobilisation: Enacting Future Users," *Science, Technology & Human Values* 34, no. 4 (2009). p.3

Picking up on the notion of research ‘complicity’ introduced in Chapter Three, this chapter seeks to recognise the significance of my own adoption of (or resistance to) these roles, employing, at times, a quite consciously self-reflexive perspective – it is, after all and unavoidably, a tale of the ‘ethical career’ told through my of my own research experience.

This journey is taken across a number of sites and through different mediums and, as such, the empirical content of this chapter is varied. Having said this, two nexical sites emerge as of particular note, and on this basis, will be elaborated briefly here. Firstly, the *careers fair*. Between February 2007 and June 2008 I attend five such events,<sup>543</sup> selected materials and experiences from which will be drawn upon and elaborated in the course of this chapter. Secondly, following my experience at the January LSE event, I sought to join the student group through which the panel event had been organised – *The LSE CSR Society*.<sup>544</sup> Starting at the beginning of the academic year 2007-2008, I attended over the course of the year all the events organised by the society, which included a number of group meetings, speaker events, and social evenings. In addition to these, I also draw on a variety of relevant text based and internet sources, such as recruitment websites, as well as material gathered from informal interviews with two careers advisors and the editor of *The Ethical Careers Guide*.<sup>545</sup>

The breadth of this methodological approach has much to do with the apparent ill-definability of the ‘ethical career’ as an empirical object itself. Noting the definitional breadth of what might count as an ‘ethical career,’ the first section of this chapter will suggest that this need only be an analytical ‘problem’ to the extent that one desires to understand the ‘ethical career’ as an employment category

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<sup>543</sup> Imperial College Ethical Careers Fair, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2007, Great Hall, Imperial College London; The London Graduate Summer Recruitment Fair, 19-20<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, Islington Business Design Centre, London; The London Graduate Autumn Recruitment Fair, 22 October, 2007, Islington Business Design Centre, London; The Guardian London Graduate Fair, 17-19<sup>th</sup> June, 2008, Islington Business Design Centre, London; and forum3, 10-11<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, Islington Business Design Centre, London.

<sup>544</sup> This student union CSR society meet regularly over the course of the academic year and, as will be explained, seek to organise CSR-centred events and facilitate networking with those in the industry.

<sup>545</sup> Gideon Burrows, editor of *The Ethical Careers Guide*, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2008; Judith Baines, ethical careers advisor at LSE, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2009; Laura Brammar, ethical careers advisor at UCL and C2. 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

consisting of particular job titles or of jobs in a particular sector. Against this, I propose that the ‘ethical career’ as *aspiration* is analytically preferable in so much as this allows for some of the multiple contradictions that this suggestion entails – as summed up by *Guardian* writer Lucy Siegle, “ [o]ne person’s evil multinational is another job-seeker’s munificent contributor to the community.”<sup>546</sup>

As ‘aspiration’ the ‘ethical career’ might further be understood to do a kind of “affective labour.”<sup>547</sup> The invocation of this understanding here however will not seek to use it faithfully as such, to refer, as it is intended, to how the types of labour in what has been called the ‘new economy’ are increasingly ‘immaterial’<sup>548</sup> – consisting primarily in relationship and communication work. Although this is no doubt a valid observation concerning much contemporary ‘ethical work,’ I am more interested in the present case to observe how aspirations themselves, especially in their affective aspect, can work to productively articulate their own possibilities for realisation. This suggestion is empirically elaborated through a discussion of the importance of ‘networking’ in new and emergent fields.

The second part of this chapter, building on the first, will focus on how the suggestion of an ‘ethical career’ construes ‘ethics’ vis-à-vis the self. Drawing on the notion of ‘enterprising selfhood’<sup>549</sup> here, I will note how much of the discourse surrounding ‘ethical careers’ functions to responsabilise individuals with regard to what are understood as their ‘own’ ethics. As such, ethical career aspirants are commonly exhorted to decide on the basis of their own values what kind of career would be ‘ethical’ for them. Rather than reading this as evidence that ‘ethics’ becomes a relative or individual practice though, this process needs to be understood in terms of the creation of ‘ethical’ *value* in a competitive *market* for jobs. Turning here to Lisa Adkins recent work on property and personhood in the new economy,<sup>550</sup> it is possible to posit an alternative reading of how ‘ethics’ subsist, in the proposal of

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<sup>546</sup> Siegle, Lucy – Quoted on the back cover of *The Ethical Careers Guide*, 2006-7.

<sup>547</sup> Michael Hardt, "Affective Labour," *Boundary* 26, no. 2 (1999).

<sup>548</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, *Immaterial Labour* ([cited 16th March 2009]); available from <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm>.

<sup>549</sup> See, in particular, the volume, Paul Heelas and Paul Morris, eds., *The Values of the Enterprise Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>550</sup> Lisa Adkins, "The New Economy, Property and Personhood," *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 1 (2005).

an ‘ethical career,’ – not as an individually possessed ‘value system,’ available for application through the process of self-reflection – but rather as a kind of future-oriented and outwardly-functioning innovative potential in a contemporary economy that is apt to value this.

### **The Emergence of the ‘Ethical Career’**

Startled by the clamorous interest in working in CSR that I had witnessed at the LSE, I decided, following this in late January 2007, to see if this same interest could be found elsewhere. Not long afterwards, trawling graduate recruitment sites on the web, I came across an event organised by Imperial College – ‘The Ethical Careers Exhibition’<sup>551</sup> it was called, taglined with words “corporate responsibility – social justice – environmental sustainability.”<sup>552</sup> Organised by the Imperial College Careers Advisory Service in conjunction with the Student Union, the event was free to attend and open to all. Running for its second year, the Imperial event was evidence that an interest in ‘ethical careers’ or working in CSR was not only specific to a certain group of LSE students; it could be noted elsewhere in London as well. Keen to find out more and get the opportunity to speak with company representatives about CSR, I set off in my crispest shirt, with hair-pulled neatly back, and an inexpertly ironed crease laboriously pressed down the front my most ‘business-like’ trousers.

The irony in my own attempts to look suitably graduate-like lost least on me, and making my way self-consciously around the various stalls assembled in Imperial’s Great Hall, I began to approach the groups of gathered representatives inquiring one by one about their company CSR program and any employment possibilities therein. At one stall, an engineering consultancy, I pose my question to the representative standing foremost behind the desk – “I was wondering if I could talk with you about your company CSR program, do you have any information about

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<sup>551</sup> Held on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> of January, 2007, in the Great Hall of Imperial College. Featuring twenty-one exhibitors. <http://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/campaign/ethical-careers-fair/>

<sup>552</sup> Imperial College Ethical Careers Exhibition Poster.

this with you here today?” Looking blank and confused, he replies “What?” “Your Corporate Social Responsibility policies,” I elaborate, “this event is about careers in CSR,” I continue, gesturing to the enormous central poster installation above which a banner with the words “All About Corporate Social Responsibility” has been suspended from the ceiling. Rescued by a colleague who has overheard, a second representative steps forth – “Oh, Corporate Social Responsibility – well I think we are currently writing up a report on that, but I mean, what can we really do – we’re an engineering company – but we are involved in schools and hospitals and stuff in developing countries.”<sup>553</sup>

Having made similarly little headway towards finding out about ‘ethical careers’ at the other stalls, I head to the seminar room at the back of the hall where speakers are presenting throughout the day in half-hour slots on topics from ‘Volunteering in India,’ to ‘Fuel Cell Technology,’ and ‘Careers in Policy Making,’ to ‘Working for Aid Agencies,’ and ‘Going Carbon Neutral.’<sup>554</sup> Certainly, from the Imperial ‘Ethical Careers Exhibition,’ no coherence or consensus was forthcoming with regard to what particular specificities might definitionally constitute ‘ethical’ employment. The assembled employers were not distinct from those who might attend a ‘non-ethical’ recruitment fair, and the advertised jobs differed only in a slight over-representation of volunteering organisations, aid agencies, and energy companies.

Yet, as I was to discover later that year, Imperial’s use of the phrase ‘ethical career’ was not anomalous, nor did this phrase lack endurance or purchase. On the basis that, as just mentioned, the exhibitors at Imperial College in February did not form a particularly coherent group that might be reliably recognised to offer, by the very nature of their work, employment of an ‘ethical’ nature, I decided to widen my search, and begin attending more generalist graduate recruitment careers – in particular focussing on the very large ‘Careers Group – University of London’<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>553</sup> Engineering consultancy representative, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2007, Imperial College, London.

<sup>554</sup> In order, these presentations were given by representatives from the following organisations – Development in Action, Imperial College and Ceres Power, Defra, RedR IHE, and RSK

<sup>555</sup> The Careers Group, part of the University of London, provides careers services to students, universities and organisations.

fairs, held twice annually, once in Summer and once in Autumn.<sup>556</sup> Given the size, prominence and popularity of these events, it would be interesting what, (if any), evidence could be found that the notion of an ‘ethical career’ was in existence here.

As the glossy ‘fair guide’ you are handed upon entry indicates, the Careers Group have been organising annual graduate recruitment events for thirty-three years. Held in the cavernous commercial space of the Islington Business Design Centre and conducted over two days, the June 2007 event featured over one hundred different exhibitors, representing a variety of sectors of the job market – from the public sector to finance, management to science, and engineering to what the guide entitled ‘alternative options’ (mostly gap year and overseas volunteering companies). A continuous programme of career presentations, seminars, and workshops took place in a number of rooms to the side of the main exhibiting area, and in the main frontal area of the hall, the Careers Group themselves ran a ‘CV-surgery’ in which graduate were able to work with a careers advisor on improving their CV.

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<sup>556</sup> In 2007, the Careers Group Graduate Recruitment Summer Fair was held on the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> June. The Autumn Event was held on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> October. The Careers Group also organise another annual event at the Islington Business Design Centre called ‘Graduate Select: Finance, Consultancy & IT.’ I did not attend this latter event given that invite was via application and graduates with degrees in the stipulated areas were sought. The Careers Group events are free to attend, but require e-mail registration.

Figures 5 & 6: The London Graduate Recruitment Fair, Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007



Crowded and bustling, the prominently displayed advertising tagline ‘One event. Hundreds of possibilities,’ captures something of the atmosphere – very much ‘fair-like,’ a kind of ‘one-stop shop’ for all things career oriented. Eager to talk and tempt potential recruits to their stall, company representatives venture into the stream of human traffic proffering gifts such as the ubiquitous Mars bar, and company branded pen. This time, my questions about CSR are readily met by most with a ready recognition of what this is.

While quick to recite company CSR policy, or recent social and environmental contributions, most representatives struggle however to tell me how I might go about pursuing a career in CSR with them. Twice I am directed to speak with the human resources department (McDonalds restaurants and Proctor&Gamble), while at TNT I am pointed to a prominently displayed and picture filled brochure, ‘Beyond Corporate Social Responsibility’ proclaimed on its cover – no CSR jobs are on offer therein though.

Elsewhere in the fair, one of this years event sponsors, a new recruitment group called Ask: What If? has a large interactive display zone set up. Under the banner ‘Your career – Our future. Some careers are more than just a job,’<sup>557</sup> advisors at this stall chat with graduates and guide them through the use of touch-screen displays featuring employee biographies and job descriptions. Amongst the featured jobs are ‘Environmental officer’ (“In the fight against climate change, the pressure is on business and industry to clean up their act”) and ‘Regeneration manager’ (“It’s about transforming the places where people live”).<sup>558</sup> Expounding the possibility of a career that has a “positive impact on other people’s lives and the community they live in,”<sup>559</sup> Ask: What If?, (without specifically employing the term ‘ethical’ career), imply something along these lines in their ideas of collective responsibility for ‘our future,’ and ‘positive impact.’

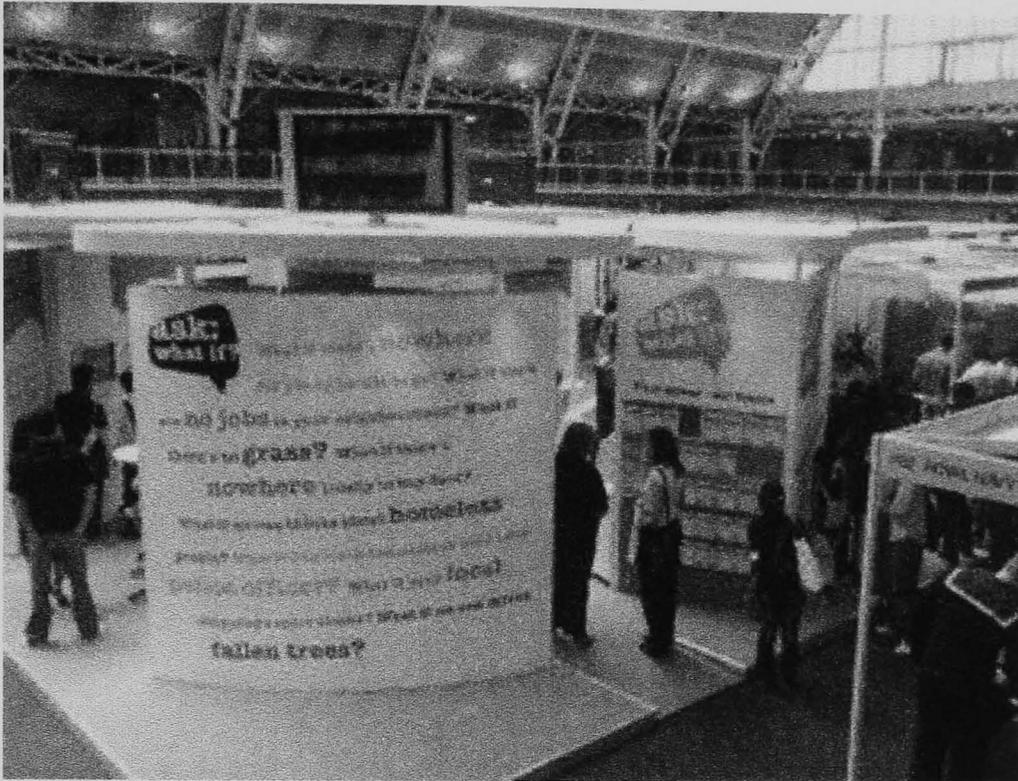
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<sup>557</sup> Ask: What If? Poster

<sup>558</sup> Ask: What If? Interactive display

<sup>559</sup> Ask: What If? Promotional material; also see, [www.askwhatif.co.uk](http://www.askwhatif.co.uk)

Figure 7: Ask: What If? Central Exhibition



Later that afternoon and downstairs, a group of sixty or so graduates assemble to hear a presentation entitled ‘Ethical Careers’ given by University College Careers Advisor Laura Brammar.<sup>560</sup> “This is the first time we’ve offered this seminar” Brammar says in opening, “and I felt quite strongly that it should be offered – I am certainly seeing more clients who are asking about ‘ethical careers.’”<sup>561</sup> Brammar is keen, given the recognised novelty of the field, to get a conversation going with the audience about what it is that might constitute an ‘ethical career.’ “What are they?” she asks, further inquiring of the audience, “ what has lead you to come to this [presentation].”

The first audience member to respond offers an explanation in terms of disillusionment with current recruitment prospects, while a second respondent

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<sup>560</sup> Laura Brammar, ‘Ethical Careers.’ Presentation given at The London Graduate Recruitment Fair, Islington Business Design Centre, London, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2007.

<sup>561</sup> Brammar – ‘Ethical Careers’ (permission to quote obtained). Brammar also gives a presentation of the same title at the following Autumn fair (October, 2007), and at both the next year’s fairs (June, 2008 & October, 2008). Her presentation is dropped from the June 2009 fair however. This is due, as she informs me during a July 2009 interview, to changing priorities brought about as a consequence of recession. Interview, 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2009, Careers Group, Stewart House, London.

echoes and expands this to include what he understands to be the prevailing nature of employment in general, articulating the desire to contribute to society instead, (themes will I will return to discuss more comprehensively in a later section of this chapter):

Audience member One: I just got a little bit lost in my degree last year, umm, [I am] not very connected with the whole graduate recruitment thing and, yeh, I starting to get into it in the last few months, but I think finance and retail, [sceptical shoulder shrug]...and I'm looking for something different, and something in the ethical sector.

Laura: So it sounds like you are disaffected from the 'corporate engine'...

...

Audience member Two: Getting beyond selling stuff. People always selling, stuff, just more and more and more.

Laura: Selling, or selling stuff.

Audience member Two: Yeh – always 'selling,' I want to give something back.<sup>562</sup>

"Ethical work,"<sup>563</sup> Brammar continues on to emphasise, is unlikely however to mean the same thing to everyone, or remain unchanged through time:

... ask, well what are my career values, what's most important for me? For some of you, working in a sustainable environment will be the most important thing, for others it will be working for a group of people who share the same values. For other people its the salary that will help them pay off their student debt, for other people

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<sup>562</sup> Audience exchange during 'Ethical careers,' (permissions to quote obtained). Respondents both male.

<sup>563</sup> Brammar, Ibid.

it's working internationally, so think what's most important to you – know and accept that those things can change throughout your career.<sup>564</sup>

One might imagine that when it comes to matters of clarifying definition, Gideon Burrows, founder of recruitment website ethicalcareers.org and editor of *The Ethical Careers Guide*<sup>565</sup> (first published in 2006) would be something of an authority. Speaking on this topic at Forum3<sup>566</sup> a 'third sector' careers fair however, Burrows only guidance in this regard is that he "count[s] as an ethical career anything that involves doing good." As elaborated in his forward to the first edition of *The Ethical Careers Guide*, the concern is not to "define what 'ethical' means," on the topic of what is 'ethical' he admits contributors to the guide "haven't always agreed."<sup>567</sup> Instead, as Burrows explains, "[w]hat we have tried to do is to provide information to help you make up your own mind, and the inspiration to encourage you to do something about it."<sup>568</sup>

On the home page of his company website, Jason Elliot, founder of Ethical Jobs, writes in a similar vein that, "choosing an ethical career...means doing something that serves your practical needs, your personal values and your interests in a way that positively impacts upon the world."<sup>569</sup> The suggestion made here and in the preceding extracts that the 'ethical' aspect of an 'ethical career' is something that must be personally or individually defined is an important one – not least inasmuch as it renders ethical values to be the property of individuals in a way that straightforwardly equates self-fulfilment in ones work with working 'ethically,' and in this way might also be said to completely relativise the ethical. As I will go on to address in some depth later in this chapter, that these 'conflations' are commonly encountered in the proposal of an 'ethical career,' suggests that particular critical attention need be paid to how ethics might be understood to be being done in the

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> Burrows, ed., *The Ethical Careers Guide 2006-7*. Now in its second edition. This is considered to be the first and foremost guide of its kind.

<sup>566</sup> Forum3 Recruitment, Volunteering and Networking event, 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, Islington Business Design Centre, London. 'Third sector' meaning not-for-profit and/or charitable enterprise.

<sup>567</sup> Burrows, ed., *The Ethical Careers Guide 2006-7*. p.3

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., p.3

<sup>569</sup> Elliot, <http://www.ethical-jobs.co.uk/>

contemporary ‘careerist’ mode. Indeed, it will be the task of latter sections of this chapter to explore these practices with regard to traditionally accepted philosophical and sociological understandings of both ‘ethics’ and ‘politics.’

For present purposes however, the fundamental contingency of the ‘ethical career’ needs to be addressed inasmuch as this might be said to make it a problematic empirical object to analytically attend. Does it, simply put, make any sense to critically engage ‘ethical careers’ if it is not entirely clear what is, or what can be, included under this heading? This question turns, of course, on the expected establishment of a particular kind of empirical object. One with reasonably discernable boundaries – so that, to take the present case by means of example, we might desire to impose, for instance, an economic criterion to the ethical job such we might restrict the object of analysis to unpaid or volunteer work.

Similarly, divisions could alternatively be made along other lines – jobs are ‘ethical’ if they involve working for a not-for-profit organisation, or in the public sector, or if ‘CSR’ is in the job title, or they are listed on an ethical jobs website, we might say. Charting the emergence of the ‘ethical career’ in this brief discussion thus far however, it is clear that divisions such as these are precisely what are refused by (or at least the subject of vast disagreement between) proponents, practitioners and participants.

So, inasmuch as there is a cultural object called the ‘ethical career,’ (and this discussion has sought to begin to demonstrate that there is, enduringly, across a number of sites, and with increasing ubiquity), and this object does not lend itself to classification in terms of the standard sector-based, revenue-derived categories of public/private, governmental/non-governmental, for-profit/not-for-profit and so forth, how might it be alternatively approached? Not captured within such static modes of categorisation is the performative functioning of the possibility of an ‘ethical career’ itself. As some of those quoted in this section have indicated, the ‘ethical career’ is not primarily imagined in terms of its appropriate organisational/corporate/institutional location, it is understood in terms of what one can *do* – the ‘doing more,’ ‘giving back,’ ‘positively impacting’ and ‘making a difference.’

Importantly, in terms of what it is *possible to do* – the ethical career might additionally be understood to performatively function so as to actually bring into being the conditions for its own emergence, coherence, and endurance. What I am suggesting is of significance here with regard to the issue of approaching what might be understood as an ‘ill-defined’ empirical category then, is that the stasis implied by this formulation fails to comprehend the way the ‘ethical career’ exists in relationship to a ‘future’ of which it is actually productive. That this process requires much further elaboration is clear – for the moment I have only been attempting to underscore the importance of such an elaboration in terms of its *a priori* necessity if the ‘ethical career’ is to make sense as a useful analytical concept at all.

### **From ‘Demand’ to ‘Aspiration’**

In the language of economics, dynamics of supply and demand are understood to drive markets. As is attested to by the commonly used phrase ‘job market,’ (and this almost goes without saying) employment is awarded on a highly competitive basis, and as such, dynamics of supply and demand may be called upon to explain (albeit perhaps in overly general terms sociologically speaking) the allocation of different candidates to different jobs. The CSR business case logic explicitly recognises the role of demand by suggesting that consumers will actively choose to buy products they perceive as more ‘ethical,’ (although as the previous chapter sought to demonstrate ‘choice,’ in this context, does not necessarily entail the rational self-maximisation that is often implied in economic and some sociological treatments of this). In the case of the present object of attention – the ‘ethical career,’ an analogous expression of ‘business case’ logic can be found readily propounded. Burrows’ *Ethical Careers Guide* for instance begins with the following proposition:

Most of us can choose which organisation, company, industry or sector we work in. The more of us who refuse to work for a company or organisation with questionable policies, exploitative working practices, poor human rights or environmental track records, the stronger the pressure on them to change. The more of us who work for

organisations and companies that actively attempt to create positive social change, the faster those changes will come about.<sup>570</sup>

Echoing this logic, an article published on the ethicalcareers.org recruitment website quotes Reed Employment's Head of Marketing, Janine Parry, as saying, "[a] decision to implement a CSR policy makes good business sense: it gives companies a competitive edge, saves money and, as our research shows, helps to attract top candidates."<sup>571</sup> The research Parry refers to is a survey recently conducted by Reed indicating that "more than half (57%) of [graduate] candidates believed that having an ethically and socially responsible employer was important."<sup>572</sup> This is taken to imply "too few jobs to meet ethical demand,"<sup>573</sup> and hence the competitive situation Parry describes.

A reading of this situation in terms of straightforward 'demand' however is problematic and unsatisfactory from a sociological perspective. While rational actor models (from wherein 'demand' derives) assume that decisions are made on the basis of optimising expected benefits, these benefits *ex ante*, at the time of their initial imagining, are only *hopes*.<sup>574</sup> To speak in terms of 'demand' about ethical careers then, is to fundamentally misrecognise what is at stake – 'demand' implies that the expectations attached to the demanded thing are always realisable, pre-determined in present time to be inherent to it. By necessity however, given that the future is fundamentally uncertain, "expectation entails mere hope."<sup>575</sup> On this basis, it is my suggestion that working 'ethically,' is not a 'demand,' but a (hoped for) prospect, a desire, or, most accurately and as I will refer to it – an 'aspiration.'

As 'aspiration,' the apparent 'problem' of ill-definability is overcome; 'definability' in terms of conventional employment categories is not at stake. The 'ethical career' is not a list of job titles, but an aspired to mode of working relation. That, for graduate job-seekers, an 'ethical career' operates as a future 'aspiration' is

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<sup>570</sup> Burrows, ed., *The Ethical Careers Guide 2006-7*. p.3

<sup>571</sup> Janine Parry of Reed Employment, [www.reed.co.uk](http://www.reed.co.uk), quoted in 'Two few jobs to meet ethical demand.' [http://ngomedia.org.uk/artman/publish/article\\_439.php](http://ngomedia.org.uk/artman/publish/article_439.php)

<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> G.L.S. Shackle (1972), in Jocelyn Pixley, "Emotions and Economics," in *Emotions and Sociology*, ed. Jack Barbalet (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). p.71

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

obvious; however, I want to claim that this is not just the case for those yet to begin their working lives. Rather, and drawing in this section on Nik Brown and Mike Michael's 'sociology of expectations,' I will suggest that the aspiration to work ethically is "route of agency" that operates "in the construction of the present's futures."<sup>576</sup> That is, given the 'ethical' content of the 'ethical career' is not fixed, how this is at any present time or point aspirationally conceived is actually crucial in bringing about the possibility, in a reflexive market context, of the 'ethical' working relation envisioned.

### **Networking as Ethical-work**

This self-fulfilling dynamic of ethical career 'creation' may be explored further by returning to examine some of the efforts towards getting an 'ethical' job made by members of the LSE student CSR Society. From the point at which I joined the Society in October 2007, it quickly became clear that the keen interest in ethical work prospects I had witnessed in January was not a marginal or mere sideline concern of the Society. Rather this aim was ensconced in its mission statement, which, at the first meeting of the year was projected via PowerPoint and explained to the assembled group by Evan, the newly elected society President.

Illustrated in the form of a flow chart, the "Mission" indicated that the Society's "strategy" was to "deliver events, workshops, platforms for dialogue" and "long-term relationship management," in order to "inspire" members, secure "internships," and "build CVs," which, through "work with [the] career office" could result in the aimed for "offer of [employment] positions."<sup>577</sup> As such, much of the task of the first meeting was devoted to nominating what kinds of events might be organised, and which contacts might be utilised to get the desired organisations and companies to attend. The outgoing 2006-7 society President, suggests, in course, a potentially useful new contact:

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<sup>576</sup> Brown, "Hope against Hype - Accountability in Biopasts, Presents, and Futures." p.3

<sup>577</sup> Evan, LSE CSR Society Mission Statement, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2007. (Names have been changed)

I met with someone actually this weekend, from an organisation called ‘Just Means,’ ... what they do is connect corporations with students, with consultancies – everything CSR oriented. And they advertise jobs or internships in CSR. ... And the good thing about this guy and the organisation is they are in contact with large corporations who are interested in CSR. And he e-mailed me yesterday and proposed two events – one is a careers fair, next term, and the other is a networking event, this term. And he proposed that we work together and invite companies and speakers to come. So, I think it’s great because they’re starting up, it’s a relatively new organisation, so they are looking for companies, just like we are, so we could be sharing or pooling resources.<sup>578</sup>

The emphasis placed here on the need to ‘network,’ and be in ‘contact,’ suggests that the ‘ethical career’ aspired to by group members is not available in the straightforward way of a conventional job vacancy. As Evan explicitly recognises in the same introductory session, “you guys, our members, obviously you want inspiration, you want to get into contact with companies which don’t necessarily have jobs assigned for you.”<sup>579</sup> The CSR job, given the novelty of this field, does not reliably exist, nor where it does exist, does it necessarily do so in the same place or in the same way from company to company.

Brammar, the UCL careers advisor, attests to this same issue when she emphasises the need to “think beyond the obvious,” and be “prepared to do the leg work.”<sup>580</sup> Evan’s repeated reference to ‘inspiration’ and Brammar’s exhortation to go ‘beyond the obvious’ underscore a sense of the need to be creative in finding ‘ethical’ work. Ethical jobs that are not entirely self-evident may be ‘found’ as it were via networking, legwork, or contacts, but also, given the novelty of field, it might even be up to the career aspirant themselves to utilise these means as a way of creating the desired job position by convincing others of its necessity or desirability.

Much to my surprise, I myself was often treated less as ‘researcher’ and more as ‘valued contact.’ As someone doing research on an emerging trend, in a number of situations I found myself unexpectedly cast in the role of ‘expert.’ On more than

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<sup>578</sup> 2006-7 (Ex-) Society President speaking at first meeting, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2007.

<sup>579</sup> Evan, Introductory meeting, LSE, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2007.

<sup>580</sup> Brammar ‘Ethical careers.’

one occasion, the CSR Society President looked to me to weigh in on ideological disputes that had broken out between members, and, one evening, when a scheduled speaker was ten minutes late, I was asked (prior to the eventual arrival of this speaker) if I might like to lead the session instead. While this could perhaps be accounted for in terms of my academic seniority in the CSR society (its membership consisting mainly of masters students and some undergraduates), elsewhere similar assumptions of my ‘usefulness’ were made.

When, at the Forum3 recruitment event, I asked Gideon Burrows if I might interview him about his *Ethical Careers Guide*, he enthusiastically agreed, but turned the intention around entirely – “it would be great to workshop the whole ‘ethical careers’ thing with you, get your perspective.”<sup>581</sup> Similarly, upon leaving a meeting with Judith Baines, advisor on ethical careers at the LSE, she wondered if I might like to come back and present to students on the topic of how to go about achieving an ethical career.<sup>582</sup>

The practice of networking, of making contacts, functions of course to actualise and consolidate a fledgling field, serving to better found or establish this, and, as I found, is always liable to work as a kind of exchange. In fact, it was on the basis of this exact understanding, (as outlined in the Society mission statement), that company representatives were invited by the CSR Society to speak to its members. Companies, it was reasoned, could “establish their name” and “get in touch with interesting students,”<sup>583</sup> while society members stood to gain connections that could prove advantageous in securing the kind of job to which they aspired. To such ends, events featuring corporate representatives organised by the society over the course of 2007-8 often had the feel of a reverse job interview. Invited speakers, such as Green & Black’s CEO William Kendall enthused about CSR – “I passionately believe in it,”<sup>584</sup> while society members gently tested such pronouncements,<sup>585</sup> at the same time

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<sup>581</sup> In conversation at forum3, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, Islington Business Design Centre, London.

<sup>582</sup> Interview with Judith Baines, LSE Careers Advisor, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2009. LSE, London.

<sup>583</sup> LSE CSR Society Mission Statement, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2007.

<sup>584</sup> William Kendall, then CEO Green & Black’s, 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2007. LSE, London.

<sup>585</sup> Kendall was quizzed in particular on the take over of Green & Blacks by ‘corporate giant’ Cadbury Schweppes.

attempting to appear non-confrontational, employable, and equally demonstrate their own enthusiasm for CSR.

To say that the aspiration to work 'ethically' is future oriented is not equivalent to saying that it is necessarily deferred, or may never be realised. Rather, as a 'sociology of expectations' is apt to recognise, "how we reflect on the past and imagine the future always emerges from the real time work we would like those representations to perform in the now."<sup>586</sup> On the basis of an understanding such as this, networking might be understood as one method via which the 'real time work' of the aspiration to work ethically is done.

This however, is not simply so in the 'rational expectation' sense, as though the desire to work ethically functions in the job market as a simple demand. Rather, as the reoccurrence of the notions of 'inspiration' and 'enthusiasm' in my description of some of the activities of the CSR Society suggests, the aspiration to work ethically is primarily an *affective* more so than 'cognitive' one. Networking then, in the present case might be understood as kind of feeling-work, or even, in so much as it performatively, or productively brings about possibility of working 'ethically' as viable in places it may previously not have been, a kind of ethical-work in itself.

### **The 'Affective Labour' of Aspiration**

Describing labour through its products, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri utilise the term 'affective labour' to draw attention to the frequently immaterial nature of these in the contemporary globalised economy.<sup>587</sup> Labour, they suggest, may seek to produce "a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion."<sup>588</sup> As a description of the types of affective experience that one might

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<sup>586</sup> Brown, "Hope against Hype - Accountability in Biopasts, Presents, and Futures." p.11

<sup>587</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. p.292 Distinct from Hardt and Negri's conception of 'affective labour,' but an area in which much has been written, is the importance of moderating affect in the workplace and the affective entailments of certain jobs. Arlie Hochschild's account of affect management amongst flight attendants is a sociological classic in this field, and equally. a burgeoning management literature on emotions can be noted. See; Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*.; Stephen Fineman, *Emotion in Organizations* (London: Sage, 1993).

<sup>588</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*. p.292

associate with the prospect of working ethically and, equally, as a description of the types of knowledge and communication work that are likely to characterise most ‘ethical’ jobs, Hardt and Negri’s analysis is apt. More substantially though, my suggestion with regard to the affective nature of the aspiration to work ethically is that it is in the *affective mode* itself that the possibility of working ethically actually inheres and emerges.

To elaborate, and to return to the importance of ‘inspiration’ and ‘enthusiasm,’ we might note how these function relatedly and in connection with regard to the aspiration to work ethically. I have already drawn attention to the enthusiastic mode of presentation employed by corporate speakers with regard to CSR, and the enthusiasm of the LSE Society members is evident not only in their membership and attendance, but also in their eagerness to engage with each other and of course ‘network’ with the visiting speakers. Additionally, as recommended by Brammar, enthusiasm with regard to ethical work might be demonstrated by taking unpaid internships, or volunteering in your field of interest.<sup>589</sup> Linked to enthusiasm, inspiration too is evidently important, not only inasmuch as it is a stated aim of the CSR Society, but also as it is understood to sustain the very possibility of working ethically. Entailed in ‘inspiration,’ and observable in this context, is the dual hope that one’s own working life might be personally fulfilling and ‘make a positive difference’ to others.

Significantly, it is very much through affective modes such as inspiration, enthusiasm, hope, and so forth, that we might understand ethical careers to be ‘sold’ in the job market and hence viable at all. This recognition is sometimes made, but with a slightly different emphasis, in the observation of a sustaining momentum or ‘buzz’ around ethical careers. Noted explicitly in reference to the recent emergence and rapid growth of the field, this is also attested to in reverse through a question ubiquitously posed of late, and considered in depth in the following chapter – what of CSR in a recession?

While practitioners, proponents and job prospectors alike are aware of the importance of keeping momentum up, of keeping the buzz going, this of course does

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<sup>589</sup> Brammar, ‘Ethical Careers.’

not function to entirely exclude from the aspiration to work ethically more pessimistic or cynical affects. Rather, what emerges are extremely complex and often ambivalent narratives that seek to balance fundamental cynicism at the very prospect of ethical (corporate) work, against a 'hope,' which, in the face of such cynicism, posits itself as genuine, and moreover, being 'hope,' unassailable.<sup>590</sup>

The extent to which networking practices are actually typical of the kind of relationship work in which contemporary labour largely subsists is theorised under varying rubrics. As already mentioned, Hardt and Negri suggest 'affective labour,' as a means via which to describe contemporary labour as the production of activities (as opposed to consumer commodities), a trend described more broadly by Maurizio Lazzarato with reference the 'immaterial labour'<sup>591</sup> of communication and cooperation, constitutive of what others still have referred to as the 'new economy.'<sup>592</sup> While these accounts differ significantly in their intellectual origins, focus, and specificity, all seek to theorise the service and knowledge intensive nature of the current economy, recognising in particular the emphasis on making relationships that is entailed in this – what Andreas Wittel refers to as 'network sociality.'<sup>593</sup>

Thus far, I have sought to emphasise how the 'ethical career' as aspiration or possibility is enacted through this type of networking or on the basis of such relationship work. This has enabled me to suggest that the desire to work ethically is not simply constituted as competitive demand for a set of predefined or pre-existing 'ethical jobs,' but instead is involved in the performative, affective, and relational process of bringing such possibilities about. What is yet to be specifically addressed in this account though, is how individual 'ethical career' aspirants are personally

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<sup>590</sup> A strong sense of ambivalence accompanied both interviewed careers advisor's approaches to the 'ethical career.' Despite specifically advising students on how to pursue a career in this vein, both Laura Brammar (UCL & C2) and Judith Baines (LSE) expressed a great deal of cynicism as to this possibility. For both, the emphasis very much was on the self-creation of an 'ethical' path, as I go on to discuss.

<sup>591</sup> Lazzarato, *Immaterial Labour*.

<sup>592</sup> See, for instance, Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism*. Also, Adkins, *Revisions: Gender and Sexuality in Late Modernity*.; Castells, *The Rise of Network Society. The Information Age: Economy, Science and Culture*.; Lash, *Critique of Information*.; Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: Norton, 1998).; Wittel, "Towards a Network Sociality."

<sup>593</sup> Wittel, "Towards a Network Sociality."

constituted in relationship to this desire. ‘Personhood’ itself, as Lisa Adkins points out, does require specific attention in the context of a ‘new economy’ of ‘immaterial’ or ‘affective labour’ inasmuch as it may actually be understood to undergo a process of material reconstitution.<sup>594</sup> Typically though, as Adkins continues to suggest, studies of the new economy “side-step” this focus, tending instead to observe how new technological objects are “reworking the material processes that constitute public and private life”, but “stop[ing] short of considering how this reworking of materiality works out in regard to people.”<sup>595</sup>

Following this observation, I want to address the way in which ‘ethics’ are configured in relation to the ‘self’ in the suggestion of an ‘ethical career.’ In particular, I will be evoking the figure of the ‘enterprising self,’<sup>596</sup> to illustrate the way in which ‘ethics’ are persistently attributed to ‘ethical career’ aspirants, as though these are uniquely ‘owned,’ individually derived, and accessible via self-reflection. Something of a double movement is also going on here though. While on the one hand, one’s ‘ethics’ are understood to be uniquely possessed, and may even function on the basis of this apparent singularity as a potentially marketable commodity in the job market, at another level, the cultivation of ‘ethics’ as the capacity or potential for a certain type of innovative market practice also emerges in the suggestion of an ‘ethical career.’

### **Ethics for an Enterprising Self?**

I think the most important thing I’m probably going to say to you today is it appears to me it’s very much down to you to define what it is that you mean by ‘ethics.’ This term is being bandied around on a daily basis by people with very different agendas, so you need to have some quiet time with yourself thinking what do you mean when you say you want an ‘ethical career.’

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<sup>594</sup> Adkins, "The New Economy, Property and Personhood." p.112

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

<sup>596</sup> Nikolas Rose, "Governing the Enterprising Self," in *The Values of the Enterprise Culture*, ed. Paul Heelas and Paul Morris (London: Routledge, 1992).

...the sort of nebulosity of this subject is your ethics will depend on your own value system and what you particularly think is valuable and is good. So ethics is individual, so think about that.

Laura Brammar, 'Ethical Careers' presentation, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2007

In this extract from Brammar's careers fair presentation, self-reflection is proposed as the recommended means via which one might navigate the multiple contradictions and tensions that inhere in the suggestion of an 'ethical career.' As Burrows concurs, "[i]t's all about what is important to you – not someone else who decides what ethics is in some lofty way."<sup>597</sup> In this regard, the proposal that one might work ethically has much in common with the popular contemporary version of 'enterprise' which suggests that self-fulfilment might be achieved "not *in spite of* work but *by means of* work."<sup>598</sup>

This is not to speak of enterprise in the merely organisation sense of "individual units competing with one another on the market," rather, as elaborated by Rose, enterprise "generally provides an image of a mode of activity to be encouraged in a multitude of arenas of life."<sup>599</sup> Pursuing a career, 'ethical' or otherwise, can be understood in the language of 'enterprise' as a means of self-actualisation, a route to the maximisation of one's self worth vis-à-vis the self.<sup>600</sup> We have encountered this idea already with regard to the injunction to work ethically, recall Jason Elliot (founder of 'Ethical Jobs') suggestion that this entails "doing something that serves your practical needs, your personal values and your interests in a way that positively impacts upon the world."<sup>601</sup> This is also captured more generally in popular

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<sup>597</sup> Gideon Burrows, 'Ethicalcareers.org.' Presentation given at forum3, Islington Business Design Centre, London, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2008.

<sup>598</sup> Rose, "Governing the Enterprising Self." p.151 (Original italics)

<sup>599</sup> Ibid., p.145

<sup>600</sup> Ibid., p.149

<sup>601</sup> Elliot, [www.ethical-jobs.co.uk](http://www.ethical-jobs.co.uk)

discourses of ‘pursuing one’s dreams’ through work,<sup>602</sup> and getting a job in which, to quote a C2 careers advisory advertisement, “you can truly be yourself.”<sup>603</sup>

Crucially though, as Rose points out, notions such as these are “governed by a single *a priori*: the ‘autonomisation and ‘responsibilisation’ of the self.”<sup>604</sup> Something which occurs part and parcel, as Paul Heelas and Paul Morris elaborate, with the “extension” and “intensification” of market forces across all aspects of contemporary life.<sup>605</sup> This process is vividly depicted in Brammar’s tellingly entitled ‘Self-Audit’ procedure in which she encourages audience members to take part during her presentation:

[On a PowerPoint screen it reads: ‘Self Audit,’ and listed below: Environmental Impact, Community/Social, Workplace Practices, Marketplace and Business - Responsible behaviour, Ethical Governance - transparency and compliance.]<sup>606</sup>

Ok – so now, and apologies if this is really patronising ... but I want you to think just for a moment what are the ethical issues or aspects of CSR that are most pertinent to you, what are the factors that you feel most strongly about, what’s actually led you to think, you know, actually – working ethically matters to me, it’s that aspect of an ethical career that appeals more than others. Now it may be all of them, I’m not suggesting that some of them you don’t give a toss about, I’m hoping that you care about all of them. But where would you most like to see yourself fitting in terms of lending your efforts and energies. I am going to give you thirty seconds to look at those, and if you had to rank the top three – guns to your head – the top three in terms of things that you feel most strongly about... Ok, thirty seconds – off you go.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>602</sup> [www.forum3.co.uk](http://www.forum3.co.uk)

<sup>603</sup> C2 careers text advertisement, The Guardian London Graduate Fair (Careers Group) 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2008 programme.

<sup>604</sup> Rose, "Governing the Enterprising Self." p.149

<sup>605</sup> Paul Heelas and Paul Morris, "Enterprise Culture: Its Values and Value," in *The Values of the Enterprise Culture*, ed. Paul Heelas and Paul Morris (London: Routledge, 1992). p.5

<sup>606</sup> Ibid. ‘Self-Audit’ PowerPoint slide.

<sup>607</sup> Brammar, ‘Ethical Careers.’

In line with the expectations of an 'enterprise' culture, our ethical values and personal convictions are depicted as that over which we exercise complete self-mastery. Self-knowledge being total, thirty seconds of self-consultation should be sufficient to determine our ethical priorities so to speak, and figure out where, on this basis, we might expect to work in order to be most 'fulfilled.'

This "reflexive hermeneutics"<sup>608</sup> of self-knowledge is also evident in the expectation that ethical career aspirants will be able to articulate exactly why it is that they wish to work 'ethically' and, in particular, that this 'motivation' will take the form of a unique, individual and compelling personal experience or narrative. As Brammar explains: "... essentially what you are going to be asked at the point of entering these organisations, whether they are massive, or just two people working from a bedroom somewhere, is what are your motivations, and what are the issues that matter you?"<sup>609</sup>

The question of 'motivations' also occupied much of the more introductory social chat that occurred between members of the LSE CSR society. Here, it was not uncommon to find these isolated to a particular experiential moment or rendered into a coherent narrative. In particular, stories of witnessing corporate exploitation in the Third World, often on a gap year, frequently emerged. The Society administrator, a particularly enthusiastic CSR proponent, explained to me how, for instance, her interest in CSR initially emerged following gap year travels in Orissa in India when she recalls being appalled by the pace of tourist development and how this was "definitely not [happening] in an environmentally or socially sustainable way."<sup>610</sup>

This emphasis on knowing your own ethics, and the having of an attendant justificatory back-story, might also be understood in the context of an enterprise culture as a means via which an establishment of the 'right' (or most economically viable) kinds of "values-cum-selfhood"<sup>611</sup> are encouraged. In the present case, this recognition draws our attention to the utility of demonstrating that you possess certain kinds of 'ethics' in securing particular forms of employment. This is, of

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<sup>608</sup> Rose, "Governing the Enterprising Self." p.149

<sup>609</sup> Brammar, 'Ethical Careers'

<sup>610</sup> LSE CSR Society Administrator, 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2007

<sup>611</sup> Heelas and Morris, "Enterprise Culture: Its Values and Value." p.8

course, inherent in Brammar's suggestion that employers will want to know what your ethical 'motivations' are, but can also be widely observed elsewhere, for instance in the trend towards CV building via volunteering. As suggested by Paul Canal, managing director of the recruiting agency Charity People, volunteering usefully "demonstrates that you care and are actively engaged."<sup>612</sup> Here, the lauding of 'care' and 'active' engagement might be understood to be indicative of the emergence of what Adkins and Lury describe as "new workplace hierarchies" wherein "knowledge of and management of the self as an individual may be exchanged for labour-market remuneration."<sup>613</sup>

Showing that you 'care,' or, otherwise put, the capacity for empathy, is, as Canal attests, something that is highly valued in the contemporary job market. This is not just the case with regard to charity, or so-defined 'ethical' jobs in which the desirability of empathy is reasonably obvious. Rather, more generally it is indicative of the aforementioned tendency towards the integration of individual and organisation goals captured in the notion of fulfilment through work.<sup>614</sup> As Eva Illouz suggests, "[e]mpathy has historically evolved with the rise of the capitalist corporation and the needs of managing a corporation."<sup>615</sup> In this way, emotion may be key in articulating a desirable (read successful) kind of corporate selfhood.<sup>616</sup>

In his treatise on social entrepreneurship, *Everyone a Changemaker*, William Drayton celebratedly proclaims of empathy: "Our world now requires [this] skill as the ticket of admission to [even the] most simple levels of society."<sup>617</sup> The 'skill' of "applied-empathy," whereby each and every action must be contemplated insofar as it stands to "impact everyone at several removes around us and long into the future," Drayton suggests is now so important that those failing to acquire this will actually be economically and socially "marginalized."<sup>618</sup> This happy 'marginalisation' of the

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<sup>612</sup> Canal, Paul, in Sandiford, Adam, "Against the Odds," *Ethical Careers Guide*, p.15

<sup>613</sup> Lisa Adkins and Celia Lury, "The Labour of Identity: Performing Identities, Performing Economies," *Economy and Society* 28, no. 4 (1999). p.610

<sup>614</sup> Eva Illouz, "The Culture of Management: Self-Interest, Empathy and Emotional Control." in *An Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship*, ed. Rafael Ziegler (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2009). p.118

<sup>615</sup> Ibid., pp.107-8

<sup>616</sup> Ibid., p.119

<sup>617</sup> William Drayton, "Everyone a Changemaker: Social Entrepreneurship's Ultimate Goal," *innovations* Winter (2006). p.86

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

un-empathetic may be taken as an example of the extent to which discourses of the emotional and economic are mutually constitutive in contemporary society – what Illouz attests to with her use of the phrase “emotional capitalism.”<sup>619</sup>

As a path to fulfilment and self-realisation then, work in an enterprise culture may be understood to subsist in the personal acquisition, display, and moderation of the appropriate emotional (in addition to technical) *skills*. To what extent however, does it make sense to understand ‘ethics’ in the current context as a set of emotional or empathetic inclinations, collected in the self, gathered through experience, available to articulate through self-reflection, and hierarchically organised in terms of relative importance? While much of the discourse surrounding ethical careers avoids specifying the content of the ‘ethical’ on this basis (recall Burrows, “we haven’t attempted to define what ‘ethical’ means ... [w]hat we have tried to do is provide information to help you make up your own mind”<sup>620</sup>), this does not necessarily conclusively constitute ‘ethics’ as a property of the individual with regard to ‘ethical careers.’

Take for example, the ‘self-audit’ categories of Brammar’s PowerPoint presentation – “Environmental Impact, Community/Social, Workplace Practices, Marketplace and Business - Responsible behaviour, Ethical Governance - transparency and compliance.” While representing some viable sectors in which one might seek to work ethically, these do not read as likely descriptors of people’s actual desires or aspirations. I am aware of course that this ‘self-audit’ was employed by Brammar only as a practical exercise in getting graduates to think about where they might most like to work, however, a larger point emerges from this.

People do of course have different ethical priorities and values – the extent to which these specifically give rise to the desire to work ‘ethically’ though is perhaps markedly over-rated in some of the discourses pertaining to this. What this focus on ‘ethics’ as a possession of the individual person fails to note, is the way in which ‘ethics’ in the context of the emerging *market* for ‘ethical careers’ actually functions

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<sup>619</sup> Illouz, “The Culture of Management: Self-Interest, Empathy and Emotional Control.” p.108 Note that Illouz’s claim is distinct from those who impute a debasement of emotion by present-day capitalism – i.e. Hochschild.

<sup>620</sup> Burrows, ed., *The Ethical Careers Guide 2006-7*. p.3

as a kind of future potential, detached from the values of the individual, and affectively orientated outwards to the dynamics of the wider market. Thus, while an approach in terms of ‘enterprising selfhood’ can account for the mechanism via which we are led to believe that ‘ethics’ is a property of the self, it is not sufficiently attuned to address the way in which these might function productively with an orientation to the future in a contemporary marketplace that construes ‘ethics’ in terms of *innovatively generative potential*.

### **Having a Salary, and Wearing One’s Sandals Too**

The sense that I am attempting to describe – in which the notion of an ‘ethical career’ functions as a supra-individual and generative future-orientation – is implicitly recognised in an interesting way by the LSE CSR Society’s stance on the seemingly rather more mundane organisational question of how CSR might be ‘integrated’ into a corporation. One of the major points covered in the Society’s Mission Statement, and an issue that was raised many times (and not often with unanimous agreement) throughout the year of events and meetings, was what Evan, the Society President, referred to in terms of the need to “de-politicise”<sup>621</sup> CSR and make it more “practicable.”<sup>622</sup> Here, in this anecdote told at the first Society meeting, his concerns are articulated:

There was this consultancy fair last week, and when we approached those consultants, who consult [with] the most important CEOs in the world (like those Mackinsey guys – they tell the managers what their strategy should look like), and then you ask them, ‘What is CSR? How do you cope with that?’ And they tell you, ‘Oh, you know what, we’ve got a department for that!’ And then you think, well, who is consulting with CEOs, is it you, or is it your CSR department? And that is actually the issue we should focus upon this year. We can see that usual jobs should include CSR, and [the question is] how can we communicate this to those studying here – studying investment banking, studying consultancy, studying everything else

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<sup>621</sup> Evan, LSE CSR Society introductory session, LSE, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2007. See also, LSE CSR Society Mission Statement, 2007-8.

<sup>622</sup> LSE CSR Society Mission Statement, 2007-8.

– how can we communicate that those things should be communicated in each strategy, of each CEO?

...

So we would see our role to de-politicise the topic, to move out of say, the green issue, and bring it more into practicability, and to show that it is not a topic for the idealistic – for some green parties, but a topic that should be integrated in the day to day of work.<sup>623</sup>

Evan's suggestion that CSR should be 'de-politicised' has directly to do with the problem of integration. CSR must become a 'practical' as opposed to a 'political' exercise if, as Evan proposes it, it is to be an 'integrated' aspect of 'day to day work.' No one 'political' issue should hold too much sway as this then makes CSR 'political' and hence liable to be marginalised. This stance was of course not uncontroversial – some members immediately worried that 'de-politicisation' was akin to selling out, 'de-fanging' the issue of corporate responsibility, de-radicalising this by mixing it with business-as-usual.

In a conversation with me at the end of his Masters degree, Evan explained the situation interestingly though. I had asked whether, given he had finished studying, he would now be seeking to get a job in CSR? His reply was emphatic and unexpected. I knew how extremely enthusiastic Evan was about CSR and 'making a difference' from all the work he had put into the Society and his presidency, however, as he explained, this did not necessarily translate into wanting to work in CSR specifically. Evan described his fears of getting 'stuck' in CSR, being organisationally tucked away and thus ineffective, an accessory or add-on as it were rather than being truly in the position to effect positive business changes.<sup>624</sup> A CSR-job then, to adapt a classic feminist phrase, risked for Evan at least, being a kind of 'green-collar ghetto.'<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>623</sup> Evan, LSE CSR Society introductory session, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2007.

<sup>624</sup> Conversation with Evan, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2008, LSE.

<sup>625</sup> Holly Sklar, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Karin Stallard, *Poverty in the American Dream: Women and Children First* (London: South End Press, 1983). These authors coined the phrase 'pink collar ghetto' to refer to the marginalisation of women's work.

In addition to being a problem of integration though, this also points towards the issue of professionalisation. Where once, working ‘ethically’ might have meant working for low or no pay, proponents of the contemporary professionalisation of this field are keen to stress that ethical jobs can now be expected to come with a pay packet. Jason Elliot for instance insists, “[c]hoosing an ethical career does not mean sacrificing a well-paid and exciting position in the corporate sector for an underpaid and under-appreciated one.”<sup>626</sup> Or, as more colourfully put by Gib Bulloch, Director of Accenture Development Partnerships: “It’s no longer a case of the evil private sector versus the sandal-wearing bleeding hearts.”<sup>627</sup>

As Evan’s concerns attest though, it may not simply be a matter of taking home a salary, and getting to wear one’s sandals too. An ‘ethical career,’ in the contemporary corporate usage of this term at least, does not invent ‘ethics’ as a unique quality or possession of the individual that pursues it, and in this way – to continue the metaphor – your chosen footwear is largely irrelevant. Rather, and to draw again from Adkins work on labour in the new economy, ethical labour might alternatively be understood to be significant in terms of effects “on the intended audience.”<sup>628</sup> In the present case the ‘audience’ being the wider marketplace for the *consumption* of various contemporary ethics, made up of ‘stakeholders’ of varying kinds including producers, consumers, shareholders and any number of interested others. ‘Ethics’ ceases to be understood as a personally derived set of individual values and becomes a mode of affective “cultural work” which, subsequently, is variously subject to the “cycles of production, distribution and reception which make up contemporary regimes of cultural production.”<sup>629</sup> Organised thus, ethical ‘qualities’ such as empathy are not accumulated uniquely and statically banked in the ‘self,’ rather ‘ethics’ is external,<sup>630</sup> a function, a ‘doing’ or a kind of ‘work.’

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<sup>626</sup> Elliot, [www.ethical-jobs.co.uk](http://www.ethical-jobs.co.uk)

<sup>627</sup> Gib Bulloch, speaking at, ‘CSR at its Crossroads,’ 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2007, Clement House, London School of Economics and Politics, Aldwych, London.

<sup>628</sup> Adkins, "The New Economy, Property and Personhood." p.123

<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid., p.125

In the sense that it is invoked in the phrase ‘ethical career’ then, ‘ethics’ might be understood to undergo a shift in both temporal and spatial organisation. Where an understanding of ethics as a sedimented collection of personal values denotes retrospection and internality, ‘ethics’ as a mode of affective productive work in the market economy is future-oriented and outwardly operating. Ethical ‘labour’ therefore is not defined with reference to any particular politics, or restricted to any particular employment sector – it is valuable with an eye to the future, in the mode of potential, of what might be otherwise possible.

## Chapter Seven

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### Reflexions on ‘Crisis’

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, 2008, a little over a week after the spectacular collapse of Lehman Brothers and right amidst the stock market pandemonium that this spurred, an email forward appeared in my inbox – “Unbelievable...where it all began,” it read. Inside was a link to a New York Times article dated the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 1999, and entitled “Fannie Mae Eases Credit to Aid Mortgage Lending.”<sup>631</sup> Positive, even ebullient, in tone, the article described how the US Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae)<sup>632</sup> were piloting a program of eased credit in order to extend lending to “so-called sub-prime borrowers:”<sup>633</sup> “In a move that could help increase home ownership rates among minorities and low-income consumers, the Fannie Mae Corporation is easing the credit requirements on loans that it will purchase from banks and other lenders.”<sup>634</sup> Fannie Mae, the article continued, “has been under increasing pressure from the Clinton Administration to expand mortgage loans among low and moderate income people and felt pressure from stock holders to maintain its phenomenal growth in profits.”<sup>635</sup>

Reading this article ten years on and with all the benefits of hindsight, ‘unbelievable’ it may be it – but then this is the problematic thing about hindsight. In the wake of the economic crisis, ‘market ethics’ (the phrase I have used throughout this thesis to simultaneously highlight the development of various markets-for-ethics and understand how, as market-based practice, ‘ethics’ are done differently) takes on a new and pressing dimension. In the recessive economic environs of 2009, the

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<sup>631</sup> Steven A. Holmes, "Fannie Mae Eases Credit to Aid Mortgage Lending," *New York Times* 30th September, 1999. Holmes, "Fannie Mae Eases Credit to Aid Mortgage Lending."

<sup>632</sup> Fannie Mae is a mortgage securitisation body created by the US Federal Government in 1938.

<sup>633</sup> Holmes, "Fannie Mae Eases Credit to Aid Mortgage Lending."

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

particular concern that has now come to dominate mainstream discourse is the *'ethics' (or otherwise) of markets themselves.*

This new locus of concern has significant implications for a CSR made popular on the basis of a proposed coincidence between what is 'ethical' and what is 'marketable.' For this reason, the present chapter will begin by utilising the 2008 financial crisis as an opportune departure point from which to critically reflect back over the period of this research as one during which notable economic changes were taking place. This will involve describing how the growth in popularity of CSR in the UK, and particularly in London, can be understood to have taken place alongside and as a function of the growth in importance of the financial sector, and relatedly, the governmental trend towards increasing deregulation. Given this lineage, one might suspect the present prognosis for CSR to be unfavourable, and yet, as this chapter will go on to explore, it is not necessarily clear that this is the case.

The question of whether CSR would survive the crisis and subsequent economic downturn was one asked repeatedly and with great frequency over the course of 2008-9. As a market phenomenon, the success of CSR has been widely interpreted to be linked inescapably to the 'success' of markets themselves. Given the 'failure' of markets, so also the 'failure' of CSR. And yet, upon closer consideration, and in line with the approach developed over preceding chapters, the ascription of 'success' and 'failure' in this formulation may be critically understood to present a number of difficulties. That markets 'failed' appears, on the one hand, reasonably self-evident. What though, this chapter will seek to alternatively ask, is exactly at stake in 'failure'? Equally, the term 'crisis,' as intuitively appealing and experientially accurate a descriptor as this may be, requires further attention and unpacking to the extent that unquestioningly instituted within is a particular version of economic 'success.'

In the course of inquiries regarding the 'fate' of CSR, the present chapter goes on to formulate a different stance regarding the characterisation of 'economic crisis' or, more specifically, regarding the critical and political efficacy of this characterisation. That the economic situation, in the wake of the precipitous market tumble of September of 2008, was understood to be almost unprecedentedly

disastrous in financial terms *matters* inasmuch as it is this understanding that gives rise in concrete ways to what it is possible to *do*. ‘Crisis’ gave rise, for instance, to the suggestion of ‘the death of capitalism,’ and in this way was understood by some to represent a new window of opportunity for Left politics. That economic recovery is now well underway and no such ‘opportunity’ emerged as predicted however, suggests instead the need for much care to be taken around face-value ascriptions of economic ‘success’ and ‘failure.’ In the present instance, the extent of ‘crisis’ and the degree of ‘failure’ result, counterintuitively in a precedence of economic ‘recovery’ that actually functions, I will suggest, to almost entirely proscribe the possibility of ‘reform,’ and in the process perpetuates increasingly severe economic volatility into the future.

So that our theoretical accounts of economic dynamics are to be able to identify and avoid such problems, it is important that we are aware also of the extent to which these may be similarly reliant on implicit or explicit notions of ‘success’ and ‘failure.’ In economic sociology (to return to a discussion begun in Chapter One), Callonistic performativity provides, on this basis I will suggest, some cause for critical concern. Entailed in the suggestion of ‘performativity’ is that things ‘work’ as they are meant to, yet, as this chapter will seek to elaborate, a certain dynamism is lacking here. While ‘not working,’ has been modelled in a performative vein by Donald Mackenzie as ‘counter-performativity,’<sup>636</sup> the continued desirability of a performative emphasis is nonetheless brought into question by the context of economic ‘crisis.’ The veil of normalcy displaced, we might take the opportunity to dwell not on the coherence of economic knowledge, but on its contestability and fluidity.

This requires not an abandonment of performativity, but a realignment. Away from the implicit assumptions of ‘success/failure,’ things simply ‘working’ or ‘not working,’ how might we be otherwise able to describe economic processes in the constant flux of change? The emphasis on the *reflexive-affective* nature of markets and market practices developed over the preceding captures and particularly in

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<sup>636</sup> Donald MacKenzie, "The Big, Bad Wolf and the Rational Market: Portfolio Insurance, the 1987 Crash and the Performativity of Economics," *Economy and Society* 33, no. 3 (2004). p.306

Chapter Three, provides a starting point here. Drawing on a collected array of ‘crisis’ flotsam in the form of newspaper clippings, magazine articles, sound bites and stories, this chapter will take a short journey back through the tumultuous times of the 2008-9 economic crisis in order to reflect upon, in light of these events, both the ‘market ethics’ that have been the object of this thesis, and the kind of critical perspectives that sociology adopts in response to ‘crisis.’ My emphasis here will be on the inevitability (as opposed to the exceptionality) of ‘crisis’ in financialised economies constituted as much in co-temporalised structures of feeling, as in calculative techniques, instruments, and models.

Where ‘crisis’ is rule though, the efficacy of this very description is called into question. Crucially, this requires a concomitant re-thinking of how ethics might be encountered in contexts characterised by endemic volatility and change, and further, how politics might also function without recourse to the different ‘beyond’ that ‘failure’ seems to promise, but upon which it rarely delivers. In the final instance, these might be understood as ethical and political questions that turn on the whereabouts of *hope*. Long the preserve of a radical and utopic ‘elsewhere,’ hope, I will suggest in closing, perhaps need not be quite so intangibly sequestered. Market-spaces, as this chapter will conclude, while not necessary hope-filled, need not be pre-emptively dismissed as ‘hope-less’ either.

### **A Long Bull Run**

Research on this thesis began in 2005. It was in this same year that I first became aware of ‘corporate social responsibility,’ my interest sparked by the rapid ascendancy and sudden ubiquity of this notion. From nowhere, and all of a sudden, ‘CSR’ seemed to me to be everywhere and setting the stage for the kind of questions that, over the preceding chapters, this thesis has sought to ask. What is evident now (though was of course not at the time), is that already by 2005 many global economies were nearing the peak of what, for some at least, was a long period of exceptionally bullish growth. That the CSR business case proposal gained in

popularity and became widespread during this ebullient era is significant now not only with regards to the future of CSR, but also to the approach of this thesis. Neither the verification nor endorsement of the business case have been at stake in the work that has preceded, but then neither has the business case reasoning ever seemed so problematic as it does in the present moment.

This chapter begins then by describing the popularisation of CSR in terms of its particular historical economic and political context. Specifically, I want to focus on how what might be called the ‘market popularism’ attendant in an era of primarily finance-led economic growth forms a foundation for the emergence and plausibility of CSR’s business case logic. In this way, CSR can be described temporally, with regard to changing market conditions across time, but also spatially, in so far as I also want to draw attention to the particularity and significance of the City of London itself in this era of financialisation. Too straightforwardly causal a description of the ascendancy of CSR in line with the ascendancy of the City though runs into problems of both a theoretical and political nature. Looking to the approach I have developed in the course of this thesis however, an emphasis on critical sensitivity to describing non-linear and non-polar processes of economic change will emerge.

### ‘Market Popularism’

In an influential polemic entitled *One Market Under God*, the American writer Thomas Frank coins the term ‘market popularism’ to critique the ascendancy of the market as a supposedly democratic organisational form.<sup>637</sup> Writing during the nineties era of dot.com boom, Frank claims that markets, in addition to being “mediums of exchange,” have become popular “mediums of consent.”<sup>638</sup> For Frank, this outcome is the result of a kind of un-holy trinity wherein the American traditions of laissez-faire and rugged individualism are understood to have joined forces with a newly vigorous and widespread shareholder capitalism. Markets, under this sway,

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<sup>637</sup> Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Popularism and the End of Economic Democracy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001).p.xiv

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

are mistaken as functioning democracies<sup>639</sup> – they are supposed “friend of the little guy,” and possessed of the power to bring down the “pompous and snooty.”<sup>640</sup> Democratic tallying machines, giant “global plebiscites,”<sup>641</sup> it is markets, so proponents of this view such as ex-Citibank chief Walter Wriston claim, that offer real “Power to the People.”<sup>642</sup>

The proposed connection between markets and democracy is of course not a new one, (as Frank himself recognises).<sup>643</sup> Recall, from Chapter One, that Milton Friedman famously argued something akin to this when he suggested that liberty is the freedom to express and satisfy one’s choices in a market context.<sup>644</sup> Democracy, following this account, might be understood analogously in terms of the ‘freedom to choose.’ What Frank diagnoses however, in the frenzied ‘new economy’ of the late nineties, is a new depth of ideological penetration so to speak. Markets are “in command,” and carried by marketers, dot.com millionaires, management gurus and shareholders at large, it is the ideology of market popularism which supplies them with the “legitimacy required to rule.”<sup>645</sup>

By May 2001 though, in an ‘Afterword’ to *One Market Under God*, Frank is writing already about market popularism in the past tense. The year 2000 had seen dot.com stocks slide, and the ‘new economy’ bubble spectacularly burst. The halcyon days the late nineties were over, and naïve trust in markets a thing of the past. Within months of publishing his treatise, history had apparently proven Frank right – the era of market popularism – dangerous, elusive, and false, had met its inevitably disastrous end.

Writing now however, in a perhaps analogous era of market-disillusion, it seems that ‘market popularism’ may be more enduring a problem than even Frank

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<sup>639</sup> Ibid., p.30 “...since markets express the will of the people, virtually any criticism of business could be described as an act of despicable contempt for the commonman.”

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Walter B. Wriston, *The Twilight of Sovereignty: How the Information Revolution Is Transforming Our World* (New York: Scribner, 1992). p.7

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Popularism and the End of Economic Democracy*. p.xiv

<sup>644</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*.

<sup>645</sup> Frank, *One Market under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Popularism and the End of Economic Democracy*. p.xv

was willing to give it credit for. Without transposing directly from the American context of the late nineties to recent years here in the UK, a related kind of faith in markets at work in the pre-credit crunch optimism of the British economy might be diagnosed.

### CSR and the City

Common to both progressions through boom and bust, is the context of the increasingly financialised economy in which they take place. The period of UK economic growth that climaxed in summer 2007, was primarily attributable to the success of London as a global financial centre.<sup>646</sup> The extent to which this was the case is demonstrated in the ten percent GDP accounted for in 2007 by financial services, of which nine percent was generated in the City of London.<sup>647</sup> Figures for this same year show furthermore that one in every thirty jobs in the UK was in the financial sector. The centrality of finance in the British economy is apparent still now, post credit-crunch, in debates surrounding the improvement of financial regulation. Herein, more stringent financial regulations are frequently understood to threaten the competitiveness of London as a global financial centre and thereby undermine the economic prospects of the UK as a whole.<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>646</sup> The hallmarks of a finance-led growth regime include a booming stock market, the ready supply of credit to sustain consumption, and a permanent optimism surrounding asset-price expectations. See, Robert Boyer, "Is a Finance-Led Growth Regime a Viable Alternative to Fordism? A Preliminary Analysis," *Economy and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000). p.116; See also, Michael Pryke and Paul Du Gay, "Take an Issue: Cultural Economy and Finance," *Economy and Society* 36, no. 3 (2007). p.339

<sup>647</sup> In 2007, according to the British Trade and Cultural Office, financial services accounted for 10.1 percent of UK GDP, and for 14 percent of UK GDP when added to associated services such as legal, accounting and management consultancy. <http://ukintaiwan.fco.gov.uk/en/doing-business/business-investment-in-uk/uk-business-environment/uk-financial-services/>. The 9 per cent figure for financial services in the City of London as a percentage of UK GDP is according to London Mayor Boris Johnson, speaking at the Conservative Party conference 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2009. See, Andrew Porter, "Conservative Party Conference: Boris Johnson Issues Challenge on Europe," *The Daily Telegraph*, 6th October 2009.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/politics/conservative/6263485/Conservative-Party-conference-Boris-Johnson-issues-challenge-on-Europe.html>

<sup>648</sup> The issue of maintaining London's competitiveness has a been much debated one not only in relation to financial regulation, but also with regard to restricting remuneration in the banking sector. In the later half of 2009, amid the suggestion that large end of year 'bonuses' be paid in the banking industry, public debate on this topic was particularly intense. See, for instance, BBC News, "Tories

The 'third way' political philosophy of the Labour government incumbent during the recent years of economic boom facilitated the growth of the City. The roll-back of government in certain traditionally public sectors and the promotion of free-market initiatives were/are characteristic of a governance style that, while seeking to maintain certain public provisions, does so at the same time as capitalising on the wealth creation possibilities offered by the competitiveness of the marketplace.<sup>649</sup> This deregulatory climate has, in the words of one commentator, given rise to a kind of "free-market fundamentalism,"<sup>650</sup> and, whether or not this overstates the case, it is difficult to deny that the pre-crisis years of the British economy were flavoured by a distinctive kind of market-derived 'win-win' optimism.

### Bye, Bye 'Business Case'?

The business case for CSR is, of course, a prime exemplar of this 'win-win' optimism insofar as it promotes the easy coincidence of 'doing well' and 'doing good.' Transferring responsibility for ethics to the marketplace, the unfortunate 'either/or' may be done away with – it need not be a choice, the 'ethical' versus the 'profitable,' one paves the way to the other, (or so the story has gone). That the growth of CSR has occurred alongside, and been entailed by, the growth of the City in recent years has certainly lent plausibility to the business case logic. What of the business case now though? In the current economic climate, the idea that markets may be enlisted as ethical vehicles appears more implausible than ever before.

And yet, while, undoubtedly, the business case is more difficult to swallow now than it once was, an interesting reversal of fortunes for CSR is also taking place as a function of the financial crisis. In a number of ways, the current crisis has seen CSR proposals writ large and endorsed as necessity. Where during the boom years

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Want End of Bonus Culture," 15th August 2009. Or; The Wall Street Journal, "UK City Minister: Government Ready to Act If Bank Bonuses Excessive," 21st October 2009.

<sup>649</sup> See, along these lines, the then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's pitch of 'personal prosperity for all.' BBC News, "Blair Stresses Prosperity Goals," 13th January 2005.

<sup>650</sup> Frank Ackerman, "The Economics of Collapsing Markets," *real-world economics review*, no. 48 (2008). p.282

ethics in business arguably risked being a ‘mere add-on,’ nice, but not actually essential, at present ‘ethics’ and ‘social responsibility’ are being proposed as core concern going forth by both government and business. “Markets need morals,”<sup>651</sup> was Gordon Brown’s emphatic response for instance, announced amidst stock market freefall on the day that UK share prices experienced their biggest one-day drop. While David Cameron, speaking at the January 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos, called for “capitalism with a conscience,” saying that while he intends to stand up for business, he would also “stand up to business when the things that people value are at risk.”<sup>652</sup>

From all corners within the current debate on the crisis, common agreement is also being achieved around the importance of *disclosure* and *transparency* in ensuring future financial stability.<sup>653</sup> These proposals have long been essentials in the CSR toolkit, and in this way, combined with widespread calls for the ‘moralisation of markets,’ the crisis offers a vindication of sorts for CSR proponents, many of whom have not missed the opportunity to say ‘I told you so,’ by publishing numerous articles along these lines.<sup>654</sup> While CSR may once have been “a luxury,” this is “no longer,” they point out: “In today’s climate, looking beyond short-term

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<sup>651</sup> BBC News, "Markets Need Morals, Says Brown," 6th October 2008. "Gordon Brown has urged global markets to abide by a system of ‘morals,’ including ‘responsible risk-taking’ and a ‘work-ethic.’"

<sup>652</sup> David Cameron, Conservative Party leader, quoted in, Dearbail Jordon, "Cameron Calls for 'Capitalism with a Conscience.'" *The Times*, 30th January 2009. Also see, Phillip Blond, "Let Us Put Markets to the Service of the Good Society," *Financial Times*, 13th April 2009. "...George Osborne, shadow chancellor of the exchequer, signaled that the Conservatives are breaking with the neo-liberal absolutism of the past 30 years to forge a new approach to the market economy. Mr. Osborne could not have been clearer; he repudiated *laissez [sic] faire* economics and the libertarian philosophy that licensed its practice."

<sup>653</sup> Oliver Kessler, "Towards an Economic Sociology of the Sub-Prime Crisis?," *Economic Sociology - The European Electronic Newsletter* 10, no. 2 (2009). p.11

<sup>654</sup> See Ethical Corporation, "Why Ethical Leadership Matters More Than Ever in a Downturn," 11th November 2008. Or, Stephen Howard, Chief Executive of Business in the Community, Responsible business is “more important than ever,” in Roger Trapp, "Corporate Social Responsibility Is Vital for Business Survival," *The Independent*, 10th March 2009.; also, Tony Webb, "Corporate Social Responsibility in a Recession, 10 Reasons to Keep Doing It," *Ethical Corporation*, 24th October 2008.; Vivek Wadhwa, "Why Be an Ethical Company? They Are Stronger and Last Longer." *Business Week*, 17th August 2009. "A focus on short-term profits to the exclusion of all else led to the current financial crisis. And guess what? Companies with the steadiest moral compasses have sailed through it."

profit is increasingly important,” corporate social responsibility is now “vital for business survival.”<sup>655</sup>

Paradoxically however, situated problematically alongside such pronouncements, are contrasting concerns regarding the continued viability CSR in a recession. A slew of articles, to be found mainly in CSR trade publications, describe how to respond to potential budget cuts by doing “more with less.”<sup>656</sup> Most strikingly perhaps, an enormous amount of attention has been devoted to the question of whether CSR itself can even weather the economic storm. Along these lines *The Economist*, for instance, suggests that economic downturn provides a “stress test for good intentions.”<sup>657</sup> The implication here being that corporate commitment to social responsibility will be tested by presumably more pressing financial considerations.

Seemingly, a failure of the business case logic is evinced by the repeated suggestion that CSR may have just been a boom-time fad.<sup>658</sup> Surely, if businesses had actually bought into the argument that profits and competitiveness could be bolstered by practicing CSR they would be seeking to increase, not decrease, their ‘ethical’ commitments as a means out of crisis? CSR is crucial in a downturn, CSR is exposed as mere fad: the contradictions appear to multiply endlessly, but then ‘contradictive dichotomisation’ may be part of the problem as it were. Analytical configurations such as ‘contradiction’ and ‘paradox,’ actually emerge, in this instance, from the demand that ‘success’ or ‘failure’ be attributable to the business case.

This leads to the question of whether it is desirable to interpret the ascendancy of the CSR business case in terms of the economic ‘successfulness’ of the era in which this occurred. Frank’s ‘market popularism’ would surely answer in the affirmative by suggesting, somewhat tautologically, that when markets are booming, market-organisation appears to work, and, ‘popularised’ as such, ever more things are likely to be organised on such a basis. The efficacy of the business

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<sup>655</sup> Trapp, "Corporate Social Responsibility Is Vital for Business Survival."

<sup>656</sup> Doug Cahn and Patrick Neyts, "Surviving Budget Cuts: Do More with Less," *Ethical Corporation*, 25th November 2008.

<sup>657</sup> *The Economist*, "A Stress Test for Good Intentions: The Recession Is a Test of Companies' Commitments to Doing Good", 14th May 2009.

<sup>658</sup> See, for instance, *Ibid.* Or; John Entine, "Financial Crisis: Crunch Time for Ethical Investing," *Ethical Corporation*, 28th October 2008.

case is, as we have seen, a major question for CSR itself (recall, from Chapter Four for instance, the various attempts to correlate ethical and financial performance). And yet, if a reading in terms of ‘faddishness’ is pursued, there is little more at stake in such a question than the prevailing market mood, or economic outlook. In the remainder of this chapter I want to look more closely at ascriptions of economic ‘success’ and ‘failure.’ It may be the case that with respect both to CSR and our engagements with what is ‘market’ more broadly, such ascriptions work against a more dynamic and sensitive account of economic process and change.

### **The Politics of Invisible Success and Paroxysmal Failure**

Inarguably, “the dominant mode of apprehension of the market, at the moment, ... is one of failure.”<sup>659</sup> This quote is taken from a 2005 article by Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles and made in reference to the post-Asian crisis Japanese financial markets, yet it might just as easily have been written in response to the recent sub-prime crisis. The apparent ‘failure’ of markets, following this, was certainly in ample evidence almost anywhere that one should care to have looked.<sup>660</sup> Without recapping familiar events in too much depth – 2008-2009 saw large portions of the global banking system ‘bailed-out’ by government funds, worldwide financial and property markets collapsed, and a so called credit-crunch saw inter-bank lending grind, for a period at least, effectively to a halt, (and this is to name but few of the profoundly unsettling consequences of the crisis). On an experiential level, in the so-called ‘real’ economy, this has meant devastating job-losses, home repossessions, extreme levels of anxiety and a host of other ills far too wide-ranging and numerous to recall in the space of this chapter. Indeed, the severity of the financial crisis of was so pronounced as to lead many across the political spectrum (from Left-wing student groups to *The Wall Street Journal*) to proclaim a

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<sup>659</sup> Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles, "Failure as Endpoint," in *Global Assemblages*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005). p.320

<sup>660</sup> See, for an academic account in terms of ‘failure;’ Peter Miller, "When Markets and Models Fail: Rethinking Risk, Regulation and the State," *Risk and Regulation: Special Issue on the Financial Crisis* January (2009).

‘crisis of capitalism’<sup>661</sup> itself, (an ascription which I will return to discuss in greater detail later in this chapter).

Despite the undeniable palpability of failure however, the question of what is at stake in this ascription needs to be asked. What are consequences of proclaiming a ‘crisis’? Practically and politically, to repeat the style of question that has structured this thesis, what does ‘crisis’ do? Just above, I suggested that the recent crisis does not necessarily amount to a ‘failure’ of the CSR business case. Further, I want now to suggest that there is good reason to give some thought to idea that the current crisis does not, in the traditionally understood way, necessarily constitute a ‘failure,’ or even a ‘crisis’ at all. As Michael Power recognises, there is a critical danger in taking the “label of financial crisis too much as face value,” even though, on the basis of the “reach of its effects,” the “temptation to be thoroughly realist about [it] is very great.”<sup>662</sup>

These claims will require some explanation, (which will be attempted over the course of this chapter), and are of course made with numerous provisos and caveats. Foremost, I want to emphasis that in no way are these suggestions intended as a denial of the profoundly felt distress and, in some instances, material deprivation and loss that have been, and continue to be, sustained as a result of recession. Instead, what I am attempting to suggest, is that caution need be exercised before buying too readily into ascriptions of market ‘success’ and ‘failure.’ These, simply put, come with a number of unexpected and oftentimes unintended side-effects that bear both on the efficacy of any progressive politics, and on the description of any market ethics.

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<sup>661</sup> This was a ubiquitously made proposal from late 2008 to early 2009 and observable across the board from student protest movements to academia and pro-free market press. See; ‘Dancing on the Grave of Capitalism,’ (student event), Halloween – 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2008 outside the ex-Lehman Brothers office in Canary Wharf; Geoffrey M. Hodgson, "After 1929 Economics Changed: Will Economists Wake up in 2009?," *real-world economics review*, no. 48 (2008). SASE Conference, “Capitalism in Crisis: What's Next? Economic Regulation and Social Solidarity after the Fall of Finance Capitalism,” Paris 16-19<sup>th</sup> July, 2009.; Richard A. Posner, "Capitalism in Crisis," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7th May 2009. “The current economic crisis so far eclipses anything the American economy has undergone since the Great Depression that "recession" is too tepid a term to describe it.” See also; Richard A. Posner, *A Failure of Capitalism: The Crisis of '08 and the Descent into Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>662</sup> Michael Power, "Opportunity out of Crisis: Economic Sociology and the Analysis of Risk, Regulation and Security," *Economic Sociology - The European Electronic Newsletter* 10, no. 2 (2009). p.4

## From 'Capitalism in Crisis' to Recovery Or Reform

Certainly, the language of 'crisis' does flow naturally from the drama of upheaval and uncertainty. As stock markets began their slide into the abyss in the latter half of 2008, reaction was, understandably, ever increasingly alarmist in tone (so very much so that one did begin to wonder with what degree of catastrophising hyperbole everything would end). From a sociological perspective, the proposal that we are in the grips of a 'crisis' does have numerous very important advantages and affordances. For one, it is an intuitively appealing way to sensitively describe people's experiences of financial turmoil and the resultant recession. These experiences have been 'out of the ordinary' (to say the very least) and in this sense certainly do warrant description in 'crisis' terms. Furthermore, 'crisis' can function as a politically astute ascription, a way of drawing attention to and recording pain and upheaval in the hope perhaps that the act of doing so will mean the same thing is less likely to happen again. When 'crisis' is represented as 'opportunity,' for instance, this is often on the basis of such reasoning.

Rahm Emanuel's now famous saying, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste,"<sup>663</sup> speaks to such a possibility in addition to acknowledging the prospects that 'crisis' might offer in terms of doing things in a way that they have not previously been done. Less than one year on from Emanuel's statement though, already the 'crisis' is being cast as 'opportunity missed.' An August 2009 *Guardian* article for instance asks: "Has the left blown its big chance of success? The collapse of unfettered capitalism should have been a golden opportunity for the left. So where did it all go wrong?"<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>663</sup>Emanuel, Rahm, [United States White House Chief of Staff under president Barack Obama] 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2009, Video interview with *The Wall Street Journal*,

<http://allthenewsthatfits.wordpress.com/2008/11/21/rahm-emanuel-dont-waste-a-serious-crisis/>

<sup>664</sup>Andy Beckett, "Has the Left Blown Its Big Chance of Success?," *The Guardian*, 17th August 2009. See, along similar lines, but from the opposite end of the political spectrum; Phillip Stephens, "Crisis? What Crisis? The Market Confounds the Left," *Financial Times*, 11th June 2009. "Surely it was only yesterday that the west was engulfed by the crisis of capitalism? ... Pace the doomsayers who predicted imminent Armageddon, liberal market capitalism has survived ... As for the predicted lurch to the left, it has not materialised. I have not seen anyone rushing to imitate the Russian model of state capitalism."

That numerous and variously perceived ‘failings’ constituted the recent ‘crisis’ is taken for granted by the suggestion of ‘opportunity.’ Over the course of the preceding year, political critique has largely centred on the analysis of failure, (‘how did things go wrong?’), and, in particular on the attribution of blame (‘who was at fault?’). This pattern is perhaps most clearly evident in the furore around executive salaries and the bonus culture in banking. Banks and bankers, we have come to understand, are mostly to blame for the ‘crisis’ to the extent that their ‘excessive’ pay levels promoted unacceptable risk taking and predatory lending practices.

While this conversation is arguably a very necessary one in a number of regards, what strikes me most here is the way in which the dominance of this response, and others made along similar failure-attributing lines, functions to confer upon ‘failure’ a kind of exceptionality, that, in the process, worryingly precludes an adjunct critical analysis of what constitutes ‘success.’ The ‘failure’ entailed by ‘crisis’ is paroxysmal – it is intense, outrageous, violent and unexpected. ‘Success’ however, as the obverse to this kind of ‘failure,’ can cease to be similarly highlighted as extraordinary, and thus recede from equal exceptionality to utter normality.

There are, however, a number of good reasons to very wary about the ‘invisibility’ conferred upon ‘success’ via the designation of ‘crisis’ – in particular, how ‘business as usual’ proceeds in such a reading to be just that. The few years preceding the crash were, it need be emphasised, not ‘usual’ or ‘normal’ in any straightforward or feasibly sustainable way. Economic growth rates all over the globalised West were exceptionally high, house-prices UK-wide seemed determine to rise indefinitely, and London in particular was awash with City cash and in the sway an inflationary deluge on the basis of the kind of lifestyles that this could afford. This ‘abnormal’ situation though, has, for many, come to represent ‘business as usual.’ Simply, impressive and continued economic growth are now what is widely *expected*. Against this, it is critical to underscore that ‘boom’ years are just that, and yet the manic quality of such economic good times is the very thing that ‘crisis’ overlooks through its insistence, in the mode of exceptionality, that something has gone *wrong*.

A different, but analogous issue also emerges here around ‘sub-prime,’ or, specifically, how what is at stake in this designation is co-opted in a similarly uncritical way through the prevalent interpretation of ‘failure.’ Attempting to develop a cultural economy perspective on this topic,’ Paul Langley notes, for instance, how the acquisition of a foe in the shape of failed financiers “rather conveniently secures”<sup>665</sup> the ‘successful’ identities of ‘responsible’ prime borrowers. In this way, as Langley goes on to note, “the prevailing tendency to clearly identify unscrupulous and predatory lenders as the cause of the crisis may actually be politically disabling.”<sup>666</sup> Practically speaking, what the blame games of the crisis may inaugurate (or intensify) is a kind of ‘double-economy’ wherein it may be that, going forward, only those who presently hold equity in their homes, or alternatively, are able to offer a large cash deposit, will offered a home loan at a reasonable rate of interest. To the extent that it encourages such an eventuality, ‘failure’ is an ascription to approached very carefully indeed.

The suggestion that the 2008 ‘crisis’ presented a (now supposedly missed) political opportunity is also involved in a problematic kind of (mis)attribution of blame. The Guardian article I referred to earlier proceeds to diagnose a kind of Left malaise in the ‘missed opportunity’ of crisis. The Left were not really interested enough, its author suggests, they did not respond speedily enough, they may even have just “run out of ideas.”<sup>667</sup> The kind of ‘opportunity’ presented by ‘crisis’ is never questioned though – and herein lies the problem. While, as per the comments that opened this discussion, crisis can, under some circumstances, open towards a discussion of how things may be done differently, counter-intuitively, the exact reverse may also be true, and, as preceding discussion has begun to suggest, this is likely the case in the present context. It is not malaise that killed the ‘opportunity’ of crisis, but rather the uncritical exuberance with which ‘crisis’ was cried.

To demonstrate this in a different way, consider what have become the opposing poles of ‘recovery’ and ‘reform.’ The extremity of the financial crisis, its

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<sup>665</sup> Paul Langley, "Sub-Prime Mortgage Lending: A Cultural Economy," *Economy and Society* 37, no. 4 (2008). p.490

<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

<sup>667</sup> Beckett, "Has the Left Blown Its Big Chance of Success?."

nearly unprecedented severity, required, even *demanding* that governments act fast. Recall, for instance, the positive international reception that the British government's comprehensive bail-out plan attracted at the time. The aberrant exceptionality of 'crisis,' and all its unhappy effects, may, alternatively to 'opportunity,' be understood to have actually prompted a race for *recovery*, that in effect functioned to secure and perpetuate the preceding status quo, against the erstwhile possibility of *reform*. The point is not that I wish to dispute the necessity (or otherwise) of the government-led banking bail-out – simply, the hurtle towards 'recovery' permits few occasions whereby we might stop to consider what the landscape of a 'recovered' economy will look like. As was mentioned earlier, there is a profound tendency to misrecognise that the 'euphoria' of economic upswing is just that – euphoric, not sustainable, not permanent.

'Reform' as such, barely had a chance, and now with markets firmly back on the up, the possibility is almost all but forgotten. Consider for instance, how rapidly Financial Services Authority Chairman Adair Turner's indictment of the banking industry was shouted down,<sup>668</sup> or how, at the 2009 G-20 summit, the need to protect 'London's competitiveness' was once again an oft-heard refrain.<sup>669</sup> In place of 'reform,' the 'crisis' has left in its wake a more monopolised financial sector, populated by institutions deemed 'too big to fail;' the moral hazard implied by this with regard to the taking of future risks contributing, furthermore, to the likelihood of future 'crises' going forward.

Will we then, on this basis, be back in very little time to the 1999 yesteryear with which this chapter opened and wherein it is said to have 'all began'? This is very difficult to know, and 'where it all begun' is highly unlikely ever to look

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<sup>668</sup> Turner, Adair, quoted in Phillip Inman, "Financial Services Authority Chairman Backs Tax on Socially Useless Banks," *The Guardian*, 27th August 2009.

<sup>669</sup> The G-20 Leaders' Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy was held in London on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 2009. Tag-lined with the words 'Stability-Growth-Jobs,' during the course of the summit consensus was reached around the need for economic stimulus plans including the immediate re-capitalisation of banks, removal of trade barriers, and the continued need for fiscal policy maintenance of low interest rates. Notably the proceedings themselves were overshadowed by the protests that took place around them. The G-20 was, as a function of these, very much an emotional flashpoint of the crisis. Collective anger directed towards the City found literal expression during the course of the protests in actions such as the storming of the Royal Bank of Scotland's London Headquarters.

exactly the same. What is apparent though, is that the mechanisms via which we represent the economy do matter. The present discussion has not detailed exhaustively all the ways that various ‘failures’ have been attributed in the course of the overarching ‘crisis,’ it has only attempted to build a beginning picture of how these notions can problematically delimit the political efficacy and critical incisiveness of our responses to economic issues. In the following section, this picture is further elaborated by critical re-return to Callon’s ‘performativity programme.’ To the extent that ‘success’ and ‘failure,’ or, as will be explained, ‘working’ and ‘not working,’ are instituted in the sociological approaches that we seek to apply to researching economic phenomena, the situation of political pre-emption that this section has described stands to be perpetuated.

### **From Performativity to ...‘Counter-performativity’?**

The kind of Callonistic performativity introduced in Chapter One of this thesis and referred to on various occasions throughout provides, broadly speaking, an account of the ‘successful’ functioning of economics. Recall, for instance, Callon famous assertion: “Yes, *homo economicus* really does exist.”<sup>670</sup> This statement is designed to draw attention to the (proposed) performative verisimilitude that exists between economic theory and practice. In this way, theories based on performativity note how economics may be observed to ‘work’ insofar as reality conforms to theory.<sup>671</sup> If this is the case though, why, as has been asked repeatedly, did ‘no one see this crisis coming?’

This question does of course not function as a ‘rebuttal’ of Callonistic theories of performativity. What it may serve to highlight though is something of an overly blinkered reliance in some accounts of performativity on ideas of success and failure, of things ‘working’ or ‘not working.’ Recall, by means of elaboration, how

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<sup>670</sup> Callon, "Introduction: The Embeddedness of Economic Markets in Economics." p.51 (original italics)

<sup>671</sup> Note that this claim is distinct from the judgement of whether economics works ‘for good’ or ‘ill.’ A value judgement along these lines is not necessarily being imparted – rather it is ‘successful functioning’ that is noted. The question of whether such an orientation implicitly imparts a value judgement nonetheless is the issue at the core of many of the objections to Callon’s work that Chapter One sought to recognise.

the concept of performativity has both ‘weaker’ and ‘stronger’ interpretations. In the ‘weak’ or ‘generic’ sense, performativity points to the way in which supposedly ‘natural’ categorisations, are not given but instead endlessly performed constructions.<sup>672</sup> Callon hereby points out that the ‘economy’ is performed by economic practices and techniques – accountancy, metrology, and so forth. A ‘stronger’ claim though is to be found in statements such as that regarding *homo economicus* quoted above. This statement approaches what Donald Mackenzie describes as “Austinian’ performativity”<sup>673</sup> (after the philosopher J. L. Austin<sup>674</sup>) whereby economics is understood to actually bring into being the relationships it describes. While “less universal,”<sup>675</sup> claims such as this ascribe a kind of ‘success’ to the postulates and techniques of economics inasmuch as they are *productive* – understood to perform and mould an attendant reality.

Alongside these two versions of performativity however, MacKenzie describes a third possibility not made explicit in the first two – that a theory or model may be “counterperformative.”<sup>676</sup> Examining the history of portfolio insurance,<sup>677</sup> and writing in reference to the 1987 stock market crash and its aftermath, Mackenzie suggests that the widespread adoption of the practice of portfolio insurance acted to undermine the “preconditions of its own empirical validity.”<sup>678</sup> Or, in other words, widespread adoption functioned to decrease rather than increase verisimilitude: the ‘failure’ of portfolio insurance, while performative, was an instance of performativity operating the ‘wrong’ way.<sup>679</sup> Through this formulation, MacKenzie uncouples performativity from the necessary ascription of ‘success’ (insofar as

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<sup>672</sup> MacKenzie, "The Big, Bad Wolf and the Rational Market: Portfolio Insurance, the 1987 Crash and the Performativity of Economics." p.305

<sup>673</sup> Ibid., p.303

<sup>674</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. A performative utterance, according to Austin, is one that makes itself true. A famous example being the pronouncement of a judge, “I hereby sentence you...”

<sup>675</sup> MacKenzie, "The Big, Bad Wolf and the Rational Market: Portfolio Insurance, the 1987 Crash and the Performativity of Economics." p.305

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., p.306; see also; MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu, "Do Economists Make Markets?."

<sup>677</sup> Portfolio insurance is a means of hedging a stock market portfolio against risk by short-selling stock index futures or by buying stock index put options.

<sup>678</sup> MacKenzie, "The Big, Bad Wolf and the Rational Market: Portfolio Insurance, the 1987 Crash and the Performativity of Economics." p.306

<sup>679</sup> Ibid.

‘success’ is intended to refer to the expected or desired outcome), however, the alternative still is necessarily attributed as a ‘failure.’

Instances of economic ‘performativity’ and ‘counterperformativity’ might also be readily discerned in the contemporary context. Consider, by means of example, some text extracted from a recently published Goldman Sachs research report entitled ‘*Reflections on the Crisis – Two Years On:*’

... this may be the first ‘Facebook’ crisis; in other words, so many people all over the world have such a strong opinion about it, partly due to access to some sort of information, that it has produced opinions that are almost definitely distorted, but nonetheless powerful. The very popularity of the view that there was a strong likelihood that the grim days of the 1920s/1930s would be repeated last Winter and in the Spring made this scenario more unlikely to play out. The fact that so many policy makers were born to parents who lived through the 1930s, and had read of how inappropriate policy probably caused the Great Depression to be such a depression, made it unlikely that they would sit idly by and do nothing when faced with the post-Lehman shock.<sup>680</sup>

Here, a combination of widely held and very grim expectations (in addition to experiences imputed to the parents of policy makers), are understood to ‘counterperformatively’ mitigate against the likelihood of these expectations actually becoming a reality. The accuracy of otherwise of this conclusion aside, we can see how (on a theoretical level at the very least), instances of ‘counterperformative’ processes may lead actually to desired (and hence successful), but not necessarily ‘expected’ outcomes. In addition therefore to ‘failure’ being ‘counterperformatively’ derived from the attempt at ‘success,’ the reverse may be true, ‘success’ too may be achieved ‘counterperformatively.’

Along lines such as these, it may be possible to argue that performativity-based perspectives can indeed be usefully employed in the context of economic crisis. However, the more pertinent question that perhaps needs to be asked regards the desirability of doing so. It is not exactly a matter of whether or not economics, as

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<sup>680</sup> Jim O’Neill, “Reflections on the Crisis - Two Years On,” in *Global Economics Weekly* (London: Goldman Sachs Global Economic, Commodities and Strategy Research, 29th July, 2009). p.3 (Research report approved for public distribution). It is interesting to note here how the title ‘Two Years On’ temporally situates the beginning of the crisis in the summer of 2007. Arguably this is over a year before many of those outside the finance industry would describe the ‘crisis’ to have begun.

a result of ‘failure,’ is now rendered as Power suggests, “non-performative.”<sup>681</sup> As the preceding discussion has attempted to illustrate, attributions of performativity can be made in ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ ways, and be plausibly drawn on both when things ‘work’ and when they do not. Callon himself does recognise that smooth economic performance is not the norm. Responding to the frequency of economic upset and conflict, Callon has claimed that performativity is always best thought of as a “co-performance” – seeking to emphasise using this formulation how performativity is achieved in practice, and collectively (thus rarely unanimously).<sup>682</sup>

What though, we might stop to ask, does a reliance on this approach achieve? Or, moreover, what is *elided* through over-reliance? Applicable in every direction and in every circumstance, recognisant of its problems, but accompanied by numerous qualifiers via which these may be circumnavigated, Callonistic performativity teeters on occasion between irrelevance and indistinguishably. That a critical preponderance around ‘performativity’ can be limiting is especially highlighted by the context of economic crisis. The restriction of economic outcomes to performative ‘success,’ or counterperformative ‘failure,’ (or any other contortion of performative direction and polar outcome), problematically distracts attention away from the detection of cyclical and patterned but dynamic market processes. These do not often lend themselves for analysis in terms of straightforward replications of an original model or plan.

One means into demonstrating this is to return to the discipline of economics itself. The tendency, from a strongly performative perspective, is to focus primarily on the models and assumptions proposed by neo-classical economics. However, as recent months have demonstrated, “the intellectual dominance of neoclassical theory is not inevitable.”<sup>683</sup> Economists working against the neo-classical tradition have of course long insisted this, ‘crisis’ though has provided them with a platform. In the search for explanations that neo-classical economics is thought to have failed to

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<sup>681</sup> Power, "Opportunity out of Crisis: Economic Sociology and the Analysis of Risk, Regulation and Security." p.4

<sup>682</sup> Michel Callon, "What Does It Mean to Say That Economics Is Performative?," in *Do Economists Make Markets?*, ed. Donald MacKenzie, Fabian Muniesa, and Lucia Siu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). p.350

<sup>683</sup> Robert Boyer and Yves Salliard, *Regulation Theory: The State of the Art*, trans. Carolyn Shread (London: Routledge, 2002). p.5

provide, the spotlight is now on alternative economic theories, (although this should not be taken to imply that they were not always there, or that neo-classical economics until now has had no challengers). The lack of coherence of the economic discipline as a whole has become much clearer to see as a function of the present crisis, and in this way the over-determination of 'performativity' in terms of a single economic account is evident.

Unearthed by crisis, Keynesian interventionism,<sup>684</sup> for instance, is back on the 'mainstream' agenda, and Hyman Minsky's much neglected treatise on financial instability is experiencing a revival. Behavioural economics which, although always popular, has tended to be relegated to the sidelines (the subject of one lecture on all undergraduate economics and finance courses but never more than one<sup>685</sup>) is now also back in vogue. Beyond the 'classics,' such as Kahneman and Tversky's demonstration of irrational economic decision making,<sup>686</sup> Charles Kindleberger's 'crowd psychology' account, *Manias, Panics and Crashes*,<sup>687</sup> and Robert Shiller's *Irrational Exuberance*,<sup>688</sup> have both come in for widespread attention of late.

Elsewhere, a number of more contemporary schools involved in the description of alternative economics are also coming to light and gaining attention. The Real-World Economics movement (formally the unfortunately named Post-

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<sup>684</sup> Keynes advocated that government policy employ both fiscal and monetary means in order to regulate the business cycle. By contrast, neo-classical economics recommends the sole use of monetary policy. See; John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920).

<sup>685</sup> This was related to me by an Economics and Finance graduate.

<sup>686</sup> Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Judgement and Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases," *Science* 27, no. 4157 (1974).; See also; Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, eds., *Choices, Values and Frames* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Kahneman and Tversky are psychologists by training and devise a number of experiments to demonstrate the irrationality of individual economic decision making. This grounding in individual psychology presents however, a series of concerns from a sociological perspective. Ultimately, most behavioural finance presents scant challenge to neo-classical assumptions insofar as it attempts to describe human actions in terms of distorting influence on (otherwise properly functioning) economic markets. See, for further discussion: Marieke de Goede, "Resocialising and Repoliticising Financial Markets: Contours of Social Studies of Finance," *Economic Sociology - The European Electronic Newsletter* 6, no. 3 (2005). p.23

<sup>687</sup> Charles P. Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*, 4th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2000 [1978]). The year 2000 re-print of Kindleberger's text might be noted to interestingly coincide with the tech-crash. In the wake of economic crisis a turn to alternatives is always observable.

<sup>688</sup> Robert J. Shiller, *Irrational Exuberance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Autistic Economics movement),<sup>689</sup> started in 2000 as a protest group of disaffected economics students in France, and now acts as a kind of umbrella for a variety of different economic perspectives, from behavioural to eco-feminist. Also worth mentioning, though not quite as recent an advent, are the French Régulation School, spearheaded by Michel Aglietta<sup>690</sup> and Robert Boyer.<sup>691</sup> This group of Marxist economists employ the term *régulation* not as an English language reading would suggest (in relation to governmental economic interventions), instead what they mean to draw attention to is the proposed normalisation or ‘regularisation’ of a financialised capitalism which they suggest is intrinsically prone to crisis, (and thus is understandably of interest at present).<sup>692</sup> The discipline of economics then, despite the recent predominance of neo-classical perspectives, can not fairly be said to operate a single consensus view. In much the same way as the other social sciences, there is always much which is contentious – where there is a lot at stake, there is also usually much which is up for grabs.

In addition to exposing the diversity of economics, the current crisis might also be said to have demystified it. For a time, especially as Lehman Brothers crumbled and stock markets began their uncontrolled slide, we all became market-watchers, and the *Financial Times* was the first place many people looked to get the news. Whether it was the finer points of derivatives trading, the exact organisation of a Ponzi scheme, the potential perils of short-selling, or the financial markets usage of the word ‘tranche,’ the doors to a closed, technical, and expert world flung open and it was suddenly not out of the ordinary to hear ruminations about fiscal stimulus in the pub, or speculations regarding the Libor rate across the supermarket aisle.

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<sup>689</sup> Edward Fullbrook, ed., *Real World Economics: A Post-Autistic Economics Reader* (London: Anthem Press, 2007). One supposes that the (somewhat unfortunate) use of the term ‘autistic’ is intended in this usage to critique the perceived rigidity of neo-classical economics.

<sup>690</sup> See, Michel Aglietta, "Shareholder Value and Corporate Governance: Some Tricky Questions," *Economy and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>691</sup> See, Boyer and Salliard, *Regulation Theory: The State of the Art*. Boyer, "Is a Finance-Led Growth Regime a Viable Alternative to Fordism? A Preliminary Analysis."; Robert Boyer, Mario Dehove, and Dominique Pilhon, "Contemporary Financial Crises: Between Newness and Repetition," *Issues in Regulation Theory* 52 (2005).

<sup>692</sup> See, for further elaboration, Jessop, "Capitalism and Its Future: Remarks on Regulation, Government and Governance."; Bob Jessop, *Capitalism, the Regulation Approach, and Critical Realism* (Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, 2003 [cited 20th July 2009]); available from <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/sociology/papers/jessop-capitalism-regulation-realism.pdf>.

It is not just though the newsworthiness of extreme events that has engendered such widespread interest. What has become clear now in an unprecedented way is the extent to which the fate of the so-called ‘real’ economy is bundled-up, part and parcel, with that of the financial economy. Problematically, economic sociology itself can act to reinforce this unhelpful distinction between the ‘financial expert’ and ‘lay person’ insofar as a performative approach usually focuses on practices of complex calculation, and in particular, how this is performed via the use of financial models. To what extent though, may a model be meaningfully said to represent a ‘market’?<sup>693</sup> Is economic knowledge and practice quite so one-dimensional as this narrow domain of focus may lead us to believe? As the preceding discussion has begun to suggest, ‘economics’ is not so over-determined as an account that operates between the poles of ‘performativity’ and ‘counter-performativity’ implies.

In the remainder of this chapter then, I want to begin to tell an alternative tale of the ‘crisis.’ This will involve an elaboration (by means of beginning demonstration) of the suggestions I have made here regarding the significance of ‘crisis.’ As a ‘state of exception,’<sup>694</sup> the term ‘crisis’ implies an aberration, an absence of normality – crisis is the presumed ‘exception’ to the rule. Following Giorgio Agamben though, we might do well to also consider the obverse possibility, that ‘exception’ itself is the prevailing ‘rule.’

### **An Affective Anatomy of ‘Crisis’**

“Can we ever trust Wall St again?”

Forbes Magazine cover headline, 2001

“The real history does not get written, because it is not in people’s brains but in their nerves and vitals.”

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<sup>693</sup> Daniel Beunza and David Stark, "Reflexive Modeling: The Social Calculus of the Arbitrageur," *Working Paper* <http://ssrn.com> (2008). p.39

<sup>694</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

The alternative reading of ‘crisis’ that this section offers is not intended as a ‘replacement’ account, nor is it an attempt to re-write history; it is a matter instead of differing emphasis and supplementation. In particular, what I will be seeking to highlight are the *temporal* and *affective* dimensions of the recent economic upheavals. Following from previous discussion, this focus may be understood as a means via which to temper the neglects of ‘performativity’ by producing a sensitivity to market changes as a function of both feeling and time. Contra the ‘exceptionality’ of crisis, what I hope will emerge from this is a sense of the *pro-cyclical* – not as repetitious and reliable, but as a mode of self-sustaining dynamism.

This is not the same as suggesting that the credit crunch, on that basis that it is part of the ‘business cycle,’ could have ‘predicted’ exactly. Nor is it to remake the ‘performativity’ argument using an altered set of terms. It is a different point I am currently seeking to move towards. One that, following the description of the economic functions of affect and attention that this thesis has pursued, may enable a description of the market dynamics through which ‘crisis’ is constituted in terms other than those of ‘failure’ or ‘not-working,’ and in doing so allow some space from which ethical possibility may remain to be observed, even when markets have ceased to be ‘popular.’

Some of the behavioural economics texts that I mentioned briefly in the previous section make a good place to start this elaboration inasmuch as they have sought to explain economic ‘crises’ as a function of the affective dimensions of market cycles. Employing the emotionally charged language of ‘mania’ and ‘panic,’ Kindleberger for instance, understands financial crises to be intimately “associated with the peaks of business cycles:”<sup>696</sup> “Once the excessive character of the upswing is realized, the financial system experiences a sort of “distress,” in the course of which the rush to reverse the expansion process may become so precipitous as to

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<sup>695</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, ed. Lucien Price (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1954). p.22

<sup>696</sup> Kindleberger, *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*. p.1

resemble panic.”<sup>697</sup> What Kindleberger recognises here is that ‘crisis’ does not emerge out of nowhere or strike at random. As he goes on to elaborate: “Speculative excess, referred to concisely as a mania, and revulsion from such excess in the form of a crisis, crash, or panic can be shown to be if not inevitable, at least historically common.”<sup>698</sup> Following this, there has to be a ‘tipping point’ as such, a point at which optimistic exuberance turns to pessimistic restraint.<sup>699</sup>

For Kindleberger though, the affective content of ‘crisis’ or ‘panic’ is only an effect and not a cause. ‘Once the *excessive* character of the upswing is *realized*,’ suggests a correct equilibrium away from which markets have strayed, and to which, upon the realisation of this ‘excess,’ panic will work to effect a return. The previously discussed dynamic of recovery *or* reform suggests however that the affective power of ‘crisis’ has a “quasi-causality,”<sup>700</sup> at least, all of its own. This is to begin to suggest what Brian Massumi has described as a logic of “preemption”<sup>701</sup> at work in the ascription of ‘crisis,’ or more accurately in the ever-present “threat” of crisis as “a futurity with a virtual power to affect the present quasicausally.”<sup>702</sup>

### Pro-cyclicity and Preemption

Threat triggers fear. The fear is of disruption. The fear is a disruption

Brian Massumi<sup>703</sup>

‘Crisis’ is not just a descriptive term; it is also as a finely calibrated economic indicator. It is into the relative sense of collective ‘crisis’ that we tune in order to know (or perhaps feel) the state of the economy. This can be readily seen in

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<sup>697</sup> Ibid., p.2

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

<sup>699</sup> See, for an account in terms of cycles of ‘opportunism’ and ‘restraint,’ Mitchel Y. Abolafia, *Making Markets: Opportunism and Restraint on Wall Street* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).; and, Mitchel Y. Abolafia and Martin Kilduff, "Enacting Market Crisis: The Social Construction of a Speculative Bubble," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1988).

<sup>700</sup> Patricia Ticineto Clough, "The New Empiricism: Affect and Sociological Method," *European Journal of Social Theory* 12, no. 1 (2009). p.51; Also, Brian Massumi, "Fear (the Spectrum Said)," *positions* 13, no. 1 (2005). p.35

<sup>701</sup> Massumi, "Fear (the Spectrum Said)." p.42

<sup>702</sup> Ibid., p.35

<sup>703</sup> Brian Massumi, *The Future Birth of the Affective Fact* (2007 [cited 18th October 2009]); available from <http://browse.reticular.info/text/collected/massumi.pdf>. p.8

the population-level affective policing of 'crisis' itself and, in particular, how this changes as a function of time. Recall, for instance, UK Business Minister Baroness Vadera's ill-timed 'green shoots of economic recovery' comment. Made deep in the darkest days of January 2009, this comment saw her widely berated for being "out of touch"<sup>704</sup> and insensitive at a time when popularly and palpably the crisis felt at its deepest.<sup>705</sup> Only eight weeks later though, US Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke's similar 'green shoots' comment saw markets rally, hailing the beginning of a recovery.<sup>706</sup>

It is not only linearly or forward across time however that the affective character of 'crisis' unfolds. In addition to being a temporally concurrent or contemporarily made ascription, employed to describe a situation that has happened or is happening, 'crisis' is an affective operation that acts in the present, through or via the future. It is in this future dimension, and following from Massumi's account of 'fear' and 'threat,' that 'crisis' might be understood to operate according to a *logic of preemption* whereby rather than "acting in the present to avoid an occurrence in the future," as for instance the notion of crisis as opportunity suggests, "preemption brings the future into the present."<sup>707</sup> Along these lines, it is the spectre of future crisis, as much as the actual eventuality of any present crisis, as a function of which the economic conditions of the present are defined.<sup>708</sup>

What this suggests is that the dynamic of 'crisis' that this chapter has sought to explore (through, for instance, a description of the prioritisation of 'recovery' at a cost to 'reform'), is self-sustaining and self-propelling into the future, as a function

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<sup>704</sup> BBC News, "'Green Shoots' Remarks Defended," 14th January 2009. BBC News: "Bit too early: Business Minister Baroness Vadera has denied she is out of touch after claiming she could see a "few green shoots" of economic recovery.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

<sup>706</sup> Stephen Foley, "Markets Soar after Fed Boss Sees 'Green Shoots' of Recovery," *The Independent*, 17th March 2009. Foley: "Public figures in the US don't have their tongues cut out for saying that they've seen "green shoots" of economic recovery. After Ben Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve, uttered the phrase on television on Sunday night, stock markets soared." The comparison I draw between the 'green shoots' comments, is not intended to be over-determined. In addition to the passage of time, and the different national contexts, the 'speaker' of the comment also matters in terms of its resultant reception, and this is often so on a political basis. The example is only intended to draw attention in a general way to the popular policing of affect under conditions of crisis.

<sup>707</sup> Massumi, *The Future Birth of the Affective Fact*. p. 8

<sup>708</sup> Or, as Knorr Cetina and Bruegger note, "Markets are as much defined by what they are not, (but might become) as by present states." p.170 Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, "Traders' Engagement with Markets: A Postsocial Relationship."

of its very relationship to futurity. The threat (and indeed expectation) of future crises functions, in other words, to actually fuel what, in the present, we take to be 'recovery.' In this dynamic, crisis is both guaranteed, inasmuch as it ceases to be 'exception' and becomes 'rule,' and necessary, insofar it is in the wake of crisis that particular paths to future profitability are opened up, (albeit in an increasingly stratified and potentially monopolising way).<sup>709</sup>

Another way of describing this dynamic, following Patricia Ticineto Clough, is to say that future crises are anticipated not in order that they may be prevented, but so as they may be preempted (and hence capitalised upon), this "leading not so paradoxically to [the] proliferation of crisis."<sup>710</sup> As a function of crisis then, crisis proliferates, even 'speeding up,' at a systemic level, the multiply dimensioned oscillation between crisis states in a spirally pro-cyclical and increasingly self-sustaining way. Or, as Massumi might describe this motion: "The affective event rolls ever more tightly around the time slip of threat, as fear becomes its own pre-effect."<sup>711</sup>

This suggests that despite the performative efficacy of a neo-classically understood 'equilibrium' in bringing about market 'corrections' (of which the recent crisis is commonly presumed to be one), the linearly bi-polar or only one-dimensionally cyclical nature of such an imaginary, (and, as such, any social science descriptions that seek variously to ascribe to this a performatively determining effect) are not sufficiently equipped to describe the always "far-from-equilibrium metastability" of a system interdeterminately suspended and "haunted by crisis."<sup>712</sup> Even 'stability' does not entail equilibrium, but is itself a sort of flux. While the immediate reasons attending subsequent 'crises,' will surely each be different, as will the form and period of each 'crisis' itself, what likely endures and strengthens is the volatility of the economic dynamic through which these are wrought.

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<sup>709</sup> Here, I am thinking of the increased post-crisis monopolisation of the banking sector in particular. Due to the numerous bankruptcies wrought and the mergers forced in late 2008, both investment and commercial banking are now more monopolised playing fields. A kind of financial survival of the fittest, resulting ever more in the 'too big to fail' situation that characterised the severity of the 2008 crisis.

<sup>710</sup> Clough, "The New Empiricism: Affect and Sociological Method." p.53

<sup>711</sup> Massumi, "Fear (the Spectrum Said)." p.41

<sup>712</sup> Clough, "The New Empiricism: Affect and Sociological Method." p.52

So, is 'crisis' still a fitting ascription if used to describe what, on the basis of this account, may be thought of as likely or even inevitable? Perhaps – but only to the extent that this is employed carefully and in such a way so as not to systematically impair our ability to critically respond in the midst of so-called 'crisis.' Too wholesale an embrace of all the exceptionality that this descriptor confers may lead, as I have suggested here, not only to the critical perpetuation of the dynamic of 'crisis' itself, but also away from other questions that stand to be asked, and other possibilities that might be explored. It is in the spirit of such 'possibility' that the following, penultimate section returns to the difficult question of ethics, and the ensuing final section to the 'whereabouts,' (seemingly perhaps even more unlikely), of hope. These possibilities may seem more distant than ever in market contexts where, as I have suggested here, 'crisis' is endemic; in the style of approach developed across the preceding pages of this thesis as a whole however, neither 'ethics' nor 'hope' are to be found in a sequestered 'beyond,' or utopic 'outside' to the kind of market practices through which we go about living our lives on a daily basis. If there is a critical politics to be developed in response to the kind of pro-cyclical economic dynamics I describe here, it must, counter-intuitively, be articulated from upon the same grounds.

### **When 'Crisis' is Rule, What of Ethics?**

'Think of a ruler held up vertically on your finger,' suggests geophysicist-turned-finance-scholar Didier Sornette. To ask which hand movement or gust of air causes its collapse is to miss the point. 'The collapse is fundamentally due to the unstable position; the instantaneous cause of the collapse is secondary' (Sornette 2003: 4).<sup>713</sup>

Where 'crisis' is not exceptional, the 'doing' of market ethics actually becomes about coping with, and even dealing in, volatility. As suggested by the preceding description, even periods of supposed economic stability entail a kind of 'volatile' motion. Upswings are as euphoric and as manic, it turns out, as downturns

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<sup>713</sup> In, MacKenzie, "The Big, Bad Wolf and the Rational Market: Portfolio Insurance, the 1987 Crash and the Performativity of Economics." p.320

are precipitous and sobering. The kind of global finance which has come to largely subsist and support many national economies is fundamentally reliant on the expectation of volatility, and recognisantly so. Future volatility is itself that upon which a wager is made in the process of transacting in the financial marketplace – it is not the certainty of the future that is wagered, it is its ‘uncertainty,’ its very “speculative-ness.”<sup>714</sup>

The relationship between ‘ethics’ and ‘volatility’ is one that has been touched upon throughout the thesis already, only in a subtly differing variety of forms. Across preceding chapters, both change and dynamism, for instance, have often been of explicit concern. This has been seen in discussions pertaining to methodological approach (for example, around what constitutes a ‘site,’ and the ‘nexuses’ approach) and in analytical descriptions of the ethical practices engaged by corporations, consumers, and ‘ethical’ job-seekers. The desire that corporate ethicality be demonstrable or/and established in relation to profitability, gave rise, as per Chapter Four, to a competitive marketplace for novel and ‘ever better’ measures; as an affective and practical achievement the ‘ethics’ of ethical consumption, in Chapter Five, were multiply defined and shifting; and, in Chapter Six’s market for ethical work, the character of the ‘ethical’ was contingent and flexibly ensconced as ‘potential.’ Indeed, the orienting focus on *practice* that has structured this thesis from the outset has quite deliberately attempted an attentiveness of this sort in order that a changing and moving research object be attended to on its own terms. Now, the present discussion of volatility suggests an opportunity through which this may be taken even further.

Earlier in this chapter I described the situation in which CSR finds itself as a kind of ‘paradox.’ Recall, for instance, how the claim that markets need ethics is being made with increased frequency at present, and across a number of quarters, from business to government, and elsewhere between. In the process, CSR has received widespread endorsement, and, to a degree, is vindicated (as it were), having been ‘right all along.’ Fears regarding the continued viability of CSR programmes amidst corporate budget cuts though have worked against this, undermining claims

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<sup>714</sup> Clough, "The New Empiricism: Affect and Sociological Method." p.52

regarding the necessity of ethics in business made by practitioners, and openly disputing the efficacy of the business case. However, described thus, CSR is rendered strangely passive, as though it were something that history might prove ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ and not a *market* actively interested in its own continuing survival and growth.

As was discussed in Chapter Two, contemporary CSR is understood by its own proponents and practitioners to significantly reinvent ‘responsibility’ (duty) as ‘responsiveness’ (a reactive mode). According to Frederick, (introduced in Chapter Two), ‘responsiveness’ refers to “the capacity of a corporation to respond to social pressures” or achieve “a generally responsive posture to society.”<sup>715</sup> In the present context, bearing ‘responsiveness’ in mind, the oft-asked ‘what will *happen* to CSR as a consequence of recession?’ forgets the extent to which CSR is structurally attuned to change, and poised to respond. Even further than this though, given the description of endemic economic volatility that this chapter has built towards, ‘responsiveness,’ (and to also elaborate this concept further in the direction of suggestions that emerge from the work of the thesis as a whole), might itself be considered a potentially *ethical* orientation. Constituted in an attentive, affective and economic mode of reflexivity, ‘market ethics’ are perhaps best described metaphorically as a ‘proprioceptive’ practice, a constant turning, attunement, and noticing of movements and stimuli. As such, it ceases to be that ethics simply ‘are,’ but are instead, always ‘becoming,’ at the crest of change and possibility.

When, as per Frederick’s description, ‘response’ implies a ‘reaction’ to something that precedes but is not contiguous (‘social pressures’ or ‘society’ for instance), a conventional temporal ordering is posited – ‘action-reaction,’ ‘question-response,’ ‘past-future.’ Response is a game of catch-up. By contrast though, when the only thing that is certain is change itself, ‘responsiveness’ might be said to relocate to the margins of future and present. It is suspended, neither entirely prospect or retrospect. This is because a past-future retrospection can not account for the mutually reflexive articulation of ‘response’ and ‘that to which is responded,’

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<sup>715</sup> Frederick, "From CSR1 to CSR2." p.152

(note how in Frederick's example 'society' for instance is a separable entity and not that in and through which CSR is reflexively constituted).

Conversely though, and as per the pre-emptory logic that was the subject of preceding discussion, prospection is not a straightforward proposition either. When expectations about the future are made in the present, they can indeed act in the present, and sometimes the present may become materially reordered so as to more closely enact the prospected future. This process however, is unlikely as straightforward and determining a one as a simple description along such lines implies. The discussion of 'crisis' that this chapter has undertaken refrains, in this regard, from making the final and determining jump whereby 'preemption' is enfolded into a conventional critique of neo-liberalism. To say, as Clough does, that "affect and its modulation ... have been essential to installing a conservative neo-liberalism,"<sup>716</sup> is, in light of the kind of ethical 'doings' that this thesis has sought to notice, describe and analyse, to instil a foregone conclusion in place of an open-ended question.

In this regard 'preemption,' as useful as this term is in highlighting the kind of systemic market dynamics through which contemporary financialised economies are organised, need perhaps be employed only at the same time as an emphasis on the ultimate unknowability of what is 'future' is also made. Simply, it is not possible to entirely colonise what is 'future' in this way. Inalienably, the future remains just that, the not-now and yet-to-be, and as a consequence, necessarily uncertain. Even the effects of this 'certainty' (the certainty of uncertainty), although they may act in the present, can not be prescribed an overly determining role in describing a yet-to-be that is more open (and a consequence, more interesting) than sociological approaches seeking exclusively to emphasise the curtailment of present possibilities allow.<sup>717</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> Clough, "The New Empiricism: Affect and Sociological Method." p.54

<sup>717</sup> This has been an ongoing theme of discussion across the chapters of the thesis. An argument along these lines was made in Chapter One in relation to the regulation versus voluntarism debate in CSR. In Chapter Two, this problem was encountered with regard to overly determined governmentality approaches to the questions of 'marketisation' and 'responsibilisation.' See also, similar debates taken up in Chapter Four around the supposed 'anti-politics of number,' in Chapter Five around reductionist 'choice,' and in Chapter Six with regard to 'enterprising selfhood.'

In and as an elaborated mode of responsiveness, ethics, in a market context, is a type of possibility at the edge. Whether any given practice, relation, object or thing is ‘ethical,’ as the analysis of preceding chapters has sought to underscore at varying points, is unstable, liable to change, and, more often than not, entirely contestable in the first instance. In a market context, and as ‘responsiveness,’ ethics are neither relative nor random, but a set particular set of possibilities, emergent in and through the intensity that occurs where attention, affect and opportunity (for profit, but also besides this) collide.

Throughout, this thesis has addressed the ethical possibilities conferred within what is an undeniably difficult space. This apparent ‘difficulty’ however, has been interesting in and of itself. If ‘ethical’ still seems like the ‘wrong’ word though through which to describe the kind of market relations that have been the focus of this work, perhaps this is because in the process, ‘ethics’ has ceased to be just about what is ‘ethical.’ Herein, ethical work has not only been ubiquitous, but also fundamentally imbricated in the affective registers of daily being and doing. The practical complexity of the market terrain itself has lead in this way, over the course of the thesis, into what William Connolly has described as “that tropical undergrowth of life flourishing beneath the brittle trees of grand moral theory.”<sup>718</sup>

The very difficulty of the market space itself has forced the style of question that this thesis has asked – it has been necessary, in the discussed contexts, to ask after ethics not as an unambiguous ideal, but instead as that which must be practically strived towards, and, finally, *hoped for*. If ethics is not the ideal, the unassailable, or the radically potent, the question has been, what then is it that ‘ethics’ becomes? Or, to phrase this differently with regard to the ‘hoped for’ – what does ‘ethics’ become as an alternative to utopia?

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<sup>718</sup> William E. Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). p.17

## Between Hope and Hopelessness

The form of this thesis has mirrored that of its object. Open-ended, and concerned with practical ‘doings’ in contemporary market contexts, the present work, like CSR itself, has not sought to impose judgment along the lines of traditional moral frameworks. A ‘mirroring’ of this sort however has not entailed a turn away from critique – quite the opposite. Starting from a point *beside* the conventional critiques levelled at market practices has enabled this work to encounter its object in a different way. The ‘*beside*’ as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, permits a kind of “spacious agnosticism”<sup>719</sup> inasmuch as it disrupts the linearity of a dualistic critical thinking. For all their rhetorical force, ‘*beneath*,’ ‘*behind*,’ and ‘*beyond*,’<sup>720</sup> are not the only avenues to critical attention. ‘Agnosticism,’ as unpromising as this may initially seem, is practically equivalent to neither ambivalence nor indecision. The ‘space’ that Sedgwick suggests is a critical one – only, as I have attempted to highlight, differentially so. Critique can effectively emerge from open-ended engagements and from attention to *process* just as surely as it can through adhering to predefined political frameworks, only, I have attempted to suggest more contemporaneously and sensitively so.

The present chapter has functioned to offer a practical illustration of this idea. Here, perhaps more immediately than elsewhere, the political significance of the way we approach what is ‘ethical’ in economic life has been at the fore. Ascriptions of ‘success’ and ‘failure,’ ‘working’ and ‘not working,’ are familiar and frequently useful critical orientations. The politics entailed within however are not always a radical, or as effective, as proponents would purport, or as the damnation entailed by a word such as ‘failure’ would suggest. What this beckons then is a careful re-thinking of what other positions might be occupied, whether alternatively, or *beside*, in the name of ‘radical’ or ‘progressive’ politics. Or, phrased differently, if the ‘beyond’ on which Left politics relies has become, in practice, self-defeating, how might this be otherwise re-imagined?

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<sup>719</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). p.8

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*

The question with which the previous section closed – ‘what does ‘ethics’ become as an alternative to utopia?’ is, amongst other things, a question regarding the whereabouts of *hope*. On the basis that it looks to a better *beyond*, hope has traditionally been a mobilising trope for radical political causes. Ernst Bloch’s classic ‘Principle of Hope’ for instance, speaks powerfully against mistakenly reducing “reality to what has become real,”<sup>721</sup> by describing a utopic version of hope as counter-point to this tendency. By recognising how that which is hoped-for speaks to what *is*, hope can certainly work to create crucial critical spaces for the enunciation of other possibilities and desires.<sup>722</sup> In this way, hope also attests to the endurance of these desires, partaking in the radical belief that “there must be better ways of doing things than are currently found in the world.”<sup>723</sup>

And yet, a hope of this nature is also always necessarily a hope ‘out-of-bounds’ and ‘out-of-time.’ For Bloch and others who have written, and continue to write, in the spirit of Marxist socialism, capitalism is that in particular against which a utopic outside is sought. It is only ‘elsewhere,’ “outside of the spirit of capitalism,”<sup>724</sup> that hopes, such writing proposes, may be properly realised. Following this however, hope is only radical to the extent that it is *other*; it is because it is *beyond* that hope is powerful, only *beyond* can it be true to its inviolability, only there is it politically radical and effective.

By contrast and in closing, if this thesis has had any hope to offer it has been a hope of an entirely different nature, (and perhaps it has been a hope all of my own), that something positive might be said against otherwise reductive accounts of how markets come to ‘matter’ our lives. It has been a hope *besides* the familiar and conventional critiques. As the preceding chapters have sought to illustrate, when ‘ethics’ inheres in, and is produced through, mundane and complex material practices, what is ‘good’ does not figure in a straightforward way. This is not say that we cannot move towards the ‘good,’ only that when this ‘good’ is constituted affectively and materially as opposed to ideologically, lines in the sand become

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<sup>721</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985). p.157

<sup>722</sup> David Pinder, "In Defence of Utopian Urbanism," *Geografiska Annaler* 84, no. 3/4 (2002). p.238

<sup>723</sup> Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, "What's Left? Just the Future," *Antipode* 37, no. 2 (2005). p.220

<sup>724</sup> Mary Zournazi, *Hope: New Philosophies for Change* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2002). p.19

difficult to draw and near impossible to maintain. This is case with regard both to prescriptive moral frameworks, and to overly absolutist political frameworks.

It is of course possible (moreover, sometimes necessary) to make equations between market expansion, right wing politics and social conservatism. Where this is achieved ideologically through a rigid insistence on separation though, the market from the strictly non-market and so on, totalisation upon totalisation is heaped.<sup>725</sup> Reading against the popular sociological grain, I have suggested in this thesis that, within particular markets, un-foretold possibilities do emerge – ‘self-interest’ is not an economically totalised motivator, calculation can be a matter of ethical ‘quality,’ and variously supposed ‘individualisations of responsibility,’ turn out, upon closer inspection, to be less straightforwardly so than is frequently proposed, opening instead into different ethico-material ways of living and feeling. Whether or not these developments occasion anything quite so radical as ‘hopefulness,’ I do not know. What is ‘radical’ though is up for grabs, and it is herein perhaps that we may find room to “dream other dreams.”<sup>726</sup> Moving ‘hope’ (as possibility at least) into bounds, we might find if not exactly spaces of hope, at least spaces that cease to be entirely hope-less.

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<sup>725</sup> Amin and Thrift have describe this situation as one of ‘authoritarian consolation.’ Amin and Thrift, "What's Left? Just the Future." p.231

<sup>726</sup> Isabelle Stengers, in interview, “We live in a very complicated world; we have to learn and become able to dream other dreams, rather than the simplifying ones which are so useful for mobilization.” Mary Zournazi, "A 'Cosmo-Politics' - Risk, Hope, Change: A Conversation with Isabelle Stengers," in *Hope: New Philosophies for Change* (London: Laurence & Wishart, 2002). p.256

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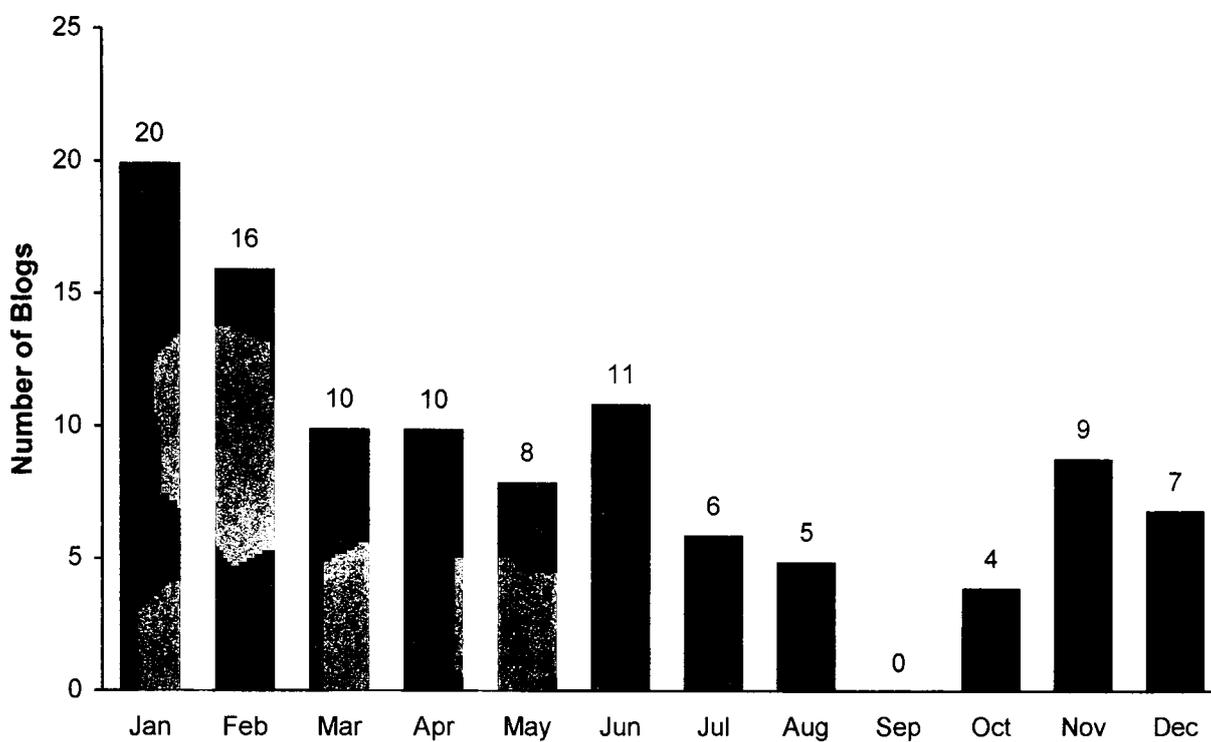
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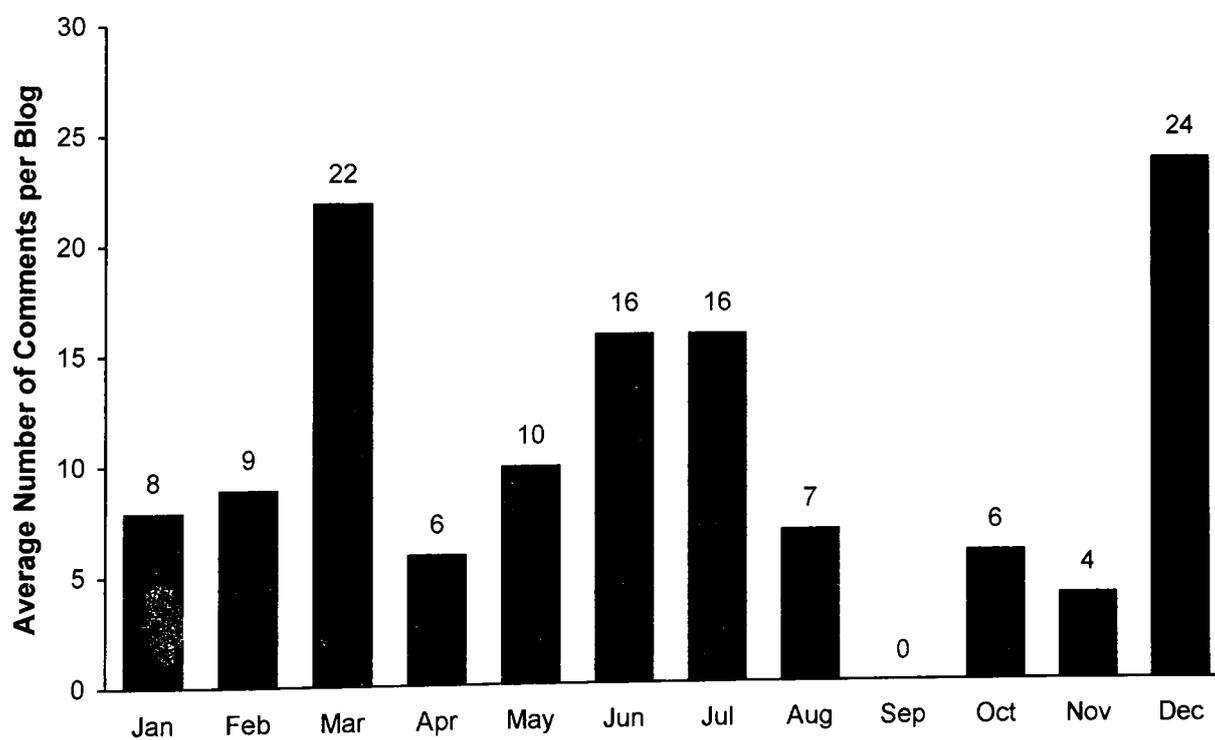
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## Appendix A

**Chart 1: Number of Ethical Living Blog Posts per Month in 2008**



**Chart 2: Average Number of Comments per Ethical Living Blog Post per Month in 2008**



## **Appendix B**

**Table 1: Number of *Ethical Living* blog postings made by individual *Guardian.co.uk* bloggers, 2008**

<b>Staff Bloggers (in order first contribution, 2008)</b>	<b>No. of blog postings</b>
Jessica Aldred	12
Alison Benjaman	7
Juliet Jowit	1
Environment Editor	9
Bibi van der Zee	22
Leo Hickman	19
Guilio Sica	1
Carolyn Fry	15
Fred Pearce	1
Kevin Anderson	1
Adharanand Finn	7
Kate Connelly	1
Nik Berg	1
Matthew Weaver	1
Peter Greig	1
Felicity Carus	2
James Randerson	1
Lucy Siegle	4
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