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Corporate Lives: New Perspectives on the Social Life of the Corporate Form

An Introduction to Supplement 3

by Marina Welker, Damani J. Partridge, and Rebecca Hardin

The introduction to this special issue of *Current Anthropology* calls for more anthropological attention to how the corporate form shapes and is shaped by daily life. It also traces anthropologists' engagements with corporations over time. We present transformations in traditionally corporate arenas, such as mining and textile production, alongside parallel developments in transnational cooperatives, organic production systems, and ethnic deployments of the corporate form. We consider corporate influence in unexpected sectors, from conservation to poverty alleviation to cancer survival. Furthermore, we analyze corporate norms and practices in relation to broader governance trends, from fair-trade dynamics to shareholder activism and from corporate social responsibility initiatives to the spread of accountability measures and the impact of corporate sovereignty. This issue brings together the voices of anthropologists, social activists, NGO managers, corporate executives, financial planners, and entrepreneurs. It is the product of a 5-day international symposium held in August 2008 at the School for Advanced Research (SAR) campus in Santa Fe, sponsored by both SAR and the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

This special issue explores one of the dominant institutions of our time: the corporation. When the symposium that led to this issue took place in August 2008, the unfolding economic crisis was calling urgent attention to the underlying phenomena that we had gathered to study and to the enduring but often hidden salience of the corporate form as it shapes and is shaped by human lives. Insurance giants, mortgage loan corporations, and investment banks—corporations that control other corporations—were beginning to crumble. Claiming that these shaky financial institutions would drag the country and possibly the world down with them should they fail, the U.S. government dug deep into public coffers to prop up the banks and lenders. Behind the adobe walls of the School for Advanced Research compound in Santa Fe, our conversations invariably gravitated to the financial meltdown and the consequences it might hold for different cat-

egories of people around the globe. What could a heightened sense of insecurity, vulnerability, and risk tell us about the broader conditions of contemporary capitalism? Who was crafting opportunities, making profits, and consolidating power amid the crisis? Conversations around these questions revealed parallels, but they also illuminated gaps and tensions that emerged from the particular geographic and professional perspectives of symposium participants. The academics, environmental and social activists, investment specialists, and corporate executives who attended the symposium came from Canada, Mexico, Nicaragua, the United States, and South Africa.¹ As symposium organizers, we had assembled a diverse roster of participants in order to reflect, albeit partially, the range of ways in which people and corporate formations relate to one another.

Corporations surface in public media and debate when they unleash spectacular social, economic, and environmental disasters. Yet our symposium, conceived and organized in the years predating the financial crisis and Gulf of Mexico oil spill, was designed to probe more quotidian domains of corporate experience, power, knowledge, and practice. As institutions that pervade the social and material fabric of everyday

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1. We should note that although many of the symposium participants work and/or conduct research outside of North America, the majority were from or trained in North America (the United States in particular but also Canada and Mexico).

life, corporations shape human experience not only in spectacular and disastrous ways but also in mundane, everyday, ambivalent, and positive ways. They are, after all, the source of or conduit for much of what we wittingly and unwittingly produce and consume as we breathe, eat, drink, read, work, play, and move about the world. Millions of people worldwide labor for corporations and depend on them for their income. Corporations are wrapped into intimate associations, memories, and affective registers, as one symposium participant reminded us with her childhood recollection of her father arriving home each day in his polyester shirt emblazoned with name of his employer, Dupont.²

On a less obvious and visible register, corporations participate in the material making of our bodies, from our molecular makeup (e.g., Murphy 2006; Petryna 2009; Rabinow 1996) to our posture, which is indelibly shaped by hours logged behind a computer or stooped over a short-handled hoe (Jain 2006). While some of us are more conscious than others of the pharmaceuticals that course out of our faucets and the bisphenol-A that laces human breast milk, no human alive today is breathing air or drinking water that has not been touched by corporate action. The pervasive influence of corporations on the environmental, political, and economic spheres of social life prompted us to gather the Corporate Lives symposium to address how anthropologists have studied corporate forms in the past and how we might consolidate and expand our inquiry in the future. It was evident to all of us that the question at hand was less whether we should extend our study of the corporation but how we would go about it: the kinds of questions we would ask, the methods we would use, the ethical dilemmas we would face, and the ways in which we would disseminate our findings. The Corporate Lives title speaks to our interest in showing how several subjects are formed through corporate action and how they intersect. On the one hand, we are interested in the lives of corporations: their conditions of possibility; their births, deaths, and biographies (Bose and Lyons 2009); how they grow and shrink, morph and mutate, spin off parts and recombine; and how these composite institutions give off the impression of unified thinking, talking, acting subjects. On the other hand, we are interested in how corporate forms shape and are shaped by the lives of other social institutions (religious, state, media, and nongovernmental); the physical and natural world; and the subjects who labor within them, consume their products, and live downstream of them.

2. As Foster (2008) and Miller (1998) have shown, through the work of shopping for commodities and embedding them in our everyday social relations, we all participate in making corporate brands meaningful and unintentionally create their value. Boon (1999:257) raises this issue in contemplating the "intensity of [his] submissive response" to Coke, which evokes vivid memories of his now-deceased parents.

Toward an Anthropology of Corporate Forms

At several junctures in the history of the discipline, anthropologists have initiated new conversations around corporations and produced multiple landmark studies, articles, and ethnographies. Anthropologists played a significant role on the interdisciplinary team from the University of Chicago that studied Western Electric's manufacturing plant in the 1930s and famously found the Hawthorne effect: workers performing better in response to researchers' taking an interest in the conditions of their labor (Schwartzman 1993). Later anthropologists turned to the rise of industrial powers, such as Japan and South Korea; produced ethnographies of conglomerates, family firms, and banks (Clark 1979; Janelli 1993; Kondo 1990; Rohlen 1974); and traced women's work in producing and maintaining corporate identities and masculinities in domestic and expatriate settings (Allison 1994; Kurotani 2005). Ethnographers have chronicled deindustrialization, or what happens when corporations pull up their stakes and tear down their factories (Dudley 1994; Nash 1989); the rise of temporary workers (Garsten 2008; Rogers 2000; Smith and Neuwirth 2008); and the growth of high-tech firms from the hubs of venture capital and product development labs (Dubinskas 1988; Gregory 1983; Kunda 2006 [1992]) to their far-flung manufacturing and service-industry sites (Aneesh 2006; Ong 1987). Anthropologists have experimented with new modes of research and writing about corporate actors (Marcus 1998), and they have crafted searing accounts of the social and environmental disasters that corporations unleash and the structural politics that enable the ongoing unfolding of disaster (Allen 2003; Fortun 2001; Kirsch 2006; Sawyer 2004). Forging new analytics such as "global assemblages" (Ong and Collier 2005) and exploring the burgeoning intersections of biology and capital (Hayden 2003; Helmreich 2009; Sunder Rajan 2006), new strands of literature are developing, with important implications for understanding corporations as social forms, actors embedded in complex relations, and entities that produce and undergo transformation, with all the friction that entails (Tsing 2005). While universities have long been sites for the production of expertise implicated in consolidating capitalist rule (Mitchell 2002), anthropologists also have recently joined other academics in calling attention to how the corporatization of the university itself is being manifested in new audit cultures (Strathern 2000); transnational higher education branding initiatives (Olds and Thrift 2005); a stifling of activist research (Greenwood 2008); and university greening initiatives that uncritically adopt corporate discourse, expertise, and funding, leading to a silencing of voices seeking to define sustainability in ways that would counter rather than expand corporate power (Kirsch 2010).

Despite all these important ethnographic forays into corporate worlds, the overall corpus on the subject remains small, and we have yet to see the emergence of a sustained line of

scholarship and inquiry that would extend to the corporation the same critical weight or significance accorded the nation-state. Anthropologists have periodically observed and lamented our failure to study corporate executives and our tendency to concede to sociologists, economists, management specialists, and cultural studies the study of corporations (Benson and Kirsch 2010a, 2010b; Bestor 2004:12–13; Gusterson 1997; Nader 1972; Welker 2009). To date, one cannot discern a coherent set of research questions or competing schools of thought characterizing the anthropology of corporations. Studies dealing with corporations have often received greater recognition for their contributions to more established genres of inquiry, such as selfhood and identity, social movements, environmentalism, science and technology, industrialization and deindustrialization, and so forth. Within the voluminous literature on globalization and the subfield of economic anthropology, corporations have not yet figured as a staple theme (Benson and Kirsch 2010a). Corporate forms rate little mention in the indexes of introductory anthropology textbooks, and upper-level undergraduate and graduate seminars on corporations remain rare. In the United States, exceptions to this rule among anthropology programs at Wayne State University, Michigan State University, and the University of North Texas remain all too marginal to the core academic discipline. Below, we return to the theory/practice divide and the second-tier status of applied anthropology programs in the United States, which Baba (2005) links to broader global and academic hegemonies. There are, in fact, new efforts to bridge this divide with more engaged, collaborative, activist, and public practices of anthropology (Lassiter 2005; Low and Merry 2010), but it is not yet clear what role business anthropology—often a politically uncomfortable form of social action—plays in these efforts (Cefkin 2009).

Several factors may help explain why anthropological analyses of corporate forms have not gathered force and focus, appearing instead as discrete and discontinuous in relation to one another. The legacy of the nineteenth-century division of labor in the social sciences—which allotted to anthropology the task of studying that which was noncapitalist, nonmodern, and non-Western—undoubtedly plays a prominent role (Trouillot 1991; Yanagisako 2002). The Hawthorne anthropologists did little to challenge this division; after World War II they formed a management consulting, marketing, and design firm, Social Research, and their work was absorbed by industry. The Manchester School anthropologists associated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute began scrutinizing the social changes wrought by capitalism in the late 1930s but focused on workers and drew many of their cases from the frontiers of colonial capitalism, such as mining in southern Africa (Ferguson 1999).

As the discipline of anthropology matured across distinct but increasingly intertwined traditions of British structural functionalism and American interpretive traditions, it also entered a new phase in its engagement with history and political economy. In spite of June Nash's (1979) call for an

anthropology of the multinational corporation that would include managers and encompass different regional scales, the historical and Marxist political economy approaches that developed in the 1960s and 1970s also concentrated, for the most part, on the perspectives of exploited subalterns (e.g., workers, indigenous peoples), with whom anthropologists felt politically sympathetic (Yanagisako 2002).

A vigorous anthropology of corporate forms is vital if anthropology is to maintain its relevance as a discipline that offers a distinctive prism for interpreting and changing the world. Raw facts about the scale and political power of the largest corporations in the world (e.g., Chandler and Mazlish 2005; Litvin 2003; Nace 2005) would seem in themselves to justify more focused anthropological attention to corporations than they have, to date, been accorded. The hold that large corporations exercise over politics, resources, public meanings, and private thought suggests a critical task: undermining and destabilizing this order and countering the “politics of resignation” that treats corporate power as inevitable and inexorable (Benson and Kirsch 2010b; Foster 2010). But the contemporary and historical significance of corporate forms derives from their scope—their ability to organize and enable a variety of activities and economic, social, and political projects—as well as from the sheer scale that the largest corporations achieve. While the business corporation is the unmarked category and the one we focus on most in this issue, the corporate form has long been used by various religious associations, schools and universities, charities and historical societies, and bodies politic such as towns and cities (Maier 1993). Among business corporations, large enterprises remain the exception rather than the norm, and as Cattelino (2011) reminds us in her contribution to this issue, families rather than shareholders and managers continue to control the majority of corporations.

Our symposium, and the work represented in this issue, develops the notion that by moving toward a focus on corporate forms rather than the corporation, we can productively shift away from default conceptualizations of corporations as solid, unified, self-knowing, and self-present actors that relentlessly maximize profits and externalize harm. Such an understanding of corporations, while appealing for its black-and-white guide to judgment, is divorced from history, geography, and actual corporate practice. It may be rooted in a parochial view that derives from the peculiar legal career of corporations in the United States: once seen as artificial persons to be monitored and restrained by the state, their personhood has been naturalized, and they have been endowed with constitutional rights and the right to free speech—including unrestrained political spending since the 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* Supreme Court decision (Lamoreaux 2004; Millon 1990). Similarly, the significance of the Michigan Supreme Court decision in *Dodge v. Ford Motor Company*, which ordered Ford to prioritize shareholder profits over employee and community concerns, has often been exaggerated even within the United States (Paine 2003). While

the influence of U.S. corporations and U.S.-specific developments of the corporate form should not be understated—U.S. corporations make up many of the largest in the world, and corporate law in other parts of the world is often formulated in relation to U.S. law—neither should it be universalized. Despite the U.S. bias of our symposium (discussed in n. 1), articles within this issue bring perspectives on corporate forms in South Africa, Italy, Papua New Guinea, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and India. We can also look to the small but important set of ethnographies of Japan and South Korea available in English for alternative understandings of the nature of corporations (e.g., Clark 1979; Janelli 1993; Kondo 1990; Rohlen 1974).

More broadly, an anthropological effort to pluralize, relativize, and contextualize corporate forms geographically and historically should participate in an interdisciplinary analytical framework that is actively engaged with the body of substantive empirical work on corporations carried out in other fields. The work of economic sociologists who study the social nature of business and organizational life more generally is crucial to this project (e.g., DiMaggio 2001; Granovetter 1985; Powell and DiMaggio 1991). New openings for conversations with business historians are also developing as the subfield has broadened its focus beyond big business and large corporations (which were once seen as the endpoint in the evolutionary trajectory of business; see Piore and Sabel 1984) to address small-scale entrepreneurs; questions of social justice, inequality, and identity; and cultural and symbolic facets of business (e.g., Horowitz and Mohun 1998; Lipartito and Sicilia 2004; Marchand 1998; Moreton 2009). New approaches in business history are informed by critical race studies and feminist theory, as well as by disciplinary trends in social history and cultural history. Anthropology can contribute to the social study of corporate forms a focus on how it can be used experimentally as the ground for various kinds of political and economic projects; an illumination of the articulation of different scales of corporate action; an examination of the links between corporate governance, sovereignty, and ethics; and an understanding of the formation of subjects in and through corporations.

An unsettled debate that is reflected in this issue is how the term “corporate form” itself should be used. Narrowly, it might be applied only to those organizations that are, in fact, legally incorporated. This seemingly narrow definition, however, would encompass a wide variety of businesses, as well as towns, municipalities, religious organizations, nongovernmental organizations, charities, schools, and so forth, illustrating how corporate forms can be put to many uses besides being vehicles for the accumulation of wealth (Maier 1993). Drawing on Marcel Mauss (1985) and Ernst Kantorowicz (1997), Shever (2010) traces how the legal personality of the corporation as a collective person under Roman law evolved into the Tudor legal doctrine of the king’s two bodies: “the mortal body of the ruler who is replaced periodically, and the eternal body politic of government that is made up of all

subjects. The former is material and temporary, the latter intangible and perpetual” (29). This amalgamation, Shever (2010) continues, “has been the grounds for some of the most powerful entities in history: the church, the kingdom, the state, the empire, and . . . the transnational business firms of the contemporary moment” (29). In light of the legal facets that Shever highlights, we can examine how corporate firms undergird powerful but also more fragile entities and projects.

More loosely, the corporate form concept can be used to explore how people have broken off and mobilized ideas, language, and technologies created within corporations and brought them into new sites, leading to the spread of corporate forms. In this case, while “corporate form” is loosely applied as a vernacular term rather than a legal term, it generally invokes a more narrow set of purposes related to capitalism, business, and profits. When people speak of the corporatization of the university and other spheres of life (e.g., childhood, biology, nature, race, religion, etc.), this usually implies the application of capitalist ideals, principles, and logics. Questions of empirical description and analytic precision arise as a result. Consider, for example, in Comaroff and Comaroff’s (2009) *Ethnicity, Inc.*, the images of magazine covers with the Royal Bafokeng Nation’s king and CEO that are juxtaposed, several pages later, with pictures of a roadside stall advertised with misspelled signs that “wellcome” visitors to the “graft market.” Are these two phenomena better analyzed under the shared rubric of incorporation (or corporatization), or would terms such as “commodification” or “marketization” be more analytically precise? Further, anthropology has its own tradition, or, as one commentator put it, “muddled debate” (Dow 1973), around corporations and corporate groups, which may be organized around various principles including kinship, location and land tenure, and guild membership (see, e.g., Smith 1975). In this issue, the concept of corporate forms is used in ways that reveal the work of theoretical bricolage, which entails borrowings and combinations that leave traces as well as unfinished seams.

Below, we lay out the architecture of the issue and introduce some of the critical themes that emerged from our symposium as a foundation for an anthropology of corporate forms. The articles are paired with comments that bring into this issue the spirit of dialogue—as well as the disagreements and dissonance—that pervaded our symposium. Readers will find that the identities of those who authored the articles and comments are mixed; some fall firmly on the corporate or activist advocacy end of the spectrum, others are more conventionally academic in orientation, and yet others write from their identities and experiences as both practitioners and academics.

Corporations and the Imperative to Critique

Benson and Kirsch (2010a) argue powerfully for more scholarship on harm industries such as tobacco or mining “that

are predicated on practices that are destructive or harmful to people and the environment” as “part and parcel of their normal functioning” (461). They later go on to note that “most, if not all, corporations are to some extent implicated in harm” (Benson and Kirsch 2010a:467). Indeed, many of us had seats at the Corporate Lives symposium table because we have been drawn to the project of documenting and mitigating the harm that corporations routinely inflict on people and the planet (and often the two simultaneously). Politically and ethically, we find a sense of security and satisfaction in exposing corporate harm; to many anthropologists, it feels right to be critical of corporations.

While corporate harm represents a crucial piece of the emerging anthropology of corporations—and critical perspectives are amply represented in this issue—an exclusive focus on the negative aspects of these institutions undermines our ability to understand and even challenge corporate life writ large. In order to provide a full account of corporate capitalism, we must capture the more ambivalent and positive ways in which corporations make and enable, as well as curtail and destroy, life. We can acknowledge the ways in which corporations address human needs and desires at the same time we question the making of a political, social, and economic order that gives corporations, as opposed to other actors and institutions, such extensive control over the engines of production and consumption in most contemporary domains of public and private life.

Indigenous polities using the corporate form can usefully complicate our understandings of the social roles of corporations, as Cattellino’s (2011) and Cook’s (2011) case studies in this issue demonstrate. The Seminole Tribe of Florida, which used its sovereign status to open a high-stakes bingo hall in 1979, has undergone a transition “from endemic poverty to economic comfort” (Cattellino 2011) and it has launched a broader tribal gaming revolution. While the Indian nation remains embedded within a neocolonial context, Seminoles now exercise far greater agency and authority in deciding questions of governance than they did when they were dependent on federal subsidies and lacked the resources to challenge federal policy. The corporate form is one focus of their exploration of new and productive means of governance. The Royal Bafokeng Nation of South Africa has fought the colonial, apartheid, and postapartheid governments to first secure and then defend its land rights in battles that sharpened with the discovery of large underground platinum deposits. Today, the Royal Bafokeng Nation is using platinum revenues to provide public education, health care, recreation, and economic development opportunities to its population, as well as to establish a fund for the future.

Both of these polities’ wealth derives from harm industries: casinos that, by definition, relieve the poor of their money and the extraction of nonrenewable resources. Commenting on Cattellino’s (2011) article, the Royal Bafokeng Nation king, Kgosi Leruo Tshekedi Molotlegi, and Royal Bafokeng Nation treasurer, Thabo Mokgatla, recognize this as a shared source

of concern and a challenge to diversify for the future. Robert Gips (Drummond, Woodsum, and MacMahon), who has worked for decades as a lawyer and business advisor to Native American tribes and now offers counsel to the Royal Bafokeng Nation, and Steve Bohlin, retired managing director of an investment advisory firm that works with institutional investors (formerly of Thornburg Investment Management), comment on Cook’s (2011) article. Both are interested in how the financial and legal architecture of nations and corporations work and interrelate and in the practical question of how the Royal Bafokeng Nation and Royal Bafokeng Holdings could leverage their resources to accomplish more for Bafokeng people and accelerate the pace of improvements.

Gregory Bateson’s (2000) notion of the double bind is fruitful for understanding the dilemmas created by corporations, as well as those that inhere in anthropological research on corporations. As Cattellino (2010) has shown elsewhere, American Indian tribal nations require economic resources to exercise their rights of sovereign governance, and yet in a settler society, the acquisition and exercise of economic resources lead to challenges to the legitimacy of indigenous sovereignty and citizenship. This poses a contradiction or paradox, a choice between incompatible alternatives that negate the possibility of a resolution. Fortun (2001) describes working within these double binds as an advocacy and research practice, which for her entailed deploying legal, bureaucratic, and environmental representations of disaster while cognizant of the inadequacies and failings of each.

Such double binds are not necessarily fixed or overdetermining. We can rethink the double bind of the anthropological researcher who works closely within a corporation and furnishes an account of the positive and negative sides of corporate life; the researcher’s proximity may potentially bring greater accuracy to her or his critique rather than disqualify it out of hand. Kamari Clarke has explored the ethical complexities of anthropologists working in postconflict settings in Africa. In an extensive review of the code of ethics for anthropologists, she lends her voice to those calling for an engagement that adequately captures the ambivalent but urgent necessity of relationships between anthropologists on various sides of politically fraught issues and between anthropologists and their study subjects (Clarke 2010).

Crossing the Applied/Academic Divide on Corporations

Corporate anthropologists in the United States have described themselves as doubly stigmatized outcasts, seen by academic anthropologists both as morally dubious because of their association with industry and as intellectually inferior because of the applied nature of their work (Baba 1998, 2005; Sunderland and Denny 2007). In order to think about how this has led to a segregated development of applied and academic anthropological research on corporations—and what might be gained by analyzing, challenging, and moving beyond it—

we included academic anthropologists, corporate executives, entrepreneurs, activists, and hybrid academic and consulting professionals in the symposium and in this issue. Susan Cook, for example, shifted from an academic career to become the Royal Bafokeng Nation Research and Planning Executive, with responsibilities ranging from planning health, education, and recreation programs to tutoring visiting journalists on proper etiquette for interacting with Bafokeng royalty (Dugger 2010). Even as she criticized high-tech efforts to make inroads among poor consumers, Anke Schwittay cofounded an NGO, Rios Institute, that consulted with corporations as part of its mission to bring new technologies to underserved people.

In highlighting the role of academics who work for corporations, we are not proposing that the goal of academic anthropology programs should be to endow students with skills marketable to corporations. Those anthropologists who question the use of anthropological expertise to increase corporate profits and generate proprietary knowledge have compelling justifications for their ethical positions, formulated partly in reaction to ongoing issues over professional codes of ethics, clandestine military research, and training of researchers (see Fluehr-Lobban 2003; Gusterson 2005). In raising such ethical issues with students, however, we would do well to first inform ourselves on the range of corporate forms, corporate practices, and the roles of anthropologists within corporations. Equipped with this knowledge, we may instill in students greater critical capacity and the ability to better anticipate, analyze, negotiate, and respond to the kinds of practical constraints and ethical challenges endemic to corporate work. Today, corporations employ thousands of trained anthropologists; simply ignoring or suppressing this fact means failing to influence this sphere of work. Further, as we discuss in more detail below, corporate anthropologists are producing work that is crucial for theory building in the social study of corporate forms.

The articles by Guyer (2011) and Coumans (2011) and the commentaries by Cefkin and Kirsch are the most emblematic contributions to the debate over the role of anthropology within corporations in this issue. Jane Guyer, who primarily identifies as an academic anthropologist, writes about her experiences as a member of the World Bank–appointed International Advisory Group on the Chad-Cameroon Oil Development and Pipeline Project, which brought her under the sort of critical scrutiny routinely experienced by anthropologists who directly consult for or are employed by corporations. Guyer (2011) illuminates the ethical challenge of “hanging in” on a project as it develops over time from its initial blueprint. She also explores the experience of being subject to criticism while her advisory group’s accomplishments—efforts made, corrective actions taken, and potential problems averted—remain anonymously authored and unacknowledged in the public sphere.

IBM anthropologist Melissa Cefkin responds to Guyer (2011), illustrating the resonance of the ethical dilemmas and a sense of incremental and often anonymous difference mak-

ing in the technology sector. Cefkin (2009) is a significant thinker in the growing network of corporate ethnographers who routinely publish on their professional work and meet at the annual Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference, which was inaugurated in 2005 and constitutes a business-specific space as opposed to the umbrella Society for Applied Anthropology or National Association of Practicing Anthropologists meetings. A new body of theory is emerging from these engagements, as well as reflexive work on how anthropology is itself branded (Suchman 2007), how consultants are increasingly outsourcing their own jobs by sending data analysis work offshore (Lombardi 2009), and how autoethnographic practices and technologies displace anthropologists (Malefyt 2009). While ethnography has achieved acceptance as a legitimate research approach in corporations—it has been effectively marketed to senior managers and is being incorporated into the business education curriculum (Kalocsai 2011)—anthropologists do not exercise a monopoly over the uses or future of ethnographic approaches. Jones (2010) notes that commercial ethnographic work is at risk of becoming a genre of research output (experience models, user personas, needs maps, and opportunity matrices) rather than a theoretical orientation that requires specific research practices to ensure an empathic description of participants’ own views of their worlds. This literature is also opening up new questions and avenues of inquiry about the emerging geography of corporate anthropology; its concentration in certain industries, particularly high-tech industries; and how this scholarship is shaped by the conditions of knowledge production that obtain in corporations, such as nondisclosure agreements (Fischer 2009) and practices of collaborative work and the enrollment of other actors (Nafus and Anderson 2009). Rappert (2010) suggests that by writing about the dynamics of concealment in corporate research—that is, directly addressing the limits, silences, and missing pieces—corporate researchers can add vital layers to their analyses.

Critiquing the silences of researchers in her article, Catherine Coumans (2011) writes as an academically trained anthropologist who became a professional activist for better social and environmental practices in mining. Coumans critiques various intermediaries—embedded anthropologists, developmentalist NGOs, and socially responsible investing (SRI) funds—for occupying the spaces of conflict created by the struggles of local community members and activists opposed to mining projects. Coumans claims that these intermediaries do not sufficiently use their knowledge and positions to benefit those engaged in struggle, arguing specifically that anthropologists could have used their knowledge to help local people. Coumans’s article shows that there is much to be gained from critically reading the reports and scholarship of consulting anthropologists, even as she rejects the terms of engagement that these anthropologists have established with corporations.

Although Kirsch comments specifically on Coumans’s work, he also makes a broader point that holds as much for

consultants who work with corporations as for activists who oppose them: one will usually feel as if one's work has not gone quite far enough; it will always feel inadequate and incomplete relative to one's aspirations and expectations, and yet there are reasons for, in Guyer's words, persevering. During the symposium, Coumans vividly described her own entry into activism as a process in which she became like a gambler who has thrown down too much money on the table to walk away from it. Kirsch, for his part, is an example of an ethnographer who combines anticorporate activism and academic anthropology: having testified on behalf of Yonggom people of Papua New Guinea in their lawsuit against a multinational mining company for environmental damage, he maintains close links with ongoing activist projects on extractive industries and has brought debates over the embedded and activist roles of anthropologists into the public sphere.

Corporate Forms Blurred and Unbounded

There are multiple salient points of entry for thinking about the diversity of corporate forms. National legal requirements and social norms and expectations—and the push and pull between them—contribute to broad differences in how corporations are organized and run in different geographical contexts. Legal norms also shape how corporations are talked about and experienced, whether as benevolent, kindly persons or irresponsible and violent psychopaths (Bakan 2004; Partridge 2011; Sawyer 2006); gendered individuals who represent the “face” of a company (Shever 2010); profit-maximizing entities that purportedly exist for the benefit of shareholders (Welker and Wood 2011); or communities that enmesh individuals in relations of mutual obligation (Rohlen 1974). Other important axes of difference include whether corporations are privately held or publicly traded; small or large; private, state owned, or in some transition between the two (e.g., Alexander 2002; Dunn 2004; Rudnyckj 2009; Shever 2008); or family run (Yanagisako 2002). Even many of the largest companies, such as Ford, are family run, and kinship metaphors also pervade corporations that are not structured around family, serving both workers and managers as mechanisms for classifying, interpreting, and enacting social relations; as ideological resources; and as moral claim-making devices (Janelli 1993; Kondo 1990; Rohlen 1974; Shever 2008). Cattellino's (2011) and Cook's (2011) contributions also address how different corporate forms organized around business and social or political purposes exist in tension with one another and the challenge of teasing apart these different legal forms and the supportive and antagonistic ways in which they interact with one another in practice.

In discussing the coevolution of corporations and cooperatives, Vargas-Cetina (2011) offers a succinct account of the career of the corporate form. Often seen as an intermediate form between socialism and capitalism, producer and consumer cooperatives have long attracted anthropological in-

terest and, early on, the vigorous support of Mauss (Ferry 2005; Fournier 2006; Greenwood and Gonzalez 1992). Since their inception as a utopian form of organization and vehicle for social action, cooperatives have, as Nash (2005) notes, “contained the same contradictions from which they were attempting to escape” (xi). Vargas-Cetina (2011) considers corporations and cooperatives within a spectrum of capitalist forms, challenging essentialized understandings of either and suggesting directions for further research on small corporations and large cooperatives, which include household names such as Ocean Spray, Purina, Best Western, Ace Hardware, and the Associated Press in North America; Amul in India; and Mondragon in Spain. Drawing on extensive research with a sheepherding cooperative in Italy's highland Sardinia, Vargas-Cetina (2011) illuminates how the European Union is altering cooperatives by eliminating subsidies and establishing geographical indication trademarks. Such trademarks are designed to safeguard local production from impostors but come with new market values and manufacture standards and regulations that may erode traditional practices and the gift economy on which they have been based.

In their comment on Vargas-Cetina's (2011) article, entomologist Emilie Bess and Michael Woodard, the codirector of the Jubilee House Community (JHC), draw on their experience operating the JHC's Center for Development in Central America project, which has been running for 2 decades now. A key component of this project is the establishment, in league with Nicaraguan cooperatives, of a vertically integrated chain producing organic- and fair-trade-certified cotton products from crop to consumer. The Nicaraguan case, Woodard and Bess argue, illustrates how states can create a hostile rather than protective environment for the growth of cooperatives, yet cooperatives with a strong grassroots basis and sound leadership can nonetheless survive. With a neoliberal regime in power between 1990 and 2007 that favored multinational corporations over local cooperatives, cooperatives also sought to gain the right to open factories in neoliberal free-trade zones. During the symposium, Woodard insisted that corporate form need not dictate substance, conjuring up the notion of the *bricoleur* by explaining: “What's available to me is the corporate form. I want to use that form to do something new and different. To use what is to make what should be.” Borrowing Malcolm X's phrase, he argued later that social equality and improvement must be pursued “by any means necessary,” including, potentially, the corporate form.

Hardin's (2011) article also takes forms assumed to be mutually exclusive—protected areas and trading concessions—and explores their historical links. She tracks elements of their common origins in the expansion of influential monarchies through trade and military institutions into arenas of imperial engagement and eventually formal colonial administration. She suggests that recent and influential critiques of conservation organizations for “selling out” to corporate interests and abandoned indigenous peoples as their partners

belie that common history of corporate forms for the mastery of territory under circumstances of empire. Further, they ignore the social complexity of patronage and informal (not representative) political processes for the distribution of services and goods, as those continue to shape rivalries and alliances to obtain extractive (or protective) rights to control resource bases.

Bahuchet, in his comment, moves further and suggests that to do ethnographic justice to the complexity of contemporary conservation mandates entails an experimental moment in environmental anthropology. He cites conversations held at his conference on social science in conservation, where Pete Brosius suggested that some ethnographers must themselves move away from the Malinowskian model of the lone researcher in his or her tent among the natives and instead fan out, covering conferences and boardrooms and complex field sites for conservation. At the same time, Bahuchet notes that long-term fieldwork during which individuals are immersed in ecologies, economies, and cosmologies that are foreign to them can continue to yield important results. Students in his laboratory are increasingly working as or with geneticists to understand deeper histories of human use of plants, land, and alliances with other humans in their reproduction and production of landscapes. Others, however, are continuing to carry out conventional studies of cultural ecology among complex groups undergoing adaptive processes to social and climate change. Still others are taking funders and NGOs as targets of study, not only in their boardrooms but also in their regional field offices, where the patronage relationships described by Hardin (2011) are perpetually at stake and yet are undergoing transformations. In grappling with the complex histories and counterintuitive effects of corporate forms, then, we also find ourselves reinventing and experimenting with canonical ideas about ethnographic fieldwork, anthropological training, and social theory in relation to other scientific fields.

Corporate Ethics, Governance, and Monitoring Regimes

Anthropologists and sociologists have long been interested in the porous relationship between economic and moral spheres of life, often questioning whether the economy should even be construed as socially disembedded and distinct from moral concerns (Fourcade and Healy 2007; Granovetter 1985; Griffith 2009; Polanyi 2001). Movements over the past 2 decades for organic and fair-trade products, SRI, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) show that there is new public and industry momentum for redefining the boundaries of economic and moral action. As anthropologists have turned their attention to movements for ethical consumption and social responsibility in corporations (e.g., Browne and Milgram 2009; De Neve et al. 2008; Jaffee 2007), Polanyi's (2001) insights into the "double movement" of capitalism between the unleashing of markets and demands for social protection have

remained relevant. These opposing tendencies, as Hart (2001: 650) stresses, can coexist and be contained within capitalism. This can be seen historically, with the precedent for contemporary ethical consumption movements in earlier formulations of consumer agency and sovereignty expressed in progressive and reactionary campaigns to boycott products or buy those affiliated with an ethical cause or label (Glickman 2004; Seidman 2003; Sklar 1998; Walvin 1997).

Schwittay's (2011) and Partridge's (2011) contributions to this issue examine how, within contemporary attempts to reformulate capitalism, corporate ethics intersect with new modes of governance, producing in turn new modes of citizenship, belonging, and exclusion. Ethical governance in corporations, they show, is both an internal and external problem and project. Merry's (2011) contribution develops an account of the indicators used to measure and monitor state, corporate, and nongovernmental ethics. Indicators are key to what Partridge (2011) calls "long-range governance," standing as a technology for acting at a distance. They are also at the heart of the corporate-NGO-state nexus, which has thickened in the wake of structural adjustment programs and the end of the Cold War, which has led to a sweeping, if always uneven, privatization of public goods and proliferation of NGOs in countries around the world (Harvey 2005).

Schwittay's (2011) article taps into the CSR turn at Hewlett-Packard (HP) as the company, then under the leadership of Carly Fiorina, sought to create new products, consumers, and entrepreneurs at the "bottom of the pyramid." Tracking the fate of initiatives that were supposed to bridge the digital divide from the moments of excitement, challenge, and possibility when they are being established, Schwittay (2011) brings to life the material, social, and emotional investments that various actors developed along the way and their bitter disappointment when corporate decisions were made to refocus, relocate, or terminate projects in Costa Rica, India, and Silicon Valley. Commentators Badiane and Berdish, drawing on their experience as employees in Ford's sustainability office, seek to recuperate the possibility that corporations can benefit those at the bottom of the pyramid. They suggest, first, that HP's efforts may not have sufficiently engaged external stakeholders and may not represent the work of other corporations. Second, Badiane and Berdish argue that such projects often have more positive impacts than are immediately apparent.

The disagreements on these pages reflect a tension that arose during the symposium over whether corporate practices of setting up labs for social and environmental innovation, such as Ford's sustainability office, should be seen as genuine efforts at transformation or as palliative gestures to critics while business carries on as usual. From the latter perspective, the self-identified intrapreneurs, change agents, and tempered radicals (Meyerson 2001) are naive to believe that politically progressive agendas can be pursued in corporate settings. Clearly, we cannot say that one or another view is correct in the abstract, and elements of both may often apply. Schwit-

tay's (2011) article and Badiane and Berdish's response suggest that we pay attention to where such programs are housed, their funding streams, whether they are treated as cost centers rather than profit centers, how personnel are assigned and removed, what external actors are involved, and so forth.

Partridge (2011) examines the trend toward what the *New York Times* recently called "activi[st]-capitalism" and how this move is changing relationships between corporations and consumers and between consumers and people working along global corporate supply chains. He observes the kinds of political mobilization that are coming into being as the result of links between corporate governance, negotiations between corporate and nation-state sovereignty, and the related setting and enforcement of labor and environmental compliance standards. He also looks at the new forms of "supply-chain citizenship" that have resulted from the connections between corporate ethics and outsourcing. This form of citizenship, he argues, is a collection of long-distance promises of care that are economically and politically backed by transnational corporations. He traces "ethical production" from design houses to factory floors, from showrooms to department stores, from NGO monitoring agencies to consumer protest networks and illustrates how ethical standards get managed under the rubric of what Anna Tsing (2009) has called "supply chain capitalism."

As he reveals the types of subjects/citizens these corporate/NGO/consumer networks produce, Partridge (2011) develops a new research agenda that explores how deeply ambivalent social impacts of corporations are now mirrored also in the role of NGOs that corporations subcontract to ensure that elements of supply-chain ethics can be verified and certified. In this sense, his piece is in line with elements of Hardin's (2011), in which partnerships between NGOs and corporations are mandated or justified by elements of consumer anxiety about the violence done in extracting or producing commodities.

In a thoughtful and candid response to Partridge (2011), Bená Burda, a veteran of the organic-foods industry and the founder and president of Maggie's Functional Organics, reflects on her company's recent use of third-party fair-trade certifiers to conduct audits as a means of monitoring subcontracted factories (Power 1997, 2003). Gaining fair-trade certification was at first exhilarating for Burda, catalyzing a flurry of public relations activity and celebrations. Once these subsided, she found herself questioning the meaning of the process, asking whether it addressed workers' own assessments of their needs and the best means to meet them. Despite her concerns, Burda remains hopeful that many different actors are engaged in and committed to improving these processes.

Audits rely heavily on assessment tools called indicators. In this issue, Merry's (2011) transnational ethnography of the genesis of indicators and their migration patterns sheds light on how NGOs and development organizations are increasingly adopting corporate forms and idioms. Development and

human rights indicators, in turn, are looping back to corporations, where they serve a mixture of strategic and social functions. Strategically, indicators can be used to anticipate risks and opportunities in a new business setting (e.g., the World Bank's "ease of doing business index"). Corporations investing in CSR and claiming a role in promoting development also use indicators to determine, justify, and evaluate various programs, although these social goals cannot be divorced from the instrumental exigencies of promoting CSR programs and accomplishments. Within a larger critique of the theories and values embedded in supposedly objective indicators and their generation in the global North, Merry (2011) illuminates the role of corporate contractors in the indicator-making process and the active role that corporations play "in defining the terms of the indicators by which their social responsibility will be judged."

Making Bodies and Fashioning Subjects

Anthropologists share with other social theorists a long-standing interest in how people construe personhood and internalize and perform identity in relation to various social institutions (Althusser 1971; Butler 1990; Foucault 1973, 1979; Goffman 1961, 1967). Foucault's (1991) work has been particularly influential for recent scholarship on how people are governed not simply by force or repression or by closed "total" institutions but through technologies and apparatuses that productively foster—and also in subtle ways influence, coax forth, and coerce—human agency and conduct (Rose 1999). Ferguson and Gupta (2002) argue that extensions of Foucault's concept of governmentality to neoliberalism have often remained tethered to "the idea of the territorially sovereign nation-state as the domain for the operation of government" (1990). Citing the example of Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company, they note that governmentality scholarship has focused little on the governance roles of entities such as multinational corporations. The final two articles in this issue consider the ways in which corporations make—and are remade by—human subjects. They address how corporations are intimately woven into our everyday lives and the intersection between personal experience and structural violence.

Beginning from her own experiences at a cancer retreat, Jain (2011) analyzes how the hegemonic languages of survivorship pervade cancer thought and experience and how Merck's campaign for its human papillomavirus vaccine, Gardasil, taps into social fears and desires in creating the figure of the "previvor." Jain (2011) shows how individuals are instilled with a sense that they can or should do more to protect their bodies from cancer (thinking positively, performing breast self-exams, eating five servings of fruits and vegetables, etc.); thus, a sense of shame is bound up with the diagnosis and even more in succumbing to disease. The emphasis on personal agency in cancer misrecognizes our lack of knowledge and control over the environment and how gender biases in health care may influence outcomes. Commenting on Jain's

(2011) article, Jane Lynch, a graduate student examining corporate involvement in handloom and handicraft textiles in India, calls for a pluralization of cancer culture that would account for social understandings of the disease that are not rooted in secular liberalism.

Welker and Wood's (2011) article explores a structural predicament that both authors share with millions of other people in the United States: being enrolled in mutual fund programs for retirement and children's college savings accounts that may support socially and environmentally destructive corporate practices. Debates over how corporate and mutual fund managers should behave in the financial interest of shareholders, Welker and Wood (2011) show, are also debates over the values and personhood of shareholders, which are routinely construed in a narrow fashion. There is a myth of agency and empowerment that individual shareholders are astute financial managers taking part in a democratically open marketplace. In practice, the shareholder is often the indirect perpetrator of social and environmental violence and simultaneously its victim. Generic shareholders with their objective desires, like generic consumers, are separated from themselves and their other social capacities (Miller 1997:341).

Corporate governance activist Robert Monks comments on Welker and Wood (2011), dissecting the various categories of shareholders and finding that, in spite of the prevalent "myth of the shareholder," none of them has the knowledge and power to exercise meaningful influence over corporations. Elsewhere, he has shown how even relatively powerful and well-informed shareholders can be made to feel powerless in the carefully choreographed setting of the annual shareholder meeting (Monks 2009).³ The government, Monks concludes, would have to change the rules for shareholder activism to matter.

Conclusion: Corporations and the Contemporary Order

Jane Guyer observed during the symposium planning process that new disciplinary themes sometimes emerge from the discipline's internal momentum and at other times because a problem in the world is pressing on the discipline. Corporations, she surmised, probably belong to the latter category in anthropology. They assertively push on all of us in everyday spheres—including university administrations—and are present in most research settings, but formulating the right responses to these pressures is challenging in part because of our disciplinary legacy.

3. Monks (2008:10) can be considered a relatively powerful shareholder because of the volume of shares his family controls. In addition, the trained lawyer is the former CEO and founder of multiple companies, investment funds, and shareholder service organizations; one of the founding trustees of the Federal Employees' Retirement System under the Reagan administration; and an erstwhile administrator under the Department of Labor of the Office of Pension and Welfare Benefit Programs, having jurisdiction over the entire U.S. pension system.

Methodological and theoretical challenges for the anthropology of corporate forms remain, including how to study these institutions from within and without. Recent anthropological work on advertising demonstrates the value of shifting from a focus on the finished public products of firms, a domain to which cultural studies also lays claim (Bose and Lyons 2009; Gordon 1995; Kaplan 1995), to the dissonant and contested processes through which advertisements are actually produced (Kemper 2001; Malefyt and Moeran 2003; Mazzarella 2003; Miller 1997). Even in cases where anthropologists and historians carry out their research without direct access (whether because they were unable to secure it or because they deemed the ethical price of admission too high), however, publicly available information on corporations is in certain cases sufficiently rich to allow for the construction of a layered portrait of corporate strategies, debates, internal dissonance, and transformations.⁴ We can also take inspiration from the innovative work of anthropologists of finance (Ho 2009; Miyazaki 2006; Zaloom 2006), which has demonstrated the complex and fractured ways in which elites make sense of the uncertainties with which they live and the consequences their everyday work can unleash.

The influence or encroachment of corporations, many would argue, has become more powerful over the past 2 decades because of the fall of socialist regimes and the dilution of policies in those countries that remain nominally socialist, as well as the spread—always geographically uneven (Harvey 2005; Smith 2008)—of neoliberal policies dismantling national social protections. The refiguring of the sovereignty of nation-states is correlated with the shifting sovereign power of the corporation. It may seem more politically proper to research and participate in the vibrant new movements developing to circumvent corporate supply chains with local, sovereign, and collectively organized forms of production, distribution, and consumption of food, clothing, work, and shelter (Gibson-Graham 2006; McMichael 2010). Yet as our contributors show, corporate forms are also being engaged to oppose the conventional ways in which large corporations are supposed to operate. More than ever, as the articles and comments in this issue argue, we need fresh anthropological research into the nature of the corporate form and the experiments in social organization it opens up, the material and symbolic power of corporations over human and environmental life, how countermovements to capitalism are reshaping corporate ethics and governance, and the contested internal nature of corporations.

4. The lawsuits that have opened up corporate tobacco archives in the United States have created an unprecedented opportunity for the development of insights into corporate processes (e.g., Brandt 2007). Moreton (2009) and Foster (2008), writing about Wal-Mart and the Coca-Cola Company, respectively, have also produced nuanced accounts in spite of limited access to internal sources.

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