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THOMAS KENT'S PARALOGIC RHETORIC AS A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY DISCOURSE

by

DONALD E. PENNER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English
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Dedication

To Chelsea. May you never need to guess at what you mean to me.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to all the mentors who guided me through this process. Dr. Hui Wu, Dr. Anett Jessop, Dr. Matthew Kelly, Dr. Tara Propper, and Dr. Emily Standridge, you've carried me through this part of my academic journey, and I won't soon forget how essential you've been to my development in this field.

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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY DISCOURSE

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May 2020

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) scholarship increasingly uses rhetorical theory as a method for analyzing contested meaning between communicants. However, the classical and social constructivist rhetorical theories typically used for analysis do not address the primary cause of contested meaning – relativism. Conversely, such theories often contribute to a dualistic worldview by utilizing internally imagined conceptual schemes for analyzing texts. This thesis proposes Thomas Kent's paralogic rhetorical theory as an alternative method of analyzing CSR texts, and focuses on three common areas typically utilized in rhetorical analyses of CSR texts: text reception, the rhetorical situation, and genre. Where paradigmatic rhetorical theories typically describe rhetoric as an attempt to persuade an audience of meaning, Kent's theory describes discourse as an interpretive process, where communicants attempt to produce universal meaning through rhetorical exchanges.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Modern capitalist societies expect corporations to act responsibly toward their stakeholders (Ihlen 2). In response, corporations utilize rhetoric to persuade audiences of a socially responsible corporate identity. In 2017, 85% of the corporations listed in the S&P 500 Index published sustainability reports, an increase from the 53% reported just five years earlier (Government & Accountability Institute). The rising popularity of sustainability reports reflects a burgeoning corporate desire to be identified as a socially responsible actor.

Corporations do not embrace social responsibility for purely ethical reasons. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) also includes "economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary activities that society demands from corporations" (qtd. in Ihlen 3). Further, corporations embrace identities of social responsibility because stakeholders, an essential piece of a corporation's ability to secure equity for more profit, require a corporation to maintain a socially responsible disposition if they wish to be viewed positively (Day 4). In this sense, CSR is used as a profit-making strategy. As such, its motivations differ from stakeholders who think that CSR should be motivated by ethical concerns for a society's well-being. Because of this, CSR rhetoric does not always persuade their stakeholders, nor do corporations always behave in the "socially responsible" ways their stakeholders expect them to. Instead, CSR exists as a contested discourse, where stakeholders and corporations create and dispute understanding. In order to contest viewpoints, communicants within CSR discourse utilize rhetoric. Corporate social responsibility concerns the rhetoric and composition field for two reasons. First, through text,

corporations utilize persuasive strategies in attempts to create effects in the world, in this case, to legitimize their socially responsible identities with stakeholders.

Second CSR discourse is a form of public writing. The primary genre employed within CSR discourse, the annual CSR report, functions as a public text. Further, the various voices that inform the content of annual CSR reports are heard in other public forums – government meetings, through protest, in equally public environmental reports. CSR discourse provides ample cases of professional, organizational, and technical writing, and grants opportunities to examine both their construction and rhetorical effects.

This project offers an intervention of the rhetorical theory both scholars and professional writers use to analyze corporate social responsibility discourse. By and large, rhetorical theory applied to CSR discourse promotes three viewpoints, Aristotelian, Kantian, and social constructivist. As systems, each worldview shares the common foundational assumption that a separation exists between the mind and the world[1]. For Aristotelians a transcendent logical system helps one interpret the ever-changing world. In the Kantian view, human consciousness interprets the natural world via innate mental categories, *a la* empiricism. For social constructivists, the consensus of discourse communities guides interpretations of the world, and is distinct from the interpretations of other discourse communities (Kent 21). Such a dualistic

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[1] Kent makes clear that the three paradigms described do not possess distinct boundaries, and various scholars within each school, such as Peter Elbow in the Kantian school, implement "strong social dimensions" which do not align with Kent's simplistic descriptions of the paradigms.

infrastructure for discourse production promotes relativism. This proves problematic, especially in CSR discourse, because relativism, the basis for contested meaning, is the primary problem that scholarship in the field seeks to solve. As an alternative, Thomas Kent's paralogic rhetoric serves as a suitable alternative or perhaps, intervention. Kent's radical viewpoint seeks to shed the conceptual schemes[2] of paradigmatic rhetorical theories upon which analysis of CSR discourse is based, and with it, the dualistic worldview which causes relativism. By applying paralogic rhetoric to CSR, we cannot conduct analysis of individual texts, as is typical in the field, but we can identify how texts and communicants interact with one another, and use rhetoric within discourse as a way to interpret meaning.

THE STATE OF RHETORICAL ANALYSIS IN CSR

CSR scholarship applies theoretical frameworks from various disciplines with the goal of defining what corporate responsibility consists of. In the last decade, scholars began to frame CSR as a discursive phenomenon. The discursive framework arises from a call to examine "overarching processes of (national and transnational) public will formation and these processes' contribution to solving global environmental and social challenges" (Okoye 616). This new critical lens seeks to examine the effects of CSR on stakeholders and the environment, and "calls for a politically enlarged conceptualization of CSR" (616). CSR, as a political arena, calls for

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[2] Kent uses Donald Davidson's definition of conceptual schemes, who describes them as "ways of organizing experience; They are systems of categories that give form to the data of sensation; they are points of view from which individuals, cultures, or periods survey the passing scene" (qtd. in Kent 81).

meaning to be negotiated through discourse. CSR, now understood primarily as a discursive

domain, must consider how communicants – corporations and stakeholders – create effects, how

they contest meaning, and how they persuade their audience. As such, rhetoric has become one

of the various disciplines important to understanding CSR.

Chapter 28 of Øyvind Ihlen's 2019 book *Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and*

Communication emphasizes the importance of rhetorical analysis in corporate social

responsibility (CSR) scholarship for the reasons discussed above. However, Ihlen observes

scholarship that embraces traditional rhetorical frameworks to be largely absent[3] from the field

(Ihlen 6). To address this lack of rhetorical analysis, he recommends several areas where

rhetoricians might contribute to the field, including rhetoric as used for identification,

investigation of the rhetorical situation, and the effects of CSR rhetoric. Further, Ihlen and other

scholars' work describes various scenarios where rhetorical analysis might prove important to

the study of corporate social responsibility discourse.

Ihlen proposes using rhetorical theory to analyze CSR because "The concept of rhetoric

helps us to understand the specific textual strategies that corporations employ when they

communicate about corporate social responsibility (CSR)" (Ihlen 2). In other words, Ihlen

envisions rhetorical theory as a system (or conceptual scheme) for producing discourse which

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[3] It is not clear why rhetorical analyses of CSR are sparse. Ihlen's investigations hint that

reasons may include A: the relative immaturity of CSR as a discursive domain or B: CSR is

primarily studied by business ethics and management scholars, who are more likely to analyze

CSR with a legal or economic lens.

might lead to predictable outcomes. Inasmuch, the analysis of this sort of logic-based rhetoric might allow scholars to solve some of the issues commonly discussed in CSR discourse. After all, if a system of discourse production is deterministic, then its effects can be predicted.

For this reason, rhetorical analysis provides a useful set of tools for analyzing CSR discourse. Ihlen observes that rhetoric plays a central role in "in the conceptualization, construction, and negotiation of CSR between corporations and stakeholders" (Ihlen 2). However, the systemic rhetorical theories proposed by Ihlen and used by others invite a kind of epistemological relativism that contributes to CSR's long-standing problem of being unable to define terms. If scholars continue to use rhetorical theories which promote relativism, then no progress can be made in the negotiation of what terms mean.

Relativism presents legitimate hurdles for CSR scholarship. Even when discussing CSR as a field of study, scholars find themselves at odds over perspective. For example, scholars cannot agree on CSR's definition and scope (Okoye 613), how CSR should be studied (Van Marrewijk 96), or even whether or not corporations should be socially responsible (Ihlen 4). In practice, communicants (stakeholders and corporations) find themselves embracing oppositional values – profit-seeking v. prosociality (Sabadoz 79). While this project seeks to answer Ihlen's call for rhetorical analysis in corporate social responsibility scholarship, it first asks what "rhetorical analysis" means in the CSR field, and what the consequences of applying these theories has on the CSR field. It is my hope for this project that by asking such questions, we can apply a sort of rhetorical lens which might help address contestedness, instead of contribute to it. That is, traditional rhetorical theory is dualistic, in that it perceives the individual as distinct from the material world. This proves problematic when used as a framework for analyzing CSR

discourse because such a view of the world reinforces relativism – relativistic ethics, worldviews, and values.

TRADITIONAL RHETORICAL ANALYSIS AS PROBLEMATIC

Ihlen's call for a "rhetorical approach" to corporate social responsibility translates to rhetorical analysis of corporate social responsibility discourse. But to call it as much invites a complicated understanding of what exactly he believes the field needs. To simply use the "rhetorical approach" for analysis invites a breadth of methodology and theory – often philosophically contrary – which might lead to various outcomes. Such a proposition is too broad to lead a rhetorician in a meaningful direction beyond permission to actually engage with the CSR field. However, between Ihlen's literature review of rhetorical analysis in the CSR field and his call for further research, we are given a rudimentary understanding of what he means when he says "The rhetorical tradition provides an important lens to analyze CSR strategies" (Ihlen 20). First, he finds applicability in using Burkean identification theory as a lens for understanding CSR's role in rhetorically shaping communicants' identities as employees, managers, and stakeholders. Second, Ihlen sees utility in examining the rhetorical situation. To use such a term summons almost as much literary baggage as rhetorical analysis. However, Ihlen makes clear reference to Lloyd Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation. While he also mentions Richard Vatz' counterpoint to Bitzer's "Platonist *Weltanschauung"*, Ihlen's primary framework for understanding the rhetorical situation comes from Bitzer, which consists of the three elements: *exigence,* audience, and constraints. Third, Ihlen invites rhetoricians to measure the effects and reception of rhetoric by both corporations and stakeholders. In expanding the "rhetorical approach" beyond individual texts – in considering interactions between texts and

communicants, Ihlen enters the critical field. While Ihlen doesn't go so far as to transition from rhetorical criticism to critical discourse analysis, he does invite discussions on the hermeneutic elements of rhetoric within CSR discourse.

Ihlen makes clear that most rhetorical analyses in CSR scholarship embrace new rhetoric, or rhetoric as epistemic. However, remnants of Aristotelian formalism remain. Ihlen's own papers frequently approach CSR rhetoric using Aristotelian proofs as a framework for analysis[4]. Such foundational use of syllogistic reasoning asserts the existence of eternal forms, or logical constructs (Kent 19). Because Aristotelian tradition "generates a logico-systemic superstructure for rhetoric that stands outside both history and social interaction" (Kent, 20), Ihlen, by extension, promotes a perspective defined by dualism between the mind and the material world.

Beyond Aristotle, CSR rhetorical analysis frequently refers to Lloyd Bitzer's description of the rhetorical situation. Particularly, Ihlen uses Bitzer's *exigence* as a way to analyze why corporations produce rhetoric (Ihlen 11). In Bitzer's theory, the rhetor, upon encountering *exigence* – which contains meaning – might produce rhetorical discourse which fits with the traits of the encountered *exigence*. Ihlen addresses the deterministic nature of Bitzer's *exigence* and expands its definition beyond constraints, to include possibilities. However, the envisioned *exigence* still contains its own meaning, which the rhetor encounters and responds to (Ihlen 14). The use of Bitzerian *exigence* implies a Platonist system where "truth is not brought to man, but

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[4] See Ihlen's "Rhetoric and corporate social responsibility," in *The Handbook of Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility* or Waeraas' and Ihlen's, "Green legitimation: The construction of an environmental ethos."

man to the truth" (qtd. in Berlin 771). As such, we find another example of the cartesian mind/body split, and a system where a correct answer exists to fit with a given situation.

Beyond the Aristotelian and Kantian conceptual schemes, CSR rhetorical analyses frequently use social constructivist conceptual schemes. Primarily, scholars utilize Kenneth Burke's theory of identification as a paradigm for understanding discourse between corporations and stakeholders. In identification theory, rhetors attempt identify with their audience in order to persuade them. In CSR scholarship, analyses often focus on corporate attempts to legitimize their own identities so they might be perceived to embrace the same values as their stakeholders. Burke's identification theory fits well with CSR's recent conception as a discursive, or political phenomenon, and considers the "concerns that face contemporary societies including the issues of power, ideology, leadership, and social change" (Day 16). While Burke's theory does not so neatly fit into the social constructivist conceptual scheme, it is based on identification with the cultural conventions of a group. What amounts to an essentialist view of the group, or community, serves as the foundation for predicting how language is interpreted. In other words, Burke must rely on the consensus of community identities as a bearing for understanding an utterance's meaning. In this way, identification becomes another conceptual scheme.

PARALOGIC RHETORIC AS AN ALTERNATIVE

Using Thomas Kent's paralogic rhetoric as an alternative to systemic rhetorical paradigms, this project examines how a contrary, non-systemic branch of epistemic rhetoric might prove useful when analyzing some common elements of CSR discourse: text reception, the

rhetorical situation, and genre[5]. Paralogic rhetoric seeks to shed any sort of conceptual scheme which might be used to interpret a corporation's rhetoric. Instead it proposes that all utterances acquire understanding through lived discourse. As such, they only contain meaning in relation to other utterances. Further, both the employment and receipt of utterances as rhetorical texts constitute hermeneutic acts, where both the encoder and decoder participate in a public guessing game – always imperfect, always related to a complex system of infinitely mutable signifiers.

Systemic rhetoric is, according to Kent, "a conception of rhetoric that treats discourse production and analysis as codifiable processes, processes derived from the idea that language possesses a foundational or conventional center of some sort" (Kent 18). Systemic rhetoric emerges from western metaphysics. Neo-Aristotelian analysis, commonly used to investigate corporate ethos in CSR, rests on the enthymeme as a foundational center. Kent labels the enthymeme as a logico-systemic superstructure for rhetoric that stands outside both history and social interaction. Bitzer's rhetorical situation operates from a cartesian worldview, named after Descartes. The foundational or conventional center in these systems is the human mind. Such a worldview utilizes empiricism, and perceives a dualism between mind and material body, consciousness and world, self and other. Bitzerian Identification utilizes a social constructivist world view as its conventional center. Here, the consensus of a group, or discourse community, acts as the conventional or foundational for epistemic authority. All of these systems promote a separation between self and other. Such dualism contributes to a relativistic understanding of

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[5] I've chosen these three areas because they are the points where rhetorical analyses in the CSR field most commonly intersect with Kent's work.

knowledge, where individuals or communities can create frameworks from which they derive epistemic authority[6], separate from the outside world. In all cases, knowledge is interpreted through an invented systematizing process – either the innate mental categories of the mind, through a transcendent logical structure, or through the cultural conventions of discourse communities. Consequently, the rhetorical theories discussed results in three assumptions for rhetorical analysis: Communicants possess relative understandings of the world; meaning making is governed by mental categories or discourse community consensus; and genre can exist as a static form and subsequently be used to interpret a text's meaning.

By utilizing the paralogic lens to intervene in traditional analysis, the scholar gains a nondualistic description of communicative interaction where the corporation, stakeholder, and society exist as collaborators in the creation of a shared meaning. Additionally, the scholar gains a new view of the rhetorical situation in which *exigence* exists neither as an external deterministic event, nor as a social construction. With paralogic rhetoric, the scholar might also shed the distractions of formalism by analyzing genre in the Bahktinian sense, where genre is defined by who it is addressed to in a communicative interaction, rather than by its static constitutive elements. Such a description of genre asks the scholar to interpret a text's meaning by analyzing its intended function and its relationship to other texts, instead of by associating it with a static form, or the formal genre it exists within. This description places meaning-making in the realm of lived discourse, as opposed to the privately conceived frameworks of conceptual schemes.

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[6] For more on the term, see Linda Zagzebski's book *Epistemic Authority.*

First, paralogic rhetoric imagines discourse reception as two related interpretive

activities: triangulation and hermeneutic guessing[7]. Like other forms of epistemic rhetoric,

paralogic rhetoric assumes that all knowledge is formed through social interaction. However,

paralogic rhetoric differs in its position that no text can be interpreted with the rules of a

conceptual scheme, be they mental categories or the consensus of a discourse community.

Instead, communicants take what they know, and make an interpretive, or hermeneutic guess

regarding a text's meaning. While the guess is founded on the knowledge the communicant

possesses from previous triangulations, meaning must be verified by all other communicants

who also possess their own knowledge in a given discourse. Through communication by parties

occupying different perspectives, a language user can triangulate a working meaning for a text

which can be of use within a discourse. This triangulated meaning, however, is always subject to

change – if the text itself changes, if communicants change, or if the background knowledge

upon which the guess is made changes.

Second, paralogic rhetoric re-engages with the rhetorical situation by addressing features

of the situation as defined by Bitzer. In regards to Bitzer and Vatz, paralogic rhetoric addresses

their contested understanding of *exigence*. While Bitzer sees *exigence* as an external event which

determines how rhetoric may be employed, Vatz believes "no situation can have a nature

independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he

chooses to characterize it" (Vatz 154). In other words, Bitzer asserts that events contain meaning,

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[7] Kent takes the term *triangulation* from Donald Davidson's "Three Varieties of

Knowledge." The *hermeneutic guess* is Kent's own invention.

and the rhetor must use an internal mental system to match rhetoric with the event. Vatz, conversely believes the rhetor assigns meaning to an event so it might be used rhetorically. This assignment of meaning, however, is based on a socially constructed, but systematized understanding of the world prior to choosing the event. Like Bitzer, Vatz asserts the existence of meaning before discourse. The paralogic understanding of exigence proposes a third view. In this view, meaning arises through the interpretation of an event. Paralogic rhetoric calls on all communicants in a given discourse to collaboratively interpret events to create a contextual and transient meaning for the event.

Exigence serves as a motivation for rhetoric, something which Kenneth Burke focused more thoroughly on. While Burke defines the rhetorical situation by the rhetor's need for identification with a community (271), paralogic rhetoric expands upon such a notion by identifying multiple elements which cannot be identified before discourse takes place. As a result, it calls into question the epistemic authority of communities for identification, and asks whether we can know who an audience is before discourse takes place.

Finally, a rhetorical analysis of any text must concern itself with style. For a paralogic rhetorical analysis, style doesn't exist as a product of discourse communities, but as a result of whichever speech genre it resides within. In this sense, rhetoric is genre bound, and genre is viewed in the Bakhtinian sense. The Bakhtinian speech genre is based on the utterance, which comes before the language conventions agreed upon by a discourse community (Bakhtin 62). The Bakhtinian genre focuses on three elements which might be useful to the analysis of CSR rhetoric. First, CSR texts originate from an utterance, and are translated into a form which readers can understand, i.e. sustainability reports and CEO letters. Kent states: "When the

utterance takes the form of genre it represents the utterance's social baggage in the sense that the utterance must take on a determinate and public form that communicants can identify" (Kent 139). When viewing CSR texts as genre derived from utterance, we must consider the possibility that extralinguistic elements exist within that text – motivations, intentions, and moves the reader can never decipher. Second, and because only part of a genre-from-utterance can be systemized, we must analyze genre by its addressivity. That is, we can only know the meaning of a text, including its rhetorical aims, by analyzing what other genres it responds to. In CSR, we might understand an annual report as a response to some stakeholder message. However, if a CSR text responds to an environmentalist report, and not the utterances of other stakeholders, its contents might fail to address an intended audience, such as the local stakeholder who is affected by a different set of corporate actions, not necessarily environmental. Lastly, paralogic analysis of genre promotes a dialogic understanding of genre, in which genre is composed of infinite other genres, is indeterminate, and requires triangulation between communicants to attain meaning. CSR as a genre, then, takes on characteristics of every other genre it has responded to – the shareholder inquiry, the lawsuit, the government regulation. As such, its characteristics become ever mutable, unpredictable, and in need of interpretation by communicants in order to have meaning within a discourse.

CONCLUSION

Paralogic rhetoric claims that humans cannot possess private conceptual schemes or rule-based systems that help them accurately interpret an utterance. Paralogic rhetoric rejects the Platonic, Aristotelian, and social constructivist paradigms that knowledge is derived via dualistic conceptual schemes. Paralogic rhetoric conversely states that meaning is made during the act of

communication, not beforehand. If we create knowledge through communication, and we

constantly communicate, then knowledge must constantly change. Further, new knowledge, and

new conceptions of being in the world must be created. Discourse, then, becomes both an

epistemic and an ontological act. This project seeks to explain corporate social responsibility

discourse as a dialogic act, "an open ended, nonsystemic, paralogic interaction between

hermeneutic strategies" (Kent 42). It is important to note that paralogic rhetoric does not claim

that facts are created through communicative interaction. In the case of corporate social

responsibility, communicants cannot argue whether CO_2 emissions trap solar energy and pollute

the air. This is a materialistic fact proven by science. What discourse can decide, is whether

reducing CO_2 emissions is a corporation's responsibility. It can determine what corporate social

responsibility means, and how scientific fact plays a part in that meaning.

      Paralogic rhetoric contains important implications for CSR because it attempts to avoid

methods of discourse production and reception that promote relativism. Paralogic rhetoric, unlike

other rhetorical theories, does not separate the individual or group from the "other." In paralogic

rhetoric, no "out there" exists, and all meaning is understood only through communicative

interaction with others. Paralogic theory views the employment of rhetoric in a given discourse

as both an epistemic and ontological act which requires other language users. When the

corporation uses rhetoric to communicate with the stakeholder, it makes a guess at what it thinks

social responsibility means by using its accumulated background knowledge. However, the guess

does not constitute meaning, it is only an idea of meaning, a theory of meaning. In order to make

meaning real, the corporation must *throw* its theory of meaning into a given discourse via

rhetoric so it might be triangulated and come into being. Stakeholders are a free audience capable

of having an opinion on social responsibility; they must make a guess at what social responsibility means to the corporation. However, social responsibility cannot possess meaning before communication takes place. Only when the corporation and the stakeholder triangulate meaning can social responsibility mean anything.

Before diving deeper into paralogic rhetorical theory and how it might offer an alternative sort of analysis on CSR scholarship, it is necessary to first investigate the ways rhetorical analysis has already been implemented into the field. The reader should note, rhetorical analyses on CSR discourse is extremely limited and might have been non-existent before 2009. As such, this essay can discuss nearly every published article[8] which conducts rhetorical analysis and/or rhetorical criticism of corporate social responsibility.

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[8] My "comprehensive" list of rhetorical analyses in CSR comes from independent research and literature reviews conducted by Øyvind Ihlen. It is certainly possible I've missed a work, or new work was published after my research concluded.

Chapter 2

Traditional Rhetorical Analyses of CSR Discourse

Rhetorical analyses of corporate social responsibility typically focus on Bitzer's Platonist rhetorical situation, Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism, and Burkean identification legitimized by discourse communities. Kent calls such paradigmatic theories "systemic," in that they "treat discourse production and discourse analysis as codifiable processes, processes derived from the idea that language possesses a foundational or conventional center of some sort" (Kent 18). Paralogic rhetoric rejects the notion of a foundation for understanding. However, before further discussing how the paralogic worldview provides an alternate focus for analysis, namely of the hermeneutic properties of CSR discourse, it is first necessary to point out three significant findings within the current CSR field.

First, the application of rhetorical analysis to corporate social responsibility is sparse. Ihlen suggests two reasons: CSR as a cross-disciplinary domain prioritizes other theories for conceptualizing CSR, i.e. economic, managerial, etc… And, CSR as a discursive phenomenon remains relatively new (Ihlen 6). Rhetoric's application to CSR evolves from stakeholder theory, a communicative domain that "focuses on interaction and interdependence between the corporation and its stakeholders" (Onkila 287). While Stakeholder theory dates back to 1995, it primarily considered the disparate values between actors, not the rhetorical strategies used to negotiate those values. My research suggests Onkila's 2009 article, "Corporate Argumentation for Acceptability: Reflections of Environmental Values and Stakeholder Relations in Corporate Environmental Statements" is the first case of a rhetorical approach being used specifically to analyze corporate social responsibility. Since 2009, CSR rhetoric and its subsequent analyses

"can be divided into three partly overlapping streams that focus on corporate advocacy or issues

management, ethos or legitimacy, and the corporate role or aspects of morality" (Ihlen 10). This

project attempts to list all significant publications which conduct rhetorical analyses since then,

but the total comes to less than ten[9].

Second, within those ten or so publications, all rhetorical analyses share three

commonalities. First, all reviewed literature relies on a deterministic event which prompts the

need for rhetoric. This event, or *exigence*, can be modified using a discursive, or rhetorical

solution (Bitzer 6). Second, scholars seek to identify how Aristotelian appeals – usually ethos–

can be used to achieve desired effects on both the audience and the situation. Finally, scholars

concern themselves with corporate identities of legitimacy, and how rhetoric is used to

strengthen or maintain those identities. These three trends rely on cartesian, Aristotelian, and

social constructivist rhetorical paradigms for research, and ultimately promote a separation

between the mind and natural world, the speaker and the audience, and the corporation and its

stakeholder.

Finally, rhetorical analyses of CSR discourse come primarily from managerial and

business journals. As such, research focuses on rhetoric as an instrumental tool to benefit

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[9] The texts reviewed here conduct rhetorical analyses of corporate social responsibility

discourse after 2009. A number of additional texts discuss the ethics of organizational rhetoric,

but "rarely reference one another. Furthermore, several of the studies fail to employ the CSR

phrase…" (Ihlen 9). For additional sources, see Ihlen's *Handbook of Communication and

Corporate Social Responsibility.*

corporate and managerial communicants. Stakeholders certainly shape the rhetorical situation as

audience. They dictate the rhetorical strategies used by corporations, and they determine if

corporate identities of social responsibility are legitimate. However, when CSR rhetorical

analyses which privilege the interests of corporations, discourse becomes not only a space where

meaning is negotiated; it becomes a place where one communicant's use of rhetoric is to

dominate another.

CSR's rhetorical landscape is documented – and in many ways shaped – by the work of

Øyvind Ihlen. While he's published various papers on the impact and use of rhetorical theory in

corporate social responsibility scholarship, two stand out as the most influential to this project's

understanding of rhetorical theory's employment in CSR scholarship. Chapter 8, **"**Rhetoric and

Corporate Social Responsibility" from his 2011 *Handbook of Communication and*

Corporate Social Responsibility provides a definition of rhetoric and its application to the CSR

field from a social constructivist perspective. He states:

> All human behavior involves rhetoric, and rhetoric constructs social knowledge.
>
> Rhetoric helps some ideas to be accepted and others to be rejected. It is not possible to
>
> "discover" or "unearth" truth, as all types of knowledge rest upon some kind of human
>
> consensus. (Ihlen 5)

In addition to adopting the view that rhetoric is epistemic, Ihlen concentrates rhetorical analyses

on two areas: How the rhetorical situation affects rhetorical strategies, and how corporations use

ethical appeals to reinforce identities of legitimacy.

In chapter 28 of his more recent 2018 work, *Handbook of Organizational Rhetoric and*

Communication, Ihlen re-iterates how rhetoric might be used to conceptualize, construct, and

negotiate the meaning of corporate social responsibility (Ihlen, Organizational 1)**.** The chapter

outlines CSR and how a rhetorical lens – and subsequent analysis – might fit into the field. While

Ihlen presents rhetoric as a tool for meaning creation, meaning relies on the consensus of

discourse communities. Here, the discourse community serves as a conceptual scheme. Ihlen

notes: "As a social construct, CSR is not static and non-contestable; it is temporally,

geographically, culturally, and organizationally bound—and polyvocal" (Ihlen, Organizational

13). This conception of rhetoric exemplifies the systemic foundation a social constructivist

paradigm relies on, requiring the consensus of discourse communities and the stability of genre

as conceptual schemes for interpreting utterances.

Onkila's 2009 article investigates the rhetorical strategies used by corporations to argue

for the acceptability of corporate environmental actions in stakeholder relations. Utilizing

Burke's theory of identification, Onkila's rhetorical approach exemplifies the sort of rhetoric-as-

epistemic view Ihlen describes, where "a difference between rhetoric and reality cannot be made

but rather rhetoric is a part of socially constructed reality" (Onkila 288). She also seeks to

systemize her analysis so it might produce predictive results. Among the questions asked in

Onkila's study, she asks: *What types of environmental values are produced in the statements?*

And *What types of relationships does the text construct between the corporation and its*

stakeholders? As a method for answering her research questions, Onkila's rhetorical analysis

consists of coding specific phrases used by corporations and measuring frequency of use.

Through the measurement of coded phrases, she observes "three power-related rhetorical forms

that are competing ways to produce acceptability in the data: dominance, subordination and

equality, and joint action" (Onkila 285). While such a method is undoubtedly productive in

answering Onkila's questions and documenting corporate use of rhetoric in CSR discourse, I

point them out only to emphasize the field's use of rhetorical theory to create discursive

frameworks and rely on language as a foundation for interpretation.

In their 2011 article, titled "Searching for New Forms of Legitimacy Through Corporate

Responsibility Rhetoric," Castelló and Lozano analyze how rhetoric used in annual sustainability

helps corporations establish identities of legitimacy with stakeholders. Their research responds to

the one of the primary problems commonly addressed in corporate rhetoric – the value disparity

between corporations and society. By analyzing how corporations use rhetoric to establish

legitimacy, they hope to assist researchers and managers understand how corporations identify

with the societies they exist in. The authors establish three 'types' of rhetoric, "(1) strategic

(embedded in the scientific-economic paradigm); (2) institutional (based on the fundamental

constructs of Corporate Social Responsibility theories); and (3) dialectic (which aims at

improving the discursive quality between the corporations and their stakeholders)" (Castelló and

Lozano 11). Like others mentioned here, Castelló and Lozano utilize Burkean identification

theory. And like others, the scholars analyze rhetoric through isolated texts – annual

sustainability reports. Further, they imagine genre as static frameworks where "rhetorical

strategies act as structural features of discourse and can be discerned through the analysis of

corporate communicative actions and issues in different situations and temporal contexts"

(Castelló and Lozano 15). While the work makes significant headway in utilizing rhetorical

theory as a lens for analyzing CSR discourse, Castelló and Lozano acknowledge that

interpretations of legitimacy will be contested. Aware of the relativistic understanding of

legitimacy firms will develop through discourse, the authors call upon additional work from "empirical and theoretical" standpoints to augment what legitimacy even means.

Magalie Marais' 2012 article "CEO rhetorical strategies for corporate social responsibility (CSR)" exemplifies the systematization of discourse production and reception as a result of the cartesian worldview. First, the article imagines a deterministic *exigence* which results in a fixed rhetorical strategy as response. Second, she organizes the CSR genre by its formal features (medium) and its perceived audience. Primarily, the article explores how executives utilize specific rhetorical strategies in response to stakeholder pressures. As such, Marais envisions stakeholder pressures as Bitzerian *exigence*, where a rhetor encounters a stimulus which can be modified through discourse. Per Marais, CEOs utilize three types of rhetoric in response to stakeholder pressure: "values rhetoric to develop moral legitimacy, normative rhetoric to improve cognitive legitimacy, and instrumental rhetoric to enhance pragmatic legitimacy" (Marais 223). With each resultant form of rhetoric, Marais finds a corresponding rhetorical appeal. Values rhetoric uses ethos; Normative rhetoric uses ethos; Instrumental rhetoric uses logos (Marais 229). For all three uses of rhetoric, the purpose is to persuade audiences of a corporate identity which possesses legitimate authority to make interpretive and real-world decisions. As a systemic way of interpreting CSR discourse, Marais organizes CSR discourse as genres defined by their formal features. She sorts by the type of medium the genre is communicated through, i.e. PowerPoint, word, videos, etc. (Marais 228).

Higgins 2012 article titled "Ethos, logos, pathos: Strategies of persuasion in social/environmental reports" seeks to understand how corporations utilize Aristotelian appeals to promote identities of legitimacy. Like the other works considered here, Higgins seeks to assist

corporate leadership in finding analytical methods which might measure rhetorical effects, or, to systematize the rules communicants use to interpret language. In doing, he hopes to show how language "assists the managerial capture of the corporate responsibility and sustainability agenda" (Higgins 18). Higgin's article follows a similar script to the other analyses discussed here, though the research methods differ. Like the other articles, its aim seems to be corporate-centric, and this is another shortfall of rhetorical analyses on corporate social responsibility. Because nearly all rhetorical analyses of corporate social responsibility discourse come from managerial and business journals, they all privilege the corporate communicant, and see the audience in material terms, as an other who affects the businesses bottom line. Such a conception of communicants within a discourse further privileges a systemic worldview, where effective discourse can be efficiently converted into capital.

Maria Gruber's 2018 article conducts a rhetorical analysis of corporate social responsibility texts in response to corporate crises. Like Marais, Gruber imagines a deterministic *exigence* which results in corollary uses of Aristotelian rhetorical appeals. While *exigence* for Marais consists of stakeholder pressure, Gruber's imagines corporate crises as exigence. In order to analyze corporate responses to crises, Gruber utilizes Situation Crisis Communication theory (SCCR), a field specific descendant of Bitzer's theory of the situation. In order to convert responses to crises into quantitative data which can be interpreted, Gruber utilizes a "codebook" for categorizing text, defined by previous studies conducted by familiar names, Ihlen, Higgins, etc. In the codebook, scholars define what each rhetorical appeal might look like in a text:

> Logos consists of the categories *facts/figures/data*, *argumentation/justification*, *logic*,
>
> *warrants*, *examples/evidence*, ethos of the categories *authority*, *self-criticism*,

consistency, *inclination to succeed*, *improve the world*, *confirmation and praise of third*

parties, *clean up one's own act* and *deference...* (Gruber 9)

Utilizing the cartesian paradigm, Gruber suggests that a text's meaning can be understood

through empirical observation. The results of her research suggest that the "distinctive context of

each case (including the corporations' responsibility for the crisis) dictated the rhetorical

adjustments of the CSR reporting after the crisis" (Gruber 1).

In their 2019 article, "Vicious and Virtuous Circles of Aspirational Talk: From Self-

Persuasive to Agonistic CSR Rhetoric," Winkler et al. observe how rhetoric is used by corporate

managers in CSR discourse with employees, or internal stakeholders to both create and relieve

tension over identity. The authors observe that rhetors use Aristotelian appeals to shape initial

employee opinions on social responsibility, but transition to a strategy of identification with

employee scrutiny as they grow skeptical of CSR rhetoric. The article suggests that CSR

discourse contains rhetorical cycles, that repeat and eventually evolve as the discourse matures.

Perhaps the only example of a postmodern rhetorical analysis in CSR scholarship, Winkler et al.

consider rhetoric's meaning in the relation to other texts within the discourse.

Rhetorical analysis attempts to help scholars understand how corporations persuade

stakeholders, but does little to address the contested meaning which incites the need for

persuasion in the first place. Scholars have only recently begun conducting such analyses on

CSR discourse. As such, few publications exist on the topic. Further, rhetorical analysis of CSR

discourse presents little diversity in how such research is conducted. But the field is young. In it,

plenty of room exists for new ideas, explorations, and theoretical perspectives. As discussed,

researchers are primarily concerned with identities of legitimacy, where compromises to

corporate identities of legitimacy serves as Bitzerian *exigence*. Per the literature reviewed here, these identities might be strengthened or at least retained through the use of Aristotelian appeals, specifically ethos, to persuade stakeholders. Of note, the purpose of such rhetorical analyses seeks to establish frameworks which can both be measured by scholars and utilized by corporate rhetors to achieve predictable results.

Chapter 3

Paralogic View of Discourse

This project, at its core, offers an alternative to the paradigmatic frameworks which utilize conceptual schemes for interpreting rhetoric in corporate social responsibility scholarship. Primarily, paralogic rhetoric does not seek to assign meaning to a text's language, but instead engages with the broader interpretive strategies communicants use within discourse to create meaning. Here, rhetoric serves as one interrelated piece of a larger meaning making process. As such, rhetoric might be seen less as a tool to persuade an "other," but instead as a verbal or written utterance representative of a communicant's interpretative guess, amongst many, based on mutually held knowledge about the world. Using this guess (rhetoric), communicants engage in a dialogic discourse to reach a mutual understanding. By engaging in public discourse, communicants not only come to understand the interpretations of others, but validate/invalidate their own interpretations. Paralogic rhetoric suggests that the only way language users can come to understand the world, and by extension themselves, is through social interaction. Rhetoric, viewed in such a way, creates both epistemic and ontological effects. Corporate social responsibility rhetoric, then, can be viewed not simply as a way for corporations to persuade their stakeholders of legitimate and socially responsible identities, but to present an untested or previously tested understanding of such terms so a contextual understanding of terms might be legitimized by all communicants within a discourse. With the paralogic requirement that other communicants – stakeholders – assist corporations in triangulating an understanding of terms, the corporation becomes reliant on its stakeholders to validate its identity. Likewise, stakeholders require the corporation to validate their own views of a given issue within the discourse. Here,

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both the corporation and stakeholder rely on the other's rhetoric to know anything about the language put forth in a discourse.

NON-DUALISTIC DISCOURSE

In order to conceive of a paralogic form of rhetorical analysis, it is first necessary to adopt an alternative theory of discourse production and reception. Kent's paralogic rhetoric concentrates on interpretation of a text, and borrows heavily from the hermeneutic theories of philosopher Donald Davidson. Paralogic rhetoric differs from systemic rhetoric in its rejection of a dualistic worldview. By rejecting the separation between the mind and the world[10], paralogic rhetoric rejects the notion that internally derived frameworks can be used to formally interpret language or its effects in any systemic manner. Instead, communicants make a hermeneutic guess about what a text might mean. While this guess might get us close to meaning, a social interaction must take place to reach a contextual, perpetually mutable meaning. For this social interaction, Kent uses the Davidsonian term "triangulation," where communicants trade their guesses via rhetoric in order to reach a pragmatic understanding of a text. Only through triangulation can communicants reach an externalized meaning, because through triangulation, the paralogic elements of language are resolved. According to Kent, "paralogic" refers to "the uncodifiable moves we make when we communicate with others" (3). Kent's work draws from various western philosophical canon and literary theory, including Nietzsche, Heidegger,

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[10] For additional information on non-dualistic composition, see Robert Yagelski's *Writing as a Way of Being*.

Wittgenstein, Dewey, Bakhtin, Derrida, and Davidson.[11] All of these, though disparate in other fundamental ways, reject the notion that human communication can be formalized and placed into a predictive framework. That is, language contains elements that emerge in real-time, and cannot be understood or predicted through internally conceived conceptual schemes. Instead, language users come to understand language's meaning through lived discourse. In this externalist viewpoint, language users determine meaning through a pragmatic consensus with another language user instead of through a theoretical understanding of language.

HERMENEUTIC GUESSING AND TRIANGULATION

Kent takes liberty when conceiving of a paralogic version of discourse reception. While he utilizes Davidsonian theories of interpretation, Davidson never implements his interpretive theories into a theory of discourse reception (93). As such, Kent appropriates Davidson's theory of triangulation and combines it with Wittgenstein's theory of interpretive, or hermeneutic guessing[12]. In a paralogic scheme, communicants utilize two strategies to create meaning. First language users make a hermeneutic guess about other communicants' understanding of a text. Second, language users triangulate a contextual interpretation through social interaction.

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[11] For further information on how Kent integrates a variety of concepts into paralogy, see chapters one and two of *Paralogic Rhetoric.*

[12] Kent's hermeneutic guessing looks identical to Wittgenstein's interpretive guessing discussed in *Philosophical Investigations,* though Wittgenstein never uses the term "hermeneutic guessing."

The first strategy language users employ to make sense of the world is a term Kent calls hermeneutic guessing. The term refers to a strategy Kent suggests all language users must make in order to approximate how other language users interpret a text. This approximation is highly accurate, states Kent, because communicants share similar experiences of a shared world from which these guesses are constructed. Further, hermeneutic guesses are so accurate, communicants within in a discourse often fail to recognize that a guess is even being made (16). The term serves a similar function to Donald Davidson's prior and passing theories. Per Davidson:

> For the hearer, the prior theory expresses how he is prepared in advance to interpret the utterance of the speaker, while the passing theory is how he does interpret the utterance. For the speaker, the prior theory is what he believes the interpreter's prior theory will be, while his passing theory is the theory he intends the interpreter to use. (qtd. in Kent 86)

In hermeneutic guessing, all communicants must speculate what the other knows. This guess is constructed using three types of knowledge, "knowledge of our minds, knowledge of other minds, and knowledge of the shared world" (Kent 89). However, a guess is all a language user can do prior to discourse, because paralogical language elements exist which can only be understood through lived discourse.

Primarily, these paralogic elements exist in the utterance, an extralinguistic function of language described by Bakhtin. In other words, while language is socially and historically

constructed, the utterance which precedes it is not.[13] Because the utterance is paralogic, it is impossible to predict what another communicant means by formalizing what is said with any sort of rule-based schema. For Kent and the other externalists, to conceive of any framework which might capture the complicated nature of an utterance is fantasy and does not correlate with the reality of lived discourse. Instead, Kent proposes discourse as a series of hermeneutic guesses, where speakers and listeners make their best guess at the other's interpretation of and motivation for an utterance.

Kent calls these elements of the utterance "paralogical elements of language use, elements like skill, intuition, taste, and sympathy" (Kent 40). While Kent composes his description of the utterance from Bahktinian vocabulary, the unknowable elements of described utterance expand on the Heideggerian concept of *vorhabe* (fore-having). Kent states: "The important point Heidegger seems to make about *vorhabe* is that this pre-understood know-how cannot be codified or learned through conventional rules…" (Kent 41). If the hermeneutic guess is the only strategy communicants have for interpreting discourse, and the hermeneutic guess relies on anterior paralogic factors which are extralinguistic, then predictions about the meaning of an utterance can only be guessed at.

If the hermeneutic guess is the primary tool communicants use for interpreting the meaning of signs, and no socially validated understanding exists prior to communicative

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[13] For Bakhtin, the utterance becomes entangled with the social and cultural conventions of language upon entering discourse. The convention burdened utterance becomes the genre. The genre then, contains conventions, but is not entirely defined by conventions.

interaction, then the role of rhetoric within discourse changes radically. In the paralogic view, rhetoric cannot be used to persuade someone of a viewpoint prior to a communicative interaction, because the entire point of a communicative interaction is to establish a valid understanding of reality which is pragmatic and contextual for the discourse. To establish this viewpoint, language users construct rhetoric as a representation of their hermeneutic guess. Rhetoric acts as an approximate guess at the recipient's understanding of the world and how they might interpret a given text. The use of rhetoric, then requires a response in order to validate the rhetor's own understanding of the world.

The use of rhetoric as a hermeneutic guess clearly has applications for the analysis of corporate social responsibility discourse. That is, in the paralogic view, the corporation can only guess how the stakeholder will interpret its guess. While the use of Aristotelian appeals can certainly be used to *attempt* persuasion, they are only hermeneutic guesses at how the stakeholder understands a given topic at a fixed time. Whether the means of persuasion are effective or not is irrelevant to the paralogic schema, because any future situations which require a new hermeneutic guess cannot be predicted by measuring the effects of a previous communicative interaction.

Likewise, the stakeholder can only guess at the anterior paralogic factors which the corporation uses to construct its utterance. Here, neither side can fully understand the other's meaning before a communicative interaction takes place. As such, hermeneutic guessing serves as a sort of placeholder for meaning until social interaction occurs to validate it. In other words, no real meaning exists until the utterance occurs. Both sides make hermeneutic guesses about the other's meaning, and rhetoric becomes a method of presenting an utterance to another

communicant. Thus, the speaker, the listener, and the conditions in which the discourse takes place can enter into a discourse with partial understanding of a language's meaning. Upon entering a public discourse, communicants move to the second strategy for reaching understanding. In the event of public interaction, users interpret other participants' hermeneutic guesses and triangulate a common interpretation of the language in use to validate its meaning for pragmatic use.

Primarily, Kent utilizes Davidsonian triangulation as the foundation for his own theory of paralogic rhetoric. triangulation is an external phenomenon which language users use to communicate, where both a speaker's and listener's reaction to external stimuli are observed by each other. Where these mutually recognizable paralogic reactions are observed to match become a common understanding. Kent describes triangulation geometrically, where each side of Davidson's triangle corresponds to three sorts of knowledge which must exist for an utterance to generate meaning: knowledge of our minds, knowledge of other minds, and knowledge of the world. Davidson thinks that one cannot form any meaning from language unless one triangulates a reaction to stimuli with the reaction of someone else. In this sense, language which has any meaning cannot be private. Instead, meaning is formed when language is placed into context with another language user, and any understanding held by a language user is the product of previous triangulation. For Kent, Davidson's external model for discourse production acts as a solution to the problematic relativism and skepticism included with an internalist form of discourse production. Kent states: "The upshot of this argument is significant. Reduced to its bare bones, Davidson's argument takes the radically anti-cartesian position that no subject/object split exists" (90). Triangulation, for Kent, is an externalist description of discourse production

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which eliminates the notion that meaning can be achieved without the active input of both a speaker and a listener.

Davidsonian triangulation impacts the idea of human subjectivity, and promotes the undoing of cartesian skepticism and relativism. On subjectivity, Kent observes a dissolution of any sort of privately valid interpretation we hold about the world. That is, for language users to hold any sort of propositional attitudes about the world, they must exist as relative to another propositional attitude. In other words, language must be shared to be validated. Inasmuch, meaning must be shared in order to be validated. Kent cites Davidson's primary argument on the matter: "…unless language is shared there would be no way to distinguish between thinking one was using the language correctly and using it correctly… If only communication can provide a check on the correct use of words, only communication can supply a standard objectivity in other domains" (qtd. in Kent 90). With the dissolution of private language, radical subjectivity – where one can hold both a private and valid worldview – ceases to exist. Of course, this does not imply that disagreement doesn't exist, it only asserts that communicants possess different socially constructed and paralogic motivations when communicating Kent states:

> We cannot form concepts without communication, and communication requires triangulation. When we triangulate, we require another language user and a shared world. In order to know the mind of another language user or objects in the world, we must match at least partially our utterances with the utterances of another. (Kent 91)

Triangulation implies a different understanding of rhetoric. If meaning cannot be created without exposure to another language user, then rhetoric can never be used to persuade another language user of subjective meaning, because subjective meaning cannot exist. Any perceived meaning

has already been triangulated with another language user, or it has no meaning. Any rhetoric then, becomes something other than a tool which might convince another communicant to adopt a meaning. Instead, rhetoric simply becomes another utterance which only has meaning in relation to its contact with its audience. Here, rhetoric should be seen as an utterance which is understood due to prior triangulation.

In the case of CSR, rhetoric used by corporate actors acts as a hermeneutic guess of the stakeholder's understanding of the corporation's identity, CSR terms, and definitions. The corporation might imagine its own conception of these elements, but they cannot have public meaning until they are triangulated from the unique perspectives of communicants in whatever present discourse they exist in. As such, rhetoric might be seen as an utterance which seeks to triangulate a meaning for two reasons. First, triangulation generates understanding of CSR terms. Second, triangulation legitimizes the identity of the corporation and ultimately, creates it. Without the stakeholder's reception of a corporation's utterance, the corporation's identity ceases to exist.

Three consequences for CSR discourse result from such a view. First, the binary nature of corporation and stakeholder disappears. Each is reliant on the other to understand anything about corporate social responsibility. Second, relativism within the discourse becomes irrelevant, because any private understanding of language within the discourse is not valid. Finally, such a dialogic view of discourse requires scholars to re-evaluate the ethics of CSR discourse, and who is allowed to participate in the act of triangulation.

EFFECTS OF PARALOGIC RHETORIC

When considering how such a viewpoint might be applied to CSR discourse production and reception, we must consider the ways CSR rhetoric is utilized. Generally, corporations use CSR rhetoric to validate identities of legitimacy, both in crisis situations and as an overall PR strategy. If we consider such uses of rhetoric from the paralogic perspective, corporations are not legitimate authorities on responsibility prior to engaging with other communicants in a given situation. Instead, they must make a guess at how the stakeholder defines legitimacy and how the stakeholder will interpret their rhetoric. Prior to text production and reception, corporate identities of legitimacy for that situation do not exist. Stakeholders, likewise, must guess at what the corporate rhetoric means by using their own knowledge of self, other, and world. Only when the discourse between communicants begins can a definition of legitimacy begin to form. To use Heidegger's term, the corporation *throws* their definition of legitimacy into a discourse, using rhetoric to best approximate how the stakeholder will interpret it, and the stakeholder responds to this rhetoric with interpretation.

At this juncture, we encounter a problem with CSR discourse. Per the paralogic model, the input of all communicants within a discourse is necessary to reach a triangulated definition for legitimacy. But we must consider scenarios when private understanding is passed off as legitimate. I'd like to propose here that in cases where non-triangulated meaning is passed off as valid meaning, unethical discourse takes place. Ann Surma defines ethics in a manner which will be useful here. In reference to public writing, ethics defines "the way we privilege certain knowledge or information…the language choices that we (are able to) make (or are aware of making) when we write, and the extent to which different readers are free or constrained to

interpret those codes of value, belief, knowledge or information in their reading of texts" (Surma 24).

While stakeholders utilize various forms of agency, dependent on the type of stakeholder, to participate in public CSR discourse, not all communicants possess an equal ability to contribute to a working understanding of important terms – like legitimacy. Individual stakeholders have little say in a triangulative process where global organizations are involved. Further, such individuals might be negatively affected were they to triangulate. Such would be the case for employees of corporations who hold commensurate values, or local residents whose interests directly contradict a corporation's. Often, individuals form their own organizations in order to achieve a balance of power in the act of triangulation – environmental groups, governments, unions, etc. However, such organizations can never achieve the sort of granular access to discourse which is necessary for all voices to be heard. In order to achieve an ethical, pragmatic understanding of a term like legitimacy, individuals must possess some means of contributing to triangulation.

The paralogic perspective on discourse reception and production relies on each communicant's interpretation of utterances which take place within a discourse. Rhetoric, as an utterance, relies on the interpretations of others. The following chapters will intervene in two areas common to CSR rhetorical analyses. First, I will discuss Bitzer's rhetorical situation, specifically the nature of *exigence*. Second, I will consider the impact of formalizing CSR texts as genre. By further exploring the paralogic understanding of these two elements CSR discourse, we might attain new perspectives on the production and reception of CSR texts, observe new

ethical frameworks informed by Davidsonian triangulation, and consider what other purposes

rhetoric might serve beyond persuading an other.

Chapter 4

A Paralogic Rhetorical Situation

In Maria Gruber's 2018 essay, "Corporate Social Responsibility in Times of Crises," she lists General Motors' 2014 vehicle recall as an example of a crisis situation where a corporation responded with rhetoric. In short, GM sold vehicles with a faulty ignition switch from as early as 2001. Upon becoming aware of the issue through various reports, the auto manufacturer refused to issue a recall, claiming a mass replacement would cost more for the company than owners utilizing their warranty upon discovering the issue. Unfortunately, over 400 drivers were injured or killed as a direct result of the ignition switch failure. In response to pressures from stakeholders – lawyers, government agencies, and consumers – GM responded to the situation through annual CSR reports in hopes that they could salvage their reputation as a reliable manufacturer. Gruber specifically uses Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) as an explanation for GM's specific use of rhetoric in response to the ignition switch crisis. SCCT, however, amounts to domain-specific theory directly pulled from the lineage of Lloyd Bitzer's rhetorical situation, where crisis amounts to *exigence* (Carroll 263). Gruber defines the *exigence*, or crisis, of the situation as a combination of failed engineering and the decade long cover-up that followed. Whatever the actual crisis was, her research suggests that corporations use specific rhetorical strategies in response to specific crises, and concludes that "especially in times of crises it is advisable to counter stakeholders' mistrust and skepticism by augmenting the dimension of ethos in one's corporate rhetoric" (Gruber 16).

So, what are the problems here? I see two which paralogic rhetoric can address: First, Gruber's use of a Bitzer-esque rhetorical situation suggests that a corporation can encounter a

problem, interpret its meaning privately using a conceptual scheme, and respond appropriately.

As previously discussed, private meaning equates to relativism between communicants. That is,

one communicant interprets an event one way, the other a different way, and on and on. An

intervention on the rhetorical situation with paralogic rhetoric first seeks to modify Bitzer's

rhetorical situation by interpreting and defining *exigence* socially, instead of privately. Through

triangulation, the *exigence*, or crisis experienced within CSR discourse would achieve an

objective meaning for all communicants within that unique context. Second, since communicants

interpret an *exigence* privately in Bitzer's theory, it is unclear what a communicant's rhetoric is

responding to. Paralogic rhetoric suggests that all texts can only respond to other texts.

Inasmuch, the paralogic lens suggest that corporations do not respond to *exigence*, or crises as

Bitzer and SCCT propose, but instead respond to other texts as a way to triangulate what an

exigence or crisis means.

Before further describing a paralogic rhetorical situation, I'd like to more closely

examine Bitzer's theory and that of his primary critic, Richard Vatz. Bitzer's rhetorical situation

offers a useful description of the context of discourse, and a paralogic intervention wouldn't see

Bitzer's theory entirely eliminated from a fruitful rhetorical analysis. However, Bitzer anchors

his theory on the cartesian worldview, and this specifically effects how he describes the elements

of the rhetorical situation. Primarily, paralogic rhetorical theory seeks to modify Bitzer's

description of *exigence,* from an event which is given meaning privately, to an event which is

given meaning through triangulation. For Bitzer, the rhetorical situation exists as a circumstance

or a collection of circumstances where rhetoric might be employed for modification. Bitzer's

rhetorical situation contains three elements which comprise "everything relevant" (Bitzer 8) to

the rhetorical situation: *Exigence*, audience, and constraints. For Bitzer, the situation precedes

rhetoric in the form of *exigence*. *Exigence* – or a "a specific union of persons, events, objects,

and relations… which [amounts] to an imperative stimulus" (Bitzer 5), dictates the nature of

rhetoric. That is, rhetorical strategies obtain their character from the situations they respond to, in

the same way that an answer obtains its character from a question. Communicants use rhetoric to

fit the situation they've encountered. Such a description of the situation appears to embody the

mind/object split paralogic rhetoric opposes. For Bitzer, events exist 'out there' to be observed

by the logical human mind, who use conceptual schemes to interpret what has been witnessed.

For Bitzer, the audience also exists 'out there', as an other. He defines audience as "persons who

are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (Bitzer 7).

Finally, Bitzer describes constraints as any element of the situation that can limit the possibilities

to modify *exigence*, such as facts, cultural beliefs, cultural conventions, etc.

First, by Gruber's utilization of SCCT, she essentially states that a corporation can

encounter a problem, interpret its meaning privately using a conceptual scheme, and respond

appropriately. That is, GM faced a "crisis," determined what that crisis meant, and responded

with rhetorical appeals in order to effectively persuade concerned stakeholders that it wasn't

entirely their fault. By assuming that GM could determine the meaning of their crisis privately,

she imagines a dualism between GM and the world they inhabit, or a crisis existed that contained

its own meaning. Further, if GM can internally interpret the meaning of a crisis, then so can its

stakeholders. Such a dualism subsequently invites relativism. In this relativistic worldview, what

is the crisis? While Gruber identifies two crises, GM's faulty engineering and their failure to

disclose its knowledge, is this how GM saw it? Such questions must be asked under a cartesian

schema. In fact, the car manufacturer wouldn't have recalled a single vehicle had the ignition switch issue not been made public, despite the 124 deaths and 275 injuries linked to the faulty ignition switch's failure (Gruber 10). For a corporation like GM, perhaps a crisis only appeared when their identity as a socially responsible corporation was compromised.

One must also imagine how stakeholders defined the crisis. Could it have been a crisis of health and safety? All of these perspectives could exist because, according to the cartesian worldview employed by Gruber, communicants create meaning privately. I propose that triangulation serves as a possible solution to the inability to objectively define a crisis. That is, GM's ignition switch malfunction became a crisis upon it being made public. However, per the paralogic description of discourse, the crisis did not yet have meaning, either for GM or its stakeholders. Stakeholders made the initial hermeneutic guess about how the issue would be understood by GM when the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommended that GM launch an internal investigation into the ignition issue. GM made a hermeneutic guess at what it thought the problem was according to the information it had. In response, GM made its own hermeneutic guess based on its own knowledge of the situation and on the text it responded to.

Second, and related to the first problem: If the crisis which exists is unclear, what *exigence* is the rhetoric responding to? In Gruber's analysis, she identifies annual CSR reports as the primary text GE used to make rhetorical appeals. But what is the annual CSR report responding to, other than GE's private understanding of a crisis? It is unclear what text GE is responding to in their annual report, If anyone. Are they responding to themselves? Again, Is the

report responding to lawsuits? Engineering failures? The coverup? Hundreds of deaths and injuries?

My primary problem with Bitzer's rhetorical situation is that it does not account for the reason verbal responses are shaped by events. If a communicant experiences an event, and it shapes the sort of rhetoric they choose to employ, then the communicant must've interpreted the event somehow. Here, we find Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation slipping into the internalist paradigm discussed throughout this project. For Bitzer, once the communicant experiences an *exigence*, they use a privately held conceptual scheme in order to process it, thus creating subjective meaning. Any subsequent understanding of the processed event has little to do with the reality, or truth of it, because it has been interpreted privately. Of course, this private interpretation of the world is incompatible with paralogic rhetoric. It also didn't work for Richard Vatz, whose famous response to Bitzer, titled "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation" calls into question the deterministic, meaningful nature of the rhetorical situation. In his essay, Vatz puts forward the opinion that events do not contain meaning, observers experience events phenomenologically, and assign meaning to them in the act of re-communicating their experience. For Vatz, the world is a series of inexhaustible events which have no inherent meaning. However, events gain salience when they are communicated. Like the externalists in Kent's work, Vatz believes that meaning generation requires social interaction. In the communicative interaction – the creation of meaning – both the speaker and audience must interpret and subsequently translate information. He states: "communicating 'situations' is the translation of the chosen information into meaning. This is an act of creativity. It is an interpretative act. It is a rhetorical act of transcendence" (Vatz 157). Here, Vatz' description

approaches the epistemic and ontological uses of rhetoric previously described from the

paralogic description. Political scientist Murray Edelman sums up Vatz' position, stating:

> Political beliefs, perceptions and expectations are overwhelmingly not based upon
>
> observation or empirical evidence available to participants, but rather upon cuings among
>
> groups of people who jointly *create* the meanings they will read into current and
>
> anticipated events… The particular meanings that are consensually accepted need not
>
> therefore be cued by the objective situation; they are rather established by a process of
>
> mutual agreement upon significant Symbols. (qtd. in Vatz 159)

For Vatz, events are chosen from an infinite pool of experience and given meaning with rhetoric.

The paralogic schema certainly agrees with Vatz that rhetoric is an antecedent to meaning. In

paralogic rhetoric however, an objective situation, or shared world, does exist that guides each

communicant's basic understanding of a given discourse and its communicants. Such a shared

world provides communicants with the background knowledge required to make a hermeneutic

guess about another communicant's understanding of the event. However, the existence of

shared reality does not equate to the existence of shared meaning. With shared knowledge,

communicants must still triangulate meaning through discourse.

In the GM ignition fault crisis, both stakeholders and general motors triangulated what

the *exigence* was through a series of communicative exchanges about what the original event/s

meant. In this case, an engineering error that endangered the lives of stakeholders serves as the

original event that compromised GM's responsibility to their stakeholders. For a decade, GM

chose not to make this event public, because they privately determined that the ignition failure

did not warrant disclosure. However, as discourse developed, as the event became public, GM

slowly began to see how stakeholders were interpreting the ignition failures, and vice versa. As communicants made hermeneutic guesses via rhetorical exchanges, they slowly began to triangulate the *exigence* of their discourse, culminating in GM issuing a recall.

A paralogic rhetorical situation asserts that communicants can partially understand a shared world through introspection, and with that understanding can make a hermeneutic guess. However, triangulation through discourse is necessary to create the *exigence* of a situation. Such an assertion relies on the idea of externalism. Kent defines externalism as "the position that no split exists between an inner and outer world, and claims that our sense of an inner world actually derives from our rapport with other language users, people we interpret during the give and take of communicative interaction" (Kent 104). To expand upon this idea, Kent uses Davidsonian vocabulary to describe an element of externalism, specifically a term called "meaning holism." Meaning holism contends that an utterance only possesses meaning through its relation to all other utterances that communicants already hold true. As such, a communicant can use the formal language elements of an utterance to construct the knowledge needed for a hermeneutic guess, but is still the missing essential piece required to construct meaning, the paralogic elements of language-in-use.

To relate the concept of meaning holism to CSR discourse, let's return to the GM crisis. In Gruber's use of SCCT to analyze CSR discourse, she suggests that General Motors encountered an *exigence*, or crisis in 2014, interpreted its meaning privately, and responded with suitable rhetorical appeals in their annual CSR report. The externalist position argues that both GM and stakeholders used rhetoric dialogically in order to triangulate meaning for a crisis. Using the paralogic lens, it can be viewed the following way: GM issued initial service bulletins in

2005, not as a rhetorical appeal based on an internal understanding of the crisis, but as their own

interpretation of a potential crisis. In response to service bulletins and driver deaths, stakeholders

issued their own statements in 2007 and 2010[14], further developing the meaning of GM's

engineering failure. Finally, as meaning became more accurately triangulated through the

utterances of stakeholders and shareholders alike, the corporation begins to recall vehicles in

2014, largely thanks to 32,000 pages of documents made public in a lawsuit against GM

regarding one of the deaths they were responsible for. GM only recalled vehicles, however, when

the crisis had been defined through triangulation between communicants. Holistic meaning does

not exist in events themselves, but communicants can derive enough meaning based on socially

and historically constructed knowledge of an event or text to form a hermeneutic guess. In GM's

case, they knew a defect could be a problem, but could not be sure until other communicants

presented their own positions on the issue. Likewise, stakeholders knew about the defect, but

could not understand its relation to corporate responsibility until GM's role in the coverup was

revealed. Put bluntly, GM wasn't irresponsible until society said they were. Social responsibility,

then, requires social interpretation, or meaning holism. Kent states: "Meaning holism emphasizes

that something we call the world, or objective fact, or essential being does not make an utterance

true; only other utterances make an utterance true" (Kent 105). Essentially, GM was not socially

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[14] According to an NPR timeline of the GM recall, the NHTSA (National Highway

Transportation Safety Administration) emailed General Motors, recommending a probe to look

into their vehicle defects.

irresponsible until communicants determined that GM was killing drivers by knowingly selling them faulty cars.

The rhetorical situation provides a useful framework for constructing a hermeneutic guess, but not meaning. Interestingly enough, Bitzer says as much in his early description of the rhetorical situation: "Virtually no utterance is fully intelligible unless meaning-context and utterance are understood; this is true of rhetorical and non-rhetorical discourse. Meaning-context is a general condition of human communication and is not synonymous with the rhetorical situation" (Bitzer 3). Perhaps Bitzer's theory has simply aged poorly, but his exclusion of rhetorical situation from the general conditions of understanding human communication are incompatible with the view that all communication is rhetorical, as paralogic and the other epistemic rhetorics assert. Further, in the paralogic view, the utterance is fully intelligible through triangulation, and the point of rhetoric is not to persuade, but to create meaning. Rhetoric, then serves as a tool for accomplishing triangulation. Before moving forward, a paralogic intervention of the rhetorical situation offers two insights. First, *exigence* does not exist until communicants create it. However, the purpose of rhetorical discourse is to create a commonly understood *exigence*. Second, communicants do not encounter an *exigence* and make a suitable rhetorical response. Instead, communicants respond to texts. In this response to utterances from other communicants, discourse becomes dialogic, and ongoing until the triangulation of an *exigence* is completed. Certainly, the socially and historically constructed elements of a rhetorical situation should continue to be used in rhetorical analysis Audience, and constraints are useful for communicants to form more hermeneutic guesses about how their texts should be read and will be received. Additionally, scholars can consider the contextual elements

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of a discourse when considering the formal elements of a discourse. A paralogic rhetorical situation, however, suggests that the elements of a situation are only part of the story. To achieve meaning holism, communicants must utilize rhetoric in a dialogic discourse in order to fully understand the event responsible for the discourse.

Chapter 5

CSR Texts as Paralogic Genre

Thus far, I've established two precepts which might be used for a paralogic analysis of

CSR rhetoric. First, the purpose of rhetorical discourse is to create *exigence* from a triangulated

understanding of the shared world. CSR rhetoric's purpose, then, is to determine what CSR

means, in both in theory and praxis. Second, meaning is triangulated through dialogic discourses

– through social exchanges of language by communicants. Corporations cannot determine

meaning on their own, nor can stakeholders. Meaning is dependent on the texts of all participants

in a discourse. However, in order for any sort of rhetoric to take place, the thing we've called

utterance must take on a form communicants can understand. The utterance must take on a

socially and historically constructed form. For paralogic rhetoric, that form is the genre. This

chapter considers the nature of a paralogic genre, and the dialogical exchange of genre that must

take place between communicants in order to triangulate meaning. First, I will provide a

paralogic description of genre based on Bakhtin's notion of *addressivity*. In doing so, genre

ceases to exist as a static language element that can be interpreted using conceptual schemes.

Inasmuch, a genre's rhetoric cannot be analyzed using systemic frameworks[15]. Second, I will

describe the exchange of genre as dialogic discourse based on the semeiotics of Charles S.

Pierce. Pierce's conception of dialogism offers an alternative to the Sausurrean semiotic theory

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[15] I've used this term throughout the paper, but here it seems especially important to

reemphasize that I'm referring primarily to Aristotelian logico-systemic superstructures,

empiricism, and discourse community consensus.

used in paradigmatic rhetorical theories. Further, it helps to explain how the identified praxes interrelate to one another, ultimately providing a both a goal and description of paralogic discourse, as well as rhetoric's role within it. Placing these objectives in conversation with CSR scholarship, we might say that paralogic description of genre prohibits analysts from interpreting rhetorical moves based on texts they exist within. Here, the paralogic intervention of CSR rhetorical analysis states that a text's meaning cannot be determined by considering an isolated text and its situation. Because texts that comprise the CSR genre – annual reports, CEO statements, and press releases – cannot exist as static signs. Instead, they exist as part of a network of signs, constantly changing, influencing, and referencing one another.

Paradigmatic rhetorical analysis generally relies on Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. That is, in order to conduct analysis, one must rely on the formal structure of language in order to make an utterance. Inasmuch, language (*langue*) as a conceptual scheme exists prior to the utterance (*parole*). For scholars conducting rhetorical analysis, such a theory means they can examine a text and determine the expressive or paralogic traits of an utterance from the text. If we recall, the paralogic scheme states the opposite. The utterance, and all of its expressive, paralogic traits, exist before it takes on a linguistic form. In the paralogic view, the utterance causes language to exist. However, it must take a shape that communicants can recognize when they hear or read it. Further, it must take on the characteristics of its socially and historically constructed context. If we recall from chapter three, the utterance serves as the foundation of language, but cannot be reduced to formalization because it is "the active position of the speaker in one referentially semantic sphere or another" (Kent 137). In other words, the utterance exists only in the act of communication. It comes into being only through lived discourse, and only

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contains meaning via its position relative to other language users. While an utterance's meaning cannot be stabilized to the point of systemization, we must communicate our utterances using a system that other language users understand. The utterance, in order to be understood by others, must take some mutually understood form. Bakhtin recognized this socially and historically bound utterance as *genre*. Genre, then, forms the foundation of communication, not *langue* as Saussure argues.

ADDRESSIVITY

For Bakhtin, the genre distinguishes itself from other formal language elements. Language is a collection of socially and historically determined (socially constructed) signs, and lack the quality of being directed to anyone specific. Words and sentences are tools. the genre, however, is not founded on historically and socially constructed language; it is founded on the utterance. Kent explains: "The genre represents the utterance's social baggage in the sense that the utterance must take on a determinate and public form that communicants can identify" (Kent 139). The utterance comes into existence to accomplish something socially. As such, it must contain a specific purpose. It must also be public, because every utterance must be addressed to someone and it must be a response to another utterance. Because the utterance is directed at someone in the world, and responds to another utterance, it is exposed to the world. Upon being exposed to the world for a specific purpose, it takes the form of genre to be understood. The utterance which is directed at a communicant for a purpose – Bakhtin calls it *addressivity* – becomes a genre. Bakhtin differentiates the genre from other formal language forms precisely because of this unique aspect of *addressivity*. That is, words, sentences are products of a structured language system, and structured systems, while useful as signs, tell us nothing about

how or why signs are employed by communicants (Kent 140). Genre, however, is not a product of a structured language system. It is a product of the utterance. Because genre originates from the utterance, it may not be reduced to formalized categories. Kent states:

> Because the genre is thoroughly hermeneutic in nature and because it comes into being only within the paralogic interchanges of public life, a specific genre cannot be treated as a linguistic element that we employ in order to make our intentions clear or to decipher the intentions of others. (Kent 145)

Paradigmatic analyses overlook genre's relationship with lived discourse. As a result, genre is studied separate from the texts it both references and speaks to. Bakhtin calls this systemization of genre into a static conceptual theme a "scientific abstraction, productive only in connection with certain practical or theoretical goals… not adequate to the concrete reality of language" (qtd. in Kent 151). And that is the goal here, to describe genre as it exists in lived discourse. By describing a genre as it functions on the concrete reality of language – only in relation to the other genres it responds to, we might move away from monological conceptions of genre that act as totalizing conceptual schemes for interpreting a text's rhetoric. Conversely, we might consider discourse as an interconnected network that works in unison to create pragmatic meaning.

GENRE AS DIALOGIC

Paralogic rhetoric imagines communication as an exchange of genre with the goal of triangulating meaning through dialogue between discourse participants. Rhetoric, in this description, is a hermeneutic guess on behalf of a communicant. While it is intended to persuade, it is not based on established meaning, only the speakers guess at meaning. In such a description, rhetoric cannot be analyzed in the context of a single text. Instead, rhetoric is one communicant's

public perspective of the shared world. And it contains meaning only in its relationship to other texts within a discourse. In the CSR field, scholars attempt to identify and analyze rhetorical strategies used in a variety of texts. Marais (2012) examines CEO statements to various stakeholders and shareholders. Ihlen (2011), Devin (2014), and Gruber (2018) analyze annual CSR reports. While each of these utilize Aristotelian formalism to conduct their analyses, they all share an additional commonality with one another as a byproduct of dualistic thinking. Their analyses examine isolated texts as rhetorical responses to *exigence*. That is, the current paradigm only considers single texts and their context, or rhetorical situations. From a paralogic perspective, such analyses miss the point of producing a rhetorical text in the first place, to respond to another rhetorical text in order to triangulate meaning.

Before moving on, I'd like to return to Gruber's rhetorical analysis of CSR, not only because it serves as a clear representation of classical rhetorical analysis, but because it, like CSR texts, cannot be understood on its own. My own interpretation of it is only a hermeneutic guess. For that reason, it serves as an example of the points I'm making in this project. First, I can understand some of what Gruber says in her article because we share some common knowledge – of the English language, of Aristotelian rhetoric, and of corporate social responsibility rhetoric. However, I cannot fully grasp what she's getting at by examining the text. I do not know who she originally wrote it for. Given that it served as a thesis paper before being published as an academic article, I can assume she wrote it for three of four faculty members, each of whom likely shaped the final product. The article was given a standard format, representative of the typical academic article, but what is its purpose? As a thesis, it served as a necessary step to attaining a degree. As an article, perhaps Gruber sought to contribute to CSR

scholarship. In its life cycle, the article seems to have been addressed to various audiences, and served multiple purposes for its author. Of course, as a reader, I can only guess at all of the article's background information that helps shape the rhetoric contained within. These guesses, though, are important, because elements that shape the meaning of an article are paralogic, and guesses are all communicants have to interpret them.

Using the knowledge we both share, I can make a fairly accurate guess at the meaning Gruber tries to convey. While her research promotes a rhetorical theory where rhetors interpret an *exigence* and respond with suitable persuasive strategies, it also exemplifies a worldview where individual texts contain meaning that can be analyzed by scholars and/or stakeholders. Specifically, such paradigmatic analyses view CSR reports as dyadic in the Sausurrean sense, where the report itself is a static sign which represents a static concept, distinct from both its audience and the world it inhabits. Here, a CSR report exists as a genre which can be interpreted using a conceptual scheme – in this case, classical rhetorical analysis. Gruber's research studies three annual CSR reports from automobile companies at two different time periods. Specifically, the author seeks to use rhetorical analysis in order to navigate how corporations manufacture their identities. She states: "Especially in these cases rhetorical analysis seems to be the most suitable method, as it allows to thoroughly examine the different dimensions of persuasive appeals that generally aim at justifying corporations' perspective of reality" (Gruber 9). My problem here is that any classical or cartesian rhetorical analysis assumes it can interpret a corporation's perspective of reality by examining isolated texts as static, systemic signs of

another's reality. When conducting a classical analysis, the text-as-sign means only what the text says it means, regardless of its relationship to other texts.

As Bakhtin advocated, genre can only be defined by its *addressivity*. In the paralogic lens, texts only have meaning in relation to the texts they respond to. If a text only contains meaning in its relation to other texts, then all texts obtain different meanings, dependent on specific communicative interactions. If a text's meaning is mutable, then the text which it refers or responds to is also mutable, and so on and so forth. As a result, a sort of infinite semiosis occurs, and genre itself becomes mutable, in what Derrida called "the indefiniteness of reference" (Kent 148). In such a description, the genre cannot hold comprehensible meaning in itself. Instead, genre's meaning exists in a vast network of interrelated reference, which must be triangulated by participants through communicative interaction. If genre is inherently paralogic, and the notion that genre can exist as a static framework and have its rhetoric be analyzed as representative of it seems off. This relationship between texts constitutes not only the communicative interaction that takes place to produce discourse, but also explains how genre is paralogical and cannot be beholden to conceptual schemes.

The paralogic lens suggests both the observer and the scholar can only guess at a corporation's perspective of reality. Further, that perspective is only one angle in a number of angles necessary for triangulating a discursive reality. If we can only guess at a corporation's perspective of reality, and discourse is responsible for triangulating a more accurate reality, then we shouldn't look to individual texts, static genres, or conceptual schemes in order to derive meaning. Instead, we should look to the relationships texts have with other texts in a given

discourse, and view a text's rhetoric as a communicant's interpretive strategy used in the process of triangulating meaning.

Kent uses the term "dialogic" to describe the communicative act that constantly interprets and validates individual understanding of the world. While scholars in the CSR field recognize CSR discourse as "dialogic in nature and… embedded in a broader social context that simultaneously constrains and expands communication choices" (Ihlen 1), Winkler et al.'s 2009 article provides on such example. However, within the limited number of rhetorical analyses in the CSR, most take a classical analytical approach. As an alternative to such formalisms, Kent proposes a definition of dialogic based on the semeiotics of philosopher and pragmatist Charles S. Pierce.

With the help of Pierce's vocabulary, paralogic rhetoric describes what it means for corporate social responsibility discourse to be a dialogic exchange of genre. In such a description, CSR discourse embodies more than dialogue between communicants, bound by the conventions of historically and socially determined language. Instead the dialogic nature of genre validates understanding by using three elements: dialogue, the dialogic object, and cominterpretant:

_____*Dialogue.* According to Kent, dialogue is the historically and socially situated communicative interaction that takes place between communicants. It has a determinate form, such as a conversation between two people. In CSR discourse, dialogue may exist as a corporate press release in response to a damning environmental report, or a CSR report in response to new government regulations. For Kent, dialogue is the interaction of genres in order to determine the purpose of a discourse.

_____*The Dialogic Object*. The dialogic object is the purpose of a discourse, achieved through dialogue between communicants. As discussed in the previous chapter, the purpose of a discourse can also be called *exigence*. Per Kent, the dialogic object is "the goal or final aim of any linguistic exchange, and on the psychological level, it corresponds to the desire to possess the other, to have our views dominate the other, to posit our consciousness in place of the other" (Kent 149). Here, the dialogic object shares similarities to Richard Vatz' description of the rhetorical situation, or lack thereof. He says: "Rhetors choose or do not choose to make salient situations, facts, events, etc. This may be the *sine qua non* of rhetoric: the art of linguistically or symbolically creating salience. After salience is created, the situation must be translated" (Vatz 160). Within CSR discourse then, rhetoric exists not to persuade stakeholders of meaning that already exists, but to engage with stakeholders as a way to create salience, or *exigence* as telos.

_____*The Cominterpretant*. Of course, to achieve salience of meaning in CSR discourse, all communicants must possess at least a temporary mutual goal. The cominterpretant can be defined as the "common mind" (Kent 149) communicants form during a dialogue. The common mind is a temporary understanding of meaning amongst communicants and it is the undeclared agreement communicants leave a dialogue with. This common mind could be a common understanding of disagreement. It is neither final nor need be universally held. Of the most importance to Kent, and I believe for a discussion regarding CSR, is the cominterpretant's role in establishing a need for further dialogue. When conceiving of CSR as a dialogic act, it must leave open the possibility for further dialogue.

CONCLUSION

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When we define genre as a socially constructed manifestation of the utterance, it can no longer be analyzed by its formal elements. Instead, the genre must be analyzed by its addressivity, or purpose. Further, when we look at discourse as a dialogic exchange of genres, rhetoric can no longer be analyzed as part of a of single text. It becomes part of a larger, interrelated discourse strategy aimed at achieving a salience of meaning. A paralogic description of genre intervenes in current rhetorical analyses of CSR discourse by asking scholars to consider a text's relationship with other texts. For example: What text does an annual CSR report respond to? Does the CSR report respond to texts produced by its intended audience? What knowledge does its author/authors reference when making hermeneutic guesses about how an audience might interpret the meaning of a specific term, such as sustainability or responsibility? What texts has the rhetor previously produced, and how has the current text changed? Why? When we begin to consider a CSR text as an essential but incomplete piece of a larger discursive network intended to create meaning, the analysis of isolated texts presents two problems. First, interpreting an isolated text assumes that the text contains some meaning in itself. It assumes that we can use a conceptual scheme for interpreting its meaning. Inasmuch, such the use of conceptual scheme for interpreting a CSR text's meaning reinforces the notion of relativism.

Conclusion

I should say at this point, readers may be skeptical of my suggestion to replace

systematized analyses with another that, in many ways, resembles its own system. If such

skepticism is the case, I must make two clarifications. First, when I say *system,* I mean a

methodology for producing an intended outcome, specifically one that uses a conceptual scheme

to interpret meaning in order to reach that outcome. Aristotelian syllogistic reasoning provides

one such example of a system. That is, if one correctly uses such reasoning, an audience will be

persuaded; an effect will be produced. Further, the producible effect can be predicted. In the case

of syllogistic reasoning, logic serves as a source of epistemic authority for interpreting the

outside world. Likewise, any social constructivist rhetorical theory which relies on essentialist

notions of discourse community consensus in order to predict the effects of rhetoric can also be

considered a *system* as I refer to it here. Gary Olson, among others, calls these systems

something else. Such systems, or *Theories* with a big *T*, as Olson calls them, are "totalizing,

essentialist, and a residue of enlightenment thinking" (Olson 8). Paralogic rhetoric is not a

Theory, per se, but the act of theorizing. While *Theories* "entice us into believing we've captured

a truth, grasped the essence of something, theorizing can be productive because it is a way to

explore, challenge, question, speculate, reassess" (Olson 8). A paralogic theory of rhetorical

analysis makes no predictive claims about the outcome it moves toward. While this statement

might resemble the sort of contextual, negotiable meaning-making process of other social

constructivist theories, it does not surmise that meaning is negotiated under the governance of a

discourse community. For example, Ann Surma's *Public and Professional Writing* imagines

outcome as "contingent, unstable, therefore as the negotiable exchange of meaning and values

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within specific communities" (Surma 29). Such claims certainly expand on the idea that our world makes our language, but still do not escape the conceptual scheme of discourse communities. In such a scheme, "writing is an unfinished, necessarily open, and ongoing activity" (Surma 31), and the paralogic lens I've promoted here agrees. However, in Surma's, Ihlen's, and most other post-modern views, meaning is still governed by the rules of a discourse community. Paralogic rhetoric asserts that while the rules of a discourse community are socially constructed, and essential for interpreting the conventions of language, they cannot account for the paralogic elements of the utterance through which language comes into being. As such, meaning is unstable and writing is an ongoing activity, but no predictive scheme exists for interpreting meaning. Because of this, communicants must always make a hermeneutic guess when inputs change or communicants are added/subtracted from a discourse. As a result, the dialogic object – the purpose of discourse – becomes infinitely mutable and is only understandable upon the triangulated interpretations of the communicants involved in said discourse. Certainly, paralogic rhetoric imagines a sort of conceptual scheme for how discourse is produced. However, such a scheme serves only as a description to explain that meaning is interpreted by communicants using more than the conventions of a given system, be it logic or the consensus of a discourse community.

This brief proposal acts as a primer for paralogical rhetorical analyses of corporate social responsibility discourse. Ultimately, my concern is that the traditional rhetorical frameworks Ihlen desires to be included in CSR scholarship might perpetuate problems the field cannot currently solve. In the cartesian worldview, communicants – corporations, stakeholders, theorists – interpret values and their meanings in relativist silos because of their dualistic philosophical

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foundations. Regardless of whether such silos are composed of the individual mind separated from the world or of the conventions of discourse communities separated from other communities, CSR's problems cannot be solved until the relativism generated within their contested discourse is addressed. Corporate Social Responsibility will never be defined, and disparate values will never coexist without co-understanding between communicants. If we are to continue discussing corporate social responsibility as a rhetorical act, we must address the relativism that paradigmatic rhetorical theory introduces to the field. As rhetoricians, we can accomplish such a task by focusing on three areas where rhetorical theory is used to analyze CSR discourse: discourse production, the rhetorical situation, and genre. A paralogic analysis considers CSR rhetoric to be a hermeneutic guess intended to shape meaning through triangulation with other communicants. Inasmuch, the purpose of discourse is to create a rhetorical situation – to generate an understanding of the reason discourse is taking place at all. This occurs through the exchange of genre, a socially and historically determined manifestation of the utterance. Paralogic rhetoric seeks to move beyond the notion that individuals can create pragmatic understandings of meaning. Instead of rhetoric being used as a tool to persuade an audience of privately held meaning, paralogic rhetoric asks communicants to use rhetoric as a tool to co-interpret meaning with other communicants in a given discourse.

Beyond the benefits paralogic rhetoric might add to the field of CSR scholarship, A co-interpreted CSR discourse presents the potential for positive real-world effects. Primarily, a non-dualistic approach to CSR would see capitalism as an interdependent relationship between corporations and stakeholders. Such an ecological view strengthens the importance of corporate social responsibility because the overall health of a society would directly affect the well-being

of a corporation. In the paralogic view, the environmental, economic, and social interests of stakeholder and corporation may not be agreed upon, but their meaning can be co-interpreted, so each side might work towards understanding the other's position. In such a scheme, the corporation can work towards identifying with the public while co-interpreting what a socially responsible identity means. CSR as a field has already adopted similar positions, sometimes called integrative theories. Still, such theories describe a dualistic relationship between corporation and stakeholder where the corporation only seeks to identify with stakeholder values, not to co-interpret the meaning of said values. Such integrative theories consist of "the scanning of, and response to, the social demands that achieve social legitimacy, greater social acceptance and prestige" (Garriga 58). Inasmuch, integrative theories are still impeded by issues of relativism and rhetoric v. action. While no rhetorical theory can hope to resolve a communicant's divergent interests, paralogic rhetoric offers a method for corporations and stakeholders to effectively understand what the other means when they convey those interests.

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