Call for Submissions

Border/Lines, an interdisciplinary magazine committed to exploring cutting-edge cultures—indigenous cultures, line arts, visual arts, gender, literature, music, and political culture. Although its geographic focus is California, this is taken as merely a starting point for the exploration of the cultural and political trends that are relevant to the United States and beyond. Border/Lines aims to fill the gap between academic journals and popular culture magazines. Our audience is diverse and eclectic, so too should the contributions range from a broad base of writers, cultural producers and animators. Potential contributors should bear this diversity in mind, and try to address cultural issues with a variety of cultural and occasional styles. We accept manuscripts at any time, so please submit them immediately. We are interested in new work, so please submit your best work. We welcome new writers. Manuscripts should be sent to the address below. All correspondence should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped return envelope. If your manuscript is on disk please send us a disk in a manila envelope.

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Spill Doctors?

Crop circles. Mist and fog have a low breast, as naturally be thougts are born at little lies down. The ship had made this passage many times, and with Alfred E. Newman conference, finally took to his bunk.

The sink is history, or what posses you now. When the oil settled, Henderson had taken some hard, EXXON had acted suitably carelessly, the fact that in Prince William Sound had died of hypothermia. Rocks were subsequently scrubbed. Valuable treasure about some oil spill dynamics were learned. Additionally, dependence on oil was highlighted, and the national product went up at the expense of the the town shelled out for clean-up.

In the Age of Expanding Context, however, there can never be another. Horrified at "Spill doctors," the wind and the slicked, hose-wielding personnel dispersed the crude, heated up the boiling puddle of oil as in a skillet try of solid dressing: they made it go away. And in the same manner, the emotions the collective "we" felt toward EXXON, Hasbrouck or our own dirty little oil habit would be dispelled by the winds of an oil refinery in another Gulf, the thunderous breaking of the communist wave, the Blue Jays winning a pennant etc. But a lingering sense of dread remained that the EXXON Valdez grounding symbolized more than mere careless treatment of the natural environment. First of all, the toxic waste in the Alaskan ocean sediments wait to precipitate a slower, deadlier crisis, such as the event's would sooner or later join the cultural domain by some magic, unanticipated process. As a process of civil process, the Greenpeace Sunbird descended upon EXXON, posting signs that read, "EXXON must change presidency. They are doing it again."

DERRIDA'S BIDET: or What Remains of "BLAME" in the Age of Expanding Context

By Andrew McMurry
ecology

John Muir said, "when we try to pick something out of everything else in the world, "Everything is connected to everything else" so says a New Age maxim. Interdependence (sic) has become the buzz word in every field from computer science to environmental issues."

Parsimoniously, a billion-ball universe is jaded in favor of the realness of irresolution, particle/virus dualities, strange attractors.

In biological terms, the "food chain" has been replaced by the "food web." A food chain is a barely ecological notion, but it did allow some recognition of the importance of elements of a particular ecosystem. In a food chain, energy passes linearly through the links in the system and any break in the chain could spell disaster for all components. A hypothetical example: the fox ate the mice, the grasshopper ate the mice, all those higher up in the chain suffered when the wheat crop was destroyed by wheat rust.

Now, by contrast, in the food web model the energy fluxes associated with ecological change arise and disperse multidirectionally, often without easily discernible origins or ends. A number of events occur when the wheat rust enters the area: grasshoppers migrate to better feeding grounds; mouse population declines; rabbit population increases; hawks benefit from the rabbit explosion; snakes increase as hawks switch to more plentiful food. We are forced to follow allowing recrudescence of native plants; losses go hungry and their fitters are smaller; and so on, in uncorrelated directions. Although the wheat rust appears to be the identifiable catalyst of change in both cases, only the web model illustrates adequately the ramping, resonating, cybromatic nature of ecological revolution. On the other hand, the determination of cause and effect becomes more troublesome in the food web model. As in the food chains, we might try to blame "the wheat rust for the fox decline, but it is not clear that the rust inhibited the decline, nor even that a fox decline is necessarily a response to wheat rust, rather a reorientation of a previous balance. Other species have increased. And we should not forget that the wheat is an introduced plant to begin with, and thus the pre-rust balance was itself artificial.

The very sophistication of the ecological paradigm thus results in a more sophisticated and nuanced version of reality. In terms of our discussion, context makes possible blameworthy, but it is context itself that is now in question. "Your wheat field is responsible for the cold on my nose" becomes a tough change to make stick.

Economy

In business, decisions are made in response to changing market conditions. Failure to understand the market can result in hubris, loss of profits, failure, and closure. When a best decision is made, popular mythology banishes that it beeds will figure-tively roll. But even in business plan does not necessarily inhore in the primary parties. In point of fact, the real hurt stemming from bad decisions is shifted to other economies, dependent industries, or more generally, the consumers, whose choices are ones shaped the market in the first place. The system, like the Catholic church, is rigid to provide sinners absolution, here in the form of City 11 protection, government bailouts, tax write-offs, and gold parachutes.

Yet those whose blunders most immediately put the corporate ship on the rocks—the shareholders, the execs, the government bureaucrats, the economists who predicted the market trends—ar the Captain (How)woods beer; for their responses to market conditions are merely programmatic, and follow the topology of the alcoholic who believes the bottle will never be empty or the hangover too painful to bear. The very existence of capitalist economies depends on these two linked identities of inexhaustible resources and insatiable consumption. If there is a problem with those assumptions, how can the people whose livelihoods must prove to be better regulated? Thus, is, in economic terms, responsibility is automatically coded to the market. It is the market that ultimately must bear the blame for the mess it creates. Yet what is the market? It is the perfect scopsog, since it is composed of everyone and everything and therefore appears as imponderable, inescapable force, like the weather. (And even in the confused aftermath of a hurricane or flood, "I blame the weather" is perhaps the most accurate statement one could make.)

Let us consider the situation in more detail. Libertarians decry the conventional wisdom that the SKLs and related financial (sic) debonnie are attributable to an amorphous "greedy 90s culture"—which thereby implicates everyone who lived through the decade equally instead of those most directly involved. Yet even those most directly involved—Reagan, Nell Bush, congress, Wall Street, hard developers, speculators—have obtained in some parts the status of tragic heroes, and
rightly so, for their ability to profit was sanctioned by a complicitous public long enmeshed with the possibility of unlimited wealth creation. So the failure to alienize silk purses from sow's ears does not mean therefore that the magic doesn't exist, but that fellible magicians botched their spells. Mistakes were made. Americans have internalized the rules of the capitalist shell-game, and they believe that anyone and everyone can attain the status of millionaires. Unlike in the Philippines, the American Mercuries receive social aquisition for their accomplishments, if they "work hard and play by the rules," the sky's the limit: and if they appear to have gone astray, it is ultimately because the system didn't correct their excesses. The system is at fault, the system must be adjusted, perhaps capital gains taxes should be lowered. But the system is in us. In a crypt-Catholic context like this, how can any one individual be damned for greediness?

Thus, culpability for the tremendously expansive S&L bailout is dispersed outward from Washington and urban financial zones into the hinterlands, even to future generations. Main commands to "stop the finger-pointing" and "take the medicine" remain: "tart-tightening" becomes the clarion-call: "we" must share the burden, try the Wall Street charge—"i.e., we must all share in the stonewall for the sin. In the understandable but theoretically indefensible resistance to this kind of group Expugnation, small wonders that a Texas tycoon made rich at the public trough can act as a born-again populist messiah for the presumably guiltless of us all.

Responsibility for the EXXON Valdez disaster is similarly and correctly devolved onto the board of an energy-hungry society in its quest for economic growth. The ex-senior pipeline engineers must be held accountable, not merely because the alternative to it was no worse than the present, but because it was no better. But it was no better because it was no worse. The system is at fault, the system must be adjusted, perhaps capital gains taxes should be lowered. But the system is in us. In a crypt-Catholic context like this, how can any one individual be damned for greediness?

Textuality

A final theoretical matrix for this phenomenon of unaccountability draws upon the post-structuralist dictum that "it's all a big house of mirrors." The system is at fault, the system must be adjusted, perhaps capital gains taxes should be lowered. But the system is in us. In a crypt-Catholic context like this, how can any one individual be damned for greediness?

For what we expect when it becomes theoretically incorrect to say "say culpe"? As has been suggested, one highlight will be the growing reactionary consensus for punishment of the body as in sacrificial retribution for the flight of sin. A return to Foucault's famous censure seems in the offing, when the brutalized flesh paid for the weakness of the spirit. Only this time, the body is made to pay for the sins of others. As factually as guilt is deemed morally instructive—whenever the general tolerance, for example, of Clint Eastwood revenge flicks. We will be led to believe that the violence against ourselves is a moral issue. But it is a moral issue. We are all to be tried on "drug plans," sent to the chair for passing cocaine through the narcotics pipelines of South China, or for playing the rabbit in the Amish and the Hamptons. As the most visible manifestation of the US. drug culture, such youths will be led to pay for the sins of our entire nation bound in a variety of forms of escapism.

We can also predict that blame, despite its practical disappearance, will continue to be theorized. Derrida, for example, always better than anyone that the world view of the world creates linkages between wildly disparate elements, hoops context on context, and makes meaning—moral "blaming"—subjectible. But to him, this does not mean that blame cannot be pronounced, only that the attempt to fix blame is always political, i.e., that blame can arise only in a context and entails certain responsibilities for the blamer.

One useful tactic, then, for those who wish to avoid being targets of blame in our insipid reactionary culture will be to reconceptualize blame so that it instead adheres to those who perceive blame. Blaming people who blame generally do so according to principles they think are actually beyond praise and blame. But, mutaer mutandis, such folk themselves become vulnerable to the same kind of moralization and to the same kind of totalization and to the same kind of moralization and to the same kind of totalization. A blamer wishes to shut down the play of signification and the consideration of other contexts. Also, and significantly in Derrida's view, is distance oneself from the structure of responsibility; by blaming others one attempts to escape oneself from blame.

On the contrary, one should attempt to be so responsible to the contexts of responsibility that one may risk appearing irresponsible. For example, when Derrida considers the Pool of Mox affair, to those who accuse the latter of newer taking responsibility for his anti-Semitic wartime writings, he urges the contexts of irresponsibility in defending him. Derrida can say that those who are most irresponsible are the critics who will not do the work of deconstructive reading, who do not read the Mox—and Derrida himself—with enough attentiveness. These critics, say Derrida, without sufficient rigorous or co-conventional contexts do not do the totalitarian summons, to bring the discussion to rest without probing the limits of de Man's discourse—as well as the limits of language itself and their own necessary implication therein. In effect, they do not wish to be truly responsible for their charges of irresponsibility.

Derrida, on the other hand, emphasizes the difficulty of the accused, cannot be considered irresponsible because he keeps open the possibility of mitigating contexts. He wishes to trace down every linguistic level, tease apart every abstraction, place de Man's words in context after context. So we have seen this seems like obscurantism, post-structuralist bullshit. But at bottom, Derrida remains untouched by the apparent odiousness of his defense because by multiplying contexts for de Man's obviously execrable writings Derrida can valorize Derrida's own discourse—by demonstrating time and again the possibility of reading and thus of making blame stick. And by contradicting his own claim, that the idea of a blacklisting is to impose the impositions of their own accusations, Derrida is able to shift the charge of irresponsibility to them. As the old joke goes, the bear can blow the rabbit if it shifts the blame to his fur; the answer being no, the bear washes himself with the rabbit.

To conclude, then, it seems that when the concept of "blame" at last reaches the end of its tether and vanishes into the ether of non ascription, the most responsible thing to do will be to speak vociferously for the negative responsibility of others—and pray that when the true comes they'll do the same for you. This way everyone's a little bit clean.

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