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Peter Hitchcock

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EVERYTHING'S GONE GREEN: THE ENVIRONMENT OF BP'S NARRATIVE

PETER HITCHCOCK

This essay looks at a particularly galling phenomenon for environmentalism, the “green” globalism of an oil conglomerate. Rather than simply dismiss such gestures as corporate cynicism, the paper suggests that one might usefully pay attention to the narrative modes at stake in these initiatives which here connect the exploitation of modernity to a parabolic logic. BP’s going green is seen as an extension rather than as a contravention of its social being and shows why, even after the Deepwater Horizon disaster, BP’s desire to move “beyond petroleum” means more rather than less oil exploitation.

Cet article examine un phénomène particulièrement irritant dans le domaine de l’environnementalisme, à savoir l’internationalisation « verte » d’un conglomérat pétrolier. Au lieu de rejeter ce type d’actions comme un cynisme d’entreprise, on suggère ici qu’il faut considérer les modèles narratifs en jeu dans ces initiatives qui établissent une connexion entre l’exploitation de la modernité et une logique parabolique. L’adoption par BP d’une perspective verte est perçue comme un développement plutôt qu’une infraction de son existence sociale; c’est la raison pour laquelle, même après le désastre de Deepwater Horizon, le désir de BP « d’aller au-delà du pétrole » [« *Beyond Petroleum* »] exige une extraction pétrolière encore plus considérable.

The truism and circular argument that global climate change is global nevertheless represents a significant challenge for environmental justice movements, whether they are confronting the prospect of massive environmental degradation in the exploitation of Alberta tar sands or laws on carbon emission that read like carbon omission when it comes to those most likely in need of legal sanction. The invocation of the planet against the globalism of globalization does not interrupt or sublimate the paradox of globality, but essentially renames its logical impasse for dominant modes of socialization. The pithiness of thinking global and acting local might seem to short-circuit the impossible demands of planetary activism, but simultaneously mimics the scalar practices of the average transnational corporation, although this is far from saying that either is constitutively ineffective. A sensitivity to scale means that globality must be radically particularized and that a politics and aesthetics of environmentalism undoes spurious appeals to the global while articulating a scale that would actually be at one with the planetary implications of sustainability as such. A certain dialectics is at stake, but not one that assumes theoretical integrity or practical solutions in advance. This does not, for instance, negate an ethical incredulity when faced with a carbon capitalism inexorably 'going green' in the current conjuncture, but it does place a special emphasis on the nature of what is otherwise an obvious logical contradiction. On the one hand, we could say it is simply not a contradiction: those who exploit natural resources, for instance, can just as easily exploit their defense—their creed is exploitation not its object. On the other hand, the contradiction remains to the extent that the scale of exploitation in one act cannot be matched by the scale required by the other. It is not just that sustainability cannot be placed in the hands of those who have facilitated its jeopardy, but going green would require an alternative logic of socialization that would dissolve the antinomy in which such a contradiction is manifest. Rather than resort to philosophical fiddling in the face of Roman fires, I want to suggest that the disjunct scales of green capitalism hold important lessons for how environmentalism is narrated. Indeed, the discursive limits of one overdetermine to a significant degree the narrative of change desired by the other.

Since my discussion is about narrative more than policy, aesthetics more than prescriptions, one might be forgiven for thinking that the hard work of activism is being bracketed for contemplation; but part of my point is that the *ratio* of oil exploitation by BP, the parabolic subject of the following critique, operates at the level of inertial rhetoric, a sustainable grammar, that both ruthlessly and elegantly orders the world as its conceptual pivot. According to this narrative frame, the problem of the environment is read as an extension of BP's global logic, not as a confirmation of its limit. Environmentalism is the scene of engaging the world and because oil majors directly affect the environment (they are always already environmental) they are singularly equipped to consider the logical extent of its globality. Now of course, the idea a transnational oil conglomerate might pioneer the dissolution of its carbon-based ontology could not be more absurd yet it makes good sense from the position of the antinomy in its globalism, especially one in which principles of justice might seek compensation for its harmful reach. For capital, 'going green' is not just a cost of production or cynical gesture: it is also the *sur-vivre* of its modern matrix, a growth model consonant with its worldly pretensions. The scale of globality comes to rest on its rhetorical logic, one in which 'sustainable development' is calibrated to sustain the development of capitalist social relations (the modernization in modernity) not the development of a sustainability coterminous with the planet (which can no longer be capital intensive according to modernization's standard model). Such scalar dissonance is most marked in how oil is constituted as a global commodity so that all claims to its alternative must match the naturalized contours of its economic, energy, and political functions while asserting their subsumption. For BP in particular, the alternatives to petroleum it poses are often discussed as a hedge against its booked oil reserves and this has much to recommend it as a Best Practice. Indeed, if one wanted to measure the truth of Hubbert's Peak Oil thesis one could usefully start by tracking the investment decisions of the oil majors, both announced and hidden in PR campaigns. The trouble is that when 'green' alternatives are articulated within an ideology of growth, oil extraction is more aggressively pursued, not less. The

emergence of one is tied to the intensive practices of the other, as if renouncing or denying environmentalism might actually leave the remaining vault of oil unlocked. Again, we laugh at such ridiculousness, but no more so than BP, who appears to understand the force of farce that globality demands and the difference between a bell curve and a parabola in oil's future.

It is often argued that BP's environmentalism is a special case among the oil majors who by and large have strenuously resisted any and all legislation that takes seriously the environmental impact of their practices. Even then, one should remember, however, that as BP's corporate narrative seemed to change course, particularly after 1997 (about which more below) it had previously lobbied as part of the Global Climate Coalition formed in 1989 to defend a climate for business against environmentalist demands. What I am suggesting is that BP's stance is consistent with its understanding of transnational globalization, but that this position is itself riven with scalar disjunctions in its worldliness, dialectical contradictions that cast a pall over whether the rate of change in the dissolution of carbon capitalism can outpace the sustainability or real foundations of planetary life. The difference between the desired narrative and the actually existing story of modernity continues to be a political and theoretical challenge necessitating closer scrutiny of how an oil corporation can be, particularly when the persistence of its being seems otherwise tied to a terminal ontology (a being-towards-death, the death of species being itself). I will sketch the contours of BP's identity as a machine of modern growth then read this into what I will elaborate as its parabolic logic which is not a strategy so much as a determinate symptom of disjunct scaling, an aesthetic correlative to what Bellamy Foster et al. have described as a metabolic rift.

The basic elements of BP's emergence in and through the oil industry are relatively well known, but offer some pertinent twists. BP traces its origins to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), incorporated in 1909, a company led by William Knox D'Arcy, a former gold explorer who turned his hand to oil concessions (interestingly,

D'Arcy's first oil concession was formalized initially by the registration of an entity called First Exploitation Company in 1903—in the days before PR companies were not quite so bashful). British Petroleum was the marketing name of a German distribution company (Europäische Petroleum Union, of Bremen) for Royal Dutch Shell that was seized as an enemy asset at the beginning of the First World War. After purchasing BP from within a government trust, APOC kept this brand name for marketing and distribution (APOC itself was a Glasgow-based subsidiary of Burmah Oil, whose most famous consultant was Winston Churchill, who in turn used government and military influence to secure its monopoly in the region). Yet since much of its oil reserves remained in West Asia (thanks to the D'Arcy Concession), the parent company remained Anglo-Persian until 1935, when Iran emerged as a nation state and the corporation was renamed Anglo-Iranian (AIOC). In fact, while BP sometimes traces its 'birth' to 1909 the parent company did not become BP until 1954, after the CIA-backed coup against Mossadegh in Iran placed the Shah in power and the corporation sought a more explicit and perhaps less controversial national affiliation (AIOC had already lost its Iraq oil concession in 1951 thanks to postcolonial nationalization). The nation hinge, while flying in the face of the realities of the global oil market, remains an important integer of oil's complex relationship to sovereignty. Indeed, as much as we would like to believe BP and the other oil majors control the petroleum business, their booked reserves now represent only 10% of the whole with national oil companies continuing to dominate the industry. In the days before the oil embargo of 1973 the oil majors, then known as the Seven Sisters, used their control of oil surpluses to fix prices and contracts over as much as 85% of global supply. Yet OPEC's formation in 1960 underlines that oil's role in modernity cleaves closely to the nation-state idea as fundamental to modernization (and was a harbinger of its 'eternal return' to the oil market stage). The nationalization of oil industries is often read as protecting sovereign command over resources, but one of the notions it consolidates is the primacy of modernity's project in which maximal resource exploitation is tied to the robust development

of the state. For all of the scrambling among oil majors for market share the truth in their competition is dialectically bound by their negotiations with national oil conglomerates who can swallow or reapportion their assets in ways far more demonstrable than mergers and acquisitions. From the outbreak of the First World War until the completion of Thatcherite privatization in the late 1980s, BP was fundamentally a national corporation. Indeed, the evolution of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company into British Petroleum elicits a strong fealty to the nation (at the time, a dying imperialism) even as capital demands accumulation beyond it. If the disjunction is obvious, however, it does not accurately explain the narrative logic of BP's being within it.

Several factors are important here. The initial strength of APOC was guaranteed by its dominance in West Asia coupled with its supply monopoly to the British war machine (aided by the aforementioned Churchill who had pushed the Royal Navy to diesel over coal-powered ships). While its BP subsidiary was distributing petrol to the new car industry (as 'motor spirit'), APOC's control by the government assured that it would not be subject to the full vagaries of market prices. In the aftermath of the Second World War, however, AIOC's profile faded like Britain's and the switch to the BP brand confirmed its diminished status before the juggernaut of American oil hegemony. Unable to compete head to head with U.S. giants like Exxon, Mobil, and Chevron, BP diversified its business interests while keeping close to its domestic advantages in which North Sea contracts were pivotal. British government control turned out to be its best defense during the oil crisis of the 1970s (when Kuwait and Libya nationalized their oilfields), although further diversification ensued (into the mining and chemical industries). In the 1980s, however, with full government divestment by 1987, a new set of strategies emerged. First, BP would revert to its core businesses, principally oil exploration, production, and distribution (it halved its workforce by doing so). Second, it saw new opportunities through mergers and acquisitions. Third, building on the success of its Alaskan exploration, it turned next to partnerships in the former Soviet Union as crucial to its global expansion. Indeed, it

is only during the 1990s that BP began to exude the brand power of its American competitors signaled most obviously by its merger with Amoco in 1998 (a legacy company of the old Standard Oil Trust) and its joint venture with THK in Russia initiated in 2003 (an endangered but profitable partnership that has allowed BP a foothold in the huge post-Soviet oil market). Finally, as a high profile global player in the oil business, BP announced in May, 1997 that its status required a public commitment to corporate social responsibility. In the words of John Browne, BP's charismatic CEO at the time: "Governments, corporations and individual citizens have all had to redefine their roles in a society no longer divided by an Iron Curtain separating capitalism from communism. A new age demands a fresh perspective on the nature of society and responsibility. If we are all to take responsibility for the future of our planet, then it falls to us to begin to take *precautionary* action now" ("Where BP stands" Browne, 1997) Like a cross to a vampire, this declaration was not exactly taken smilingly by the oil industry who added to the environmentalist charge of hypocrisy the no less realist accusation of heresy. Not every oil company cried foul, however: Shell, for instance, had already seen the public relations advantage in corporate social responsibility ('good corporate citizenship') and made steps to push its own ethics and environmentalism agenda. Three years after the speech at his *alma mater*, Stanford, Browne solidified BP's environmental credentials by rolling out its new corporate logo, a blossom of sun in yellow and green accompanied by an acronym which now meant 'Beyond Petroleum' (BP claims this is a slogan, not the company name but British Petroleum almost never appears alongside the new logo). Few waited for the Deepwater Horizon disaster to call the bluff on such brand bravado, but the speech and its implications for BP's profile as a transnational corporation place a special stress on narrative logic that requires further comment.

Beyond the obvious pause one must feel before an oil behemoth declaring its commitment to fighting the deleterious effects of hydrocarbons the real question is how the aim is declared as reasonable and reasoned, as the epitome of non-contradiction delivered in a tone

devoid of either irony or self-abasement. Here I believe it is useful to conjoin a parabolic aesthetic with the extant demands of corporate social responsibility under the sign of perceived globalism. While Umberto Eco's interpretation of Thomas Aquinas (Eco's first book, developed from his dissertation) offers a template for the parabolic, the intention here is not to reproduce parabola as the ward of thirteenth century hermeneutics, but to consider it as an epiphenomenon of reading the world today as necessarily post-ideological. For Aquinas, the parabolic was not a synonym for allegory, but a poetic sense in which the word and its meaning were maximally appropriate. Here, appropriateness is a measure of scalar semiosis and dissonance. What could be read as blatantly false might nevertheless be appropriate to its scalar demands, which is more about the difference between fiction and truth in fiction. On this level, Browne's perception of BP's new mission is neither opportunistic nor hopelessly muddleheaded, but replete with the rhetorical conventions of worlding, a passionate admixture of *nationalis nervosa* and the perception that the corporation is indeed a global citizen. The parabolic rhetoric holds these elements in tension as a condition of narrative extension. Put another way, the parabola permits narrative sustainability as sustainability as such. The rhetoric of sustainability can certainly contribute to sustainable practices regarding renewable resources and alternative forms of energy, but its primary thrust is to sustain its rhetoric as a solution produced by the schisms between nation and the environment as a planetary concern. However contradictory, such parabolic rhetoric is crucially consistent with the predicaments modernity has wrought.

When Browne delivered his speech he had already become something of a corporate star (the following year he would be knighted, and in 2001 he would become a Lord—Baron Browne of Madingley). The oil business is risk-centered and Browne took on risk with gusto (an enthusiasm that not surprisingly would lead to his replacement as CEO in 2007, although media revelations of his private life also played a significant part). While the speech is dialogically measured, its worldview surprised many across the industry, as if it

were an innovation like slant and horizontal drilling in oil's history. As noted, Browne begins his analysis by referencing the collapse of communism and the fall of the Soviet Union, an epochal shift that reconfigures the world and oil in equal measure. If modernity had always been riven by the conflicting claims of nation and transnationalism, the end of the Cold War alibi for imperialism returned this schism to the global stage in an intensified form. In light of communism's fall, two possibilities, according to Browne, were quickly offered: one by Fukuyama's end of history thesis, the other by Jacques Delors in the form of "accelerated history." (Delors, one should recall, in his plea for European integration and the Euro and in his formation of the think tank "Notre Europe," was not well liked by the British establishment.) Neither is accurate, says Browne, but something has indeed changed and that is "ideology is no longer the ultimate arbiter of analysis and action." The ideology that denies itself as such is the ideology of deepest pedigree, but this is not the heart of the parabolic conundrum BP now represents.

"Social" for Browne means identifying BP interests with those of teachers and students (recall, he is speaking at Stanford), "business people with capital to invest" (a key portion of the audience), legislators (who might otherwise legislate a reduction in BP's power via taxes or regulation), voting citizens (whose democratic zeal must be considered at odds with the power of corporate donations) and finally consumers (those with the 'power of choice'—determined by disposable income or access to debt). Overlaps between each category are acknowledged by Browne, but here social is assumed to be the space of agreement where, in the absence of ideology, a response to environmental crisis is mutually shared rather than fragmented by constitutive contradictions and fundamentally antagonistic interests, like class. To this extent, Browne's "social" is meant to fill the conceptual space produced by the basic Thatcherist maxim that there is no such thing as society. In neoliberal logic, "society" encourages socialism; "social," parabolically, excludes it. Again, this kind of thinking (a shared 'conviction' that you do not know you have—ideology) is precisely permitted by the appeal

to scale that the global environment represents. It is, moreover, a ‘thrown parallel’ in which BP’s identification is posed as a plane consistent with the social as its axis. The invocation of a geometric parabola is perhaps most appropriate when thinking of modernity as not only an arc opening upward in terms of development and growth, but also as the curve of Galilean falling bodies that occurs as gravity pulls a projectile back to Earth. We might associate this rising and falling action with Aristotelian aesthetics yet we should also note its register in Aquinas: *sub sensu litterali includitur parabolicus seu metaphoricus*. The metaphor is parabolic to the extent that it curves back to a literal sense of the word, a relationship that Aquinas distinguishes from its mystical or spiritual sense, which is further subdivided into allegorical, anagogical, or moral. I would suggest there is also a parabolic connection between the literal and mystical, which is the arc of ideology Browne must sensibly repress. Thus, social is a metaphor in Browne’s speech yet might also be posed as the solution to the impasse that metaphorization represents.

For his part, Browne introduces what he calls “an appropriate metaphor” to describe the new space and process of responsibility, ‘the journey.’ The “precautionary action” as journey sounds particularly anodyne but in fact it radically reduces the promise of action to one route (something along the lines of “our way or/on the highway”). Browne explains that there are two possible courses of action, but only one effective journey because the other entails immediate and drastic reductions in carbon emissions and/or the banning of fossil fuels (necessitating the social exclusion of BP itself). Thus, the only way for the metaphor to be substantive is for the journey to include BP and for steps to be “balanced and gradual.” Again, one alternative is banished while the other, preserving BP, is perfectly reasonable. The cognitive dissonance here is symptomatic of the scalar disjunction capitalist globalization offers. Corporate social responsibility at this level means acknowledging specific courses of action are unsustainable (Browne’s term) because they would adversely affect the modernization efforts of developing nations. This is true, of course, but only if

there is a prior determination not to redefine growth or redistribute social wealth globally. Instead, “we believe we can contribute to achievement of the right balance by ensuring that we apply the technical innovations we’re making on a common basis - everywhere in the world.” It is vital we understand the parabolic function of this claim because it appears rational and logical even when you add the silent conditional clause for those other members of the social invoked along this journey, “if you let us.” Here reason always seems to fall short of understanding, which is the truth of its action. In fact, we are closer to metonymy because the social as axis has been substituted by its putative parallel, the responsible corporation. Again, the antinomy is not wrong, but consistent with how BP must be global. If it has a *Weltweisheit*, a kind of worldly wisdom, it is yet discontinuous with the world as environment.

This is not simply the vulgar ideological cut between appearance and reality, as if this alone would be a measure of truth and falsehood. The appearance of tackling environmental degradation is the real of BP’s being, as a corporation, as an oil major. The ‘journey’ forward cannot be imagined outside its crucial participation just as, after the events of 1989-1992, the truths of capitalist history are irrelevant. This part of the speech is very clear: we will take care of business rather than you taking care of us. We will monitor, measure, and reduce our carbon emissions and strive to “keep our house in order” so that you are not compelled to do so. In a statement remarkable for its gestural largesse, Browne declares, “Our overall goal is to do no harm or damage to the natural environment” as if corporations regularly assert the opposite. He continues not by hiding the real role, but by carefully explaining it: “Companies work by prioritizing what they do. They take the easiest steps first—picking the low hanging fruit—and then they move on to tackle the more difficult and complex problems. That is the natural business process.” In the oil business, especially drilling and exploration, there is no low hanging fruit left. If the price of oil is high enough, cost-intensive extraction is feasible, with the caveat that difficult and complex problems may emerge. To put this in perspective, Browne’s speech comes

in a banner year of 104 recorded oil spills for BP. In 2000, BP paid the EPA a \$10 million fine for sloppy management practices at its U.S. refineries that had raised the risk of greater environmental harm. In 2001 and 2005, BP was assessed by Multinational Monitor as one of the ten worst transnational corporations based on environmental and human rights records. It is true that by 2002 Lord Browne had declared global warming to be real, but BP's fruit-picking mentality could hardly claim to be addressing it.

Why then does Browne argue for BP's environmental credentials? Rather than maintaining a relationship with the denialists, Browne reads corporate responsibility as "showing willing" about fighting climate change. The strategy both attempts to set BP apart (a leviathan with a social conscience) while constructing a rather literal corporate sustainability model: "market based solutions are more likely to produce innovative and creative responses than an approach based on regulation alone." The market, and particularly technology, will roll back the threat of ecological catastrophe and part of what is meant by social responsibility is recognizing that fact. The conceit here is that corporate nature, like environmental nature, is self-regulating. The corporation is organic enough to understand its metabolic function in the world and social enough to be as good a citizen as any other. The journey metaphor parabolically assumes our consent to its convention, which conveniently sees BP as a constituent in its narrative. This is corporate ontology as narcissism, in which the transnational oil company makes the world its dependent and is therefore as indispensable to it as its sun.

Much is written about the anthropomorphization of the corporation whereby its rights are defined as not just social (citizens) but human. Corporations are not living, breathing organisms of course (they have bodies, *corps*, but this is metaphorical and sometimes metaphysical weight). Often the desire is simply to render the corporation human enough to claim its individual protections and deflect the perception that it often acts beyond broadly social mandates. For BP, corporate personhood is defined by its social responsibility, and



Fig. 1 BP Corporate Logo

to brand the latter in 2000 the company unveiled a new logo that invoked Helios, the personification of the sun in Greek mythology.

This is in keeping with Browne's famous speech that clearly wanted BP to step up its efforts in developing alternative energy, including solar. The colors of the Helios, according to BP, suggest heat, light and nature. It represents a pattern of interlocking shapes: like BP, a single corporation produced by many different parts that form a single image. The conceit here is literally magnificent because the power of the sun as god is the spirit of the new age, one in which we draw on nature to offset the disequilibrium we have produced in it. While it is true big oil branding closely follows the standard

public relations and marketing practices of transnational corporations (they produce a consciousness flexible enough to be niche-marketed within global exchange), the differences are instructive, particularly because oil and gas production and distribution simultaneously affords an oil major power, prestige, and pariah status unmatched by other industries. The Helios is both a measure of that intensity and contradiction: the sun as master signifier of all that founds and founders socialization.

Helios in Greek mythology is also a master eye, the preeminent panopticon whose powers of observation over the world made him a tale bearer for the gods. This function of narrative mediation remains in BP's Helios which is why we might usefully cleave to the stories the oil majors make. There is no room for this here, but one of the ways Big Oil occupies national oil space is by claiming it can "see" oil that state oil companies cannot (via proprietary imaging software and equipment): seeing energy is a scale of power. The other side of anthropomorphization is the ontological aura such cognition provides, one shorn of basic psychology yet replete with all we associate with drives, Eros and Thanatos combined. BP wants Helios to simply represent power in its myriad forms, but it cannot escape the deep structure of its sign, the political and poetic unconscious of its very possibility. Gathering oil, like stories, has its own narratological compulsion and while a brand's cultural symbolic is meant to stabilize or obfuscate any adverse elements associated with such pursuit the Helios in this example richly accentuates the waywardness of BP's storyline. Like Shell (whose name and insignia also brim with pertinent paradox), BP must convince itself (and in turn its shareholders) that its story is in accord with its narrative needs and is as dependable as a sunrise or fractional distillation. The logo intends to explain the brand both as a reality and as an aspiration or desire. Here again, however, the structure of the narrative permits BP to extol contradictory parts of its corporate being as coeval and complementary. Yes, BP has invested significant capital in solar, wind, and biofuel power, but the carbon footprint of its oil and gas operations dwarfs these efforts at every turn. BP's

website (itself a master narrative) claims that it strives to provide power without harming the environment but, while the effort is appreciable (ebbing and flowing according to the dictates of its core business), this seems only to sanction the ecological catastrophe the oil industry otherwise facilitates. On this level, the Helios is parabolic not in shape, but in its poetic license whereby its powerful association is made possible by the power that, historically and narratologically, has meant its negation. Parabolic logic permits BP to become "bp" ("We're not big bad oil, we're a lower case giant") and British Petroleum to become "beyond petroleum." The latter slogan is BP's insurance policy, a hedge on energy futures, for this is how its world and story must be scaled.

These elements, of scale, narrative, and symbol are not unique to capital, corporations, or globalization, but their specific combination in BP is salient and vital at this juncture because of the dominance of oil and the ecological crisis in which it seeps. What tends to happen is that the logic of articulation, its grave grammar, is obviated in the face of a storyline that teeters between truth and falsehood. The big books on BP, the journalistic exposés, (recently, for instance, those by Edwin Black and by Mike Magner) provide scathing evidence of the company's questionable business practices and environmental harm, but only by meeting the expectations of the genre, which is to say that a defense of Big Oil, while often proffered, does not sell as many books. Obviously, one hopes that the greater the criticism of oil conglomerates like BP, particularly after the Deepwater Horizon disaster, the more possibility will be created to limit the power of Big Oil and draw down the use of the commodity at its base. The value of oil supply under the sign of capital, however, structures the logic of its narrative hold; something as strong as power dependency and profit is not fatally undermined by rational explanation of its true costs. Indeed, the muckraker, like the oil producer, is calculating the costs of the narrative options she or he pursues according to what the market will bear. Make no mistake, intense critique makes more than a living and can, for instance, embolden deeper and far-reaching sanction for the

excesses of the industry. Yet, such is the inertia in BP's being that every public relations fiasco, even one like Deepwater Horizon that has so far cost it over forty billion dollars in damages and compensation, is simply a business risk not a fatal flaw. It is already part of the business model, part of the 'journey' that BP sets itself. The "beyond" in "beyond petroleum" is not a lie, but a constitutive limit, an existential claim determined by oil in its value. To change this narrative one would have to change the value form of oil itself.

The scale of this value form also prescribes the content of BP's "going green," irrespective of the cynical opportunism and outright falsehoods one may discern in its pronouncement. In Lefebvre's terms, BP has a perceived space, a spatial practice that precisely shapes its relationship to people, other companies and states. I suggested earlier that oil's consanguine ties to modernity give to us the lineaments of a world, but one that cannot but be out of sync with the planetary scale environmental change requires. It is not just that BP deals with those spaces in which oil and gas can be extracted and distributed, but that modernity's logic of under and uneven development determines the force or resistance to "green" initiatives. The value form of oil produces a world at this scale and at this scale only. It is variable—new oil discoveries, new technologies of extraction, dried up wells, embargoes, accidents, wars, fluctuating demand, etc.—but it cannot, by definition, jump effectively to the planet as a global, homeostatic system. Surely, however, the scale of failure in BP's *dispositif*, which is not only about power but the business of power, must logically undo its grip on the hegemonic ways sustainability is thought?

The Deepwater Horizon disaster of 2010 produced the largest oil spill in U.S. history, with almost five million barrels of crude oil devastating the eco-systems of the Gulf of Mexico (almost two years after the spill slicks and tar balls are still being detected along the Louisiana coast in particular—interestingly, because BP maintains that the spill volume from the blowout is not precise, it omits *all* such calculations from its website). The cause of the blow-out has been linked to well design

as well as to insufficient or faulty safety precautions in the daily operation of the rig. In some respects, the Deepwater Horizon rig was a marvel of technological development. Built by Hyundai, owned by Transocean, and leased to BP, in 2009 the rig, sitting some four thousand feet above the ocean floor, had drilled a well over 35 thousand feet deep. The Deepwater Horizon was drilling in the Macondo Prospect in April 2010 when an explosion occurred, killing eleven rig workers and creating a well leak that took over two months to cap. As the crisis developed, BP set aside a fund of \$20 billion to cover litigation and clean up, but it was soon clear their financial exposure would far exceed that figure. Some of their costs will be offset by the outcome of their own lawsuits (these suits total \$40 billion), particularly against Transocean, Halliburton (who provided the cement for the well) and Cameron (who had manufactured the blow-out preventer). Despite the *schadenfreude* of the other oil majors there was deep concern that the legal proceedings and BP's subsequent tumbling share price would cripple the company or subject it to takeover bids that might be a necessary consolidation yet would set a dangerous precedent for the industry's approach to risk. Without reviewing all the elements of the case, Deepwater Horizon offers further insight for our understanding of BP's 'journey' through oil and the environment.

First, the inertia in its narrative cannot be creatively subsumed even by the deepest of crises. If the construction and running of deep-water wells risks environmental disaster, this is an inevitable cost of being an oil major, of maintaining a market share of available oil and gas output. Second, Deepwater Horizon did not necessarily negate BP's environmental credentials; on the contrary, BP has used its robust response to the accident (which has much to do with legal enforcement) to massage its profile by claiming that its diligence in emergency response proves its commitment to ecological sustainability. Third, in BP's post-Browne culture, there has been another marked turn to the industry's core values: not only has BP backed off on its investment strategies in solar energy (the "beyond" part of "bp"), but its pursuit of oil exploration and commodity trading

in oil itself has intensified. For those who thought that BP would blink at the prospect of high extraction costs and environmental risks of Alberta tar sands, for instance, the opposite has been the case (the first of its massive lease fields, “Sunrise,” will be operational in 2014). And the volatility of oil prices, while allowing for complex trade manipulations (in derivatives in particular) has meant an increase in risk positioning. As for the Gulf, BP continues to fight the legal fallout from Deepwater Horizon, but now operates *more* drilling rigs in the region than it did before the crisis. When Deepwater Horizon blew up and sank, some environmentalists saw this as a moment of decisive change, that new legislation would sharply curtail high risk oil and gas extraction and that we would witness a credible turn to green in power production. There are many encouraging signs outside the oil industry, but the margins in oil production and distribution remain substantial and the demands of compressed modernization push oil prices high enough to justify ever more difficult extraction scenarios. Would it not be better if BP just said forget “beyond” and, like Exxon-Mobil, just focused on the petroleum at the heart of its being?

In the same way BP’s investment division can take positions against itself to hedge its exposure in the industry, so addressing rather than denying global warming, as Browne did in his Stanford speech, offers a green position against the reality of the oil market. The scale of this market is imbricated in the life of states and transnational commerce in such a way that corporate responsibility is better viewed as a niche market rather than as a paradigm shift, along a scale that follows the long fall of a parabola rather than the abrupt finitude of a bell curve (like Hubbert’s theory). More than this, however, the investment strategies of transnational corporations can make ‘going green’ a flexible exploitation strategy. It is not a mask for the deleterious business of fossil fuels, but a complement of its productive logic. For instance, cognizant of a parallel compulsiveness between oil and coffee production, BP sought to garner increased credible responsibility by developing a sustainable coffee subsidiary, Wild Bean Café. As Starbucks has proved, the margins on

specialty coffee are appreciable, but legitimate questions about the Arabica industry have led major purveyors to stake claims for ethical production, sustainable agriculture, organic certification, fair trade practices and labor protections. Obviously, Wild Bean Café was meant to enhance revenue streams at gas stations while simultaneously offering a sustainable complement to the parent company’s oil practices. BP’s coffee is UTZ certified, but like rig safety, responsibility’s narrative form contains small print. The UTZ code of conduct leaves a lot open to interpretation and is particularly vague on environmental protection. Originally developed by a large Dutch coffee conglomerate, Ahold, it has often been favored by similarly large corporations (Sara Lee, IKEA) looking for global citizenship. Crucially, it does not prohibit the use of chemicals in coffee production either as fertilizer or as insect control, compounds that can be produced for the coffee industry by sourcing BP’s petrochemical division. This is not a case of direct synergy but, like my other examples, underlines that BP’s green logic is hardly inconsistent with its oil ontology.

Clearly one can read BP in a number of different ways. Ecological critique can easily dissect the “greenwashing” of its environmental campaigns, but my point here has been to examine narrative aspects in the logical structure of BP’s being. (“We are BP” is its constant refrain, but what is the being at stake in the pronouncement, Cartesian, Hegelian, Heideggerian, Deleuzian?) Oil majors do not just exercise economic and political power, but actually shape the manner in which we conceive of global interaction. BP’s narrative or ‘journey’ articulates a scale that reveals both the shortcomings of an oil ontology, but also the conditions of its persistence. In part, parabolic logic merely returns us to the scene of ideology, in which governing ideas seem to paralyze logical alternatives; but more than this, it draws attention to the schism between state and corporate solutions and the scale of responsibility necessary for an end to oil. BP’s global citizenship accentuates the impasse because the more it claims to self regulate the less a true alternative in power production and distribution can establish a being and narrative in its own scale. And without this planetary basis for being, there will be no beyond petroleum.

Image Notes

Fig. 1 BP Logo. August 28, 2012. <<http://hilobrow.com/2010/06/15/bp-logo-redesign/>>

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Hitchcock, Peter: Peter Hitchcock is Professor of English at Baruch College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is also Associate Director of the Center for Place, Culture and Politics at the GC. His books include, *Dialogics of the Oppressed*, *Oscillate Wildly*, *Imaginary States*, and *The Long Space*. His current research includes a study of commodity architectonics of which his work on oil is a part.

Hitchcock, Peter: Peter Hitchcock est professeur d'anglais au Baruch College et à l'Université de la Ville de New York, dans le cadre du Graduate Center. Il est également directeur adjoint au Center for Place, Culture and Politics dans le cadre du même Graduate Center. Il est auteur des livres *Dialogics of the Oppressed*, *Oscillate Wildly*, *Imaginary States*, et *The Long Space*. Sa recherche actuelle, dans laquelle s'inscrit son travail sur l'industrie pétrolière, traite de l'architectonique des marchandises.

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