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# Literacies of the Disaster Zone: New Media Genres and Participatory Rhetorics After the 2010 Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill

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LITERACIES OF THE DISASTER ZONE: NEW MEDIA GENRES  
AND PARTICIPATORY RHETORICS AFTER  
THE 2010 GULF OF MEXICO OIL SPILL

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Dean of the Graduate School

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## **Dedication**

For my fellow survivors of Columbine on April 20, 1999.

For those who were—and continue to be—  
affected by the Gulf of Mexico explosion and oil spill on April 20, 2010.

And for Dean and for Georgia, in all of their subjectivities.

LITERACIES OF THE DISASTER ZONE: NEW MEDIA GENRES  
AND PARTICIPATORY RHETORICS AFTER  
THE 2010 GULF OF MEXICO OIL SPILL

by

ROSS JACOB (R.J) LAMBERT, B.A., M.A.

DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

On April 20, 2010, explosions at the British Petroleum (BP) Macondo Project in the Gulf of Mexico initiated what would become the world's largest accidental release of oil into the ocean. This ecological disaster, a unique combination of natural and human causes, is one of many significant traumas over approximately the last two decades that various stakeholders have documented, participated in, and responded to largely through the expanding and increasingly ubiquitous media of the internet, computers, cell phones, and other networked communicative technologies, which both enable and constrain the variety of responses to traumatic events.

This dissertation improves our understanding of the discourse conventions in response to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill and other disaster contexts—which I term “disaster zones”—by analyzing the production, distribution (circulation), and consumption (reception) of disaster zone discourse(s). Proceeding from postmodernist and poststructuralist assumptions about subjectivity and discourse, I utilize Grounded Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, and rhetorical historiography to *redefine* disaster zone genres and *recover* disaster zone rhetors through a collective case study of the broad range of literate activities following the 2010 BP oil spill.

In Chapter 3, I describe the disaster zone as a discourse community characterized by genre participation—including the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria* (accusation), *apologia* (defense), and *antapologia* (defense critique)—and I suggest that these critical genres constitute an *interpretive* community. In Chapter 4, I expand upon the above genres to explain the epideictic uses and critiques of (in)eloquence in BP's damage control discourse. My analysis concludes in Chapter 5 with a *reception study* of the “center” genre of the online victim compensation interface and a *resistance study* of “periphery” genres, such as protests, graffiti, and rap music.

I conclude that different types of disaster zone genres provide relative constraints and affordances for disaster zone subject positions. For example, “optional” genres (Chapters 3 and 4) represent a mixture of constraints and affordances on social subjects in the disaster zone community, whereas “necessary” genres (Chapter 5) represent extreme genre *constraints* on institutional or “center” subjects (“victims”) and extreme genre *affordances* for resistant or “periphery” subjects (“agents”).

As defined and applied throughout this dissertation, the *disaster zone* is a dynamic rhetorical concept for understanding past and future trauma discourses, and my study has implications for research methods, pedagogy, and the disciplinarity of Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS). In an effort to contribute to a better understanding of research processes, this project outlines a flexible, recursive Grounded Theory CDA methodology for discourse and genre analyses. Toward pedagogical ends, I offer the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone as a useful teaching case for rhetoric and composition courses at any level, as it clearly illustrates real-world discourse practices and rhetorical appeals. Similarly, the disaster zone genres relating to risk, crisis response, and victim compensation are useful teaching cases for technical and business writing courses.

Furthermore, these pedagogical implications centralize RWS as an active and productive discipline central to progressive undergraduate and graduate education. In the complex negotiation of subjectivities through disaster zone genre participation, it becomes imperative for the educated public to understand how discourse—especially technologically mediated discourse—functions rhetorically, or else risk uncritical acceptance of institutional constraints on discourse and subjective agency. The discipline of RWS is specially equipped to characterize and problematize these discourses through scholarship and teaching. As teachers of writing and critical thinking skills, we are in a unique position to help improve critical literacy in the public, one class at a time.



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# Chapter 1: Theorizing and Situating the Disaster Zone

## Introduction

On April 20, 2010, explosions at the Deepwater Horizon oil drilling rig of the British Petroleum (BP) Macondo Project in the Gulf of Mexico initiated what would become, over the following three months, “by far the world’s largest accidental release of oil into marine waters” at 4.9 million barrels (210,000,000 U.S. Gallons or 780,000 cubic meters) of oil (Robertson & Krauss, 2010). This ecological disaster, a unique combination of natural and human causes, is one of many significant traumas over approximately the last two decades which various stakeholders have experienced, documented, participated in, and responded to largely through the expanding and increasingly ubiquitous media of the internet, computers, cell phones, and other networked communicative technologies.<sup>1</sup> The litany of similar large-impact traumatic events mediated through technology goes back at least to the Columbine High School shootings in 1999 and also include the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C., flooding after Hurricane Katrina (along the Atlantic Coast and the Gulf of Mexico) in August 2005, the Virginia Tech shootings on April 16, 2007, and—most recently—the devastation of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017 and the February 14, 2018 mass school shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

At least two things become immediately evident from the above examples. First, it must be admitted that ecological disasters and other instances of national or international trauma will

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term *communicative technologies* throughout to indicate technologies such as “smart phones” or computers which, while used to communicate, may, at other times, be used for other non-communicative purposes such as entertainment, hobbies, or productivity.

continue into the foreseeable future; it is not a question of *if*, but rather *when*, *how*, and *to whom* the next large-scale traumatic event will occur. Following from this, it is also clear that new media, social networking, and networked communicative technologies enable and constrain the variety of victim responses to traumatic events. In the past, “victims” of such tragedies might have found voice in newspaper or television interviews, framed by the meta-narrative of the report itself—but most who experienced such tragedies would have done so privately.<sup>2</sup> More recently, however, social media and networked communicative technologies have opened other venues for literate responses to traumatic events, which include narrative as well as overtly critical discourse. Although it should not be understood as an unproblematic or entirely democratic phenomenon, rhetorical participation in new media and social networking has undeniably come to characterize victim responses to large-scale traumatic events.

While no in-depth study of rhetorical and discursive practices of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill has yet been published, scholars from RWS and related disciplines have begun analyzing discursive responses to Columbine, September 11, Hurricane Katrina, and Virginia Tech, and the contributions of these studies inform my research. For example, Maya Socolovsky (2008), in “Cyber-Spaces of Grief: Online Memorials and the Columbine High School Shootings,” analyzed several memorial sites related to the high school shootings, including the ways in which they attempted to “narrate death as an affirmative presence” (p. 200), countering the helplessness and loss of such a traumatic event. She also noted, however, that the technology-mediated experiences of and responses to traumatic events is not neutral; these sites of online “memory [...] become politicized” according to the agendas and perspectives of the ever-diverse global audiences which contribute to their online content (p. 201). Socolovsky also described the community contexts in

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<sup>2</sup> I use *disaster*, *tragedy*, *trauma*, and *traumatic event* interchangeably throughout to indicate the precipitating event of a disaster context.

which web memorials function. Since web memorials are “not only sites of unhaunted memory, but also sources of information for grief counseling, religious education and inspiration, community-building, and various clearly laid-out political agendas and voices” (p. 191), they serve important civic and community purposes. In my discussion of oil spill commemoration and public rhetoric(s) in Chapters 3-5, I similarly attend to the political dimensions of technology-mediated discourse(s) and the civic and community functions they perform.

Traumatic events provide the community exigence not only for discursive responses, but also for critical analyses of community, industry, and public responses. Less than a year after the September 11 attacks, Jenny Edkins (2002) analyzed symbolic responses to that traumatic context. Theorizing traumatic contexts broadly, Edkins wrote, “Traumatic events demand a response that recognizes their impact rather than one that moves rapidly to forgetting the trauma or incorporating it into existing narratives” (p. 243). As a necessary starting point, she usefully defined trauma as that which “involves an exposure to an event so shocking that our everyday expectations of how the world works are severely disrupted,” and she quoted Maurice Blanchot’s definition of trauma as “the disaster, unexperienced. It is what escapes the very possibility of experience—it is the limit of writing” (p. 245). This being said, victims of traumatic or disastrous events often turn to writing and other forms of discourse (e.g., multimodal compositions) to narrate or critique their subjective experiences. Looking at discursive responses to the trauma, Edkins’s stated goal was to “examine a number of ways of responding to trauma” such as September 11. She arranged these responses according to four categories: “those that securitize, those that criminalize, those that aestheticize and those that politicize” (p. 245). Her analysis concluded that only the “fourth response—politicizing [...] takes a more measured and more difficult approach. It asks whether there might not be a form of response that does not reenter the same cycle of security and trauma” (p. 254).



Edkins's study assumes an "Anglo-American framework and focus on how responses to trauma might be constrained by that setting (p. 245). To understand the complexity of post-trauma discourse, especially in a multilingual and multicultural context such as the Gulf Coast, would similarly require close attention to minority or otherwise marginalized voices and subjectivities within dominative Anglo frameworks.<sup>3</sup> One such example of attention to minority subjects is Marcia Alesan Dawkins (2006) in "A Rhetorical Response to Hurricane Katrina." Dawkins paraphrased Kenneth Burke to describe how the "aesthetic that informs those who describe the scene is of necessity linked to the mood and environment" of victims, survivors, and audiences, creating a "state of awareness, in which we can recognize and learn about patterns of experience that have been literally and figuratively submerged by our cultural conditioning" (p. 12). Not surprisingly, given the shared Gulf Coast context between Hurricane Katrina and the 2010 oil spill, Dawkins raised (but did not answer) three questions that are central to my study of post-trauma discourse: "How do catastrophic and ineffable events [...] become controversies contested on the symbolic level? (b) How can rhetoric be mobilized to persuade disparate communities and audiences to act according to a shared vision of the common good? And (c) How is humanity argued for in a contentious climate?" (p. 13). She focused primarily on how the symbolic trauma of Katrina created a context for understanding the "existent patterns behind chaotic scenes," including oppressive systems affecting minorities in the affected community (p. 13). My close analysis of post-trauma discourse(s) considers not only the ways in which institutional responses to trauma marginalize disadvantaged or marginalized groups (as with the Gulf Coast Claims Facility for victim compensation, which I discuss in Chapter 5), but also the various responses of

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<sup>3</sup> Following Domino Renee Perez (2008), "I use the term *dominative* instead of *dominant* to both acknowledge and account for the power within subgroups that is not defined, exclusively, in relation to the Anglo, Protestant, middle-class, heterosexual, male ideology that shapes life in the United States" (p. 210).

those who are marginalized in the aftermath of the event, including the possibilities for civic agency in the form of discursive productions—textual, visual, aural, or multimodal—and/or new-media authorship.

In one of the most relevant recent analyses of public responses to trauma, Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes (2010) analyzed “Technologies of the Self in the Aftermath” of the Virginia Tech shootings at “the complex intersections of new media and subjectivity” (p. 146). Their study considered various online responses to the shootings in order “to link the aftermath production of rich, varied, and, at times, disturbing content by everyday Internet users to larger conversations about subjectivity” (p. 147). Their driving concern was determining how to “use new media to open up spaces, not just for immediate response but also for critical reflection” (p. 147). Throughout their essay, they draw on Foucault to call attention to (and resist) “how the speed of production of the content cants the discussion toward discourses of subjective normalization” (p. 149), and they critique online responses “that quickly move to silence views in the service of promulgating standard, normative responses” (p. 158). Their close attention to online user responses to the shooting is exemplary for this study, even though they focused largely on responses from those who did not directly or even indirectly experience the event. This makes sense given the considerably smaller number of affected users in Virginia Tech as opposed to a large-scale regional environmental disaster such as the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Both indirect and direct consumption (or reception) of discourses are components of the disaster context, and my study thus considers authors and primary discourses within communities directly affected by the Gulf oil spill as well as wider community-level and public critiques at various levels of macrodiscourse or metadiscourse.

As the above examples begin to make clear, a rhetorical study of responses to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill offers insight into, first, the theoretical concept of a post-disaster context (what I define below as the “disaster zone”), and, existing within this, the disaster zone *qua* discourse community characterized by participation in predictable discourses and genres. Aside from the subject matter itself, the timing of my study has implications for the results, as well. First, the online application process for victim compensation via the Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF) closed on June 4, 2012, with BP transitioning to a legal (court-facilitated) claims process for compensating victims (Gulf, 2011). This means that not only is the online compensation program subject to being studied in its entirety—from conception to closing—but, in addition, there are now summary statistics of the GCCF in terms of how many people were compensated, their average compensation, and their average compensation time. Another outcome of this study being conducted during the eight years following the spill is that there is now a large and varied sample of discursive responses to the oil spill available for rhetorical analysis, including new media and social networking, print media, graffiti and murals, pictures of protests, and official documentation from BP and the GCCF. As an extension of this last point, enough time has now passed for entertainers to incorporate references, jokes, critique, and satire into various entertainment productions, including movies, television, and music, that were not released in the immediate aftermath. That the entertainment industry continues to reference and discuss the 2010 oil spill speaks to its endurance as a cultural reference point worth studying. Similarly, this study of a specific disaster zone is relevant to contemporary rhetorical research given how individuals increasingly respond to large-scale tragedies through new media and networked communicative technologies.

Following similar studies of post-trauma discourse, my primary aim will be to closely analyze the discourses of subjects directly or indirectly affected by the Gulf oil spill, which will supplement and extend published studies on other post-trauma discourses. Studies of discursive responses to traumatic events published in the eight years since the oil spill have covered several disaster contexts, and scholars have by now begun publishing about the 2010 Gulf oil spill, specifically. However, most of the available scholarship on the oil spill begins from the vantage point of environmental research (e.g., McCormick, 2012; Wickman, 2014), legal scholarship (e.g., Norse & Amos, 2010; Spencer & Fitzgerald, 2013), business and/or management studies (e.g., Hoffman, 2012; Mejri & De Wolf, 2013), or public-relations (e.g., Harlow et al., 2011; Muralidharan et al., 2011). Consequently, very little research on this case is rooted in the discipline of rhetoric, or even in related disciplines that incorporate rhetorical scholarship.

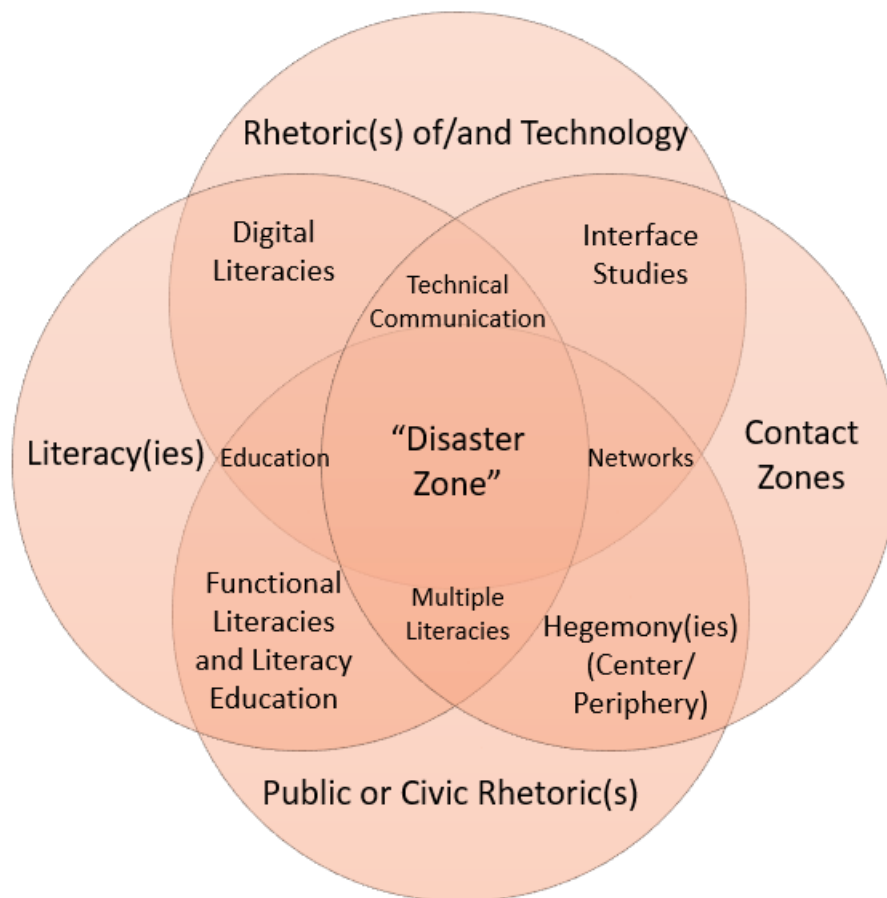
Even ostensibly rhetorical scholarship that considers new media technologies have tended to focus on the corporate crisis response of BP to its own disaster. For example, in “Damage Control: Rhetoric and New Media Technologies in the Aftermath of the BP Oil Spill, Hall et al. (2012) considered the new media responses of “victims” and stakeholders primarily as they shape and constrain the crisis response of BP—in other words, the focus of their study was to examine the changing discourse of crisis response amidst new media responses from the public.

While aspects of my research parallel the concerns of Hall et al. (2012), my study offers significant contributions to the scholarship of disaster contexts by, first, defining and characterizing these contexts as “disaster zones,” and, further, by examining the *diverse* and *plural* crisis responses that include victims and stakeholders, not just the corporate crisis response of BP. Unlike Hall et al., my study considers the public’s crisis responses as participation in a conversation about the crisis rather than as constraints on the official crisis response of a

corporation. Implicit in my approach above is a pluralization of the definition of “crisis response,” which as a subject of research or theory has traditionally been understood solely from the public relations perspective of an organization, government, or business. Extending a part of the argument from Hall et al., I argue that the definition and critique of “crisis response” must be expanded from a unidirectional corporate *response* to a multidirectional and fluid conversation of plural crisis *responses*, often asynchronous, intertextual, multimodal, and mediated through networked communicative technologies according to predictable rhetorical genres (see Chapter 3). As is clear in the large-scale crisis of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill (and, foreseeably, for most future crises), a scholarly definition of “crisis response” must now be pluralized to include multiple authors, genres, media, technologies, and especially *purposes*. *Purposes* are important insofar as “crisis response” has typically been synonymous with “crisis resolution” or “crisis management,” both of which have a distinct and likely unidirectional purpose of mitigating the crisis for shareholders or the public in general. To understand “crisis responses” in their plurality is to allow for purposes that directly contradict the official “crisis response” of an entity—their purposes may be to call attention to, rather than deflect attention away from, a crisis, and their effects may in fact exacerbate the crisis rather than mitigate it. By studying the plurality of post-trauma discourses after the 2010 Gulf oil spill, this project contributes to the well-established field of crisis response scholarship.

In the remainder of this chapter, I situate my project within the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies (henceforth, “RWS”) by briefly reviewing relevant literature in four overlapping areas of rhetorical scholarship: 1) contact zones (with an emphasis on hegemony and the center/periphery binary), 2) literacy (from literacy education to multiple/digital literacies), 3) public or civic rhetoric(s) and participatory culture, and 4) the rhetoric(s) of/and technology

(including interface studies and networks) (see Figure 1.1, below). Finally, I conclude this chapter by outlining Chapters 2 through 5, including the motivating questions of inquiry, principles of organization, methods, and objects of analysis for each chapter.



*Figure 1.1: Overlapping rhetorical scholarship relevant to the disaster zone.*

### **Contact Zones**

The primary argument of this chapter, which also serves as the overarching metaphor for this project as a whole, is that Mary Louise Pratt’s (1993) notion of “contact zones” can be appropriated and modified to describe post-trauma contexts, which I term “disaster zones.” In

“Arts of the Contact Zone,” Pratt defined contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (p. 34). In her analysis of Guaman Poma’s *New Chronicle* as an autoethnographic text, Pratt described how such “texts are representations that the so-defined others construct *in response to* or in dialogue with [ethnographic] texts” (p. 35). This distinction between ethnographic and autoethnographic texts characterizes not only the responsive relationship between textual artifacts; more broadly, it acknowledges the responsive socio-cultural relation(s) between rhetor(s) and audience(s) within the contact zone.

Pratt’s description of contact zones, which was intended “to reconsider models of community” (p. 34) within literary and educational contexts, also serves as a fitting description of the complex contexts following traumatic events such as the 2010 Gulf oil spill, as well the “aftermaths” of any of the other large-scale traumatic events mentioned above. Building on Pratt, then, I theorize the “disaster zone” of the Gulf oil spill as a specific type of contact zone, including its constituent “spaces” (physical spaces and, especially, digital/cyberspaces), “negotiations” (production, distribution, and consumption/reception of discourse), and “asymmetrical relations of power” (the power of government, organizations, corporations, or other institutions in relation to the agency of individual victims and discourse communities). The metaphor of the disaster zone thus serves to situate this study conceptually while also characterizing the literal situatedness of the 2010 (temporal) Gulf of Mexico (geographical) oil spill.

While Pratt’s work on contact zones may have preceded technological innovations and communicative technologies that would increase the sites of contact and the contestation of power through technology, other scholars have extended her work to electronic contact zones. For

example, in “Supporting Deliberative Democracy: Pedagogical Arts of the Contact Zone of the Electronic Public Sphere,” Philip J. Burns (1999) connects Pratt’s concept of the contact zone to the electronic communications through which real-world literacy practices now most often occur (para. 128-129). Burns characterizes electronic contact zones as “civic contexts within the public sphere itself” (p. 129). As with Pratt’s original use of the term, Burns’s emphasis is on pedagogical intervention to improve students’ agency as “individuals themselves [or] in concert with like-minded others [to] alter power relations to the extent desirable for a more responsive democracy” (p. 129). While my concern in the majority of this study is not explicitly pedagogical, I do agree with Burns that “we must move out of the classroom and into the political public sphere to do some of our work, especially to support rhetoric in a deliberative democracy” (p. 129).

### **Scientific and Technological Discourse**

Given the changing contexts of technology-mediated writing and communication in recent decades, the discipline of RWS has responded in a variety of both useful (productive) and less useful (less productive) ways to the exigencies of technology. To understand these, it’s helpful to note the extent to which science and technology have become increasingly imbricated with the discipline over the last century, a point which several scholars have already traced. In *Writing in the 21st Century: A Report from NCTE*, Kathleen Blake Yancey (2009) noted how science (as the larger domain of which technology is a part) began influencing composition and writing instruction over a century ago: “At the beginning of the 20th century, the influence of science permeated all of education,” including “a more systematic approach” and a view of writing as “a phenomenon to be measured” (p. 3). Along these lines, Michael Zerbe (2007) has similarly argued that science—including technology—has become our culture’s dominant discourse, even if “[w]e do



not readily see scientific dominance as an outcome of contests for knowledge legitimization that came to a head in our culture some three hundred years ago—and are still waged today” (p. 32). Further, Zerbe (2007) maintained that the dominance of science and technology “occurs at the expense of other equally valuable forms of knowledge production and truth claims that rhetoric and composition deems valid,” meaning RWS scholarship must “engage” such discourses from our disciplinary perspective in order to “argue compellingly for the legitimacy of these other (more overtly rhetorical) epistemological and ontological operations” (p. 68).

However, some rhetorical scholars also argue that the strong influence of science and technology in relation to rhetorical scholarship has been associated with misdirections in RWS—the result of not paying attention to and making the most of technology’s place in the discipline. For instance, Yancey (2009) noted how the cultural prioritization of science and technology resulted in “the influence of science and the absence of theory” in writing instruction (p. 3). That being said, in addition (and perhaps subsequent) to an early uncritical adoption of technology within the discipline, many writing instructors still avoid incorporating technology into their pedagogies. With regard to teaching, Cynthia Selfe (1999) argued how a false binary of “technology as a boon or technology as a bane” has come to influence (and limit) many of the decisions about using or teaching with and about technology for writing instruction (p. 39). She concluded that this “reductive binary... encourages a widespread lack of attention to the complexities and nuances of the issues with which we [writing instructors] are now faced” (p. 39).

Selfe (1999) further described that there are serious pedagogical and curricular limitations associated with the false binary of technology as “boon” or “bane.” From a pro-technological perspective, advocates of technology in writing instruction often “remain uncritically enthusiastic about computers, often com[ing] to use these machines without paying attention to the social,

political, and economic issues associated with such use” (p. 38). She continued, “Because they accept technology as a natural and unquestioned part of their lives, they also may come to ignore it” (p. 38). Even in the many cases when technology is adopted within writing instruction, the emphasis may be more on functional computer use than on critical technological literacies. Selber (2004), for instance, noted that “most computer literacy programs [have] overemphasize technical skills and fail to adequately prepare students for the writing and communications tasks in a technology-driven era” (p. 1). These critiques highlight a missed opportunity to teach technology through the critical lens of rhetoric.

From the opposing side of the artificial binary, however, Selfe (1999) described how individuals may see technology as inherently negative or deleterious, and thus insist against using it (para. 37 ff.). She faults this view for influencing educators who “come to believe decisions about technology should be made by others,” who “may ignore the decision-making processes for purchasing and using technology in school systems,” and who “by resisting computer technology [...] feel they are absolved, or removed from the responsibility of paying attention to technology generally” (p. 37). In different ways, then, both views might be seen to instantiate Yancey’s (2009) description of the implementation of technology at the expense of new theory—in particular, theory that might foster Selber’s (2004) cultural and rhetorical categories of technological literacy.

Other scholars within RWS focus more specifically on unequal technological access and participation among minorities such as African Americans. In *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology*, Adam Banks (2006) highlighted the ways in which African Americans (and other minorities) have been denied access to technological resources, and then proposed how a uniquely African American approach to technological access can benefit society as a whole. Similar to Selfe’s critique of false binaries, Banks drew on African American history to resist reductionist binaries

that limit our thinking and theorizing about technology: “rather than answer either/or questions about whether technological advancement and dependence leads to utopia or dystopia, whether technologies overdetermine or have minimal effects on a society’s development, or whether people... should embrace or avoid these technologies, African American history as reflected through its rhetorical production shows a group of people who consistently refused to settle for the limiting parameters set by either/or binaries” (p. 2). Following African American history, Banks proposed pursuing “‘third way’ answers to systematically racist exclusions, demanding full access to and participation in American society and its technologies on their own terms, *and* working to transform the society and its technologies, to ensure... all Americans can participate as full partners” (p. 2). He terms this “transformative access” in that gaining access for African Americans—whether to aspects of society or to technology itself—challenges systems in meaningful ways that ultimately increase access and participation for all (p. 2). Banks’ notion of transformational and meaningful access centers on the agency of individuals, requiring “users, individually and collectively, to be able to use, critique, resist, design, and change technologies in ways that are relevant to their lives and needs, rather than those of the corporations that hope to sell them” (p. 41).

### **Literacy/ies**

In *Fragments of Rationality*, Lester Faigley (1992) described how the perceived “literacy crisis” and the subsequent “Back to Basics” movement of the early 1970s reflected the “magnitude of the difference between writing teachers’ optimistic visions of literacy leading to social equality and the attitudes of much of the public” (p. 61). The dissonance between writing teachers’ socially

oriented visions of critical and technological literacies and the public's demand for basic, testable literacy skills persists to this day.

Despite—or, indeed, because of—the pervasive binary between technology *adoption* and technology *aversion* among writing instructors, many scholars within RWS have argued cogently for charging our discipline with teaching critical technological literacies. Selfe (1999), for instance, argued, “Literacy alone is no longer our business. Literacy and technology are. Or so they must become” (p. 3). She based her argument on not only “our expertise with language and literacy studies but for the attention we pay—as humanist scholars, teachers, and citizens—to the complex set of social, political, education, and economic challenges associated with technology” (p. 4). In other words, she argued that RWS is charged with paying attention to complex issues underlying technological literacies—the same underlying issues that Scribner, Banks, and others have critiqued in terms of gatekeeping and hegemony

By analyzing a range of discourses in response to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, this study aims to broaden disciplinary understanding of literate activities, from functional literacies to literacies in digital contexts, a fitting concern for contemporary RWS. As a discipline, RWS has a long and complex relationship with issues of *literacy*, further complicated by the new and pluralized notions of *technological* literacies. This study therefore draws on disciplinary definitions of literacy that complicate static, traditional notions of print or functional “literacy” towards “technological literacy” and “multiple literacies,” including new-media and multimodal compositions (e.g., Bezemer & Kress, 2008). In “Literacy in Three Metaphors,” Sylvia Scribner (1984) observed that “[l]iteracy has neither a static nor a universal essence” (p. 72). From this contextual view, she analyzed literacy across three common metaphors through which literacy is commonly discussed: adaptation (literacy for functional survival), power (literacy as related to

economic or social change), and grace (literacy as representative of one's inner virtues or cognitive abilities) (para. 75 ff.). Scribner then highlighted the ideological assumptions behind the common literacy metaphors (what Jean Francois Lyotard might call "grand narratives") and illustrated how they are inherently situated, political, and (re)productive of power relations within a culture.

The hegemonic power relationships pervading traditional literacy definitions—between those who define them and those who are defined by them—constitute a central current running through Cynthia Selfe's (1999) *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century*. Like Scribner, Selfe focused on the situated values that helped shape official definitions of literacy "along the axes of existing power formations in a society," including class and race (Selfe, pp. 18-19). In this way, the very definition of literacy often functions as a benchmark or gatekeeper, marking inclusion in—as well as exclusion from—civil, social, and industrial participation: "On a pragmatic level, definitions of literacy serve as triggers, or requirements, for other socially determined systems of support" (p. 18). She further argued that "definitions of literacy play a significant role in creating and maintaining a cohesive hegemonic system in the United States that affects every citizen's chances for success" (p. 18). This appears to be the case for the system of compensation of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility and for networks of social support after the oil spill, as discussed in the following chapters.

To better understand literacies in the disaster zone context, I draw on disciplinary scholarship to broadly theorize multiple and technological literacies. As networked technologies pervade nearly every aspect of social life and higher education, the increasing ubiquity of technology requires definitions of technological literacies to modify previous definitions of traditional literacies. A discussion of technological literacies requires first defining the term's constituent parts. While any writing instrument may broadly be conceived of as a writing

“technology,” a more specific use of the word refers primarily to contemporary electronic or digital technologies, and these may be viewed through the lens of Heidegger’s complex definition of technology as the “manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools, and machines, and the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve” (qtd. in Banks, 2006, p. 3). Definitions of literacy (both traditional and technological) have never been static or universal, but they have followed common patterns and narratives over time.

With the expansion of technologies and their related literacies, Cynthia Selfe (1999) offered two distinct but related definitions of technological literacy. The first and more limited of these definitions amounts to a functional skill, related most closely to Scribner’s metaphor of *literacy as survival*, and derives from “the 1996 federal publication *Getting America’s Students Ready for the Twenty-First Century*: [...] ‘computer skills and the ability to use computers and other technology to improve learning, productivity, and performance’” (p. 10). On the other hand, Selfe’s more expansive second definition of technological literacy relates to Scribner’s metaphor of *literacy as power*, and consists of “literacy as a cultural phenomenon, one that includes cultural dimensions” (Selfe, p. 11). Whereas the first definition focuses more specifically on functional *computer* literacy, the second definition of “*technological* literacy refers to a complex set of socially and culturally situated values, practices, and skills involved in operating linguistically within the context of electronic environments, including reading, writing, and communicating” (p. 11). Although the first definition may be considered a necessary condition of the second definition, Selfe’s broader second definition informs my study of new media genres and other technology-mediated literacy activities in the Gulf Coast. Since the majority of literate responses in the disaster zone are mediated, it is important to understand the social and cultural contexts and functions of digital literacies as practiced in real-world disaster zones.

Similarly, other scholars in the discipline of RWS have defined technological literacies in illuminating ways for both research and teaching. For instance, Selfe's (1999) two definitions of technological literacies closely relate to Stuart Selber's (2004) theory of multiple literacies in *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*. Selber described three complementary technological literacy categories: functional, critical, and rhetorical (para. 24). Selber's "functional" literacy most closely parallels Selfe's first definition of "computer" literacy, whereas his "critical" and "rhetorical" literacies may be understood as opening up more expansive categories within Selfe's second definition of situated technological values, events, and practices. In emphasizing the situated sociocultural functions of literacies, these definitions of multiple (and) technological literacies serve as a foundation for theorizing literate activities as forms of community and/or civic engagement.<sup>4</sup>

### **Public Rhetoric(s) and Civic Engagement**

In the critical introduction to a special issue of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* on human rights rhetoric, Arabella Lyon and Lester C. Olson (2011) highlighted the importance of a rhetorical understanding of witnessing and testifying, as "both language and symbolism are a necessary means for asserting and advancing specific rights" by bearing witness: "the transcendence of a spoken and lived reality, the creation of a counter-discourse, and the creation of a different world" through discursive participation (pp. 207-208). Similarly, I contend that technology-mediated discourse and its related literacies in disaster contexts amounts to a form of community and civic engagement. RWS and Technical Communication scholars have studied civic engagement and

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<sup>4</sup> While my focus is largely multiple *technological* literacies, there exist multiple literacies which are *not necessarily* digital. For example, in Chapter 3 I describe visual literacies such as memes and murals, and in Chapter 5 I analyze protests, graffiti, and rap music as disaster zone genres existing outside of traditional print literacy genres.

participatory rhetoric in a number of contexts involving change, including organizational change (Faber, 2002), urban teen publics (Coogan, 2010), and public scientific discourse (Simmons & Grabill, 2007).

In *Community Action and Organizational Change*, Brenton Faber (2002) focused on real-world responses to change: “people need to make decisions in less than ideal environments. In the face of change, people need to act” (p. 14). A community’s literate acts in response to traumatic events, such as the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, help us understand the ways in which people negotiate change through daily activities. In a different context, David Coogan (2010) described the concept of a “middle space” where urban teens responded to changes in their community, concluding that “a middle space is not generating and then disseminating ideal strategies for rhetorical intervention but generating publics capable of addressing their own social problems” (p. 159). The 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, while an environmental and economic problem, was also a social problem insofar as it affected individuals and communities, and was a rhetorical problem to the extent that it was mediated through discourse.

Constraints on discourse often transcend individuals and specific contexts and are part of larger systems. By studying public responses to scientific discourse, Michele Simmons and Jeffrey Grabill (2007) identified “inquiry practices that allow citizens to understand the particular institutional systems” (p. 422). They argued that effective use of these systems “must be able to produce the professional and technical performances expected in contemporary civic forums” (p. 422). Grabill (2007) then looked further into “the knowledge work of everyday life” (p. 2) in *Writing Community Change: Designing Technologies for Citizen Action*. In Chapter 5 in particular, I build on Grabill’s argument that “information has become a powerful social good” and that “interventions at the level of infrastructure are necessary to enable citizen action in



communities” (p. 20). Importantly, Grabill identified the possibility for community knowledge to constitute expertise about community change and problems, writing that “knowledge produced in communities must be shown to be expert in some way, to be capable of contesting the rhetorics of expert institutions” (p. 59). Chapter 3 shows the ways in which technology-mediated community responses to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill contribute expert knowledge, understanding, and criticism to post-trauma discourse(s) constituting “interpretive communities” (Zelizer, 1993). Conceptually, this community knowledge may be understood as a distinction between the individual and institutional/systemic contexts following traumatic events, even though the distinctions between “individual” agency and “institution/system” often overlap and change.

### **Chapter Outline**

As this introductory chapter has shown, technologically mediated responses to traumatic events invite scholarly attention and analysis from a rhetorical perspective. This project contributes to our understanding of discourse conventions in response to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill and of disaster zone contexts more generally by analyzing post-disaster discourse across new media genres and the institutionalized victim compensation interface of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF). The remaining four chapters characterize the production, distribution (circulation), and consumption (reception) of discourse(s) to more broadly understand a range of literate activities as rhetorical acts that constitute civic participation.

In **Chapter 2**, I establish the theoretical foundation and methodology for the following three discourse-analytical chapters, which are all understood within, and help to further characterize, the Gulf Coast “disaster zone.” This chapter theorizes the rhetorical and civic implications of participatory rhetoric in the form of new media narrative and critical discourse. In

“Literate Acts in Convergence Culture,” Debra Journet (2005) discussed transmedia participation and literacies, including how various forms of social networking and media participation can influence institutional discourse and action. Similarly, James Porter’s (2005) “Rhetoric in (as) a Digital Economy” focused on social production, access, and labor with regard to the social value(s) of technology-mediated discourse. The motivating question for Chapter 2 concerns what methodologies and methods are best suited to study the disaster zone and its constituent discourses. The chapter begins with a discussion of postmodernist and poststructuralist theoretical assumptions underlying the study as a whole, and then narrows to a more specific description of grounded theory and critical discourse analytical methods, such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which I employ in the final three chapters.

In **Chapter 3** I combine scholarship on ancient Greek rhetorical speech sets to show how disaster zone discourse falls into predictable genres. Given that victim and public discourses in the disaster zone are often electronically mediated and distributed (circulated), can we conceive of and characterize of the disaster zone as a discourse community—and, if so, how would the disaster zone discourse community best be defined? John Swales (1988) suggested defining discourse communities by their participation in genre conventions, even when the members of the discourse “community” are not connected socially, in the normal sense of the word “community.” In this sense, I argue, the “disaster community” may be defined in terms of individuals’ participation in certain post-trauma genre conventions, rather than by social relationships between individuals. In “The Genre Function,” Anis Bawarshi (2000) conceived of genres as productive rather than merely interpretive, and it is this productive sense in which genres can be considered to enable agency within the disaster zone. Chapter 3 is organized around examples of the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria* (accusation), *apologia* (defense), and *antapologia* (defense critique), and includes a

detailed discussion of “invective” in the rhetorical genres of the disaster zone discourse community.

In **Chapter 4**, I draw on the above examples of disaster zone genres to better understand a prevalent rhetorical consideration in disaster zone crisis response and damage control—the (mis)use of eloquence. The central questions for this chapter are how does eloquence function within post-trauma crisis response and damage control, and how do receptions or critiques of (in)eloquent discourse in this context reflect historical views of eloquence from around the world. I trace historical notions of eloquence from rhetorical traditions around the world to show how central the issue of eloquence is to disaster zone discourse, as well as how Americans audiences express simultaneously an expectation and a distrust of eloquent speech. Notions of eloquence in this chapter are paired with representative examples from the Gulf Coast disaster zone, which I analyze at various levels of discourse and metadiscourse using CDA.

My study concludes in **Chapter 5** with a case-study analysis of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF) victim compensation website—a literal and metaphorical point of discursive contact between victims and corporate (BP) and governmental entities. The question motivating this chapter is how effective was the GCCF victim compensation for actual users. To answer this question, I draw on technical communication and user-centered design to analyze screen shots of the now-defunct online portal. To my knowledge, this is the only rhetorical analysis of the GCCF compensation portal and includes what may be the only extant screenshots, which I collected from when the portal was still active in 2012. Although the online Gulf Coast Claims Facility has closed and therefore cannot be directly subject to a reception study, the abundance of discursive critiques of the GCCF website and claims process may be considered as the public’s own reception study of the website. Harris (2005) and Ceccarelli (2005) each argued for the importance of reception

studies for understanding how actual users, not ideal or imagined users, interact with technical rhetoric such as scientific discourse. I extend this argument to compare actual versus ideal users of technical writing in the case of the GCCF web interface. Since reception studies are not currently possible for the claims website, I characterize the reception of the website and the claims process through published discourse that details the critical reception of the GCCF. By categorizing the available critiques of the GCCF website and claims application process, incorporating summary statistics about online claims applications, and examining BP and GCCF responses to complaints, Chapter 5 discusses how the GCCF was received and how future claims or compensation processes might improve upon this model—a fitting teaching case for technical or business communication in the larger discipline of RWS.

## **Chapter 2: Methodologies for the Disaster Zone**

### **Parsing Pratt's Definition**

In the first chapter I extended Mary Louise Pratt's (1993) concept of contact zones to theorize post-disaster contexts such as the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill as "disaster zones." To determine the best methodology for studying the specific disaster zone of the oil spill, I return again to Pratt's original definition of contact zones: "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (p. 34). Parsing Pratt's definition is instructive for grounding my study in relevant theory and choosing an appropriate methodology.

A fitting place to start, as it is perhaps the most important aspect of Pratt's definition, is that contact zones (and, by my extension, disaster zones) are characterized by a "clash" between rhetors "in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p. 34). The asymmetrical power relations in the "aftermaths" of large-scale disasters are, in fact, the exigences that motivate discursive participation in the contact zone—using Carolyn Miller's (1994) suggestion that "exigence must be seen neither as a cause of rhetorical action nor as intention, but as social motive" (p. 30). In other words, there is a social motive or exigence to participate rhetorically within contexts of asymmetrical power relations. For example, the accusatory and defensive rhetorical genres of Chapter 3, the critiques of rhetorical (in)eloquence in Chapter 4, and the technically communicated official victim compensation procedures in Chapter 5 all relate to the exercise and critique of power in the post-oil spill disaster zone.

Since the above discourses are the objects of study in each of the remaining three chapters, my theoretical and methodological approaches take seriously the influence of asymmetrical power relationships in the disaster zone, per Pratt's original definition of contact zones. I begin the next section by referencing relevant postmodernist and poststructuralist theory regarding power, subjectivity, agency, and discourse as social practice. Building on this theoretical foundation, I then explain the collective case study approach to this project and my use of Critical Discourse Analysis methodologies guiding the study. Finally, I detail a recursive Grounded Theory approach to the interdisciplinary critical discourse analytical methods for each chapter, drawing from Rhetorical Genre Studies for Chapter 3, Contrastive and Comparative Rhetorical Analysis for Chapter 4, and Technical Communication Usability and Reception Studies in Chapter 5.

### **Relevant Postmodernist and Poststructuralist Theory**

In *Power/knowledge*, Foucault (1980) discussed the relationship between discourses and social power: "in any society there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (p. 93). For Foucault, then, understanding discourse is central to understanding the constituting and reconstituting of power: "There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association" (p. 93). However, to understand how power is discursively established and resisted within the disaster zone, it is first necessary to characterize subjectivity and agency from postmodernist perspectives (subjectivity and narrative identifications, on the one hand, and agency or public/civic rhetorical participation, on the other). My aim is not to theorize subjectivity and

agency *per se*, but rather to draw on postmodernist theories of subjectivity and agency to characterize the formation of subjectivities in discursive responses to the oil spill.

With regard to subjectivity, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) paraphrased Foucault to argue that “subjects are created in discourses” (p. 14), and thus that “the constitution of subjects” should be “a key focus of empirical analysis” in a discourse analytical framework. Foucault (1982), in fact, later indicated that the goal of his work was “not to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis,” but rather “to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (p. 777). A postmodernist orientation towards disaster zone discourses thus takes into consideration the fluid subjectivities (such as individual versus community, or victim versus agent) of Gulf Coast residents, other stakeholders, and critical observers as constructed through discourse after the oil spill.

Norman Fairclough (1995b), one of the founders of Critical Discourse Analysis in social linguistics, similarly explained the dialectical or interactive implications of postmodern subjectivity for discursive analysis, “emphasizing that discourse makes people, as well as people make discourse” (p. 39). According to Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), Fairclough (2001) “applies the concept of *discourse* in three different ways”: discourse as a count noun referring to a particular experience expressed through discourse that is distinguishable from other types of discourse (e.g., environmental discourse), discourse as the kind of language used in a field or context (e.g., in business or politics), and discourse as social practice (e.g., discourse is dialectically constitutive) (p. 66). This third meaning, that “discourse is both constitutive and constituted,” is the most abstract of Fairclough’s concepts of discourse, referring to “language as social practice” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 66). Accordingly, my study focuses on subjectivity as both *constructive of* and *constructed through* discourses of the disaster zone. One example of fluid subjectivities and

how rhetors “shift from a subject position within one discourse to a subject position within another” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 125) within the disaster zone is how a Gulf Coast resident could alternate between victim subjectivities and social or political agency through participation in various genres of discourse. In disaster zone discourse, as in discourse more generally, the discursive negotiation between subjectivities may be reflected in characteristics such as pronoun choice, active versus passive grammar, subjective identification with different groups (e.g., victims versus protestors), choice of genre participation (depending on available genres), choice of media (depending on available media), and verbal or visual frames or metaphors.

If, per Foucault, subjectivity is discursively constructed and fluid, then participation in a variety of discourses implies that disaster zone subjectivities are fragmented, unstable, and contextually situated (Faigley, 1992). Fairclough (1995b), for instance, “distinguishe[d] various facets of the subject” (p. 39)—including social, institutional, economic, political, ideological, and discursive—although his primary concern for discourse analysis was *social subjects* and *institutional subjects* (para p. 39). He defined a social subject as follows: “the social subject is the whole social person, and social subjects occupy subject positions in a variety of institutions” (p. 39). In other words, *social subjects* who are constrained by their positions within institutions become *institutional subjects* to the extent that institutions constrain them discursively and ideologically: “institutions construct their ideological and discursal subjects; they construct them in the sense that they impose ideological and discursal constraints upon them as a condition for qualifying them to act as subjects” (p. 39). An example from the Gulf Coast disaster zone was the way in which subjects were constrained economically after the oil spill, not only by the depression of local Gulf Coast economies but also by the official Gulf Coast Claims Facility victim compensation process, which in this case is also a governmental constraint since the compensation



process was governmentally mandated and later replaced by a judicial compensation process (see Chapter 5).

*Institutional subjectivities* are important for understanding the disaster zone because part of how institutional power and hegemony function in the disaster zone is through constraints on available subject positions by institutions. As discussed above, these subject positions are constitutive of and constituted by discourse. For example, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) described how in Laclau and Mouffe “actors are understood—whether they are groups or individuals—as subject positions determined by discourses. Everyone does not have equal access to all subject positions, and in our society, constraints can, for instance, be a function of categories such as class, ethnicity and gender” (p. 55). Interestingly, as Chapters 3 and 4 show, there are institutional constraints on victims as well as perpetrators of large-scale disasters (and, as well, on everyone in between)—all social subjects in the disaster zone are subject to institutional constraints on genre participation (Chapter 3) and discursive content and style (Chapter 4).

The fragmentation of and negotiation between subjectivities is reflected in the proliferation of disaster zone discourses, all vying for predominance. Again drawing on the poststructuralist writings of Laclau and Mouffe, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) described how “one discourse can never establish itself so firmly that it becomes the only discourse that structures the social. There are always several conflicting discourses at play” (p. 41). Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) note that, far from being deterministic, subjective structuring is ongoing and dialectical: “the individual is partly structured by discourses, but the structuring is never total” (p. 42). Put another way, Foucault (1978) wrote, “Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind”; “it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears” (p. 116). This understanding of the ongoing processes of

subjective structuring through discourses forms the basis of the critical discourse analytical framework described below.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis as Methodology**

The above postmodernist and poststructuralist theoretical framework, which relates to the exercise of power to subjectivity and agency in discourse, calls for an appropriate methodology to study disaster zone discourse as a dialectically constructive social practice. To that end, I employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a fitting methodology for analyzing the role of discourse in asymmetrical social and power relations in the disaster zone. As Gregory et al. (2009) pointed out, discourse analysis is both a critical interpretive approach and a formal method. In this section, I describe the interpretive methodological approach.

Fairclough (1995a) described how, through CDA, “We can see social life as interconnected networks of social practices of diverse sorts (economic, political, cultural, family, etc.)” (p. 1). His definition of social practice as “an articulation of diverse social elements within a relatively stable configuration, always including discourse,” included “classroom teaching, television news, family meals, medical consultations.” CDA has been employed to study various types of discourse, often focusing on political discourse, and in this study I use CDA to characterize discursive responses to traumatic events in the disaster zone.

Teun van Dijk (n.d.), an influential CDA scholar, described how CDA is not a singular method, but rather a diverse set of methodological approaches: “Methodologically, CDA is as diverse as DA in general, or indeed other directions in linguistics, psychology or the social sciences.” While CDA is clearly not *one singular* method, CDA has been employed methodologically in various disciplines as various appropriated methods for research problems in

those disciplines. Similarly, in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Wodak and Meyer (2009) described CDA as a “school or paradigm” of similar methodological approaches, stating that CDA is “thus necessarily interdisciplinary and eclectic” and “characterized by a number of principles” (p. 3).

Despite the variety of disciplinary and methodological approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis in fields such as linguistics, semiotics, social psychology, and—of course—rhetoric, it is both possible and important to distill the common concerns and methodological approaches under the broad CDA umbrella. Wodak and Meyer (2009) noted that, while CDA methodologies as used across various disciplines all study discourse, they also share “at least seven dimensions in common” (p. 2). Below, I describe each of Wodak and Meyer’s seven “dimensions” of discourse study, or common methodological approaches, as they relate to the project at hand.

First, Wodak and Meyer (2009) identified that CDA methodologies are concerned with how “real language users” produce “naturally occurring” language use, as opposed to “abstract language systems and invented examples” (p. 2). Although there are prospective implications for my study, insofar as I argue that the common discursive activities of the disaster zone are likely (if not certain) to recur after future large-scale disasters, the focus of this study is not to abstractly theorize the disaster zone or to invent hypothetical examples or systems. Instead, my retrospective study focuses on actual examples of discourse as produced, distributed, and consumed in the specific disaster zone of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. For example, Chapter 2 categorizes disaster zone discourse into interrelated genres which are used in specific contexts for specific purposes.

The second and third aspects of CDA methodologies are closely related in that they extend CDA beyond the isolated semantics of strictly textual analysis to focus more on larger-scale

communicative (inter)actions. Wodak and Meyer (2009) described how CDA's basic units of analysis are larger than "isolated words and sentences"; instead, CDA analyzes "texts, discourses, conversations, speech acts, or communicative events" (p. 2). This second point leads to the third dimension or characteristic of CDA methodologies, namely, that in CDA, discourse analysis is extended "beyond sentence grammar" to focus instead on subjective human "action and interaction" (p. 2). This relates closely to Bourdieu's theory of social action, as well as postmodernist notions of agency, discussed above. The implications from the second and third dimensions of CDA for my study are that I am not concerned so much with sentence-level grammatical analysis, but rather with the disaster zone as a discourse community characterized by socially motivated genre participation (e.g., Chapter 3) and critique (e.g., Chapters 4 and 5).

Fourth, Wodak and Meyer (2009) observed that CDA extends beyond verbal discourse to analyze communication that is "non-verbal (semiotic, multimodal, visual)" and includes discourses such as "gestures, images, film, the internet, and multimedia" (p. 2). While this does not mean that textual or verbal discourse is excluded from CDA or from my study, strictly textual discourse is not the sole object of analysis, and it is considered within, among, and between other forms of discourse. Specifically, much of my analysis in the remaining three chapters considers the visual components of multimodal discourse such as television commercials, YouTube videos, billboards, murals, graffiti, and protest signs. Nonetheless, as Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) noted, Fairclough "confines the term, discourse, to semiotic systems such as language and images in contrast to Laclau and Mouffe, who treat all social practice as discourse" (p. 67).

The fifth and sixth dimensions of CDA methodology outlined by Wodak and Meyer (2009) relate to the diverse real-world contexts and uses of language. They first described CDA as focused on "dynamic [...] interactional moves and strategies," and they then noted the importance

in CDA of “the functions of (social, cultural, situative and cognitive) contexts of language use” (p. 2). Both of these are central concerns in my study, which hinges on the metaphor of the disaster zone as a dynamic social context in which rhetorical subjects interact through various discursive strategies.

The seventh and final dimension common to CDA methodologies is that they consider “a vast number of phenomena of text grammar and language use” (p. 2). Wodak and Meyer (2009) mentioned several examples, ranging from linguistic to psychological phenomena, but the most relevant ones for this study are macrostructures, speech acts, interactions, turn taking, politeness (eloquence), argumentation, and rhetoric. While various levels of discourse from microanalysis to macrostructures are, of course, a part of my critical discourse analytical approach in the three chapters that follow, I diverge a bit from Wodak and Meyer and instead argue that rhetoric should be considered not one phenomenon of language use, but instead is the overarching concern for all discourse analysis in the disaster zone. In other words, the seven dimensions common to CDA methodologies as outlined by Wodak and Meyer, if taken together, highlight how discourse is situated and persuasive, and thus rhetorical. In the remaining three chapters I therefore employ CDA in order to elucidate how discourses of the disaster zone context are persuasive, or rhetorical, for subjects’ specific purposes.

### **Grounded Theory: A Recursive Approach to Method**

In describing the research design and methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) noted that “[t]he delineation of the steps and their internal order should be seen as an ideal type: in practice, a study may not follow the framework in a linear way; rather the research may move backwards and forwards between the levels a number of times before finding

it appropriate to move on” (p. 77). This “real-world” process of flexibly moving among and between steps of research design and revising along the way are what the discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies refers to as “recursivity.” An understanding of recursive writing processes as studied in the field of RWS informs my recursive approach to research. To that end, I now briefly summarize rhetorical scholarship on recursive processes.

Scholars in RWS have thoroughly investigated real-world writing and revision processes since the 1960s, improving our understanding of actual writing processes. For example, Janet Emig’s multiple publications have been influential in moving the field of RWS away from a product focus and towards investigations of actual and varied writing processes. Emig’s (1964) studies of revision are notable for describing a variety of processes and for introducing the idea of “recursive” processes of invention, writing, and revision—processes that I argue are applicable as well to research methodology (pp. 7-8).

Emig and other scholars have since attempted to better understand the components of the writing process by studying students and writers, leading her to describe writing as “a process, which is laminated and recursive” (1971, p. 33). In appropriating the mathematical term “recursive,” Emig conceived of writing processes that were not linear from start to finish or from invention to revision, noting instead “certain recursive movements, certain pendulum swings” between the related processes of invention, composing, and revising (p. 56). Later, in “Components of the Composing Process,” Sharon Crowley (1977) published an informal study of students’ composition diaries regarding the writing process in linear segments, from “preparation” and “incubation” to “writing” and “revision” (p. 166). Alternatively, Crowley’s *prescriptive*, “ideal” model viewed writing as “a recursive movement” that “moves forward and backward between synthesis and analysis” (p. 167; 168).

In a response article, Nancy Sommers (1978) argued that revision was a central and ongoing activity throughout the writing process, rather than a distinct stage between or after writing: “This is a process that occurs prior to and throughout the writing of a work as a writer continues to be surprised and enlightened by his own words and ideas” (pp. 209-210). For Sommers, then, “process suggests not just one, but a series of ongoing activities” (p. 210), and she ended her article with a call for scholars “to develop theoretical models which will generate important research questions about the operations of the composing process and which will lead us to ask basic ontological questions of how the process differs from the product” (p. 211). It is this issue which I argue is important for a recursive approach to research methodology—namely that the recursive approach has ontological implications for the ongoing shaping of the research project and the knowledge that it produces.

To that point, in a later study, Sommers (1980) continued to operate from the assumption that writing functioned through the “recursive shaping of thought by language,” distinguishing it from the linear models that were based on speech (p. 378). Sommers critiqued these, since, “by staging revision after enunciation, the linear models reduce revision in writing, as in speech, to no more than an afterthought; instead, Sommers was looking for a model of revision processes *distinctive to writing* and *distinct from speech* (p. 379). She ultimately claimed “revision strategies are a process of more than communication; they are part of the process of discovering meaning altogether. Here we can see the importance of dissonance; at the heart of revision is the process by which writers recognize and resolve the dissonance they sense in their writing” (p. 385). She ultimately concluded that “It is a sense of writing as discovery—a repeated process of beginning over again, starting out new [...]. I have used the notion of dissonance because such dissonance, the incongruities between intention and execution, governs both writing and meaning” (p. 387).

By the early 1980s, then, revision was already better understood in the field of RWS as a series of ongoing cognitive processes and writing activities that occurred recursively along with other writing activities, with the assumption that writing is not a fixed and singular process, but rather a plurality of varied processes across contexts and writers. Here I contend that a more complex understanding of recursive *writing* and *revision* processes, based in large part on the process-oriented scholarship above, significantly influences my recursive *research methodology*.

Specifically, the non-linear, recursive approach to research used in this study is known as *Grounded Theory*, which Joyce Neff Magnotto (1998) described as a “fluid, open, and provisional” approach to analyzing qualitative data from a variety of sources (p. 125). In fact, Magnotto (1996) noted that “[f]or those of us familiar with the notion of writing as a recursive process, the iterative nature of grounded theory will seem quite familiar” (pp. 2-3). She described the recursivity of grounded theory as follows: “to organize the many ideas which emerge from systematic data analysis and then to generate theory which is tested through further recursive analysis. Actually, in doing Grounded Theory, the activities of collecting data, analyzing data, and writing up the research often occur simultaneously. The process both reflexive and recursive” (p. 2).

Magnotto (1996) further described Grounded Theory as a process of “constant comparison” between research procedures and the objects of analysis (p. 2), which is methodologically recursive insofar as it represents “theory as process; that is, theory as an ever-developing entity, not as a perfect product” (p. 3). Since Grounded Theory “promotes the teasing out of political and social components affecting writing” (p. 3) it is fitting for this project, which is concerned in large part with the political and social dimensions of discourse, as my descriptions of postmodernist theory and CDA methodology have shown.



## Research Design and Methods

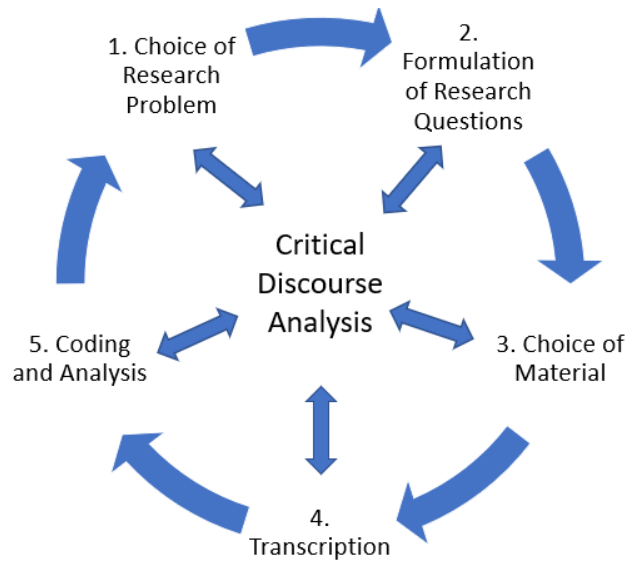


Figure 2.1: A recursive Grounded Theory approach to CDA research methods

Having established a theoretical orientation, explained the dimensions underlying CDA methodologies, and described my recursive Grounded Theory approach, the question remains: by what *specific means* or *methods* can CDA be applied in the analysis of disaster zone discourse? Here, I follow Fairclough's application of CDA to the entire research design, as distilled and described by Phillips and Jørgensen (2002). As they note, in "the majority of discourse analytical approaches [...] —and for qualitative research in general—there is no fixed procedure for the production of material or for analysis: the research design should be tailored to match the special characteristics of the project" (p. 76). Thus, I follow their description of Fairclough's CDA approach as a flexible guide at every stage of the research design and analytical process, from choice of research problem through to transcription and analysis (Figure 2.1, above). It should be reiterated, as described above, that I followed a recursive Grounded Theory approach, and thus the stages of research design and procedures were open to modification and revision based upon added

information and understanding gained during the selection of materials, discourse collection and transcription, coding, and analysis.

## **1. Choice of research problem**

At the beginning of research design, I used CDA methods to choose the research problem, itself—in this case, the disaster zone of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Wodak and Meyer (2009) described how all CDA approaches are “problem-oriented” (p. 3), and, drawing from critical social theory, “should be oriented towards critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory oriented solely to understanding or explaining it” (p. 6). Similarly, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) suggested that CDA, as “critical social research,” should attempt to address or rectify “injustice or inequality in society” (p. 77). Since contact zones are, in Pratt’s definition, contexts of asymmetrical power relationships, and since the disaster zone in particular follows a large-scale traumatic event which adversely affects local populations and society as a whole, the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill is an important research problem for the application of CDA. Put another way, a CDA research problem “takes its starting point in a problem that the research should help to solve”—which may “either be a problem identified by individuals or groups in society... or it can be identified by the researcher who may want to disclose a [...] mismatch between reality and the view people have of this reality that functions ideologically” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 77). The discourses of the Gulf Coast oil spill were, in fact, motivated by the asymmetrical power relationships of the disaster zone. Through description and critique of these discourses, my project aims to characterize the discourses and thereby problematize the asymmetrical power relations of the disaster zone.

## 2. Formulation of research questions

Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) described the second stage of Fairclough's CDA method as motivating the formulation of research questions: "The governing principle is that discursive practices are in a dialectical relationship with other social practices: discourse is socially embedded" (p. 78). This relates to Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework of *discourse as text*, *discursive practice*, and *social practice*. According to Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), to understand discourse and "the character of a discursive practice depends on the social practice of which it forms a part" (p. 78). Thus, CDA research must begin with social practice in the formation of research questions. This second step is one in which the discipline of the researcher and the study have great influence. Per Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), "it is necessary to draw on the discipline, or disciplines, that studies the social practice of interest" (p. 78).

In order to formulate questions of inquiry for this project, I followed the process of *immersion/crystallization* as described by Borkan (1999) as "cycles whereby the analyst immerses him- or herself into and experiences, emerging after concerned reflection with intuitive crystallizations" and repeating this process of immersion/crystallization "until reportable interpretations are reached" (pp. 179-180). Borkan (1999) wrote that immersion/crystallization "uses more of the researcher, often requiring cognitive and emotional engagement of the self to get beyond the obvious interpretations to hear, see, and feel the data" (p. 180). In the early stages of this project, I immersed myself in the Gulf Coast and in relevant discourses: I visited the Gulf Coast over a dozen times, I lived in New Orleans for a period of approximately one year, and I spent a great deal of time talking to Gulf Coast residents and searching online for discourses related to the 2010 oil spill. For the purposes of forming research questions, my interpretations needed not be final or conclusive. My provisional research questions focused mostly on the distinction

between victim narratives and overtly critical discourse. However, as I proceeded with literature review and immersed myself further in disaster zone discourses, I was able to formulate the research questions related to disaster zone discourse communities and genre participation (Chapter 3), the uses and critiques of (in)eloquence as a stylistic characteristic of disaster zone discourse (Chapter 4), and usability and reception of actual users of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility victim compensation portal (Chapter 5).

Borkan (1999) also described immersion/crystallization as “fluid during all research stages, from conceptualization to data collection to write-up” (p. 180). Following my recursive approach to this project, the research questions addressed in each of the remaining chapters were open to revision depending on my ongoing collection and analysis of disaster zone discourses. As one example, my initial focus for Chapter 5 was to collect and compare victim narratives that many Gulf Coast residents wrote and submitted through the online victim compensation portal. However, after reaching out to Gulf Coast residents in an attempt to obtain these victim narratives, it became apparent that most residents either did not keep the original copies or were not able to locate them. Following from this, I changed the focus of Chapter 5 to compare imagined/ideal audiences and real audiences of the claims portal, including usability and “reception” of the portal based on published critiques of the process.

### **3. Selection of materials**

The third step in Fairclough’s CDA method is the choice of materials—in other words, the choice of discourse(s) or artifact(s) as object(s) of analysis (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, para. 78). This step is, of course, influenced mostly by the first two steps (i.e., the choice of research problem and the formulation of research questions), as the objects of study should be the most useful and

relevant for helping to address the research questions and shedding light on the overall research problem. In addition, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) noted that there are other real-world constraints that often influence the choice of material, including researcher characteristics (e.g., the researcher's knowledge of or familiarity with possible materials) and contextual concerns (e.g., what materials are available for study and "whether, and how, one can gain access to" them) (p. 78). Since CDA, as a *methodology*, is concerned with real-world discourses, as a *method* it is also concerned with real-world constraints on the materials available to the researcher relating to a given set of research questions.

In this project, I use a *collective case study* approach, selecting different discursive artifacts as smaller cases within the overall case of the post-2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill disaster zone, using Grounded Theory as "a means of meta-analysis across [case] studies" (Magnotto, 1996, p. 4). Adams et al. (2014) highlighted the case study design's ability to support multiple sources of data: "It is appropriate where the research aim is to explore contextual or complex multivariate conditions and not just isolated variables." They described "the study of more than one case as collective case studies, each of which is an instrumental study linked by coordination between individual studies [which] provides a structure to gain insight into the issue of interest across settings as it allows comparison within and between cases" (n.p.).

Other than the determination that the discourses selected must have been produced during or following the April 20, 2010 oil spill, there was no end-date for eligible inclusion or analysis; additional discursive artifacts discovered at any point during this research project were eligible to be selected and analyzed if they were relevant to the study. The objects selected for this case study are several cases of technology-mediated responses to the 2010 oil spill. In the selection of materials (artifacts) I drew on Fairclough's broad conception of "discourse" quoted above, to

include traditional texts and other discourses coded with meanings. For example, in this study I qualitatively analyzed a variety of discursive products or artifacts from victims, stakeholders, and outside observers, including recorded interviews, published narratives, artistic productions, commercial and corporate media, user-created media, government documents, and critical responses disseminated through networked media and social networking. By including multiple sources, I am able to more fully characterize the genres of discourse enabled and constrained by the oil spill disaster zone context.

Although a wide range of discourses and a number of examples in each category of discourse were considered, the choice of which discourses to analyze, and which of these analyzed discourses to include in this study, follows what is known as *purposive sampling* (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). In other words, the goal of this study was not to fully survey and exhaustively characterize all discourses within the disaster zone. Rather, as discursive artifacts were interpreted according to each chapter's questions of inquiry, only relevant discourses were included in the final analysis.

#### **4. Transcription**

The fourth step of Fairclough's CDA method, as described by Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), is transcription. The need for transcription depends on the research materials (discursive artifacts) selected in the third step. For example, purely textual discourse in the language being studied does not need to be transcribed; however, research materials that include aural, visual, or multi-modal discourses or other languages need to be transcribed, in whole or in part (para. 80). Transcription of non-textual discourse for the purposes of CDA research "is not only a question of selection, but also of interpretation," and as such this process is inherently analytical and subjective (para. 80). When the fourth step of CDA methods involves transcriptions, the researcher "has to choose between systems of transcription" based on "what is required in view of the research

questions” (p. 81). The primary concern here is what level of discursive specificity or detail is required to address the research questions (e.g., detailed microlinguistic analysis versus larger-scale discursive analysis). For my purposes in this study, transcription was undertaken for coding and analytical purposes, as described below. For example, videos with spoken discourse needed to be transcribed in order to be categorized in the analysis phase.

## 5. Analysis

In Fairclough’s application of CDA method, the main emphasis is the fifth and “final” stage: analysis. Note that I use “final” only in terms of the linear numbering of five stages outlined by Phillips and Jørgensen (2002); given the recursivity of this process as discussed above, analysis is part of an iterative research process and in many cases leads to revisions of earlier stages of the research process even as analysis is undertaken. Here, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) described the application of CDA methods to analysis using Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of *discursive practice*, *discourse as text*, and *social practice* (p. 77; p. 81).

Analysis at the level of *discursive practice* “focuses on how the text is produced and how it is consumed” (p. 81). Another way to think of this is how discourses are *coded* with meaning by authors/rhetors and subjectively *decoded* by audiences. For analysis on the production side, this often involves examining the conditions and processes of production, including reproduction, mediation, revision, and change (para 81). On the consumption side, audience or reception research may shed light on how audiences receive and interpret discourses (para. 82).

Fairclough’s approach to analysis of *discursive practice* often emphasizes the relationships between discourses and texts, “identifying what discourses they draw on (*interdiscursivity*) and how they *intertextually* draw on other texts” (Phillips & Jørgensen, p. 82). One of the central

concerns here is the boundaries and overlap between discourses, and Chapters 3-5 illustrate the extent to which disaster genres reflect each other intertextually.

Next, analysis at the level of *discourse as text* uses a set of tools to show “how discourses are activated textually and arrive at, and provide backing for, a particular interpretation” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 83). Some of the linguistic textual analysis tools used by Fairclough in this area of analysis are shown below in Table 2.1.

*Table 2.1: Tools for analysis of discourse as text (adapted from p. 83)*

“Interactional Control”	“The relationship between speakers, including the question of who sets the conversational agenda”
“Ethos” or subjectivity	“How identities are constructed through language and aspects of the body”
“Metaphors”	Includes visual and textual metaphors and framing
“Wording”	
“Grammar”	See grammatical elements <i>transitivity</i> and <i>modality</i> below:
“transitivity”	“how events and processes are connected (or not connected) with subjects and objects”; i.e., agency. Includes active vs. passive tense, explicit vs. omitted grammatical subjects, and “ <i>nominalization</i> whereby the noun stands for the process”
“modality”	“the speaker’s degree of affinity with or affiliation to her or his statement”; this includes <i>truth</i> claims, <i>authority</i> , <i>permissions</i> , and <i>intonation</i> (e.g., moderating phrases); modalities may be expressed objectively or subjectively; mass media often use categorical, objective modalities.

After analyzing the levels of *discursive practice* and *discourse as text*, what remains is to analyze the *social practice*, or the context in which both text and discursive practice operate. There are two primary aims of the analysis of social practice. The first aim of analysis at this level is to



characterize “the relationship between the discursive practice and its order of discourse”—in other words, what is the genre of the discursive practice, what “network of discourses” does it belong to, and “how are the discourses distributed and regulated?” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 86). The second “aim is to map the partly non-discursive, social and cultural relations and structures that constitute the wider context of the discursive practice—the *social matrix of discourse*” (p. 86). This second aim attends to considerations such as the economic and institutional conditions surrounding discursive practice, and—since CDA is not equipped to analyze these conditions—this is where CDA methods rely on interdisciplinary approaches, such as cultural studies, “that shed light upon the social practice in question” (p. 86). Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) summarize that it is here, “in the analysis of the relationship between discursive practice and the broader social practice that the study arrives at its final conclusions,” usually with regard to whether discursive practice reproduces power relationships “and thus contribute[s] to the maintenance of the status quo” or whether “the order of discourse has been transformed, thereby contributing to social change” (pp. 86-87).

Coding processes served as the foundation for analysis at the three levels described above. My coding followed Magnotto (1996), who described two interpretive coding operations or procedures central to a qualitative Grounded Theory approach: *unitizing* and *categorizing*. These two ongoing processes also illustrate the recursive nature of Grounded Theory research. For Magnotto, “Unitizing means deciding what will constitute a ‘unit’ of information” for analysis, which she also described as “chunks of meaning” (p. 3). In this study, unitizing involved breaking down larger discourses into meaningful grammatical, textual, and/or visual units. This was an inherently analytical procedure, as the distinction between units of meaning was subjective and provisional. Following Magnotto, these units were “then labeled to indicate source, type of

respondent, site, and episode” (p. 2). Categorizing—the second procedure Magnotto described—involved “grouping similar” units of meaning into categories, “writing rules that describe the category,” and then “assigning future chunks or units based on the [category] rule rather than on the initial process of subjectively grouping units (p. 2). Thus, *unitizing* led to *categorizing*, which in turn influenced the ongoing *unitizing* and attendant *categorizing* of additional discourses. To a large extent, both unitizing and categorizing procedures were open to ongoing revision depending on the availability of larger or smaller units of information and narrower or broader categories of meaning. With regard to the epistemological implications of coding, Crang (1997) noted that, as opposed to coding in quantitative research, in qualitative research “what is generally of interest is not so much the codes as the text they denote, not how often they occur but what is in them” (p. 188). In other words, coding for qualitative research is not an end in itself or the primary goal of the research, but rather functions to improve our understanding of the discourses being studied.

In this study, discourses were coded in a series of passes (open, axial, and selective) to refine my analyses throughout the research process (Magnotto, 1998, p. 126). During the process of unitizing and categorizing the chosen discursive artifacts, I coded their discursive units according to: 1) levels of discourse, e.g., primary, meso, macro, and meta; 2) genre characteristics, e.g., narrative, critical, accusatory, defensive, and (un)mediated, public, private, (un)sanctioned; 3) subjective identifications, e.g., individual, group, victim, activist, protestor, governmental, public/civic, governmental, author, audience, and various institutional subjectivities; and 4) patterns and themes, e.g., greed, eloquence, (ir)responsibility, and the environment (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 57-69). My Grounded Theory approach remained “flexible and open so that additional data, perhaps from additional sites or subjects, can be incorporated over time to enrich

the explanatory and predictive power” of my coding and analyses in each chapter (Magnotto, 1996, p. 4).

In coding, it was explicitly not my intention to objectively label individuals or communities as either local stakeholder or outside observer, passive victim or agent, or any other false binaries or dichotomies. As Kwan (2002) noted in her feminist approach to qualitative coding methods, “Great care is needed when developing a coding scheme because rigid categorization is a major weakness” (p. 164). Nonetheless, coding of discourses helped to illustrate at least some of the ways in which “victims” or other stakeholders are enabled or constrained by the technologies, media, and genres of their literate responses. Ultimately, the results of my coding and analysis of discourse are that the seemingly stable categories of “victim” and “observer” or “insider” and “outsider” are complicated by considering the ways in which subjects address the civic and cultural questions of the Gulf oil spill through discourse. The above coding procedures helped me organize the discourses of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico disaster zone into specific areas of concern that form the foundation of the remaining chapters: genres of accusation and defense in Chapter 3, critiques of (in)eloquence in Chapter 4, and actual user responses to the online victim compensation interface in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 3 I trace the genres of victim response, following Clay Spinuzzi’s (2003) methodology for genre tracing. Drawing on Bakhtin, Spinuzzi described genre tracing as “*dialogic* [because] it draws on the metaphor of dialogue to examine how people interact with complex institutions, disciplines, and communities” (p. 23). However, my application of genre tracing functions through discourse analysis instead of direct observation. Whereas Spinuzzi traced genres through behavioral observation in a workplace environment, I instead categorize and analyze the genres of discourse produced in response to the Gulf oil spill. Other scholars, such as Miller

(1984), have discussed genre as abstraction at various levels across cultures, and Toms and Campbell (1999) analyzed form and function in digital genre conventions. In this chapter I categorize responses across media according to participation in genres characteristic of the disaster zone, such as *kategoria* (accusation) and *apologia* (defense).

In Chapter 4 I apply a form of contrastive rhetorical analysis, following what Wendy Hesford (2006) and others have described the “global turn” in rhetoric and composition studies. Hesford was primarily concerned with forecasting productive directions for research in RWS. In her discussion of possible directions for rhetoric and composition research, Hesford predicted that, “[a]s rhetorical scholarship reorients itself toward an examination of the global, it will increasingly need to pursue interdisciplinary and collaborative work,” (p. 794). The complex and contested disciplinary identity of RWS leads researchers to look outside of the U.S. for rhetorical and discursive practices, as I have in this chapter, where I trace various conceptions and critiques of eloquence and ineloquence from world cultures across time, starting with ancient eastern and western philosophy through to more contemporary views of eloquence. I do so not as an end in itself, but instead use these views a heuristic approach to examining different uses and critiques of (in)eloquence in disaster zone discourse.

Finally, Chapter 5 considers the usability and design of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility for victim compensation and, in particular, the web interface of the claims application process. Scott et al. (2006), described “our field’s need for more research and teaching approaches that historicize technical communication’s roles in hegemonic power relations—approaches that are openly critical of nonegalitarian, unethical practices and subject positions, that promote values other than conformity, efficiency, and effectiveness, and that account for technical communication’s broader cultural conditions, circulation, and effects” (1). To that end, this chapter aims to problematize

the asymmetrical power relations and constraints on subject positions and agency in the victim compensation process. Given that the majority of claims applications for the first five years, the usability of this interface helped shape and constrain individual applications and the overall process of victim compensation after the oil spill. As discussed previously, this is not a “reception study” in strict terms, given that the online claims portal is no longer accessible. Characteristics of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility’s web interface and the victim compensation application process raise questions pertinent to the field of RWS and the specialization of Technical Communication within this discipline. For instance, a large amount of specialized information is presented in digital format through the web interface, and this information and the interface itself is subject to analysis according to the tenets of effective technical communication and user-centered design (Johnson, 1998). The highly technical nature of the application process for victim compensation also relates to concerns about disproportionate access, both in terms of physical access to the requisite technologies as well as with regard to training, education, experience, and ease with using such technologies.

## Chapter 3: Genres of the Disaster Zone Discourse Community

### The Disaster Zone as Discourse Community

In “Arts of the Contact Zone,” Mary Louise Pratt (2002) described how “the idea of the contact zone is intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy” (p. 11). The issue of community comes through in her description of contact zones as “social spaces” where social subjects grapple in asymmetrical power relations. By highlighting clash and conflict rather than utopian symmetry between subjects, Pratt’s idea of community departed from traditional conceptions of linguistic speech communities, which, she wrote, “tended to be theorized as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogenous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members” (p. 11). She distanced her own definition from Benedict Anderson’s description of “imagined communities” where members “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 12).

Pratt’s more complex description of contact zone communities, as composed of heterogeneous subjects, is particularly fitting for the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone, which demographic reports show to be highly diverse in terms of ethnicity, language use, literacy, education, and socioeconomic status. However, Pratt’s conception of “contact” in this case was quite literal—for Pratt, *social* spaces were *physical* spaces in which subjects came into contact. On the other hand, I argue that contemporary disaster zones in many ways extend beyond local communities and include anyone who produces discourse in the post-disaster zone context. Just as the environmental, economic, social, or political effects of the disaster zone extend far beyond

its immediate victims, so, too, does discursive participation occur on a national or international scale. In other words, discursive responses to local or regional disasters are not limited to subjects directly victimized by catastrophic events. Not only do the types of response to the event vary, but they often originate from a variety of geographic and sociocultural subjects, and their discursive products or artifacts serve a variety of purposes for a variety of audiences. In the aftermath of the 2010 oil spill, for example, literate responses took many forms, from local art, such as graffiti and murals that was primarily received by local audiences, to digital discourse that was disseminated audiences to wider through social media.

This raises an important question: Given the heterogeneity of discursive media and modes, as well as author and audience, how may the disaster zone be understood as a community? John Swales (1988) attempted to “resolve the logical problem of assigning membership of a community to individuals who neither admit nor recognize that such a community exists” (p. 213). To do so, he characterized discourse communities primarily according to subjects’ participation in genres, noting (like Pratt) that “strong levels of interpersonal relationship are not criterial for the creation of a discourse community” (p. 211).

Following from the above arguments from Pratt and Swales, respectively, that 1) discourse communities are diverse and heterogenous and 2) are characterized primarily by their genre participation, the goal of the remainder of this chapter is to describe the post-oil spill disaster zone as a discourse community by characterizing the production, dissemination, and consumption (reception) of discursive genres. I begin by describing how this chapter undertakes critical historiography by *redefining what “counts”* as rhetorical participation and thereby *recovering who “counts”* as a rhetorical subject in the disaster zone. I then employ rhetorical scholarship to show how accusations against BP’s policy and character were defended and, in some cases, refuted again

according to the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria*, *apologia*, and *antapologia*. The remaining sections of this chapter group genres from across modes and media into three common and recurring disaster zone rhetorical themes: invective, nature and the environment, and humor or comic frames. Having shown that the majority of disaster zone genres reflected subjective interpretation or critique, I conclude the chapter by arguing that the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone community constituted not only a discourse community, but also as an interpretive community.

### **The Disaster Zone as Rhetorical Historiography**

The popular adage that “a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing” represents a simplified version of Kenneth Burke’s concept of “terministic screens”: “even if any terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, p. 1341). Histories, as well as terminologies, are necessarily “filtered” through screens. In the case of a disaster zone such as the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, history will reflect the subjective discourses, values, beliefs, and experiences of those who have written it. Because histories are necessarily limited—and, at times, *limiting*—in recent years scholars have proposed critical historiography to more fully reflect the important contributions among marginalized and silenced individuals and groups. In this section I elucidate Jacqueline Jones Royster’s (1996) conception of historiography to show how redefining and recovering rhetorical participation in the disaster zone contributes to and expands the rhetorical canon.

In addition to “History” in the traditional sense, critical historiography refers to “histories” within various disciplines, including RWS. For example, Royster’s (1996) “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own” alludes, in both title and content, to the importance of representing a variety of perspectives, including traditionally marginalized voices, within rhetorical histories.



Following Burke<sup>5</sup>, Royster proposed “subject position as a terministic screen in cross-boundary discourse [...] thereby permitting interpretation to be richly informed by the converging of dialectical perspectives” (p. 29). Further, she described how subjectivity “pays attention dynamically to context, ways of knowing, language abilities, and experience, and by doing so it has a consequent potential to deepen, broaden, and enrich our interpretive views in dynamic ways as well” (p. 29). Royster’s contextual approach to subjectivity is an “enterprise [that] supports the sense of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies as a field of study that embraces the imperative to understand truths and consequences more fully” (pp. 29-30). It is important to note Royster’s postmodernist assumptions that a plurality of possible “truths” are perceived (and created) from a plurality of subject positions. This view, which admits of and encourages multiplicity, speaks to the underlying aims of historiography as pursued in this chapter and in my study as a whole. Specifically, by examining diverse genre participation by a variety of subjects, I illustrate how multiple “truths” are contested in the writing of the histories of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

As the above quotations imply, Royster resisted static histories from limited perspectives. She instead promoted historiography as

operating deliberately on codes of better conduct in the interest of keeping our boundaries fluid, our discourse invigorated with multiple perspectives, and our policies and practices well-tuned toward a clearer respect for human potential and achievement from whatever their source and a clearer understanding that voicing at its best is not just well-spoken but also well-heard. (p. 40)

Royster’s rhetorical approach here elevates fluidity over fixity and multiple voices over singular perspectives. Of course, her final point about being “well-heard” requires the ability of diverse

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<sup>5</sup> This is an ironic choice upon which to build a theory of critical rhetorical historiography since Burke may be seen as representing the traditional canon of white, male rhetorical scholarship.

subjects to earn a place within the dominative narratives and discourses of a society. While I argue that networked communicative technologies have in some ways increased the ability of traditionally marginalized subjects, such as women, ethnic minorities, linguistic minorities (nonnative speakers), and lower socioeconomic classes, a large proportion of rhetorical production continues to be ignored or forgotten. This is precisely why critical historiography aims to recover and restore marginalized subjects alongside traditional rhetorical histories.

In her later article “Disciplinary Landscaping, or Contemporary Challenges in the History of Rhetoric,” Royster (2003) further argued that, far from reflecting a causal relationship with objective truth, historical “knowledge [is] an interpretive enterprise, a social construction” (p. 149). Since knowledge, including rhetoric as a species of historical knowledge, is socially constructed, rhetorical histories have served to privilege certain groups at the expense of others. Royster contended that these rhetorical histories often marginalized groups who were out of power, an issue of special importance in this chapter. Since disaster zones reflect the asymmetrical power relationships described by Pratt, it is vital that disaster zone histories such as the current study consider the fullest possible range of discourses (genres) representing the fullest possible range of voices (subject positions).

Royster (2003) thus critiqued the “deeply entrenched habit of standing in one place” (p. 149), or, in other words, of viewing rhetorical knowledge and histories from the lens of those in power. Doing so fails to reflect and *give voice* to the historical experiences and roles of the marginalized other. To that end, my critical rhetorical historiographic approach to *redefine* and *recover* disaster zone genres is intentionally democratic and admits of various subject positions, modes, and media (see Table 3.1, below).

Table 3.1: Redefined and recovered genres of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico disaster zone

Medium	Mode(s)	Discursive Artifact	Theme(s)	Speech Position(s)	Chapter(s)
Direct Visual Media	Graffiti and Street Art	[BP Oil Spill + Sea Turtle graffiti]	Mimicry	<i>Kategoria</i>	Chapter 5
		[sever bp graffiti]	Mimicry	<i>Kategoria</i>	Chapter 5
		[BP Trash Stencil]	Invective	<i>Antapologia</i>	Chapter 3
	Murals and Artworks	New Orleans Pelican Mural	Nature and Environment	<i>Kategoria</i>	Chapter 3
		“Louisiana Oil Tower” Mural	Nature and Environment; Invective	<i>Kategoria, Antapologia</i>	Chapter 3
	Clothing, Merchandize	T-shirts, Baby Clothing (Various)	Humor, Invective, Nature and Environment	<i>Kategoria, Antapologia</i>	Chapter 3
Direct Textual Media	Signs	Protest Signs (Various)	Invective, Humor	<i>Kategoria, Antapologia</i>	Chapters 3, 5
	Billboards	“Tony Baloney”	Humor	<i>Antapologia</i>	Chapter 3
Mass Print Media	Newspapers, Magazines, Print Journalism	(Various)	Nature and Environment	<i>Kategoria</i>	Chapters 3, 4
	Print Advertisements	“Make This Right” [via AdAge]	Nature and Environment	<i>Apologia</i>	Chapter 4
	Editorial Cartoons/Comics		Humor	<i>Kategoria, Antapologia</i>	Chapter 3
	Print Editorials or Commentary	The New York Times, The-Scientist	Nature and Environment	<i>Kategoria</i>	Chapter 3
Mass Digital Media	News (Radio, Television, Podcast)	NBC News Interview of Tony Hayward		<i>Apologia</i>	Chapter 3
	Television or Radio Advertisements	BP “Sorry” Ad		<i>Apologia</i>	Chapter 3
	Movies and TV (Entertainment)	South Park: “We’re Sorry”	Humor	<i>Antapologia</i>	Chapter 3
	Rap Music	Black Cobaine: “Spillionaire”	Compensation		Chapter 5
Networked or Social Media	Websites	Gulf Coast Claims Facility	Compensation		Chapter 5
	Blogs	<i>Ecocentric</i> (Time.com)	Nature and Environment		Chapter 4
	Twitter	@BPGlobalPR (Satire)	Humor		Chapter 3
	Facebook	Tony Hayward Apology, User Comments		<i>Apologia, Antapologia</i>	Chapters 3, 4
	YouTube	Various Videos, User Comments		<i>Kategoria, Antapologia</i>	Chapter 4
	Memes	BP Logo Memes (Various)	Humor	<i>Kategoria, Antapologia</i>	Chapter 3
	Apps	“The leak in your home town”	Humor	<i>Kategoria</i>	Chapter 3

This view of history and knowledge-making has specific implications for the “(re)landscaping” of rhetorical scholarship, and Royster (2003) proposed critically conscious historiography as a corrective to the traditional histories that privilege some experience and discourse while silencing others. By including a variety of genres in this chapter, I accordingly pursue *redefinition* of “what constitutes rhetoric” in the disaster zone. By extension, I also *recover* otherwise overlooked or marginalized subjects who produced or authored the discursive genres that may have otherwise been marginalized or even erased from rhetorical histories of the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone.

### **The Rhetorical Speech Set of *Kategoria*, *Apologia*, and *Antapologia***

Perhaps the most abundant and recognizable literate responses of the disaster zone are those characterized by genres of blame and apology, as responsible parties, victims, and outside observers attempt to explain, blame, excuse, and defend. In “*Kategoria* and *Apologia*: On Their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set,” Halford Ross Ryan (1982) stipulated that the genres of *kategoria* (accusation) and *apologia* (apology or defense) constitute a “speech set” in which the function of each genre and the vital issues pertaining to both must be understood in relation to each other (p. 254). Using two of Walter Fisher’s (1970) four motives for communication—affirmation and purification—Ryan explained that the motive of *kategoria* is to affirm or “to give birth to an image [...] through accusatory discourse,” while the motive of *apologia* is to purify, correct, or modify the previously affirmed “image through apologetic discourse” (p. 255). This speech set of accusation followed by apology or defense is easily recognizable following any scandal or wrongdoing, and it usually plays out in the media for multiple audiences.

However, the modern media landscape ensures that most high-stakes disasters are not only characterized by a finite speech set of *kategoria* followed by a responsive *apologia*. While these two genres still exist in the contemporary disaster zone, the expansion of discursive options available to subjects across media and networked communicative technologies also expands the speech set. Fittingly, more recent scholarship has shown that the speech set of *kategoria* and *apologia* is often followed by a further “acceptance or rejection” of the apology or defense (Tavuchis, 1991), in what Kevin Stein (2008) has labeled *antapologia*. According to Stein, then, an *apologia* may be followed by either an additional instance of *kategoria* to the original event, or by a “third component” of the speech set—*antapologia*—which he defines as a specific response to or critique of the *apologia*’s image-repair strategy (p. 19). Figure 3.1 (below) illustrates the discursive artifacts I have chosen to represent this unfolding rhetorical speech set within the 2010 Gulf of Mexico disaster zone in this section.

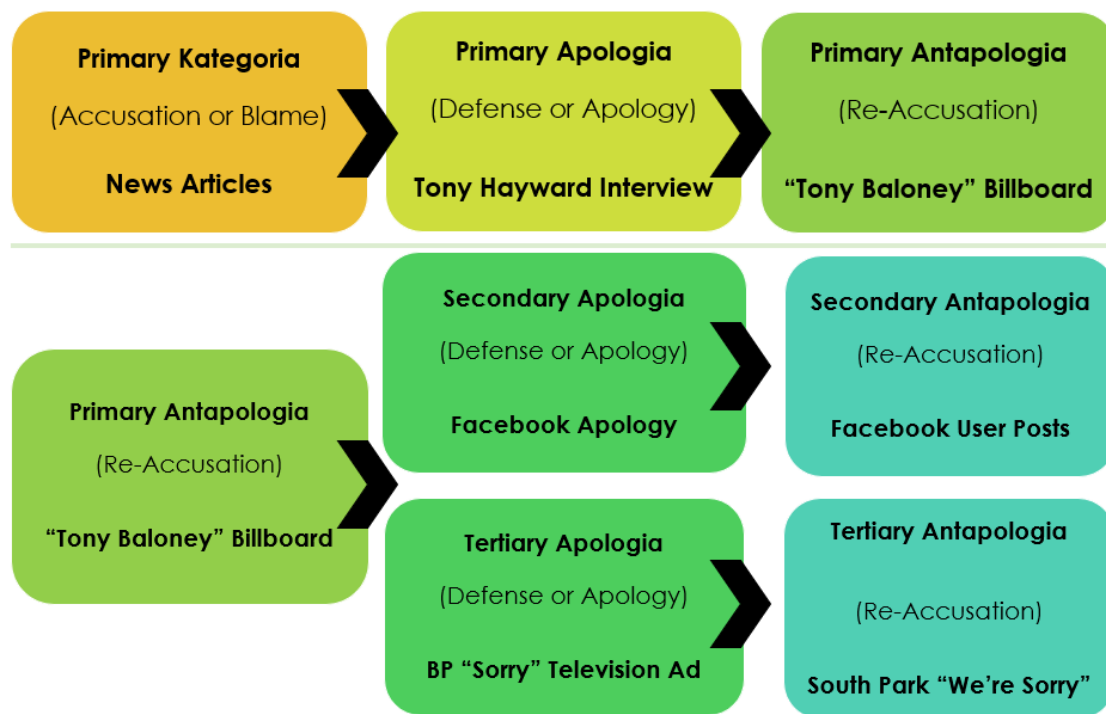


Figure 3.1: Examples of the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria*, *apologia*, and *antapologia*

In the disaster zone, as in any context, multiple lines of argument are being communicated through discourse at any given time. It is not the purpose of this chapter or the project as a whole to trace every line of argument; my focus in this chapter is to characterize genre participation rather than analyze the staseis of each argument. Thus, for the purposes of illustrating the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria*, *apologia*, and *antapologia* in the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone, I have chosen to analyze the central line of attack against BP and then-CEO Tony Hayward at various stages of *kategoria*, *apologia*, and *antapologia*.

### **1. Primary *kategoria*: News articles describing the explosion and oil spill**

In the case of the 2010 oil spill, the initial *kategoria* or accusation against BP was that it bore responsibility for the explosion, which injured and killed employees, as well as the oil spill or leak and its environmental effects. In this sense the initial *kategoria* could be considered collective as it took the form of many news articles across media, including print, web, television, and radio. Two articles from April 21, 2010—the day after the explosion—provided what information was known at the time and set up some of the points of accusation for which BP would be called to respond through *apologia*. An Associated Press article published on FoxNews.com began as follows:

NEW ORLEANS - Rescuers in helicopters and boats searched the Gulf of Mexico for 11 missing workers Wednesday after a thunderous explosion rocked a huge oil drilling platform and lit up the night sky with a pillar of flame. Seventeen people were injured, three critically. The blast Tuesday night aboard the Deepwater Horizon rig 50 miles off the Louisiana coast could prove to be one of the nation's deadliest offshore drilling accidents of the past half-century. (AP, 2010, n.p.)

This article, authored by a national news service and posted on a national news website, thus highlighted the human costs of the explosion. It went on to describe the Coast Guard's rescue efforts, the size of the rig and the depth it was drilling at, worker compensation and work schedules, and possible causes for the explosion. The article ended by highlighting the danger of offshore drilling and providing demographics on other deaths, injuries, and explosions in the region:

Working on offshore oil rigs is a dangerous job but has become safer in recent years thanks to improved training, safety systems and maintenance, said Joe Hurt, regional vice president for the International Association of Drilling Contractors. Since 2001, there have been 69 offshore deaths, 1,349 injuries and 858 fires and explosions in the Gulf [...]. (AP, 2010, n.p.)

This article thus emphasized the danger of offshore drilling, both generally speaking and in the specific context of the Gulf of Mexico, and this issue of danger and risk became an ongoing critique in disaster zone discourses following the spill. Interestingly, this web article was accompanied by a file photograph of the Deepwater Horizon rig in working condition, on a sunny day over blue waters, which taken before the explosion. The description of the aerial image was, "The Deepwater Horizon rig is shown operating in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico," which failed to reflect either in the description or in the image itself the severity of the explosion which would permanently close the rig. Thus, the visual argument represented a functional and environmentally benign oil well, as opposed to the dangerous and catastrophic reality described by the article text.

A similar example of journalistic *kategoria* was an April 21, 2010 article for the local Louisiana *Times-Picayune* newspaper (Purpura et al., 2010). In contrast to the article described above, this article was accompanied on the internet by a picture of four red ships circled around and spraying water on the engulfed Deepwater Horizon rig after the explosion. The caption read:

“Hours after the oil rig explosion, fireboats try to extinguish the blaze on the Deepwater Horizon rig south of Venice. At least 15 workers were injured and 11 workers are missing Wednesday after the Tuesday night blast.” Whereas the prior article’s picture displayed the working rig in majestic working condition, this article’s picture highlighted how the explosion’s fire and smoke clouds completely obfuscated the rig—only a small portion of the rig could be seen beneath the thick smoke clouds and fire. Similar to the first article, the text of this article described information about the oil rig as well as the Coast Guard’s rescue efforts. What is of note in this article is that it sets up the issue of possible environmental damage, which, as I show later in this chapter, is one of the main discursive themes of the disaster zone’s genres. Specifically, the article quoted Coast Guard Rear Adm. Mary Landry as saying, “We are only seeing minor sheening on the water. We do not see a major spill emanating from this incident.” This contrasted with then-vice president of BP David Rainey, who was quoted in the article as saying “There is the potential for a pollution event.” This statement, quoted in one of the first articles following the explosion, was ultimately proven true, yet its language of “pollution event” underscores how the choice of words from BP representatives never seemed to align with the severity of the environmental impact as seen by those who lived in the Gulf Coast region (as well as many who did not).

## **2. Primary *apologia*: Tony Hayward’s NBC Today Show Interview**

On May 30, over a month after the explosion, then-CEO Tony Hayward appeared in a television interview as he was visiting cleanup effort in the Gulf Coast. This interview was one of many that Hayward offered to print and news journalists and functioned as primary *apologia* (apology or defense) in response to the primary *kategoria* (accusation or blame) like the news articles above. In the interview, Hayward apologized in general terms and described the ongoing cleanup efforts:



We're sorry for the massive disruption it's caused to their lives. There's no one who wants this thing over more than I do. You know, I'd like my life back. So there's no one who wants this thing done more than I do and we are doing everything we can to contain the oil offshore, defend the shoreline and return people's lives to normal as fast as we can. There's just no effort being spared in any dimension. ([CNN], 2016, n.p.)

As I show below in rhetorical responses to this interview (as well as in Chapter 4), Hayward's gaffe became one of the most memorable and criticized discursive events in the 2010 oil spill disaster zone, inviting satirical responses, additional journalistic news coverage, and other discursive critiques. The quote that was most repeated in these critiques was "There's no one who wants this thing over more than I do. You know, I'd like my life back." However, there are rhetorical problems in the whole text which begin to exemplify one of Hayward's biggest challenges in his *apologetic* efforts; namely, Hayward seemed to have trouble identifying the contextual constraints on his subject position and, by extension, on his rhetorical appeals. In his comments, Hayward failed to recognize that he was being interviewed in his corporate capacity, with institutional constraints on his subject position. In other words, he was expected to speak for BP rather than for himself. By explicitly highlighting his own difficulties and, further, arguing that getting beyond these difficulties was a primary motivation for addressing the oil spill, Hayward's comments had an opposite rhetorical effect than that which he intended. Hayward tried to personalize his perspective and identify with the suffering of Gulf Coast victims in order to deflect blame and add weight to his apology. Instead, his *apologia* served as the basis for a wide variety of primary *antapologia* and secondary *kategoria*.

### 3. Primary *antapologia*: “Tony Baloney” billboard

Although many disaster zone subjects produced critical *antapologia* in response to Hayward’s interview comments, in my historiographic effort to redefine and expand what constitutes rhetorical participation in the disaster zone, I include as an example of primary *antapologia* a billboard in BP’s logo colors that portrayed a grinning caricature of Tony Hayward as “Tony Baloney,” dressed in a “BP” hat and accompanied by a paraphrase of Hayward’s controversial interview comments, “I Want My Life Back” ([JM], n.d., n.p.). Figure 3.2, below, shows the billboard, which I collected as a screenshot from a video posted online. Although there was no date on the video or the billboard itself, the user description of the video contextualized the billboard geographically and temporally within the 2010 disaster zone: “Locals in Grand Isle, Louisiana demonstrate their feelings towards the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico.” The billboard also included a URL for [www.TonyBaloney.org](http://www.TonyBaloney.org), which is now defunct and redirects to a web host. While Hayward’s gaffe was quoted and critiqued extensively in the media and online, this billboard, in its visual and textual simplicity, illustrates how *antapologia* seized on his statement, using it to portray Hayward and BP in a negative light, and inviting yet further *apologia*.



Figure 3.2: “Tony Baloney” billboard in Grand Isle, Louisiana

#### **4. Secondary *apologia*: Hayward's Facebook apology**

As critiques of Hayward's interview comments proliferated, Hayward and BP were called to directly respond and further apologize. On June 2, 2010, the BP Facebook page posted an apology credited to Hayward and titled "BP CEO Tony Hayward Issues an Apology for Remarks" ([BP America], 2010, n.p.). To briefly summarize here, the apology quoted the original wording that drew so much criticism and acknowledged that his comments were "hurtful." In this apology, Hayward places himself in this audience subject position by quoting his earlier statement and being "appalled" when he "read that recently." I more closely analyze Hayward's continuing ineloquence in this apology in Chapter 4.

#### **5. Secondary *antapologia*: Facebook user comments**

Following Hayward's secondary *apologia* on Facebook, users critiqued the apology and Hayward and BP more within the user comments section ([BP America], 2010, n.p.). These comments represent how the real, direct audience of Hayward's *apologia* were able to critique his discourse and respond again through *antapologia* almost in real time. While I describe and analyze some of these user comments more closely in Chapter 4, it is stunning when one steps back to think of the power disparity represented on each side of this discursive Facebook exchange. Hayward, a wealthy CEO for one of the world's largest and richest corporations, posted a brief textual apology, which was then immediately responded to and critiqued by actual users, representing not only the immediate disaster community, but also perhaps the broader audience paying attention to the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone.

## 6. Tertiary *apologia*: BP's "Sorry" television ad

A tertiary form of *apologia* that also responded to criticism of Hayward's television comments came in the form of a television ad. The day after Hayward's Facebook apology was posted, on June 3, 2010, BP started airing an apology ad featuring Hayward. CNN described the ad as containing "a carefully crafted message," perhaps contrasting the ad's scripted content to the uncared comments during his earlier television interview. In this advertisement Hayward was at times shown "on location" against a Gulf of Mexico backdrop, while at other times sweeping video footage of BP's cleanup and containment efforts were shown along with the audio. Hayward's audio message in the video ad, as transcribed by CNN, was:

The Gulf spill is a tragedy that never should have happened. BP has taken full responsibility for cleaning up the spill in the Gulf. We've helped organize the largest environmental response in this country's history. More than 2 million feet of boom, 30 planes and over 1,300 boats are working to protect the shoreline. Where oil reaches the shore, thousands of people are ready to clean it up. We will honor all legitimate claims. And our cleanup efforts will not come at any cost to taxpayers. To those affected and your families, I am deeply sorry. The Gulf is home for thousands of BP's employees and we all feel the impact. To all the volunteers and for the strong support of the government, thank you. We know it is our responsibility to keep you informed. And do everything we can so this never happens again. We will get this done. We will make this right. (CNN Wire Staff, 2010, n.p.)

As in his prior apologies, including the botched television interview and the later Facebook apology described above, Hayward attempted in this ad to straddle subject positions, on the one hand speaking in his corporate subjectivity as BP CEO (e.g., "We know it is our responsibility to

keep you informed. And do everything we can so this never happens again.”) and on the other hand identifying more with BP workers who are local subjects affected by the oil spill (e.g., “The Gulf is home for thousands of BP’s employees and *we* all feel the impact” [emphasis added]). Hayward’s audio message in this television ad also established discursive arguments that I analyze in the next two chapters. First, his assurance that, “We will get this done. We will make this right,” became a bit like a tag line for the BP damage control discourse, such as a series of print ads that I analyze in Chapter 4. Second, his conservative wording in saying “we will honor all legitimate claims” actually undercut his attempt to portray BP as generous and responsible by modifying the promise with the word “legitimate”; indeed, the question of what constituted a “legitimate” claim for victim compensation was and remains a central point of contention in the disaster zone, and the technologically mediated claims portal is the primary issue I examine in Chapter 5.

## **7. Tertiary *antapologia*: South Park’s “We’re Sorry” video**

I conclude this trace of the unfolding rhetorical speech set with a tertiary form of *antapologia*, which directly critiqued the above apology ad. The comedy television show South Park parodied Hayward’s “I’m Sorry” within one of its shows. The 24-second video clip description on the South Park Studies web site described it as “The President of BP issues an apology for the Gulf Spill” ([South Park], 2010, n.p.). In the video, a cartoon caricature of Hayward spoke directly to the audience and repeated variations of the phrases “We are deeply sorry” and “We’re sorry” in multiple settings, starting with a ship in what appears to be the Gulf Coast, followed by an arctic setting where the cartoon Hayward was petting a baby seal, then a domestic kitchen scene while the cartoon Hayward places cookies in the oven, followed then by Hayward skiing alone down a mountain—in each scene apologizing to the audience. In this clip, the monotone repetition of the apology phrase “I’m sorry” or “We’re sorry” robs the phrase of any

meaning. In addition, the variety of settings in which the cartoon Hayward was shown apologizing in the clip manages to critique both BP's efforts to show environmental concern and Hayward's wealthy socioeconomic status. The video clip ended with the cartoon Hayward stating that "BP has taken full responsibility for cleaning up the spill in the Gulf, and in doing so, we have changed our name from 'Beyond Petroleum' to 'Dependable Petroleum.' DP: We no longer fuck the earth, we DP it." This vulgar ending to the video, which implies a sexual act and visually shows two drills penetrating the earth, serves as a fitting transition to the next section, in which I characterize several disaster zone genres through which subjects communicate using "invective."

### **Invective in Disaster Zone Genres**

The crude sexual pun that ended the above South Park video clip is not an aberration within the discourses of the disaster zone. Perhaps it should not be surprising that a discursive context characterized by blame and defense between discursive subjects in asymmetrical power relations often results with those in relatively weaker positions of power using extreme discursive strategies to "speak truth to power." Indeed, my analysis of disaster zone discourses found "invective" to be a common rhetorical technique in the 2010 Gulf of Mexico disaster zone.

"Invective" has been studied elsewhere as a literary genre (e.g., Ciavolella & Rizzo, 2016). For instance, in the book *Archaeologies of Invective*, Robert Eisenhower (2007) proponent the literary study of invective:

It seems to me that, while such derogation is no doubt objectionable, there is little doubt that invective has played a catalytic role in the "golden ages" of literature and that we lose something when we confuse the literal and the figurative, when we become overly fearful or excessively cautious in enforcing the boundaries of 'proper discourse.' (p. 3)

In keeping with this chapter's rhetorical historiographic aims, I have chosen three diverse genres of disaster zone discourse representing the rhetorical appeal of invective: protest signs, murals, and graffiti or street art. It goes without saying that neither the genre type nor the chosen artifacts are meant to be exhaustive or complete, but they do serve the dual purpose of illustrating invective in the disaster zone while also painting a fuller picture of the media and modes of disaster zone genres.

### Invective genre 1. Protest signs



*Figure 3.3: Street protest signs illustrating the use of invective against BP*

The three protest signs in Figure 3.3 above (from July 29, 2010, June 7, 2010, and July 3, 2010, respectively) illustrate perhaps the most common correlation (outside of web user comments, which are discussed in Chapter 4) between a disaster zone genre and the rhetorical use of invective. Within the already contentious disaster zone context, protests are unique for being a site of contestation that is both discursive (rhetorical) and physical. In other words, as opposed to the large majority of published disaster zone discourses that are mediate and disseminated online, protest signs are—at least initially—direct and unmediated, and discursive subjects are physically present to communicate their arguments. The common theme among the three signs—which read “BP LIES / THE GULF / DIES,” “A TISKET / A TASKET / BP OIL / BLEW A / GASKET / NOW ANIMALS / NEED A CASKET,” and, simply, “BP / KILLS”—made explicit what is

widely implied visually and textually in other disaster zone genres: that BP is a killer. This is literally true in the sense that there were human fatalities and countless animal deaths from the Deepwater Horizon explosion, although these deaths were obviously not intentional on the part of BP. Nonetheless, framing BP as a killer accomplished some of the goals of the protestors, such as getting their message out. Despite the direct and “unmediated” nature of the protest signs, their invective messaging drew attention in the form of news articles and the accompanying photographs.

## **Invective genre 2. Murals**



*Figure 3.4: A mural illustrating the use of invective against BP*

The mural pictured above in Figure 3.4 makes a similar invective argument as the above protest signs, again framing BP as a killer. This triptych mural consists of, from left to right, a “Louisiana ~~Water~~ OIL Tower,” then-President Obama surrounded by question marks and the words “WHAT NOW,” and then depiction of the Gulf of Mexico coast from Texas to Florida in green, with a black-hooded grim reaper bearing the letters “BP” and the caption “YOU KILLED OUR GULF..... / OUR WAY OF LIFE!” The mural’s author seems to represent the subject position of a Gulf Coast resident victimized by the spill.



### **Invective genre 3. Street art**

Similar to the protest signs and murals described above, graffiti and street art are primarily direct, unmediated discursive genres, produced and consumed (received) locally within a specific physical context. In addition, each of these three invective genres have of the purpose of being seen and conveying a discursive message representing the subject view(s) of the author(s). In some cases, such as the stencil art pictured below in Figure 3.5, pictures of these direct visual genres are circulated online, carrying their message to wider audiences. This stencil was pictured in Houston, which sits just off the Gulf of Mexico and was also affected by the 2010 oil spill. While not as crude or extreme as other invective genres, this geometric stencil of a generic person throwing the letters “BP” in a trash can clearly insults BP and in a way implies that BP is “small,” “manageable,” and that it is within a person’s power to “dispose” of it. In Chapter 5, I analyze additional examples of disaster zone street art and graffiti as genres of cultural resistance.



*Figure 3.5:* Houston street art illustrating the use of invective against BP

### **Nature and the Environment in Disaster Zone Genres**

The examples of disaster zone genres described above make clear that environmental damage and the protection of nature are central lines of critique in disaster zone discourse, which began in the earliest news articles describing the explosion and oil spill and persists to articles

published online this year. Applegarth (2011) has studied genres of environmental literature, using the term to describe “a range of genres and forms of engagement with the natural world” (p. 51). I borrow her description of the definition but slightly modify it for the purposes of rhetorical historiography in this chapter. Below I describe three diverse modes of “environmental genres” of the disaster zone, “a range of genres and forms” that communicate about the 2010 oil spill’s environmental impact on the Gulf of Mexico: editorials in the *New York Times* and *The Scientist*, a street mural in New Orleans, the meme of the BP logo, and clothing items.

### **Environmental genre 1. New York Times and The Scientist editorials**

One of the primary themes in print genres of the disaster zones was to describe the extent of environmental danger or damage caused by the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Apart from news articles, where journalistic subjects attempted to present a factual account of environmental damage related to the spill, or blogs that represented ardent pro-environment interpretations of the disaster zone (such as the *Ecocentric* blog on Time.com that I analyze in Chapter 4), there also exists the genre of editorials or opinion pieces focused on environmental issues following the oil spill. For example, in an August 5, 2010 opinion piece in *The Scientist* magazine, Linda Hooper-Bui described the challenges of researchers trying to collect data from the Gulf Coast disaster zone ecologies. Her self-identified subjectivity as “an independent researcher” says just about all that needs to be said about her argument in the opinion piece. In other words, she is a “researcher,” yet she struggles in the disaster zone context to maintain her “independence”:

But I am having trouble conducting my research without signing confidentiality agreements or agreeing to other conditions that restrict my ability to tell a robust and truthful scientific story. I want to collect data to answer scientific questions absent a corporate or governmental agenda. I won't collect data specifically to support the

government's lawsuit against BP nor will I collect data only to be used in BP's defense. Whereas I think damage assessment is important, it's my job to be independent—to tell an accurate, unbiased story. (Hooper-Bui, 2010a, n.p.)

In this quotation Hooper-Bui ties defined “research” and “independence” inextricably together, bolstering her argument for increased access and independence for researchers in the disaster zone. Interestingly, she also twice described her role as a scientist in discursive terms: “to tell a robust and truthful scientific *story*” and “to tell an accurate, unbiased story [emphasis added]”.

In a later, April 24 editorial in *The New York Times*, Hooper-Bui (2010b) also lamented the lack of access for “independent researchers”: “The problem is that researchers for BP and the government are being kept quiet, and their data is unavailable to the rest of the community” (n.p.) Interestingly she described the disaster zone researchers as a community, which fits nicely with my conception of the larger disaster zone as a community of subjects participating discursively.

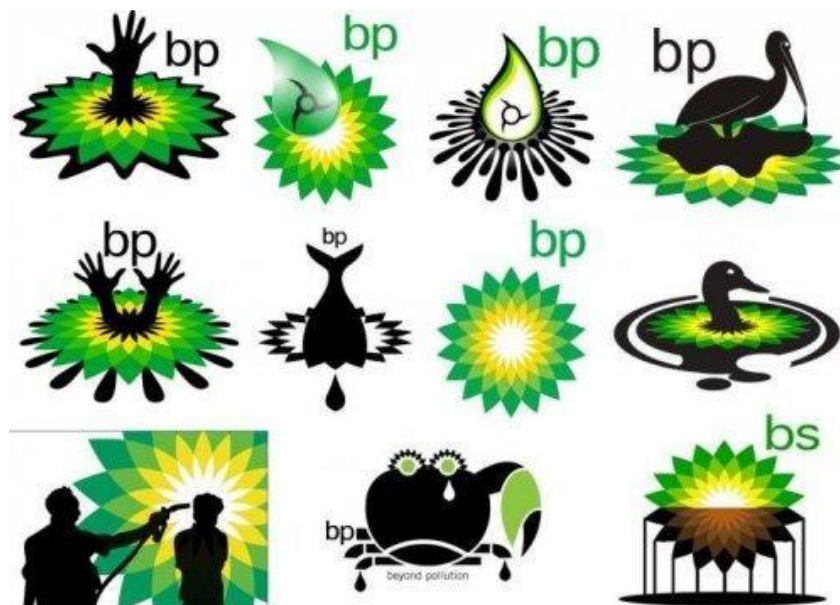
## Environmental genre 2. Mural



Figure 3.6: New Orleans street mural as environmental genre

The mural described earlier in this chapter (Figure 3.4) made an environmental statement, accusing BP with the words “YOU KILLED OUR GULF..... / OUR WAY OF LIFE!” Similarly, the above picture (Figure 3.6, above) on the side of a building in New Orleans showed a large pelican rising in flight out of a black ocean, with a “NOLA [New Orleans, LA]” emblem burning in the background like the sun or like the Deepwater Horizon rig after its initial explosion in April 2010 (D. Lambert, personal communication, 2017). As the Louisiana state bird, the metaphor of the bird taking flight could represent the disaster zone community’s ability to finally transcend the effects of the 2010 spill, although the black ocean crests and the oil dripping from its wings imply that the environmental damage will continue to last and affect local residents.

#### **Environmental genres 3 and 4. Memes and clothing with the BP logo**



*Figure 3.7: Memes of the BP logo as environmental genre*

BP’s characteristic green and yellow sunburst logo has been redesigned hundreds of times to represent the environmental consequences of the 2010 oil spill (see Figure 3.7, above). The act of reproducing and modifying an image such as the BP logo for comic or rhetorical effect has

turned it into a meme. In many cases, the logo was modified to show it dripping with brown or black oil. In other instances, illustrations of human body parts (arms or faces) or wetland animals (such as frogs, whales, turtles, and pelicans) were shown covered with oil. Often the sunburst logo was shown to represent the sun over the ocean; in one case, the BP logo was shown representing the mouth vent on a gas mask. Still other revisions to the logo show alternate words represented by “BP,” such as “broken promise,” “beyond pollution,” “be patient,” “blame other people,” or—in the case of the gas mask meme—“be prepared.”



*Figure 3.8: Clothing with the BP logo environmental genre*

The rhetorical effect of altering the BP logo as a meme does not only exist digitally, where most memes are produced and disseminated. In the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone, the BP logo meme extends to direct genre of clothing. Clothing featuring altered BP logos for rhetorical effect falls into many of the same categories described above: the addition of oil or animals and the changing of what the acronym “BP” stands for. Two examples of children’s clothing are shown above in Figure 3.8. The child’s shirt on the left featured a solid black seagull sits behind the white lettering “OIL SPILL,” and the bottom of the shirt stated in black letters “BP = Black Plague.” The children’s shirt on the right presents a large yellow and green BP logo as the background and a black pelican dripping with oil in the foreground. Tony Hayward’s reviled quote from the

botched television interview, “I’d like my life back,” curves along the top of the logo, and the words “boycott BP” are printed in black lettering beneath the pelican. The inclusion of this quote on a child’s shirt is puzzling, but it speaks to the fact that the intended audience for BP-themed clothing was probably adults rather than the children who wore them. Given the myriad visual and textual alterations in the BP logo meme, both online (digitally) and on clothing, almost every theme of *kategoria* (blame or accusation) related to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill is represented.

### **Humor and Kenneth Burke’s Comic Frame in Disaster Zone Genres**

In the aftermath of the 2010 BP oil spill, some of the disaster zone community responded in a surprising way: through humor. Many of the examples above function at least to some extent through humor, and humor was the explicit goal for examples such as the South Park “We’re Sorry” video described earlier. Editorial cartoonists, whose professional subjectivity invites them to approach every news story with humor and wit, also weighed in on BP, Tony Hayward, and the environmental and economic aftermath in the Gulf Coast.

Despite the rather consequential issues at play in disaster zone discourse—not least among them being life and death, the environment, and the economy—much of the genres of the disaster zone community critique each other or BP with humor. In “Choosing a Rhetoric of the Enemy: Kenneth Burke’s Comic Frame, Warrantable Outrage, and the Problem of Scapegoating,” Desilet and Appel (2011) utilized Kenneth Burke’s “comic frame” as a discursive approach. They noted how Burke’s emphasis on “action” leads to “drama,” and “Dramatism is always on the edge of this vexing problem that comes to a culmination in tragedy, the song of the scapegoat” (Burke qtd. in Desilet & Appel, 2011, p. 341). If the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone is understood as a “tragedy” in this sense, then disaster zone discourses—especially those of the speech positions of *kategoria*

and *antapologia*—could be understood as “scapegoating.” As this is a common theme across disaster zone discourses, I end my description of disaster zone genres in this chapter below by characterizing one unique genre, “The leak in your home town” augmented reality iPhone app.



*Figure 3.9: “the leak in your home town” iPhone app as humor genre*

According to the official app web site, the iPhone app called “the leak in your home town” is an iPhone app that lets users see the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill whenever they see a BP logo” (n.p.). The website describes what Figure 3.11 (above) illustrates, that any iPhone user can point the phone’s camera at a BP logo and see a broken cartoon pipe begin leaking cartoon “oil” into the surroundings. What is discursive about this is primarily that it critiques BP and allows anyone with an iPhone to turn the logo into an instance of *kategoria*. I included it here in an effort to fully round out or “redefine” what constitutes genre participation in the disaster zone discourse community. I include it as well because, in its visual simplicity, it gets to the heart of the story of the BP oil spill: much like the Exxon Valdez in decades past, BP—its name, its image, its very brand and logo—will forever be tethered to the disastrous Gulf of Mexico explosion and oil spill.

## Conclusions: The Disaster Zone as Interpretive Community

In “Genre, Location, and Mary Austin’s Ethos,” Risa Applegarth (2011) wrote that genre theories “draw on the language of *location*, *environment*, and *site* in order to characterize the work rhetors must do to navigate between strategy and social norm” (p. 49). While admittedly not exhaustive, this chapter traced a variety of real-world disaster zone genres, some of which have been studied elsewhere (e.g., Twitter and Facebook posts about the Gulf of Mexico oil spill), and some of which invite additional rhetorical scholarship (e.g., murals, street art, apps, and memes). My description, categorization, and analysis of disaster zone genres in this chapter parallels what Applegarth described:

Although new conceptions of genre are richly varied, in general, recent genre scholars have rejected classificatory, static, and restrictive modes of genre, replacing “container”: models with theories that emphasize social action, subject formation, and knowledge production (p. 49)

In the introduction to this chapter, I characterized the disaster zone as a discourse community characterized by subjective genre participation. As this chapter has shown, whatever their subjectivities in the disaster zone, the authors of disaster zone discourse are critical subjects, in that they interpret and critique events and other discourses as the basis for their own discursive production. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria*, *apologia*, and *antapologia* across any media and modes.

Having now established the disaster zone as a discourse community, and then having characterized the genres of the disaster zone as critical or interpretive genres, I conclude this chapter by defining the disaster zone as an interpretive community. Barbie Zelizer (1993) used the term “interpretive community” to characterize the profession of journalists. According to



Zelizer, an interpretive community is “united by its shared discourse and collective interpretations of key public events” (p. 219). Interestingly, by critically engaging genres of the disaster zone and undertaking critical rhetorical historiography, this chapter and my dissertation overall constitute one as yet untraced genre of the disaster zone. This situates my research and my scholarly subjectivity within the interpretive community of the disaster zone.

## **Chapter 4: The Epideictic Functions of Eloquence in the Disaster Zone**

### **National Contexts for Eloquence**

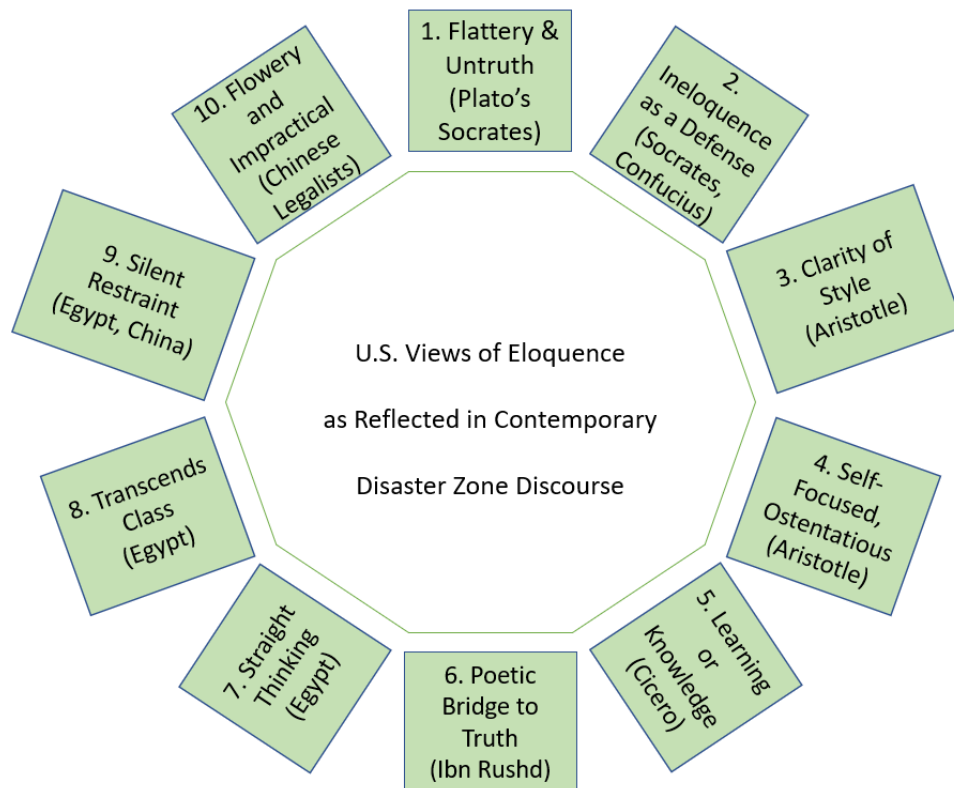
Less than two months after the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, then-CEO of BP Tony Hayward gave a June 1 television interview while touring coastal cleanup efforts. During the interview, he made the most memorable and controversial comments related to the oil spill, stating, “I’m sorry. We’re sorry for the massive disruption it’s caused their lives. There’s no one who wants this over more than I do. I’d like my life back” (Lubin, 2010; [climatebrad], 2010). Hayward was widely criticized, mocked, parodied, and vilified for highlighting his own hardship in his comments, but how should his apology, as well as BP’s wider attempts at “damage control,” be understood in the critical context of the disaster zone? In “Rhetoric and Eloquence: The Language of Persuasion,” Paddy Bullard (2013) illustrated how “Eighteenth-century [European] rhetoric is characterized above all by its urge to observe the natural sources of eloquence, to describe the phenomenon of untaught excellence in speaking and writing” (p. 84). In comparing English, Irish, and Scottish conceptions of eloquence, Bullard argued that “the development of critical commentary on the art of eloquence during the eighteenth century can be seen most clearly in terms of national context” in that contrasting national “approaches to the subject diverge because of variations in constitutional context; because of conflicting local allegiances to earlier thinkers; and because academic institutions had traditions of approaching the subject in contrasting ways” (p. 85). This argument—that unique national contexts influence citizens’ use of and attitudes towards eloquence—is germane for understanding how eloquence functions within the contemporary national U.S. context of the 2010 oil spill.

In Chapter 3 I showed how the disaster zone can be understood as a discourse community of rhetors participating in a rhetorical speech set of three genres: *kategoria*, *apologia*, and *antapologia*. For my purposes here, I use the term “damage control” to refer collectively to the *apologia* of BP and any of its representatives, including—most notably—then-CEO Tony Hayward. Elsewhere, scholars have analyzed BP’s attempts at damage control from various perspectives, including a BP website analysis and an analysis of the oil spill’s effect on food safety (Hall, Kice, & Choi, 2012). My aim in this chapter, however, is to show how disaster zone damage control (*apologia*) and its reception (*antapologia*) reflect rhetorical traditions of eloquence (see Figure 4.1, below).

Wendy Hesford (2006) noted how historical and contemporary research can work together in global contexts: “Turning toward the global, therefore, does not make archival or historical work irrelevant. On the contrary, the global pivot calls for new questions about and perspectives on the relation between past and present prototypes of globalization, consideration of how symbols and symbolic practices are appropriated, translated, and rehistoricized (p. 795). This chapter thus extends critical rhetorical historiography by situating contemporary disaster zone discourse within rhetorical traditions from around the world.

I begin by tracing various conceptions of and attitudes toward eloquence through Western, Chinese, Egyptian, and Arabic thought, providing contemporary examples from disaster zone discourse following the 2010 oil spill. I conclude the chapter by showing how attempts at damage control and the published critiques of these attempts serve epideictic functions, reflecting the dominative values of contemporary American society through praise and blame. Ultimately, I argue that the diverse rhetorical history of the United States is reflected in its complex view of the proper use of eloquence. Further, as eloquence is a commonly recurring basis for critique of the

asymmetrical power relationships represented in disaster zone discourse, I argue that subjectivity functions largely through the use and/or critique of eloquence, especially when used for damage control.



*Figure 4.1:* Complex U.S. attitudes towards eloquence reflect various rhetorical traditions

### **Tracing Rhetorical Traditions of Eloquence**

While the American public generally values, and even expects, a certain facility and eloquence in corporate and political discourse, too much eloquence is sometimes met with distrust or disdain in the public sphere, where it has been maligned as artifice or, worse, deception. These attitudes towards eloquence, divergent as they seem, have a long history among those who have theorized the functions and proper execution of public discourse. In fact, rhetorical traditions from a variety of cultures have characterized and critiqued eloquence through history. Various beliefs

about eloquence in both the Western rhetorical tradition (including Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero) and other rhetorical traditions from around the world (including Egyptian inscriptions, classical Chinese thought, and the Arabic scholarship of Ibn Rushd) illustrate views that in many ways anticipate contemporary damage control discourse in response to disasters such as the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Below, I trace these various conceptions of eloquence and describe how illustrative examples of disaster zone discourse reflect institutional or contextual constraints on subjectivity.

### **Example 1. Eloquence as contemptible flattery unaligned with truth**

As part of the foundation of Western philosophy, Plato's Socrates can be understood as representing the strongest critique of eloquent discourse in classical Greek philosophy. Socrates discounted eloquent rhetoric in several of Plato's dialogues, including the *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, and *Apology*, often condemning the Sophists' attempt to teach eloquent speech. In Plato's *Gorgias* (Waterfield, 2008), for example, Socrates argued against the Sophists, critiquing rhetorical appeals that function through flattery. Plato's Socrates denounced rhetoric for taking persuasion, rather than truth, as its object, and he specifically critiqued Gorgias and the Sophists for teaching eloquence for persuasive purposes: "And you'll teach him all he needs to know to persuade a crowd of people—not to make them understand the issues, but to win them over" (p. 23; 458e). As a corrective to the Sophists, Plato's Socrates prioritized understanding the truth over mere eloquence—which he took as a persuasive characteristic of rhetoric—and he therefore derided eloquent rhetoric as mere "flattery" that is both "bad" and "contemptible" (p. 30; 463d). Plato's Socrates further articulated a "critique of the art of speaking" in the *Phaedrus* (Waterfield, 2009, p. 47; 260d), where he characterized eloquent, persuasive speech as an "unsystematic knack." He claimed that "without a grasp of truth there neither is nor ever could be genuinely professional

speaking” in the way the Sophists claimed to teach (p. 48; 260e). For Plato’s Socrates, then, truly skilled speaking should aim towards *truth*, as he believed philosophy does, instead of *eloquence*, as he claimed rhetoric does (p. 48; 260e).

An example of the critique of BP’s damage control discourse as untrue flattery is the YouTube compilation video “The video Tony Hayward, CEO of BP, DOESN’T want you to see.” This video juxtaposed multiple interviews from Hayward that portray inconsistent comments about the extent of environmental damage and about BP’s prioritization of safety. For example, following an introductory slide with the text “But safety’s his number one priority, right?”, Hayward was shown in 2010 responding to the CNN interviewer’s litany of safety violation accusations by stating, “All I can say is since I’ve been in this job for 3 years I have focused remorselessly on safe and reliable operations. [...] And, of course, you can never do enough.” Following this CNN interview, another editorial slide with the text “That’s strange. What did he say at a business lecture on 12 May 2009?” introduced a video of Hayward stating, “we had too many people that were working to save the world. Which sort of lost track of the fact that our primary purpose in life is to create value for our shareholders. How you do that, you need to take care of the world. But our primary purpose in life was *not* to save the world.” The YouTube video compilation ended with an ominous slide stating “Tony Hayward – nowhere to run, nowhere to hide!” ([Oxford3215], 2010, n.p.)

This last statement did not reflect any attempt by Hayward to hide from the media or shy away from disaster zone damage control; in fact, Hayward was a regular guest on news programs, provided many print journalism interviews, and testified before congress (as described in the examples that follow). Instead, what the author of this YouTube video seemed to imply by that ominous critique was that Hayward could not “run” or “hide” from his past statements, and that

his priorities seemed to depend on his subject position, which reflected the context of his remarks his intended or perceived audiences at any given time. Specifically, in the May 2009 speech to business audiences, Hayward occupied a purely corporate subjectivity, extolling the profit motive of BP for its shareholders. This contrasted sharply with the CNN interview a year later, in which Hayward's corporate subjectivity was constrained by mass audiences and a focused interviewer who expected safety and environmental concerns to be of primary importance following the 2010 oil spill. A cynical reading such as that of the YouTube video's author implies that Hayward was untethered to truth and contemptibly used eloquence to flatter or appeal to audiences in each situation. From a postmodern rhetorical perspective, however, these examples highlighted how one person serving as CEO of BP over the span of a year was subject to different contextual constraints, first preceding and then following the oil spill, and that different audience expectations constrained the discursive options available while occupying each subject position.

### **Example 2: Ineloquence as its own defense**

Returning, again, to consider the distrust of eloquence in ancient Greek philosophy, it therefore makes sense that Socrates explicitly defended himself against the accusation that he employed rhetoric and eloquence for his own purposes and had misled his audiences by making the worse case seem the better. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates began his defense by rejecting this claim outright and again expressing his continued distrust of eloquent speech as characterized in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*. Specifically, Plato's Socrates defended himself against his accusers by noting his *deficiency* of eloquence in the rhetorical or persuasive sense, saying that his accusers "ought to have been ashamed of saying this, because they were sure to be detected as soon as I opened my lips and displayed my deficiency." In so doing, Socrates slyly defended his speech by instead aligning his discourse with the pursuit of truth. He jokingly redefined "eloquence" to mean

“truth” and, in so doing, turned his accusers’ words back on them: “unless by the force of eloquence they mean the force of truth; for then I do indeed admit that I am eloquent. But in how different a way from theirs!” By again elevating the pursuit of truth over the pursuit of persuasion, Socrates temporarily redefined his own truth-seeking as a more noble “eloquence,” one which he claimed is the only accusation of eloquence that could fairly be made against him. Paradoxically, Socrates thus utilized eloquent (rhetorical) speech in order to deny and condemn eloquence for merely persuasive purposes. In keeping with his critiques of eloquent speech, Plato’s Socrates thus defended “eloquence” only insofar as it aligns with truth and knowledge.



*Figure 4.2: BP CEO Tony Hayward’s Facebook Apology on June 2, 2010.*

One example from Gulf Coast damage control discourse mirroring the Socratic defense above was the public Facebook apology BP posted on June 2, 2010 on behalf of then-CEO Tony Hayward (see Figure 4.2, above). Unlike Hayward’s initial video comments that caused such



public outrage and critique, the Facebook apology erased Hayward's identity in almost every way possible—there was no image, audio, or video to accompany the text, and although the apology was attributed to Hayward and placed in quotation marks, it was posted by BP. In this sense, the subjectivity of Hayward as CEO, or even as author of his own apology, was subsumed under the corporate (institutional) subjectivity of BP CEO. In the text of the apology, Hayward implicitly claimed ineloquence as its own defense, placing himself in the audience position and reacting in shock to his own words: "I made hurtful and thoughtless comments on Sunday when I said that 'I wanted my life back.' When I read that recently, I was appalled" (BP America, 2010, n.p.).

By phrasing his apology from the subject position of a passive reader of his earlier ineloquent remarks, Hayward was able to distance himself and avoid taking full responsibility for speaking them in the first place. His declaration that "Those words don't represent how I feel about this tragedy, and certainly don't represent the hearts of the people of BP" was effective in further distancing him from the original comments; the use of "those" instead of "my" implied distance instead of ownership, and the second half of the sentence shifted the focus from Hayward to "the hearts of the people of BP—many of whom live and work in the Gulf—who are doing everything they can to make this right" ([BP America], 2010, n.p.). The implied argument in this Facebook apology is that unscripted damage control speech is often ineloquent, unrepresentative, and should not be taken as seriously as more eloquent, scripted or published damage control discourse. With regard to subjectivity, the implication is that Hayward's ineloquent earlier comments were personal and did not reflect his official institutional subject position as BP CEO. The complete stripping of Hayward's personal identifiers, such as his voice or physical appearance, in the text-only BP Facebook post only accentuated the complete institutional constraints on his subjectivity in this capacity, as evidence by the discursive apology.

### Example 3: Eloquence as clarity of style

Later examples from Greek philosophy, such as those of Aristotle, portrayed slightly less critical views towards eloquence than those of Socrates, instead allowing for its use as a pragmatic rhetorical technique. As a former student of Plato's Academy, Aristotle was surely aware of Plato's deep distrust of eloquence for merely persuasive purposes; nonetheless, in *On Rhetoric* (Kennedy, 2007), Aristotle detailed specific stylistic techniques that helped make discourse more stylistic and persuasive to audiences. *On Rhetoric* was concerned with describing the best "path" to follow for persuasive discourse, and Aristotle included style as part of the definable and teachable body of knowledge of rhetoric. Specifically, in Book III, Aristotle discussed style and delivery with regard to clarity in persuading one's audience: "it is not enough to have a supply of things to say but it is also necessary to say it in the right way, and this contributes much toward the speech seeming to have a certain quality" (p. 194; 1403b). Aristotle then spent most of Book III outlining specific ways to communicate "in the right way," including that "one should pay attention to delivery" (p. 195; 1404a). Aristotle's main focus, however, was clarity, and he argued that "the virtue of style [should] be defined as 'to be clear'" since "speech is a kind of sign, so if it does not make clear it will not perform its function" (p. 197; 1404b).

Despite the many critiques of Tony Hayward and BP's damage control discourse following the oil spill, one thing that often came through was Hayward's seeming recognition that it was important to be as clear as possible about his understanding of the severity of the disaster. In two of his damage control discourses—the Forbes interview and his scripted opening statement to the U.S. congressional subcommittee—Hayward repeatedly used the word "clear" to explicitly highlight his understanding of BP's circumstances or its intended messaging. For example, in his May 2010 Forbes interview, Hayward explicitly stated the importance of clarity in BP's objectives

and in communicating those objectives: “I do think being calm, clear and focused is important. *We’re very clear* [emphasis added] in each stage of this what our objectives are” (Helman, 2010, n.p.). The next month, while describing the severity of the tragedy in his congressional statement, Hayward said, “This is a tragedy: people lost their lives; others were injured; and the Gulf Coast environment and communities are suffering. This is unacceptable, I understand that, *and let me be very clear* [emphasis added]: I fully grasp the terrible reality of the situation.” In the same congressional statement, Hayward described BP’s Gulf Coast clean-up efforts as follows: “federal law requires BP [...] to pay to clean up the spill and to compensate for the economic and environmental impacts of the spill. *Let me be clear* [emphasis added]: BP has accepted this responsibility and will fulfil this obligation” (“BP chief,” 2010, n.p.). The irony of these latter two statements following “let me be very clear” and “let me be clear” is that they each referred to a fact or reality that was widely accepted and should not have required added emphasis or clarity. These facts—the “terrible reality” of the “tragedy” and the fact that BP would be “required” to pay for clean-up and victim compensation—were plainly obvious conditions of the aftermath of the oil spill; they would never need to be stated by Hayward or another person in their purely social subjectivity. The need for emphasizing a basic understanding of these plainly obvious facts may have been an issue of timing, as the congressional hearing followed Hayward’s earlier television gaffe and its associated Facebook apology. Since Hayward failed to adequately show that he grasped the extent of the tragedy and BP’s culpability in prior discourses, the institutional constraints of congressional and media pressure forced him in his institutional subjectivity to highlight with explicit clarity that BP understood the severity of the tragedy and was prepared to take full responsibility for the clean-up and compensation costs.

#### **Example 4: Eloquence as an ostentatious focus on the speaker**

Despite Aristotle's elevation of clarity and style in delivery as described above, he ultimately cautioned against overusing or misusing stylistic elements, which differentiated between effective style and distracting eloquence, perhaps reflecting Plato's memorable distrust of overly eloquent speech. For example, Aristotle explained that "propriety is a matter of contraction or expansion [of what is being said]. As a result, authors should compose without being noticed and should seem to speak not artificially but naturally. (The latter is persuasive, the former the opposite; for people become resentful, as at someone plotting against them [...])" (p. 198; 1404b). Aristotle therefore constrained effective discourse to that which is appropriately stylistic without becoming overly eloquent: "Thus, it is clear that if one composes well there will be an unfamiliar quality and it escapes notice and will be clear" (p. 200; 1404b). In other words, effective *style* should facilitate clarity, whereas ostentatious *eloquence* draws attention to itself—and the rhetor—at the expense of clarity and should therefore be avoided.

While the most memorable example of ostentatious eloquence drawing attention to the speaker might have been the video in which Tony Hayward said he wanted his "life back" (Lubin, 2010; [climatebrad], 2010), the critique that Hayward ostentatiously over-personalized the oil spill continued to follow him in other instances of BP damage control discourse. For example, in his lengthy prepared opening remarks to the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations on June 17, 2010, Hayward again drew attention to his own subjective experience of the oil spill and its aftermath. He described how he had "spent a great deal of my time in the Gulf Coast region and in the incident command centre in Houston," implying that it was a sacrifice to spend "my time" in the disaster zone. He also described how personally affected he was, both initially and as time went on: "When I learned that 11 men had lost their

lives in the explosion and fire on the Deepwater Horizon, I was personally devastated. Three weeks ago, I attended a memorial service for those men, and it was a shattering moment. [...] My sadness has only grown as the disaster continues. [...] Indeed, this is personal for us at BP” (“BP chief,” 2010, n.p). During the same hearing, U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky critiqued Hayward’s ostentatious self-focus in real time, saying he was “probably not as devastated as the widows that testified before our committee” ([Illinois9th], 2010, n.p.).

What these discursive examples illustrate is that Hayward continued to struggle with the challenge of balancing his social subjectivity, as a person who feels sorrow and regret over the oil spill disaster, with his institutional subjectivity as then-CEO of BP, who rightfully was expected to own part of the blame and take responsibility for rectifying the situation. While it is normal and perhaps even admirable that Hayward, in his social subjectivity, felt “sadness” and was “shatter[ed]” by the employee deaths and wider Gulf Coast fallout from the oil spill, he failed to recognize that his personal experience of the disaster would never compare to—and indeed should not have been compared to—the experiences of those directly affected, such as the spouses of those killed or those who lived full time in the Gulf Coast disaster zone. Speaking in the news interview where his first gaffe occurred, and then testifying to a congressional subcommittee where he continued to personalize his experience of the tragedy, Hayward should have recognized that he was speaking in his institutional subjectivity as a representative for BP, and thus that ostentatiously drawing attention to his own subjective experience of the tragedy was inappropriate. As an interview subject or a speaker at a congressional hearing, Hayward represented BP—a corporation—and might have attracted less criticism if he attempted to maintain that institutional subjectivity rather than ostentatiously drawing attention to himself through emotive discourse.

### **Example 5: Eloquence as representing learning or knowledge**

Returning, now, to consider the Western rhetorical tradition after Plato and Aristotle, the Roman rhetorician Cicero laid out rhetorical principles that coupled eloquence and wisdom in effective oratory in *On the Ideal Orator* (May & Wisse, 2001). In contrast to Plato and, to a lesser extent, Aristotle, Cicero elevated eloquence as the supreme goal of the ideal and skillful orator: “For I declared that [...] the eloquent speaker was someone who could amplify and give distinction to whatever he wished in a more marvelous and magnificent way, and whose intellect and memory encompassed all the sources of all the subjects that had any bearing on oratory” (p. 79; 1.94). Cicero also explained how the ideal orator, if such a person ever existed, would build on natural talents through comprehensive learning; “devoting himself with greater effort to listening, reading, and writing, he will emerge as the kind of orator we are looking for—an orator who may rightly be called not just an accomplished speaker, but an eloquent one” (p. 79; 1.95). In explicit contradistinction to the Platonic/Socratic critique of eloquence versus philosophy, Cicero (through the speaker Crassus) noted that the “one thing that surpasses all others [would be] the learned orator” because eloquence paired with “knowledge is present in the perfect orator, while the knowledge of the philosophers does not automatically imply eloquence. And although they scorn it, yet it is inevitably true that eloquence somehow sets a capstone upon their arts” (p. 266; 3.143). Thus, whereas Plato derided eloquence as masking a lack of knowledge or understanding, Cicero instead defined the ideal eloquent orator as a person with extensive knowledge of many subjects, a knowledge which both informs and strengthens oratory.

Using Cicero’s definition as a guide, it could be argued that Tony Hayward was far from the ideal orator in his discursive damage control efforts following the 2010 oil spill. Hayward, speaking in his institutional subjectivity as a BP CEO and, more broadly, as a representative of the

oil industry, repeatedly used the defense that the causes of the oil spill were *as yet unknown*, if not *unknowable*. For example, in his May 2010 interview with Forbes, Hayward made statements such as “We really need to understand get the results of the investigation” and “There will be time to really understand fully what’s happened and therefore what we need to do differently” (Helman, 2010, n.p.). Similarly, in his scripted opening remarks to the congressional subcommittee in June 2010, Hayward repeated this line of defense. He claimed that “None of us yet knows why it happened,” and “We don’t yet have answers to all these important questions” regarding the oil spill’s causes, the extent of environmental damage and cleanup efforts, and how the oil spill related energy policy more broadly (“BP chief,” 2010, n.p.). Several days after the congressional subcommittee appearance, a Time.com science writer on the *Ecocentric* blog critiqued Hayward’s unscripted comments before the subcommittee:

And of course no one will forget Hayward’s bravura performance before Congressional investigators on June 17, when he revealed that he apparently knew very little about, well, anything at all that had to do with the Deepwater Horizon accident. A summary of particularly choice Hayward quotes from that extremely uncomfortable day:

I can’t possibly know why the decisions were made [on the rig].  
I don’t know.  
I can’t answer the question in that form. I can’t recall the number.  
I can’t answer because I wasn’t there.  
I’m afraid I can’t recall.  
I can’t recall that either.  
That was a decision I was not party to.  
I don’t know.  
I’m afraid I don’t know that either. (Walsh, 2010, n.p.)

The contemporaneous critique by congressional subcommittee members, as well as the later critique by the Time.com blog author, was that Hayward—and, by extension, BP—lacked

sufficient knowledge to answer even the most basic questions about what caused the spill, who was responsible for important decisions, and why. While it may be granted that Hayward personally was not a party to all decisions made relating to the oil spill, by speaking in his institutional or corporate subjectivity as BP CEO, the public's expectation was that Hayward would be able to provide such answers. Despite how seemingly well-crafted and persuasive his scripted or unscripted remarks may have been in responding to other questions, by lacking basic knowledge about so many facets of the topic at hand—the causes and effects of the oil spill—Hayward's performance was critiqued as “uncomfortable” for its Ciceronian ineloquence.

#### **Example 6: Eloquence as a poetic bridge to truth or knowledge**

Turning to consider a view of eloquence from outside of—although concerned with—the Western rhetorical tradition, Arabic scholar Ibn Rushd (also known as Averroes) represents the “Middle Eastern contribution to Western scholarship within the rhetorical tradition” of Aristotle's texts (Borrowman, p. 354). Ibn Rushd was “able to stress the importance of rhetoric for ‘inquiry and instruction,’ and, thus contradict the then prevalent tendency to restrict the power of rhetoric to eloquence” (Clark, p. 377). Shane Borrowman characterized Ibn Rushd as valuing poetic discourse “by making it a syllogistic practice as concerned with the search for truth as any other logical practice” (p. 352). Ibn Rushd's approach to Aristotle's rhetorical texts therefore elevated poetic or stylistic speech to a discourse of inquiry and truth-seeking, a view that contrasts sharply with how both Chinese and Platonic thought differentiated between truth and eloquence, often elevating the former over the latter. Thus, Ibn Rushd's emphasis on poetic discourse that “owes much to oratory and leans heavily upon it” (p. 352) also closely reflects Cicero's elevation of oratory as a possible bridge between philosophical knowledge and persuasive eloquence.



An example of poetic eloquence used to further knowledge or understanding in Gulf Coast disaster zone discourse is the recurring use of military metaphors. For instance, in his May 2010 interview with *Forbes*, Tony Hayward invoked Churchillian World War II metaphors to describe coastal protection measures:

On the shore, it's called defend the beaches. We've got now 10,000 people, 4,000 fishing boats defending the beaches. I have resorted on occasion to some Churchillian statements. The analogy with Normandy is quite good. It is like the Normandy landing. We don't know when we'll be successful but we will be successful. We will prevail. We can't predict exactly when that will be. I've also resorted to Churchill in the matter of: "When in hell, keep going." (Helman, 2010, n.p.).

Hayward explicitly paralleled his executive subject position to the executive subject position of Churchill during war. By drawing on militaristic metaphors and referencing a beloved British leader and a famously ambitious battle, Hayward thus bolstered not only his image, but also the image of BP in its efforts to “defend” the coast and survive the oil spill disaster.

Elsewhere, militaristic metaphors were also used to represent those in relatively less powerful subject positions than Hayward. In an April 2015 Times-Picayune web post about environmental effects five years after the spill, journalist Mark Schleifstein described “an army of scientists probing an urgent public question: Was the spill destroying the Gulf of Mexico’s ecology?” (Schleifstein, 2015, n.p.). This central metaphor for the collective mission of scientists reflected how their efforts to measure the effects of the spill were repeatedly stifled by corporate and governmental representatives: “It wasn’t the first or last time independent research efforts after the spill were disrupted [...]. Other scientists were physically blocked from accessing affected areas, and many who had access working for BP and for federal and state governments were

muzzled by confidentiality agreements” (Schleifstein, 2015, n.p.). Interestingly, both Hayward’s and Schleifstein’s uses of militaristic metaphors represented protecting and caring for the same Gulf Coast ecology, except that Hayward used the metaphor of Normandy as a more literal defense of the coast and Schleifstein used it more poetically to refer to a besieged scientific mission dedicated to the advancement of knowledge. Another way to look at the distinction is that Hayward used the metaphor to represent defending the coast in advance of environmental damage, whereas Schleifstein wrote five years later about efforts to understand the damage that had already occurred. What this illustrates is that the disaster zone lends itself to certain kinds of eloquent discourse—such as commonly used militaristic metaphors—and that such poetic or metaphoric references transcend subject positions as well as time, persisting from the early days of the disaster to retrospective discourse several years following the disaster.

### **Example 7: Eloquence as straight thinking**

If we continue to look outside of (and, in some cases, before) Greek and Roman rhetorics, other rhetorical traditions from around the world often articulated other conceptions of and responses to eloquence. According to David Hutto (2002), for instance, Old and Middle Kingdom Egyptian rhetoric (approximately 3100-1550 BC), much like Ciceronian rhetoric, ascribed great value to eloquence, which even had its own “personified deity of eloquent speech, named Hu” and was “one of the attributes of the godlike pharaoh” (pp. 220-221). Hutto built on “Lichtheim’s assertion... that Egyptian eloquence was joined with straight thinking, and that it was the Greeks who [later] discovered that rhetoric could be used for bad purposes” (p. 226). This favorable Egyptian conception of eloquence in the service of “straight thinking” can be likened to Aristotle’s argument that style should facilitate clarity rather than distract from it, except that Aristotle also cautioned against ostentatiously eloquent speech.

Examples of disaster zone discourse and BP's damage control efforts often drew attention to straight thinking or referenced the thinking process, itself. In his May 2010 *Forbes* interview, for instance, Tony Hayward repeatedly described his thinking process as it related to disaster response and safety measures, saying "I think it's too early" to draw conclusions about deep water drilling, but also, "You need to be thoughtful about understanding the risk and that's going to come from the investigation." Responding to a question about safety changes to projects around the world, Hayward further elevated the importance of thinking through the problem: "you want to be certain you're eliminating risk, not deluding yourself into thinking you've eliminated risk." Interestingly, he presented the metaphor of an "aperture" to describe "holistic" risk assessment: It's having the aperture very wide rather than narrow. [...] People just didn't expect that what they *thought* [emphasis added] was perfectly pure oil actually had some water in it, and therefore you could get corrosion. It sounds simple, but it was an aperture that was too narrow *in terms of thinking about the risk* [emphasis added]." What this illustrates is that, as opposed to occupying a social subjectivity, Tony Hayward's institutional or corporate subjectivity placed constraints on how he spoke about his thought processes relating to risk and safety. Given the incredible fallout from the BP oil spill and the risk for further fallout if similar environmental disasters were to happen, Hayward's subject position compelled him to explain his thinking processes surrounding risk with as much clarity and detail as possible. Implicitly responding to the common critique that oil corporations did not know what they were doing or care to think about safety, Hayward's remarks had the added benefit of conveying to the audience that Hayward and BP did take drilling safety and environmental risk seriously.

### **Example 8: Eloquence as transcending social and economic class**

In his analysis of Egyptian rhetorics, Hutto (2002) also described how eloquence sometimes transcended distinct power relations and hierarchical social divisions in Egyptian society: “language was recognized as a great source of power, that ability is nevertheless recognized (at least in literary works) as belonging just as likely to the most powerless members of society” (p. 225). For instance, the Egyptian story “The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant” apparently ascribed eloquence to all classes of Egyptians: “skill with language, or eloquence, does not necessarily belong only to a particular class or group of people” (p. 224). This view also potentially distinguishes some Egyptian conceptions of eloquence from Cicero’s, as “the Egyptian view clearly is that anyone can be born with a basic ability (although other references indicate the idea of learning to be a skilled speaker)” (p. 225). This latter view aligns more closely with the Ciceronian view of eloquence for an ideal orator, representing innate skill cultivated through broad learning and knowledge.

In the disaster zone, where subjects in asymmetrical power relations (including different social and economic classes) engage through discourse, the idea that eloquence transcends class became evident in critiques of eloquence by those who were not in power. In fact, many of the critiques of BP and Tony Hayward following the 2010 oil spill equated his ineloquence with his wealth and perceived greed. This was a common source of critique in user comments responding to Hayward’s June 2010 Facebook apology. On Facebook, for example, users posted comments such as “Nice job, Mr. \$4 million-a-year big mouth.....” and “you just fucking care about money but you are destroying the only world we have to live on, STOP THE SPILL ALREADY!” Another Facebook user comment posted in response to Hayward’s Facebook apology similarly emphasized the disparity in wealth: “FUCK YOU BP-from one pissed off and heartbroken

Floridian preparing to watch my beloved state be destroyed in the coming days. 14 BILLION IN PROFIT A YEAR. 66 MILLION DOLLARS A FUCKING DAY. AND BITTERLY FOUGHT TO NOT SPEND A LITTLE EXTRA MONEY ON PROPER EQUIPMENT AND SAFETY FEATURES” ([BP America], 2010, n.p.).

However, there exists a wide middle ground of subject positions between Facebook users and BP CEO Hayward, as shown during June 2010 congressional subcommittee hearings. For example, Rep. Jay Inslee offered a similar line of critique as the Facebook users during Hayward’s June 2010 testimony. Questioning Hayward about BP’s insufficient emphasis on safety, Inslee compared the money invested in safety to Hayward’s annual salary as BP CEO: “British Petroleum is investing about ten million dollars a year in safer drilling technology. How does that ten million dollars a year compare to your compensation last year, for instance?” ([jayinslee], 2010, n.p.). Even more to the point, Rep. Mike Doyle explicitly pointed out how Hayward’s elite position did not reflect sufficient eloquence or knowledge in his appearance before congress:

Those of you at the top don’t seem to have a clue about what was going on this rig. I’m sitting here thinking I could be a CEO of an oil company. I hear it pays a little bit better than being a member of congress. Because I’ve watched you in front of this committee and you’re not able to give us much information on anything here” ([CongressmanDoyle], 2010, n.p.)

The Facebook user comments and congressional questioning illustrated that there was a basic distrust of large corporations as greedy, and Hayward—in his corporate subjectivity representing BP—thus represented wealth and greed. Like the commonly recurring militaristic metaphors described in a previous example above, it is clear that highly asymmetrical power relations in the disaster zone, which include but are not limited to financial asymmetries, generate critiques of

ineloquence based on the perceived wealth or greed of corporations and their subjective representatives, such as Hayward.

### **Example 9: Eloquence as silent restraint**

While much of the world's rhetorical traditions evaluated the characteristics and proper uses of eloquent speech, other rhetorical traditions have considered *restraint* and *silence* as sometimes preferable to discourse. For instance, although Hutto (2012) highlighted the value of innate ability and learned eloquence for the Egyptians, he ultimately argued that silence and restraint were the predominant Egyptian rhetorical techniques, given the conservative culture of Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt (para. 233)—a view which relates to later rhetorical views of silence in China. In contrast to earlier Egyptian notions of a positive eloquence across social classes, George Q. Xu (2004) described how eloquence was maligned by Confucianism and other classical Chinese thought. For example, Xu articulated a Confucian hierarchy of rhetorical acts, with “silence” at the top and “eloquence for expediency” with “glib speech” considered negative types of discourse at the bottom of the hierarchy: “verbal eloquence was not valorized by classical Chinese thinkers, and on the contrary the views found in their texts reveal a general mistrust of it” (p. 115). This distrust of eloquent speech mirrors the way Plato's Socrates did not trust eloquent speech from the Sophists, but, unlike Plato's Socrates, the Confucian view proposed silence—rather than truth—as the ideal.

Due to the exigence for discursive response in the context of the disaster zone, silence is often deemed insufficient, yet it could be argued that silence is preferable to gaffes or offensive comments. Silence on certain topics or aspects of a crisis may, in fact, facilitate damage control by avoiding unnecessary distractions or drawing attention to the speaker. In the Chinese rhetorical view of silence as an eloquent discursive act, speech was sometimes seen as unnecessary and less

preferable to, for instance, action. For example, in his May 2010 *Forbes* interview, Hayward described how, “At the end of the day, *actions speak louder than words* [emphasis added]. I can say this stuff forever and ever, but when it turns up on the ground— [...] maybe the message will get out” (Helman, 2010, n.p.). A month later, Hayward repeated his emphasis on actions instead of words in his scripted opening statement to Congress. He said, in response to Americans’ “concerns, fears, frustrations—and anger—”:

I understand it, and I know that these sentiments will continue until the leak is stopped, and until we prove through our actions that we will do the right thing. Our *actions will mean more than words*, and we know that, in the end, we will be judged by the quality of our response. Until this happens, *no words will be satisfying* [emphases added]” (“BP chief,” 2010, n.p.).

Damage control and disaster zone discourses also represent fallout for political representatives. For example, in a 2010 television interview, President Obama explained his choice not to communicate regularly with Hayward and BP following the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Obama said that he valued silent restraint and expected action over empty words: “I’m not interested in words. I’m interested in actions. [...] Look, I would love to just shout and holler because, just, I’m thinking about this day in and day out. But my main job is to solve the problem” ([StrippingTheMedia]), 2010, n.p.). The above two examples of Hayward’s disaster zone damage control discourse, along with Obama’s political critique, suggest that corporate subjects (Hayward) and political or governmental subjects (Obama) within the disaster zone context each recognized the limits of spoken discourse and the rhetorical power of silent restraint.

### Example 10: Eloquence as impractical argumentation

In addition to Confucianism, other classical Chinese schools of thought paralleled Plato's famous distrust of eloquence. For instance, Xu (2004) noted that the Daoists "rejected the folly of pride and self-assertion" and formed an ethical view of speech: "To talk little is natural. [...] Truthful words are not beautiful; beautiful words are not truthful" (p. 116). The Daoist elevation of truth over eloquence, while pointing out the underlying distinctions between the two, is akin to the defense Socrates argued in the Plato's *Apology*. Similarly, Xu described the Mohists of China as believing that "the wise discerns all in his mind but speaks simply. [...] In speech, not quantity but ingenuity, not eloquence but insight, should be cultivated" (p. 116). The ancient Chinese Legalists represented another, somewhat similar critique of eloquence from the Chinese rhetorical tradition, as they "disdained 'indulgence in argumentation with no useful purpose and flowery eloquence with no practical results'" (p. 116).

An example of disaster zone discourse that criticized BP's damage control campaign is an AdAge article describing and critiquing a magazine and newspaper print advertisement campaign two months following the spill. The author, Michael Bush (2010), described how BP had been running daily full-page print advertisements with taglines such as "We will get it done. We will make this right" and touting "the largest environmental response in this country's history. Bush described the damage control discourse as "an enormous image crisis and a seemingly unwinnable battle for BP" on account of political investigations, BP's "failed attempts at plugging the leak," and "reports that BP has restricted access to journalists in certain areas." Bush quoted Chris Gidez, a crisis response expert, as saying "BP can't begin to think about rebuilding its reputation until it stops the oil leak" (n.p.) These contemporaneous critiques of BP's ambitious damage control campaign reflect the above Chinese critiques of eloquence as impractical argumentation. In other



words, even though Gidez described the advertisements as “bold and strong” and representing a large-scale communications effort, Bush and Gidez concluded that BP’s damage control efforts were “ringing hollow” because the daily advertisements featuring seemingly persuasive promises were not matched by actions such as stopping the leak. The print advertisement campaign amounted to what the Chinese Legalists might describe as “indulgence [...] with no useful purpose and [...] no practical results” (Xu, 2004, p. 116).

### **Example 11: Eloquence used to critique (in)eloquence**

One additional, and perhaps telling, parallel between Socratic and Chinese rhetorics is how Socrates used eloquent speech to malign eloquence, and how Confucians and other schools of Chinese philosophy similarly sidestepped their own use of eloquence, in what Xu (2004) called “the irony of [...] employing [eloquent] speech to denounce eloquence” (p. 122). For his part, Confucius claimed to have “merely transmitted (old traditions) without creating anything new,” thus stating that everything originated from sage masters, and he accordingly did not create new eloquent discourse such as that which his philosophy critiqued. As noted above, Plato’s Socrates reframed and defended his use of eloquence as truth-telling, differentiating his use of eloquence from the mere flattery or persuasion he derided.

The use of eloquence to critique eloquence could be seen throughout discursive responses to Tony Hayward’s and BP’s attempts at damage control following the 2010 oil spill. A prime example of critical subjects using eloquence to critique eloquence is the many members of U.S. Congress who interviewed Hayward in June 2010. For example, Rep. Eliot Engel told Hayward:

Well Mr. Hayward, perhaps your lawyers have told you to be very cautious, but it’s really an insult for you to come to this committee and keep repeating the same thing, evade questions, evade answers, and just repeat again and again that you were not responsible

and that we have to wait for an investigation. [...] You're really insulting our intelligence, with all due respect. [...] Mr. Hayward, let me just say, with all due respect, I, like everyone else here and everyone else in America, is thoroughly disgusted. I think you're stalling, I think you're insulting our intelligence, and I really resent it. ([Engel2462], 2010, n.p.)

As this excerpt shows, Rep. Engel and other congressional interlocutors of Hayward were positioned to utilize eloquence in the critique of Hayward's (in)eloquence. As elected representatives for the country that was most affected by the oil spill, they occupied combative subject positions against Hayward, who represented the corporation deemed to be at fault. These congressional members also had the unique position, unlike journalists, victims, or casual media observers, to first question Hayward and then critique both the content and the style (eloquence) of his answers in real time.

### **Conclusions: The Epideictic Functions of Disaster Zone (In)Eloquence**

The above examples of disaster zone discourses following the Gulf of Mexico oil spill illustrate how efforts at damage control—and critiques of these damage control efforts—attempted to navigate acceptable uses of eloquence, reflecting views in various, well-established rhetorical traditions of eloquence from around the world. Whereas Platonic and classical Chinese schools of thought valued truth (and silence) over eloquence, Aristotle, and Ibn Rushd's interpretation of Aristotle's work, emphasized the effectiveness of poetic and stylistic devices for persuasive communication, especially oratory. While ancient Egyptians valued rhetorical silence, they sometimes elevated eloquence in much the same way that Cicero did in his descriptions of an ideal orator, as one whose skill is improved through learning and knowledge. Each of these views of eloquence reflects cultural beliefs about truth, persuasion, and how human power relationships

function through discourse in a culture. These complex and contested rhetorical traditions help illustrate contemporary Americans' seemingly paradoxical expectation and critique of eloquence in the disaster zone.

I conclude this chapter by arguing that discursive attempts at damage control and the critical reception of these attempts serve epideictic functions, reflecting the dominative values of contemporary American society. As a stylistic rhetorical appeal, eloquence transcends various disaster zone genres and modes of discourse, and disaster zone subjectivities are constructed and function through these discourses to achieve Aristotle's notion of *epideixis*, or a public rhetoric of praise and blame (para. Segal, 2005). Epideictic rhetoric was one of Aristotle's three public occasions for rhetoric, which also included forensic rhetoric and deliberative rhetoric. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle described epideixis as the discourses that discuss "virtue and vice and honorable and shameful" (Kennedy, 1991, p. 75). In particular, he defined "whatever are the works of courage or signs of courage or have been done courageously are honorable; also just things and works justly done [are honorable]" (p. 77). Along these lines, Aristotle explained that "the just is honorable, and not to be defeated is characteristic of a brave man. And victory and glory are among brave things" (Kennedy, 1991, p. 78). Clearly, the uses of eloquence and the associated critiques of disaster zone (in)eloquence described earlier in this chapter functioned epideictically in this sense, as reflecting survival or victory over catastrophic or tragic conditions. In any disaster zone communication—whether on Facebook, in the journalistic media, or in a congressional hearing—the goal is to eloquently gain or maintain some rhetorical advantage.

Specifically, I use Aristotle's description of epideixis in accordance with Hartelius and Asenas's (2010) extension of the term to include epideictic purposes: "Classically conceived, epideictic oratory is produced as a response to certain formal exigencies: funerals, weddings,

commencement ceremonies, inaugurations, keynote addresses, and so on [...] however, we are concerned with how [...] rhetoric writ large serves epideictic purposes” (p. 367). As the case of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill illustrates, the disaster zone context reflects both Aristotle’s classical conception of a formal exigence for epideixis, as well as Hartelius and Asenas’s extension of the concept, which builds on

Condit’s functional approach to theorizing epideixis. According to her [Condit’s] triad of speaker and audience functions, epideictic rhetoric (1) makes sense of a confusing social world, (2) displays the orator’s performance in a way that pleases the audience, and (3) creates and maintains community. (2010, p. 367 n. 9)

By describing and analyzing the uses and critical reception of eloquence in public discourses of the disaster zone above, it becomes clear how epideixis—a rhetoric of values—helped reproduce subject positions, such as the corporate subjectivity of Tony Hayward, the political or governmental subjectivities of congressional members and President Obama, journalistic and media subjectivities, and even the victim subjectivities of Gulf Coast residents posting comments to BP and Tony Hayward on Facebook.

In rhetoric scholar Judy Segal’s (2005) words, “Epideictic rhetoric is a culture’s most telling rhetoric, because, in general, we praise people for embodying what we value, and we blame them for embodying what we deplore” (p. 61). The critical discourse analysis of damage control and other disaster zone discourses in this chapter clearly illustrates epideictic rhetoric’s functions of public praise and blame. From the beginning, Hayward was critiqued for his ineloquence, and every following critique of his varying attempts at eloquence—on Facebook, YouTube, and in Congress—further constrained the discursive responses available in his subject position. Given his institutional corporate subjectivity as BP CEO during the oil spill, Hayward was critiqued, not

for his ineloquence in its own right, but rather because he and BP were blamed for “embodying what we deplore” as a result of the oil spill. In other words, it was BP’s and Hayward’s culpability for causing the economic and environmental disaster of the 2010 oil spill in the first place that invited a barrage of critiques for their (in)eloquent attempts at damage control. As journalist Gus Lubin (2010) fittingly summarized for Business Insider online, “BP has stumbled through numerous PR glitches, including an insensitive tweet which they attributed to a hacker. Of course, these mistakes aren’t the ones that matter” (n.p.).

## Chapter 5: Interfacing the Disaster Zone

### Interface as a Disaster Zone Genre

As the prior two chapters have shown, the disaster zone *as interpretive discourse community* is characterized by a wide variety of genres through which subjects accuse or defend (e.g., Chapter 3) or praise and blame (e.g., Chapter 4). If we consider the disaster zone as having an “institutional center” around which discursive subjects negotiate asymmetrical power relations, then the genres discussed in the prior two chapters could be understood as representing the “center” of the disaster zone, as they were available to a wide variety of subjects. By contrast, in this chapter, I analyze genres at the “center” and “periphery” of the disaster zone—an admittedly artificial binary that is nonetheless theoretically illuminating. For my purposes here, “center” genres include the Gulf Coast Claims Facility victim compensation portal, whereas “periphery” genres afford agency through appropriation and resistance of institutional constraints.

Throughout this final chapter I draw conclusions about the relevance and importance of these issues for the discipline of RWS. I begin by analyzing RWS disciplinarity in terms of “positive” and “negative” liberties for discursive subjects. I then use the distinction between positive and negative liberties to characterize institutional constraints on subjectivity in “optional” and “necessary” disaster zone genres. Genre analyses are pursued according to the “center/periphery” distinction described above. I first analyze the *interface as discursive object* in the form of a reception study of the online victim compensation portal and its real-world reception as reflected in published metadiscourse such as blogs. I then problematize the center/periphery binary of the disaster zone and analyze *interface as discursive context* by looking at three

“periphery” genres: rap music, graffiti, and protest. I conclude the chapter by redefining the disaster zone as interface.

### **Towards (Inter)Disciplinarity: Positive vs. Negative Liberties**

Disciplinarity is a recurring concern underlying much scholarship in RWS—including my research—and yet notions of disciplinarity are complex and contested. From one perspective, there are those who defend a disciplinarity identity, however loosely or diversely conceived, and argue that this disciplinarity is generative for theorizing rhetoric and teaching writing. As an influential text defending this view of disciplinarity, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg’s (2000) critical introduction to *The Rhetorical Tradition* resisted essential definitions by describing rhetoric in complex terms. The editors explained that “[i]t is less helpful to try to define it [rhetoric] once and for all than to look at the many definitions it has accumulated over the years and to attempt to understand how each arose and how each still inhabits and shapes the field” (p. 1). This orientation, with its focus on diversity rather than essential disciplinary unity, enabled the rhetorical historiography within *The Rhetorical Tradition*, allowing the editors to construct “a more detailed historical and theoretical picture of the development of rhetoric.” For Bizzell and Herzberg, then, rhetoric is “a complex discipline” characterized by its multiple definitions and diverse traditions (p. 1).

An alternative conception of the (inter)disciplinarity of RWS may be found in “The Constitution of Rhetoric’s Tradition,” in which Maurice Charland (2003) critiqued the disciplinarity of rhetoric based on many of the same diverse characteristics Bizzell and Herzberg (2000) highlighted. According to Charland, rhetoric is not a discipline because it lacks a specific historical point of view and objective criteria for study, except insofar as it “signals a commitment

to the idea of agency in discourse” (p. 119). Charland thus characterized rhetoric as defined only through *negation*, in that rhetoric distinguishes itself from philosophy and other disciplines which it is *not* (para. 119). However, like Bizzell and Herzberg, Charland did not devalue RWS through this characterization; instead, he proposed that “rhetoric’s non-identity offers certain autonomy” (p. 120). In other words, he argued that its very lack of disciplinary constraints could be utilized as a “potential source of strength” (p. 121).

The distinction between *positive* and *negative* liberties is useful for understanding how these two arguments, alternately in defense of and arguing against disciplinarity, reflected different understandings of the enabling or constraining function of disciplinarity and the epistemic nature of RWS. Bizzell and Herzberg’s (2000) insistence that rhetoric is a discipline, however complex, prioritized “positive liberty”—in other words, the complex disciplinary characteristics of rhetoric create the very conditions from which rhetorical scholarship is possible. Charland’s (2003) opposing claim, that the lack of disciplinary constraints on rhetorical scholarship is a source of strength, instead exemplified the philosophical concept of “negative liberty,” by which freedom is defined by “absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints” (“Positive and Negative Liberty,” 2003). As noted, Charland’s view of negative liberty highlighted the agency implicit in discursive acts and actors.

Interestingly, the underlying concepts of positive versus negative liberties are often associated with collectives versus individuals, respectively. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007) explained that, “[w]hile negative liberty is usually attributed to individual agents, positive liberty is sometimes attributed to collectivities, or to individuals considered primarily as members of given collectivities.” This distinction fittingly reflects Charland’s (2003) and Bizzell and Herzberg’s (2000) respective attention to collective versus individual agency in



rhetorical scholarship. For instance, Bizzell and Herzberg's insistence on rhetorical disciplinarity highlights how a *collective* conception of the discipline (to which their edited collection contributes) established the grounds for agency in rhetorical scholarship, whereas Charland's critique of rhetorical disciplinarity endowed *individuals* with the agency to pursue their own scholarly interests in an interdisciplinary manner, untethered from traditional disciplinary constraints.

However, *collective* and *individual* liberties within rhetorical scholarship do not constitute a simple oppositional binary. I would argue they instead mutually constitute and are constituted by genre constraints and affordances. In this chapter, I use *interface* as a literal description as well as an operational rhetorical concept that promotes both collective and individual liberties as they function through agency and subjectivity. Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) wrote that "When collective (and individual) identity is investigated by discourse analysis, the starting point is to identify which subject positions—individual or collective—the discursive structures indicate as relevant. That can be done by looking for the nodal point around which identity is organized" (p. 46). In this chapter I propose that *victim subjectivities* are most associated with institutional constraints in the "center" genre of the victim compensation process, whereas *subjective agency* is associated more with civic or political participation in "periphery" genres.

### **From "Optional" to "Necessary" Genres**

An understanding of positive versus negative liberties also illuminates the *constraints* and *affordances* genres provide for disaster zone subjects. In "Technology, Genre, and Gender," Wells (2005) discussed the concept of "affordances" provided by subjective participation within genres.

As opposed to genre *constraints*, genre *affordances* can be understood as possibilities for action or subjective agency.

In *Discourse Analysis*, Barbara Johnstone (2002) repeatedly illustrated how “discourse is never a transparent medium for the exchange of information.” She further argued that “[s]ocial identity and social status are not facts about people which either ‘come through’ in communication or do not; they are interactive processes that are created in discourse” (p. 192). The interactional and ongoing processes of identity production become clear when comparing different types of disaster zone genres. In Chapters 2 and 3, I traced a variety of disaster zone genres and argued that participation in these genres is what characterizes the disaster zone as an interpretive discourse community. The majority of these genres—for instance the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria*, *apologia*, and *antapologia* described in Chapter 2—could be described as “optional,” in the sense that disaster zone subjects, as *social subjects*, have a choice between which genres to participate in, as well as the choice *whether or not* to participate in disaster zone genres at all. Similarly, my analysis in Chapter 3 of how disaster zone subjects used these genres to praise or critique (in)eloquence further implies that participation in those genres was in some respect “optional.” Social subjects using these “optional” genres may also be described by the “collective” identity of the disaster zone community.

By contrast, I would argue that certain other disaster zone genres are “necessary” for social subjects to position themselves as other subjectivities, such as “victim” or “civic agent.” Specifically, near the “institutional center” of the disaster zone, the institutional subject position of “victim” necessitated participation in the genres of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility victim compensation fund. At the other end of the spectrum, the “periphery” subject position of “activist” or “political or civic agent” requires participation in genres of resistance, such as music, graffiti,

or protest. As opposed to the “collective” identity of the overall disaster zone community, subjects participating in these “center” and “periphery” genres could be described as doing so “individually.”

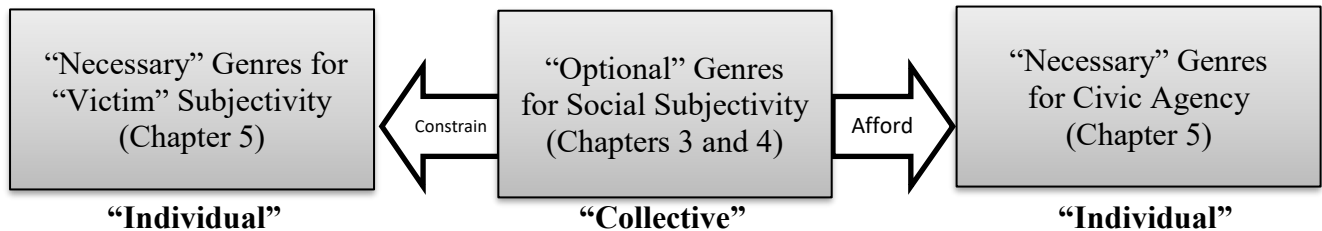


Figure 5.1: The subjective constraints and affordances of optional versus necessary genres

Figure 5.1 (above) shows the relative constraints and affordances of different genres on disaster zone subjects positions. As this figure shows, “optional” genres as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 represent a mixture of constraints and affordances on social subject positions in the “collective” disaster zone community, whereas the “necessary” genres described in this chapter represent the extremes of genre constraints on institutional subjects (individual “victims”) and genre affordances for resistant subjects (individual “agents”).

### From Discourse Analysis to Interface Studies

In *Lingua Fracta: Towards a Rhetoric of New Media*, Collin Gifford Brooke (2009) described a necessary disciplinary “revaluation, the move from text to interface (or from page to screen[...])” (p. 23). His call for interface studies “necessitates that we begin thinking less in terms of (textual) objects and more in terms of (medial) ecologies” (p. 23). Although I would argue that the Critical Discourse Analytical approach of this project considers textual objects as constituted

by and constituted of medial ecologies, in this chapter I heed Brooke's call for interface studies, analyzing both literal and figurative interfaces of the disaster zone.

Disaster zone interfaces potentiated—and, in some cases, required—participation by discursive subjects and audiences engaged in differential power relationships. Such interfaces functioned through the literal and figurative en-framing of meaning through visual and textual discourse. In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger (1977) drew on Heisenberg to critique man's final delusion about the rhetor's en-framing of meaning. Whereas “It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself. [...] *In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself*” (p. 14). The modern proliferation of networked communication technologies has only exacerbated the extent to which rhetors en-frame their communications for audiences. Both the size and the diversity of a rhetor's audience have increased, and—as I will later argue—networked technologies constrain and enable the frames through which messages are communicated between rhetor(s) and audience(s). It is important to understand at the outset that although these frames imply contact between the rhetor and the audience, even rhetor without an explicit audience may serve as his or her own audience and thereby exist in contact with himself or herself, serving as both rhetor and audience for an en-framed communication.

### **Discourse as Interface: Problematizing Institutional Genres**

Scholarly consideration must be given to the constraining or enabling forces of institutions (e.g., corporations and governments) on disaster zone subjects. As I have shown, the “collective” discourse community of the disaster zone is defined by its participation in certain discursive genres. While disaster zone genre participation avails itself to a variety of subject positions, the

only genres that require the subject position of “victim” are those related to the institutionalized victim compensation process.

*Table 5.1: Victim compensation procedures for recent disaster zones*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Disaster Zone</b>	<b>Victim Compensation Procedure</b>
1999	Columbine High School Shooting	Sheriff’s Office Victim Fund
2001	September 11	September 11 Fund
2005	Hurricane Katrina	Court Settlements
2007	Virginia Tech Shooting	Local Victim Fund
2010	BP Gulf of Mexico Explosion and Oil Spill	Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF)
2012	BP Gulf of Mexico Explosion and Oil Spill	Court Supervised Settlement Program

Victims of individual crimes as well as large scale disasters in the U.S. are often eligible for monetary compensation. In the case of large-scale traumatic events, followed by institutionalized corporate or governmental compensation procedures (see Table 5.1, above). Victims of crimes, such as the shootings at Columbine or Virginia Tech, had access to victim compensation either through the local government or through private insurance claims. In response to the events of September 11, the U.S. Department of Justice established a dedicated victim compensation fund, which was open for applications until December 2003. Similarly, after the Gulf of Mexico oil spill in 2010, the U.S. government mandated that BP “endowed a \$20 billion fund to compensate victims of the gulf oil spill and said it would play no role in awarding the dollars”; the lawyer Kenneth R. Feinberg, who administered the earlier September 11 victim

compensation fund, was placed in charge of BP's Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF). The claims process operated primarily through an online application interface with optional in-person assistance at local offices throughout the Gulf of Mexico coastal region.

The GCCF was discontinued in 2012 and replaced by the Court Supervised Settlement Program, whereby the legal system settled victim claims. Although the online GCCF portal (interface) is no longer accessible, I archived several of the pages, menus, instructions, and announcements from when the GCCF website was active in 2011-2012. These artifacts illustrate the purposes and genres of BP and the GCCF while also constraining the types of discursive productions available for victims during the claims process.

### **A Reception Study of the Victim Compensation Interface**

My descriptions in the preceding sections of the disciplinary concerns of RWS and the subjective constraints and affordances of genres on disaster zone subjects suggests that analysis from rhetorical and technical communication perspectives may be particularly illuminating. My analysis is informed by Thomas Gruber's work on conceptual information design. Gruber argued that explicit conceptualizations are designed; in other words, "when we choose how to represent [information visually], we are making design decisions. To guide and evaluate our designs, we need objective criteria that are founded on the purpose of the resulting artifact..." This is a highly rhetorical conception of document design, whereby one evaluates the design based on its intended *use(s)* and, by extension, its *user(s)*. This user-centered approach relates to Robert Johnson's (1998) scholarship in the area of user-centered technology design. Johnson argued that designers are limited in their ability to plan for user's needs and expectations, so users should therefore be consulted and involved in the design process to meet their needs.

The takeaway point is that the end of a technology is in its *use*; thus, the “end” of technical communication such as the online Gulf Coast Claims Facility interface is its *use* or reception by actual users. To that end, in the following three sections, I analyze 1) the usability of the technical instructions (primary discourse) of the compensation application process via the official Gulf Coast Claims Facility web interface, 2) the self-referential macrodiscourse posted to the GCCF portal, and 3) independent blogs as critical metadiscourse, which I argue constitute a reception study of the claims process. This section could be described as a “self-usability” or “auto-usability” study; whereas a usability typically implies a real-world user as opposed to a scholarly analyst, the online interface is no longer available or operational, and thus for usability purposes I approximate the role of a user and analyze the archived content according to usability measures.

### **1. Primary discourse analysis of the GCCF interface**

In this section I first show several screenshots archiving the GCCF interface from March 21, 2012, after which I analyze some aspects of this level of primary discourse. To my knowledge, these screen shots are the only archived version of the GCCF web portal. Thus, for the purposes of historical documentation and historiographic “recovery” I have chosen to include all of the screen shots I archived from when the web portal was still active.



Figure 5.2: Gulf Coast Claims Facility main page

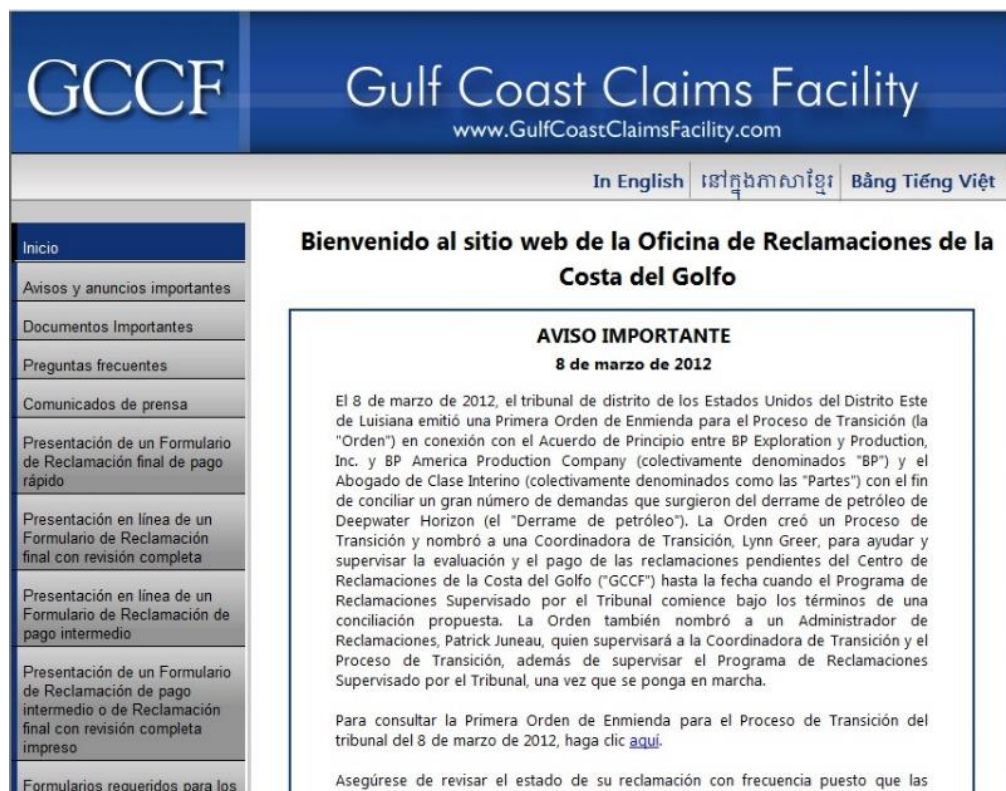


Figure 5.3: Gulf Coast Claims Facility main page in Spanish



Home
Important Notices and Information
Important Documents
Frequently Asked Questions
Press and News Releases
File a Quick Payment Final Claim Form
File a Full Review Final Claim Form Online
File an Interim Claim Form Online
File a Paper Interim or Full Review Final Claim Form
Attorney Portal
Required Forms for Claimant Representatives
Claims Site Offices
Check Claim Status
GCCF Program Statistics
Free Legal Assistance
To Report Fraud
Contact Us

Figure 5.4: Gulf Coast Claims Facility main navigation menu [selection]

Home	<b>Important Documents</b>
Important Notices and Information	
Important Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Court's Order Amending the Court's previous Order of December 28, 2011 dated January 4, 2012</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">GCCF's January 3, 2012 Response to the Court Regarding the Order and Reasons dated December 28, 2011</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Order and Reasons As to the Motion to Establish Account and Reserve for Litigation Expenses dated December 28, 2011</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Second Modification to Final Payment Methodology</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Modification to Final Payment Methodology</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Protocol for Interim and Final Claims</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Final Methodology</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Interim Payment Claim Form</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Full Review Final Payment Claim Form</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">GCCF Document Requirements</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">GCCF Change of Address Form</a></li> </ul>
Frequently Asked Questions	
Press and News Releases	
File a Quick Payment Final Claim Form	
File a Full Review Final Claim Form Online	
File an Interim Claim Form Online	
File a Paper Interim or Full Review Final Claim Form	
Attorney Portal	
Required Forms for Claimant Representatives	
Claims Site Offices	
Check Claim Status	
GCCF Program Statistics	
Free Legal Assistance	
To Report Fraud	
Contact Us	

Figure 5.5: Gulf Coast Claims Facility “Important Documents”

Home
Important Notices and Information
Important Documents
Frequently Asked Questions
Press and News Releases
File a Quick Payment Final Claim Form
File a Full Review Final Claim Form Online
File an Interim Claim Form Online
File a Paper Interim or Full Review Final Claim Form
Attorney Portal
Required Forms for Claimant Representatives
Claims Site Offices
Check Claim Status
GCCF Program Statistics
Free Legal Assistance
To Report Fraud
Contact Us

## Important Notices and Information

### IMPORTANT NOTICE Updated January 19, 2012

#### **Update on the Court's Order Requiring the GCCF to hold-back 6% of payments to MDL claimants.**

In an Order and Reasons of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana, dated December 28, 2011, the Gulf Coast Claims Facility ("GCCF") was ordered to withhold 6% of any and all amounts determined to be paid to eligible GCCF claimants to be deposited into a Court supervised Escrow Account. The purpose of the Escrow Account is to establish a fund from which common benefit litigation fees and expenses may be paid to the Plaintiffs' Steering Committee and other lead or liaison plaintiff counsel if and when awarded by the Court.

In a letter dated January 3, 2012, the GCCF sought clarification of the Court's Order and on January 4, 2011, the Court issued an Order clarifying and amending its previous Order to make clear that the 6% hold-back applied prospectively to all claimants who were issued a payment determination letter from the GCCF dated after December 30, 2011. The amended Order clarified that the 6% hold-back did not apply to settlement payments (interim or final) made or offered to claimants in a payment determination letter issued on or before December 30, 2011.

**The Court on January 18, 2012, issued an Order Amending and Superseding the Court's Previous Orders of December 28, 2011, and January 4, 2012. The Court's January 18, 2012 Order now limits the 6% hold-back requirement to GCCF claimants who have filed a suit in the MDL or a claim against Transocean in its Limitation of Liability proceeding in the MDL ("claimants-in-limitation") or state court plaintiffs represented by counsel that had access to the MDL discovery process. The 6% hold-back does not apply to claimants who never filed an MDL suit or claim in limitation or state court plaintiffs whose counsel has not had access to the MDL discovery process. Click [here](#) to view the Court's January 18, 2012 Order.**

In accordance with the Court's January 18, 2012 Order, please note the following:

- The Court-ordered 6% hold-back shall be applied to claimants who: (1)

Figure 5.6: Gulf Coast Claims Facility "Important Notice"

## SECTION 15 – CLAIMANT BILL OF RIGHTS

### 131. You have the right to equal treatment.

You have the right to be treated with respect, dignity, and fairness, without regard to your race, color, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, gender, or disability.

### 132. You have the right to equal access to the claims process.

If you have a disability, the Gulf Coast Claims Facility ("GCCF") will make reasonable accommodations in order for you to access the services of the GCCF.

If you have difficulty communicating in English, the GCCF will provide translation services for you to communicate about the claims process with the GCCF.

If you have difficulty reading or writing, the GCCF will endeavor to explain all documents and forms in a plain and simple manner, and assist you in filing a claim form.

### 133. You have the right to privacy.

Your submitted personal information will be kept secure by the GCCF and will only be used and disclosed for legitimate purposes in connection with administering the GCCF.

### 134. You have the right to information about your claim.

You can meet with a member of the GCCF staff to ask any questions you have about the claims process. Once you have filed a claim with the GCCF, you have the right to check the status of that claim by calling the toll-free number (1-800-916-4893 (TTY 1-866-682-1758)), visiting the GCCF's internet site, [www.GulfCoastClaimsFacility.com](http://www.GulfCoastClaimsFacility.com), or visiting a GCCF office in person. (A list of site offices is available by phone or on-line.)

### 135. You have the right to a fair review and determination of your claim.

The GCCF Claims Evaluator will consider all properly submitted evidence that you provide to prove your loss.

### 136. You have the right to a timely claim decision.

The GCCF will issue a timely determination of your claim. If the GCCF needs additional information in order to decide your claim, the GCCF will notify you in a timely manner of the request for additional information.

### 137. You have the right to timely payment.

If you qualify for a payment, you will be paid promptly.

### 138. You have the right to ethical treatment.

All representatives of the GCCF will act ethically and in good faith.

### 139. You have the right to be represented by an attorney of your choosing.

You have the right to be represented by an attorney of your choosing and to consult with that attorney before accepting any settlement or signing a release of legal rights.

[\(back to top\)](#)

Figure 5.7: Gulf Coast Claims Facility “FAQ”

GCCF Program Statistics Free Legal Assistance To Report Fraud Contact Us	Select any one of the following language for future communications and notices. <input checked="" type="radio"/> English <input type="radio"/> Spanish <input type="radio"/> Vietnamese <input type="radio"/> Khmer	
	Last Name:	<input type="text"/>
	First Name:	<input type="text"/>
	Middle Initial:	<input type="text"/>
	Current Address:	
	Street:	<input type="text"/>
		<input type="text"/>
		<input type="text"/>
	City:	<input type="text"/>
	State:	<input type="text"/>
Postal Code:	<input type="text"/>	
Parish/County:	<input type="text"/>	
Country:	<input type="text"/>	
	Other: <input type="text"/>	
Home Phone Number:	<input type="text"/>	
Cell Phone Number:	<input type="text"/>	
Email Address:	<input type="text"/>	
Date of Birth:	<input type="text"/> (MMDDYYYY)	
Please select the identification number that applies to you and provide the number below	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Social Security Number <input type="radio"/> Individual Taxpayer ID	
Other Name Used (Maiden Name, Previously Married Name(s), Aliases):	<input type="text"/>	
In order to proceed you must create a password that is at least 8 characters long and contains at least one digit. Please enter and re-enter your new password below. Please note that you should save this password for future reference.		

Figure 5.8: Gulf Coast Claims Facility “File a Full Claim Form Online” [selection 1]

**Claim Form**

- File a Full Review Final Claim Form Online**
- File a Paper Interim or Full Review Final Claim Form
- Attorney Portal
- Required Forms for Claimant Representatives
- Claims Site Offices
- Check Claim Status
- GCCF Program Statistics
- Free Legal Assistance
- To Report Fraud
- Contact Us

☐ Current Employer ☐ Other/Previous Employer

**Name of your employer :**

**Street:**

**City:**

**State:**

**Zip Code:**

**Parish/County:**

**Country:**

**Employer Identification Number(EIN)** (From your W-2 or 1099 form):

**Period of Employment:**  to

Does the Claimant own any part of a business listed above and/or serve as an officer in the business? If so, name the applicable business and check either or both boxes below and specify the percentage of ownership and/or the office held:

**Name of Business:**

☐ Owner (specify percentage):

☐ Officer (specify title):

Figure 5.9: Gulf Coast Claims Facility “File a Full Review Claim Form Online” [selection 2]

The GCCF main page (Figure 5.2), at that time, included a notice about the end of the GCCF and the transition to a court-based settlement system. What is of interest in terms of usability in this example was that the notice is written in a way that the average civilian claimant, occupying the subject position of “victim” for the purposes of filing a compensation claim, might have difficulty navigating the legalistic writing in the notice. For example, the notice includes a number of acronyms and dates, as well as wording such as “facilitate and oversee the evaluation and payment of pending Gulf Coast Claims Facility (“GCCF”) claims.” Similarly, the web site is noticeably plain to look at, lacking images or a variety of colors, both of which could be used to enhance the user experience and help direct the user where to begin and how to proceed through the claims process. In short, this screen is both overwhelming in terms of context and confusing in terms of design. As affordances go, the main page (and the site as a whole) offer the information

in various languages, which are shown in large text at the top of the screen. For example, the Spanish version of the main page is included above (Figure 5.3), inviting inclusion for the linguistic variety of victim subjects.

Figure 5.4 shows the full main menu of the GCCF web interface, which was a vertical menu along the left side of the online interface. This menu was extremely long and contributed to the overwhelming and confusing presentation of information in the claims portal. Each menu box and the text links were the same size and color, and there were no main headings or other organizational features (such as numbering). The lack of main menus, numbering, or other visual cues forced victim subjects to navigate an already complicated and overwhelming claims process with very little visual or organization direction.

The “Important Documents” page (Figure 5.5) was confusing from a user-centered point of view as well, given that the list of documents are presented as a bullet list of links. A lack of numbering, dates, and brief descriptions would require users to open certain linked documents in order to determine what their purpose or use was. In addition, 9 of the 11 documents links led to PDF files (which are not pictured or archived). PDF files are useful for producers or authors of documents to maintain formatting, but they may not have been the most useful document format (compared to a webpage format) given that users would have to open several links in one sitting.

The “Important Documents” (Figure 5.5) and “Important Notices and Information” pages (Figure 5.6) are notable for their use of legalistic and academic terminology, which does not fit the intended victim subject position from the Gulf Coast region. This is not to imply that Gulf Coast residents were uneducated or illiterate; rather, user-centered design and technical communication should aim to make the content available to a variety of users, including those with less education or limited literacies. For example, Figure 5.6 includes the document title “Second Modification to

Final Payment Methodology,” and Figure 5.6 shows a January 19, 2012 notice titled, “Update on the Court’s Order Requiring the GCCF to hold-back [*sic*] 6% of payments to MDL claimants.” It is hard to imagine that the average claimant would find this writing accessible and useful in completing the claims process. However, since claimants using the GCCF web portal sometimes granted third-party access to lawyers, it is possible that some of the documents and links were intended for use by legal readers rather than the “victim” applicants, themselves

The “FAQ” link of the GCCF portal (Figure 5.7) interestingly led the user to a page titled “SECTION 15 – CLAIMANT BILL OF RIGHTS,” which, like most of the rest of the website, could be overwhelming due to its lack of visual differentiation and its abundance of text. The selection pictured in Figure 5.7 is the bottom of the page, where the list ends at item “139. You have the right to be represented by an attorney of your choosing.” Interestingly, from a user perspective, this would have been more useful at the beginning of the list than after reading the whole list of “rights.”

I archived the “Fill a Full Claim Form Online” screenshots (Figures 5.8 and 5.9) to show the kinds of information that a user was required to provide in order file a claim. One requirement shown in Figure 5.8 is that the applicant must have either a Social Security Number or an Individual Taxpayer ID. In addition, Figure 5.9 shows that current or past employment information was also required to file a claim.

Not pictured in these archived screen shots is that there were five categories of claimants outlined in the GCCF eligibility criteria, including: “Removal and Clean Up Costs, Damage to Real or Personal Property, Lost Earnings or Profits, Loss of Subsistence Use of Natural Resources, and Physical Injury or Death” (Gulf, 2011). These constrain the available subject positions as

users must position themselves in relation to the valid victim subjectivities outlined by the claims website.

## **2. Macrodiscourse analysis of the GCCF interface**

Moving beyond the primary level of instructional and technical discourse, which is the main purpose of the claims interface, it is also useful to highlight self-referential macrodiscourse posted within the claims application interface. These macro-level articles were linked to from within the GCCF, reflecting both positive and negative press related to the victim compensation claims processes. From a user-centered point of view, the inclusion of self-referential macrodiscourse that is not essential to the application process would seem distracting and confusing, so the choice to include it must be understood as intentional and purposeful. In other words, I treat this content as an active technical communication and design choice, not as a chance or accident. I therefore argue that this macrodiscourse serves multiple purposes within the context of the claims application interface, including three major functions. One such purpose is to establish an ethos of credibility and transparency by posting both positive and negative news articles (Figures 5.10, 5.11, and 5.12, below). By including a seemingly “balanced” representation of news coverage, the Claims Facility reified its own identity as a balanced and neutral arbiter of claims applications.



November 25, 2010

## Are Victims of the Gulf Oil Spill Getting What They Deserve?

IS KENNETH R. FEINBERG, the man in charge of compensating the victims of the gulf oil spill, an extortionist? Alabama Gov. Bob Riley (R) says so, and he's joined in hyperbole by Troy King, the state's attorney general, who issued a "consumer alert" last week about the \$20 billion fund BP set aside for Mr. Feinberg to administer. Local media in Alabama have asked President Obama to fire the "pay czar," and the state's congressional representatives are adding to the pressure.

Among other things, the critics complain that emergency compensation has been too slow to arrive, that many claims aren't being paid in full and that victims have to waive their right to sue if they accept a final cash settlement. Mr. King warns his constituents not to participate in the claims process, in which government representatives will soon begin considering final settlement claims in earnest.

Figure 5.10: "Are Victims of the Gulf Oil Spill Getting What They Deserve?"

*New York Times*

### BP Makes Amends

By [JOE NOCERA](#) (January 9, 2012)

Today, I'm going to say some nice things about BP and some not so nice things about the lawyers who are suing BP. Please don't spill your coffee.

As horrific as the Deepwater Horizon accident was in April 2010 — killing 11 rig employees, while pouring millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico — BP has performed quite admirably in its aftermath. It has spared no expense in cleaning up the oil. It has set aside \$1 billion to restore the environment and coastal ecosystem. It underwrote an advertising campaign to lure tourists back to the Gulf Coast. Today, less than two years after the spill, the beaches are sparkling, most fishermen are working and many of the hotels are full.

At the urging of President Obama, BP also agreed to set up a \$20 billion fund to compensate anyone who could show that they'd been economically harmed by the accident. Ken Feinberg, the former administrator of the Sept. 11 victim compensation fund, was put in charge the Gulf Coast Claims Facility, as it was named. Feinberg has since paid out \$6.3 billion to nearly 200,000 claimants. Daniel Becnel, an attorney who has settled thousands of claims, says that his clients often receive more money from Feinberg than they would have if they had gone to court. "You couldn't have done a better job than Feinberg did," says Becnel.

To put it another way, the Gulf Coast Claims Facility has been a remarkably effective alternative to the cumbersome way damages are usually meted out after a corporate accident: through the tort system. Compare it, for instance, with the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster in Alaska, which took nearly two decades of court battles for the plaintiffs to finally get around \$1.3 billion.

Figure 5.11: "BP Makes Amends"

Another purpose of the macrodiscourse may have been purely informational for applicants, almost akin to the aforementioned "FAQ" section (Figure 5.7, above). This understanding is supported by the proximity of the two tabs on the main menu: "Press and News Releases" (Figure 5.12, below) was listed directly below "Frequently Asked Questions," and both were near the top of the menu, as though to intercept and address any questions before users get to the "Contact Us" option at the bottom of the menu. This informational function may also be intended for broader audiences than applicants—for instance, this informational is available without logging in and



could therefore be accessed by lawyers, journalists, or other interested parties who would not have occupied “victim” subjectivities through their use of the application for victim compensation.

Home	<a href="#">BP Makes Amends-January 9, 2012</a>
Important Notices and Information	<a href="#">Claims Czar Kenneth Feinberg Says Pace of Payments Quickens - June 20, 2011</a>
Important Documents	<a href="#">Weiss Announces Appointment of Judges for GCCF Appeals Process - June 9, 2011</a>
Frequently Asked Questions	<a href="#">Gulf Coast Claims Facility Releases Report on Status of Claims Process On Eve of One Year Anniversary of Deepwater Horizon Oil Explosion - April 18, 2011</a>
<b>Press and News Releases</b>	<a href="#">Gulf Coast Claims Facility Announces The Appointment Of Jack M. Weiss to Select Appeals Judges - March 24, 2011</a>
File a Quick Payment Final Claim Form	<a href="#">Gulf Coast Claims Facility Announces an Important Milestone: Over Half of All Interim and Final Claims Submitted to the GCCF Have Been Processed - March 14, 2011</a>
File a Full Review Final Claim Form Online	<a href="#">Gulf Oil Spill Damages, Phase Two - March 13, 2011</a>
File an Interim Claim Form Online	<a href="#">Gulf Coast Claims Facility Administrator Feinberg to Hold Town Hall Meetings in Alabama and Florida - January 13, 2011</a>
File a Paper Interim or Full Review Final Claim Form	<a href="#">Gulf Coast Claims Facility Administrator Feinberg to Hold Town Hall Meetings in Mississippi and Louisiana - January 6, 2011</a>
Attorney Portal	<a href="#">Expert on Legal Ethics: Feinberg and the Gulf Coast Claims Facility are Independent and Meet all Appropriate Ethical Standards - December 30, 2010</a>
Required Forms for Claimant Representatives	<a href="#">Gulf Coast Claims Facility Announces Next Phase of the Compensation Program for Victims of the BP Oil Spill - December 13, 2010</a>
Claims Site Offices	<a href="#">Gulf Claims Piñata - November 26, 2010</a>
Check Claim Status	<a href="#">Are Victims of the Gulf Oil Spill Getting What They Deserve? - November 25, 2010</a>
GCCF Program Statistics	<a href="#">Mr. Feinberg and the Spill - November 25, 2010</a>
Free Legal Assistance	<a href="#">Professor John C. P. Goldberg's Report on Liability for Economic Loss in Connection with the Deepwater Horizon Spill - November 22, 2010</a>
To Report Fraud	<a href="#">Feinberg Announces Clarification Regarding Geographic Proximity - October 4, 2010</a>
Contact Us	<a href="#">Feinberg Announces Faster and More Generous Payments from GCCF - September 25, 2010</a>
	<a href="#">Gulf Coast Claims Facility Marks One-Month Anniversary - September 23, 2010</a>
	<a href="#">Mr. Feinberg and the Gulf Settlement - August 29, 2010</a>

*Figure 5.12: Gulf Coast Claims Facility “Press and News Releases”*

Finally, the inclusion of summary reports (Figure 5.13, below) of claims applications and awards served at least three purposes in itself. Summary reports, which were also available to the public without logging in, first served the informational purpose noted above. News media, lawyers, or other interested parties were able to review the reports for the updated status of all applications. In addition, the summary reports served to bolster the authority of the GCCF as the final arbiter. Summary reports, by their nature, imply finality and authority—especially with the

great level of detail provided about types of claims and their status. These reports seemed to improve the reputation of the GCCF by showing the number of awards and the amount of money awarded. In the face of criticism that the GCCF was not doing enough or awarding enough, the summary points presented a counter argument.

Home	<b>Overall GCCF Program Statistics</b>
Important Notices and Information	<a href="#">Overall Status Report</a>
Important Documents	<a href="#">Overall Claimant Details</a>
Frequently Asked Questions	
Press and News Releases	<b>Alabama Program Statistics</b>
File a Quick Payment Final Claim Form	<a href="#">Alabama Status Report</a>
File a Full Review Final Claim Form Online	<a href="#">Alabama Claimant Details</a>
File an Interim Claim Form Online	<b>Florida Program Statistics</b>
File a Paper Interim or Full Review Final Claim Form	<a href="#">Florida Status Report</a>
Attorney Portal	<a href="#">Florida Claimant Details</a>
Required Forms for Claimant Representatives	<b>Louisiana Program Statistics</b>
Claims Site Offices	<a href="#">Louisiana Status Report</a>
Check Claim Status	<a href="#">Louisiana Claimant Details</a>
<b>GCCF Program Statistics</b>	<b>Mississippi Program Statistics</b>
Free Legal Assistance	
To Report Fraud	<a href="#">Mississippi Status Report</a>
Contact Us	<a href="#">Mississippi Claimant Details</a>

*Figure 5.13: Gulf Coast Claims Facility “Program Statistics”*

### 3. Metadiscourse analysis of blogs

Finally, at the level of metadiscursive analysis, I argue that public blogs that reference the claims process and the Gulf Coast Claims Facility specifically. This is my initial attempt at a reception study of real Gulf Coast Claims Facility users. Harris (2005) and Ceccarelli (2005) have each argued for the importance of reception studies for understanding how actual users, not ideal or imaged users, interact with technical discourse. I extend this argument to actual versus ideal users of technical writing in the case of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility. I argue that published blogs reflected the actual reception of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility through their own production

and broad dissemination of positive, negative, or neutral responses to the application process. I understand these blogs as a counter-discourse that indicates the reception of actual users. The archived blog screenshots below (Figure 5.14) shows the critical reception of BP and the claims process. *Rick's Blog* posted news of the GCCF process coming to an end, along with the critical editorial comment, “So if you haven’t settled yet, expect to be caught up in more red tape while the new center figures it out.” This reflects the actual users’ views of the claims process as being mired with “red tape,” implying difficulty, obstruction, or confusion.

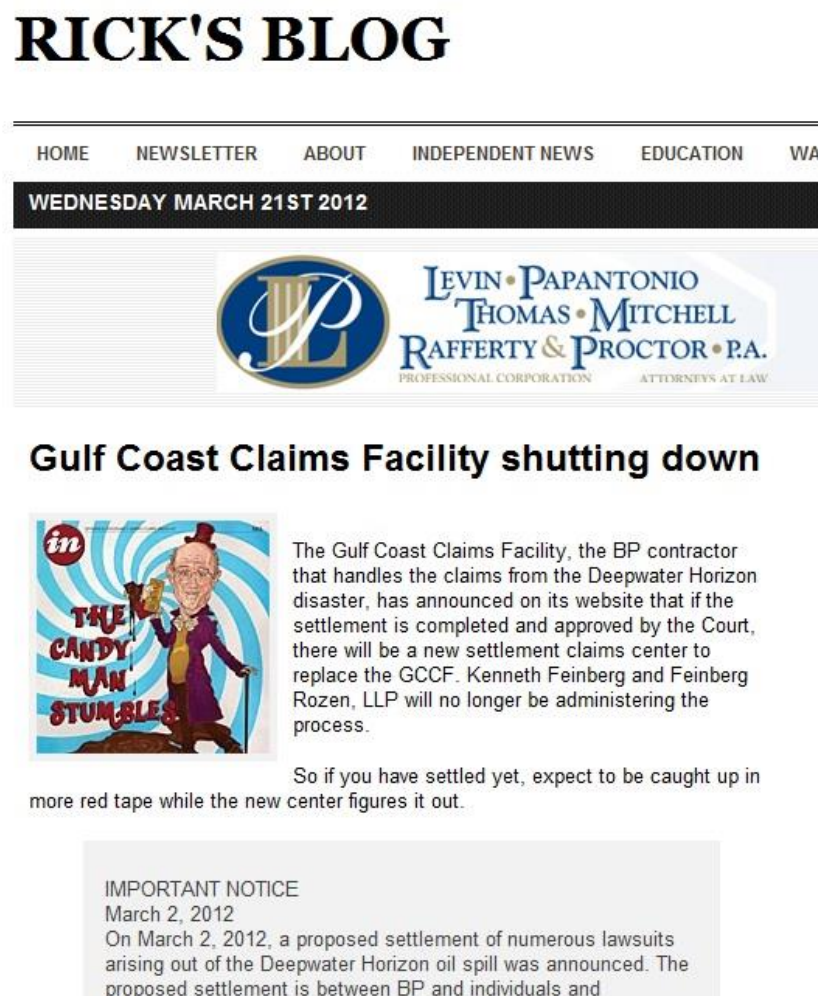


Figure 5.14: Rick's Blog

### **Preliminary Conclusions: Digital and Multiliteracies in RWS**

Several characteristics of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility's web interface and the victim compensation application process raise questions pertinent to the field of RWS and the specialization of Technical Communication within this discipline. For instance, a large amount of specialized information is presented in digital format through the web interface, and this information and the interface itself is subject to analysis according to the tenets of effective technical communication and user-centered design (Johnson, 1998). The highly technical nature of the application process for victim compensation also relates to concerns about disproportionate access, both in terms of physical access to the requisite technologies as well as with regard to training, education, experience, and ease with using such technologies. So conceived, "access" depends as well on definitions of "literacy" (Banks, 2006; Selfe, 1999) within the context of victim compensation, both in the traditional sense of print or functional literacies and with more complex (and contested) understandings of technological literacies. Issues relating to production are also important on two fronts: institutional production of the web application interface from the perspective of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility (on behalf of BP and the U.S. government) as well as from the perspective of those "victimized" by the event, as they are enabled or constrained in their production of "texts" across various genres of documentation during the compensation application process (from financial receipts to personal narratives to social networking participation).

Clearly, various literacies (textual, visual, technological, and financial, to name a few) were required of applicants to the GCCF website, and a user's ability to effectively utilize these literacies surely had direct and indirect implications for successful positioning as a "victim" for the purposes of compensation. The content and design of the GCCF interface implied the type of "ideal" user

the site invokes through its discourse, including what types of technological literacies (Selfe, 1999) or multiple literacies (Selber, 2004) the victim compensation process expects or required of applicants. My analysis above echoes Johnson's (1998) concern for users in technical design and communication and Carroll's (2010) critique of how "ideal or hypothetical scenarios result in design that ignores users' needs and expectations, suggesting that user narratives can help influence the design or invention process." I argue that the GCCF web interface can be used as a valuable teaching case for technical and workplace communication courses by integrating reception theory and user-centered design principles, and by documenting the only known screen shots of the user interface in this study, I make them available for future studies or for use as teaching cases.

While technological changes have elevated the disciplinary position of RWS, they have also influenced certain trends in RWS scholarship, ranging from imminently practical to highly theoretical pursuits. In addition to the above practical trends in pedagogy (represented by Yancey and Selber, for instance) and access (represented by Banks and Selfe), we might add the sub-specialization of technical writing, represented by scholarship such as Johnson's (2008) treatise on user-centered technology and the 2005 TCQ special issue on the rhetoric of science and technology (Gross & Gurak, 2005). Alternatively, the more theoretical end of the spectrum includes research trends in visual rhetoric—represented in the works by Handa (2004) and Hope (2006)—and postmodernist theories of post-human and/or cyborg subjectivities, represented most visibly by Haraway (1991). In addition to the pedagogical concerns of technological literacies and access outlined above, these additional research trends are likely to shape RWS scholarship for the foreseeable future.

Simmons and Grabill (2007) have argued that effective use of technical communication “must be able to produce the professional and technical performances expected in contemporary civic forums” (p. 422). Grabill has also argued that “information has become a powerful social good” and that “interventions at the level of infrastructure are necessary to enable citizen action in communities” (p. 20). It is therefore important to understand the functions and purposes of technical communications and public receptions of those communications in the context of the disaster zone.

### **Discursive Context as Interface: Problematizing the Center/Periphery**

In “Contact Zones: Composition’s Content in the University,” Katherine Gottschalk (2002) drew on Pratt’s contact zone theory to critique “a myth of homogeneity, of “imagined community,” whereas (often chaotic) heterogeneity is actually the norm” (p. 58). The heterogenous reality of disaster zone demographics, subject positions, and discursive productions shows how, in traditionally “periphery” contexts such as the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone, local language practices and associated cultural values are continually negotiated by local subjects who must contend with dominative narratives and discourses.

Scholars such as Alastair Pennycook (2006) have analyzed the ways in which language and race have been imposed upon and resisted by local subjects who are often at the “periphery” of power and hegemony. In negotiating between dominative and local language practices, periphery subjects exercise choice and agency through active negotiation of hybrid discourses and racial identities that appropriate the “center” culture into local cultural, racial, and linguistic contexts. In this section I briefly describe his conceptions of discursive appropriation and

resistance “at the periphery” and discuss to what extent the “center/periphery” binary may be useful for understanding subject position and genre participation in the disaster zone.

Pennycook is careful to note that opposition and resistance to English does not mean rejecting English wholesale, but instead involves negotiation and reconstitution for local purposes: “From this point of view, then, there is always a response to the designs of Empire, processes of resistance, rearticulation, reconstitution.” His study therefore focuses not on the rejection of English, but rather on how the spread of hip-hop exemplifies, at least metaphorically, “a set of interrelated processes that have transgressive or transformational orientations: transgression and resistance, translation and rearticulation, transformation and reconstitution, translocalization and appropriation, transculturation and hybridization.”

What becomes clear is that language and culture are not wholly accepted or wholly rejected by periphery subjects; rather, local subjects negotiate and localize the cultural and linguistic influences that spread from Western to non-Western, periphery contexts. This underlies Pennycook’s larger argument about how languages and cultures flow between and within local contexts. For example, he quoted Berger to underscore that “influence is often a two-way street; that is, rather than merely reproducing existing ideologies, singers, culture workers, and listeners may use music to actively think about, debate, or resist the ideologies at play in the social world around them.” Thus, for Pennycook, the transcultural flow of culture and language negotiation and appropriation may be most evident in non-curricular sites of education, as with hip-hop performance and music.

Ultimately, Pennycook argued for extending our focus on cultural and linguistic education to non-traditional sites of education, such as hip-hop performances: “From this point of view, the locus of educational encounter is not the village culture of the classroom observed from the

ethnographer's seat in the corner, but rather the educational equivalent of the hotel lobby, ship or bus: the shopping mall, skateboarding scene or fast-food hangout. The point, however, is not just to relocate our pedagogical gaze to the street, but to understand the fluidity, fixity and flow of cultural movement.” For Pennycook, hip-hop serves as a specific example and fitting metaphor for understanding these processes of cultural and linguistic resistance, appropriation, and multi-directional flow between local contexts around the world.

### **A Resistance Study of Periphery Genres**

I conclude my analysis in this chapter by turning my attention to genre affordances available to social subjects who might otherwise be constrained by institutional genre participation. If the above examination of the actual reception of the GCCF process constituted a “reception study,” the following analysis of actual periphery genres constitutes a “resistance study.” Miller and Shepherd (2002) specified that a “Darwinian approach to genre requires an understanding of what makes a rhetorical action ‘fitting’ within its cultural environment,” especially in terms of its *kairos*, which “describes both the sense in which discourse is understood as fitting and timely—the way it observes propriety or decorum—and the way in which it can seize on the unique opportunity of a fleeting moment to create new rhetorical possibility” (2002, p. 84). Miller and Shepherd further argued that “Genres certainly incorporate decorum, even helping to create the decorum of situations, but they are also complex enough—and often flexible enough—to offer resources for innovation” (p. 84).

The above “institutional center” genres relating the GCCF victim compensation process may be understood as those which most create “decorum,” in Miller and Shepherd’s words. At the other end of the description exist “periphery” genres, which, to use their words, are “flexible



enough” to allow for “innovation” and, as I further argue below, resistance. My contention is that these periphery genres enable or afford social subjects with civic and political agency, the least “constrained” subject positioning I have traced in the disaster zone. Below, I analyze music, graffiti, and protest as periphery genres where social subjects can position themselves in resistance to institutional constraints.

### **1. Rap Music as Periphery Genre**

One “periphery” genre of the disaster zone is music generally, or in this example rap music. In the song “Spillionare,” rap musician Black Cobain incorporated descriptive metaphors of the oil spill, as well as the popular phrase “spillionaire,” which was used in the Gulf Coast Disaster Zone to refer to those who were well-compensated by the GCCF or court compensation process. His lyrics include “That dude spilling that whole glass, I’m G shit that’s no sense,” referring to a glass of alcohol but also alluding to the oil spill. The hook of the song is “Shawty only like because the way I spill / Spillionare crazy / I do this for real / Spill. Black Cobain ends the song ends with the visual metaphor of the spilla slick of black oil on the Gulf of Mexico’s surface—to refer to himself flying overseas and performing: “Black across the water / rip the stages in Versace.” The use of “spill” in the song represents “spilling” lyrics or rapping (similar to the common phrase “spitting” for “rapping”). The subversive use of environmental metaphors and the appropriation of the disaster event and the compensation process for the purposes of periphery subjectivity is a political or civic act in that it defies the constraints of most of the traditional genres described in previous chapters.

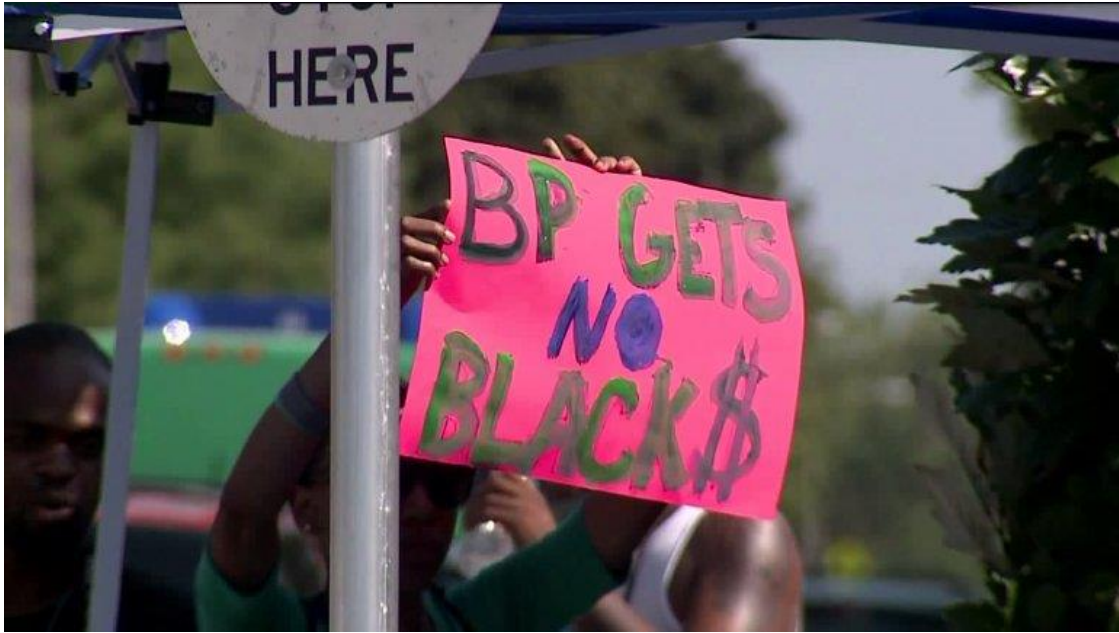
## 2. Graffiti as Periphery Genre



Figure 5.15: “BIG PROBLEM” graffiti as periphery genre

Chapter 3 included a brief description of a Houston street art stencil of a geometric human figure discarding of the BP logo in a trash can. There are a number of other examples of critical street art and graffiti from the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone online, but I include the above example (Figure 5.15) because of its self-referential inclusion of an illustrated graffiti artist shown in the act of producing the graffiti. The painted or stenciled artist in the picture is presented *in medias res*, with a spray-paint can raced above its head. The iconic BP sunburst logo is shown dripping with black paint that visually references the oil spill, and the “bp” acronym is modified with large black letters to form the words “BIG PROBLEM.” This example therefore represents graffiti or street art as a periphery genre in general, but also visually constitutes the resistant political subject that is formed through participating in the genre.

### 3. Protest as Periphery Genre



*Figure 5.16: “BP GETS / NO / BLACK \$” protest sign as periphery genre*

Whereas sites of physical protest and the accompanying genre of protest signs were analyzed in Chapter 3, I include here an example of protest and protest signs as a periphery genre that affords maximum agency for civic or political subjects to resist institutional constraints. Of the countless examples of protest signs pictured online, the picture of the sign above (Figure 5.16) contains the statement “BP GETS NO BLACK MONEY.” In Chapters 3 and 4 I already discussed at length the recurring theme of corporate greed related to BP in the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone. What is interesting here is that the modifier “black” in “BLACK \$” calls attention specifically to the sign’s author as a politically resistant and racialized social subject.

In her article “Mimesis between Poetics and Rhetoric: Performance Culture and Civic Education in Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle,” Ekaterina Haskins (2000) traced mimesis across ancient philosophers to the point that the concepts of “identification and performance both activate

and sustain one's civic identity" (p. 7). Similarly, as the above examples of resistant "performance" shows, social subjects in the disaster zone position themselves as political or civic subjects through discursive participation in "periphery" genres.

### **Conclusions: The Disaster Zone as Interface**

I end this project not far from where it began, with Pratt's conception of the contact zone as a social space where subjects negotiate power imbalances. If Pratt had written her seminal article decades later, in the age of ubiquitous networked communications technologies, her popular metaphor of the "contact zone" may have been a technological metaphor, instead: that of the interface. Clearly, literal, technological interfaces such as the Gulf Coast Claims Facility web portal described above exist in the disaster zone. So, too, do metaphorical "interfaces"—the points of cultural contact and subject negotiation in the disaster zone context. In this project I have theorized the disaster zone as discourse community and as interpretive community. I conclude by suggesting that the disaster zone context is a metaphorical interface in which the interpretive discourse community negotiates between subjectivities through genre participation. Ultimately, as I have shown throughout the previous chapters, the wide variety of genres available to disaster zone subjects constrains and affords various subject positions, from the most constrained institutional subjects ("victims") to the most afforded or enabled agency ("political" or "civic" subjects).

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

### Not *If*, but *When*, is *Now*

Since beginning this study in the Spring of 2012, a number of large-scale national or international disasters have proven my contention that far-reaching disastrous events are all but inevitable. As I noted in Chapter 1, it is not a matter of *if* they will happen, but rather *when*, *how*, and *to whom*. By way of example, a short list of such events includes Hurricane Sandy in October 2012, the Sandy Hook school shooting in December 2012, Hurricanes Harvey and Maria in 2017, and the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland Florida on February 14, 2018. Given the likelihood of such events continuing to occur with regularity in the future, along with the reality that networked communicative technologies are here to stay and will continue to serve as a primary means through which communities respond discursively to those events, the conclusions that can be drawn from this study are immediately pertinent for understanding the ways that victims, responsible parties, and removed observers participate and respond discursively. In this brief concluding chapter, I first summarize my findings from the three previous analytical chapters, focusing on the disaster zone discourse community, its characteristic genres and rhetorical appeals, and disaster zone subjectivities, and I argue that the major contributions of this study have implications for research methods, pedagogy, and the disciplinarity of Rhetoric and Writing Studies. Finally, I discuss how the limitations inherent in this study and its findings make way for future research and how this dissertation constitutes a disaster zone genre inviting future rhetorical participation.

## **Significant Findings and Contributions**

By conducting a collective case study of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico disaster zone, I devised a critical discursive framework for understanding disaster zones, both past and future. Thus, the main contribution of this study is the extension of Pratt's (1993) concept of the contact zone to establish the concept of the disaster zone—a historical, often geographical, and utterly theoretical space following a disaster event in which subjects negotiate asymmetrical power relationships through discourses. As defined and described throughout this study, the disaster zone is a dynamic rhetorical concept, and my analysis of the disaster zone in this study has implications for methods, scholarship, pedagogy, and the disciplinarity of Rhetoric and Writing Studies.

### **1. Implications for methods**

In Pratt's (1993) original article defining contact zones, she mentioned “the importance of process as opposed to results” (p. 32), an emphasis that has become central to composition scholarship in the discipline of RWS. Whereas earlier composition scholarship focused more on the finished product, in recent decades RWS scholarship has aimed to better understand and explain the great diversity of real-world writing practices utilized by actual writers. Similarly, as I described in Chapter 2, the pragmatic attention on real-world writing practices also applies to real-world research methods. In an effort to contribute to a better understanding of research processes as opposed to just results, part of this study's contribution is the formulation of a flexible, recursive Grounded Theory CDA methodology for the study of disaster zones, one that could also be applied to other discourse community analyses, comparative and contrastive rhetorical analyses, and rhetorical genre studies.

A specific contribution of this study to CDA research methods is that my rhetorical approach to CDA begins to address some of the limitations of discourse analytical methodologies

as identified by Phillips and Jørgensen (2002). Given CDA's emphasis on discourses (rather than on discursive production and consumption), they described Critical Discourse Analysis as having "a theoretically weak understanding of processes of group formation, the subject and agency, including questions regarding subjectification and subjectivity and how much control people have over their language use" (p. 90).

With regard to "group formation," in Chapter 3 I defined the disaster zone as an interpretive discourse community based on genre participation. Similarly, by pairing CDA with a *rhetorical approach to genre* in this study—including rhetorical appeals and their acceptance or rejection by audiences—I described how genre constraints and affordances affect subject positioning in the disaster zone. In addition, my description in Chapter 5 of the distinction between "optional" genres and "necessary" periphery genres addressed the control (or agency) disaster zone subjects had over their language use depending on their genre participation. Specifically, I suggested that "victim" genre participation near the institutional center of the disaster zone corresponded to greater constraints and less choice over language use, whereas genre participation toward the "resistant" periphery of the disaster zone corresponded to greater agency and genre affordances.

## **2. Implications for pedagogy**

Pratt's (1993) article specifically described the classroom as a contact zone: "every single text we read stood in specific historical relationship to the students in the class, but the range and variety of historical relationships in play were enormous" (p. 39). Whereas Pratt was originally describing literature classrooms, it is especially fitting to explore what implications my study of the disaster zone may have for rhetorical pedagogy and writing instruction (p. 39). Toward these pedagogical ends, I offer the 2010 Gulf of Mexico disaster zone as a useful teaching case for rhetoric and composition courses at many levels, as it clearly illustrates 1) real-world discourse

practices, 2) rhetorical concepts such as context, exigence, discourse, genre, author, and audience, and 3) rhetorical appeals such as the epideictic critique of (in)eloquence described in Chapter 4. Similarly, the disaster zone genres relating to risk communication, damage control, crisis response, and victim compensation are also useful teaching cases for technical and professional writing courses. For example, the Gulf Coast Claims Facility (GCCF) informational website and online claims and appeals process that I archived and analyzed in Chapter 5 can be further analyzed in terms of technical communication and user-centered design. As in Pratt's (1993) original classroom example, the diverse genres and subject positions of the disaster zone discourse community are also likely to reflect the "range and variety of historical relationships" and subject positions of students in rhetoric and composition classes.

Important pedagogical implications also follow naturally from Critical Discourse Analysis as a method. With regard to pedagogy, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) described how "training in critical language awareness" serves the aim of CDA to "promote more egalitarian and liberal discourses and thereby to further democratization" (p. 88). In the discipline of Rhetoric and Writing Studies (RWS), "critical language awareness" might be understood to mean critical or rhetorical literacies, which are goals of rhetorical writing instruction. Cynthia Selfe (1999) and Kathleen Blake Yancey (2009) offered several specific suggestions for moving forward with critical literacies in writing instruction. From a broad interdisciplinary perspective on composing and literacies, Yancey (2009) called for "a new agenda" including new models of composing that are already at work in the world, developing new curricula, and finally, creating new models of collaborative teaching (pp. 6-7). Selfe (1999) similarly expressed that "teachers need to recognize that they can no longer simply educate students to become technology consumers without also helping them learn how to think critically about technology and the social issues surrounding its



use” (p. 152). In other words, the cultivation of critical rhetorical literacies in rhetoric and composition courses may help address the aims of CDA and contribute to democratization first within the educational institution and then in the culture at large.

### **3. Implications for RWS disciplinarity**

The above pedagogical implications centralize RWS as an active and productive discipline central to progressive undergraduate and graduate education. In the complex negotiation of subjectivities through disaster zone genre participation, it becomes imperative for the educated public to understand how discourse—especially technologically mediated discourse—functions rhetorically, or else risk uncritical acceptance of institutional constraints on discourse and subjective agency. The discipline of RWS is specially equipped to characterize and problematize these discourses through scholarship and teaching. As teachers of writing and critical thinking skills, we are in a unique position to help expand critical literacies in the public, one class at a time. In the words of Michael Zerbe (2007), “I believe wholeheartedly that it is possible to artfully discover and incorporate into our courses [...] dominate rhetorics in ways that students—no matter their major or area of interest—would find interesting and relevant” (p. 11).

Similarly, in “Looking for Rhetoric Where It Has Not Been Found: Definitions, Border Disputes, Future Directions,” Roxanne Mountford (1997) extended the scholarly pursuit of new questions and perspectives to include “looking outside the field of rhetoric and composition for examples,” since “beyond our borders the study of rhetoric is robust” and serves as “the basis for many cultural-studies projects” (p. 32). Mountford argued against a negative view of interdisciplinarity, since “[r]hetoric already is a transdisciplinary subject” (p. 33). In other words, research outside of the traditional confines of the discipline is important to sustain the discipline and assert its relevance in contemporary public contexts: “At a time when the polis is increasingly

in need of rhetorical exploration, we must risk looking for rhetoric beyond narrow disciplinary interests—to look for rhetoric where it has not been found (p. 34). As I described in Chapter 2, my methodology for this project involved critical rhetorical historiography, whereby I attempted to redefine what counts as rhetoric through the description and analysis of disaster zone genres, as well as to recover otherwise overlooked rhetors whose subjective participation in those genres constituted the disaster zone discourse community.

### **Study Limitations**

Limitations of this study may be grouped into two categories: limitations attributable to Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodology and limitations specific to my real-world application of CDA in this study. First, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) described a notable “deficiency on the part of Fairclough and the other forms of critical discourse analysis [as] accompanied by a corresponding dearth of empirical research into the consumption of texts” (p. 90). Because my study focuses only on what can be understood through rhetorical discourse analysis, I describe improved attention toward real-world audiences, perhaps through usability studies and research, as a future direction for research below. However, in the preceding chapters I attempted to overcome this shortcoming by analyzing the consumption or reception of texts through an analysis of other discourses that critically responded to resisted the original discourses. This approach toward *discursive responses as discursive consumption or reception* was perhaps most evident in the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria*, *apologia*, and *antapologia* in Chapter 3, in the variety of published critiques of Tony Hayward’s (in)eloquence in Chapter 4, and in the resistant “periphery” at the end of Chapter 5.

Specific limitations of my real-world application of CDA methods in this study relate to my selection and inclusion of discursive artifacts. My goal in this study was to characterize the disaster zone discourse community by identifying, describing, and analyzing a wide variety of discursive genres. As Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 illustrates, the three analytical chapters survey a range of discursive genres, including textual, visual, and multimodal, as well as direct, mediated, and multimedia. In order to analyze this variety of genres, I included a small number of representative examples for each genre—in some cases, only one example was analyzed per genre. Similarly, this study was limited in that I only included already published or “extant” discourses in my analyses. While I believe this fulfills the CDA mandate of analyzing real-world discourses, a fuller picture of lived discursive practices in the disaster zone might benefit from the collection of narratives or the performance of usability studies. These study limitations are expanded upon below as possible future directions for disaster zone research.

### **Directions for Future Research**

There are many examples of mediated, literate responses to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill—many more than could be analyzed in this study—and each would benefit from in-depth critical analysis and interpretation from a contextualized, rhetorical perspective. This creates two possible directions for future rhetorical scholarship related to disaster zones. Following from my broad characterization of genres of the disaster zone and analysis of representative examples, one direction for future research would be to delve deeper into each genre to paint a fuller picture of the variety of approaches to and uses of each genre. For example, I included several examples of protest signs representing different themes and rhetorical appeals in Chapters 3 and 5, yet there are

dozens if not hundreds of pictures of protesters and protest signs from this disaster zone published online that are available for analysis.

Further, since I argue that the 2010 Gulf of Mexico disaster zone and its genres are applicable to other disaster zones, another direction for future research would be to repeat aspects of this study as they apply to a different disaster zone, for example tracing the Hurricane Katrina disaster zone community according to its characteristic genres, including optional and necessary genres, such as protest and victim compensation. As I have shown in Chapter 5, the “periphery” genres of protest and victim compensation are central genres for the disaster zone community. By extension, another area for future research would be to compare discursive practices and genre participation between or across disaster zones, for example comparing the discursive or rhetorical elements of protest signs following Hurricane Katrina to those following the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, each of which directly affected Gulf Coast residents, communities, economies, and institutions.

With regard to the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria*, *apologia*, and *antapologia* as described in Chapter 3, another research direction might be to outline and analyze the various arguments across these genres in the disaster zone by using stasis theory. For example, in “The Syllogism of Apologia: Rhetorical Stasis Theory and Crisis Communication,” Charles Marsh (2006) incorporated stasis theory and the rhetorical speech set of *kategoria* and *apologia* to improve crisis response at the three staseis of minor premise, major premise, or conclusion. This type of stasis analysis would be useful in the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone and any other disaster zone where blame, defense, and re-accusation form the basis through which disaster zone subjects contest asymmetrical power relationships.

Finally, since I have utilized extant published discourses as the basis of this study, it may be informative to gather additional discursive artifacts through methods such as qualitative interviews or narratives and usability studies. For example, disaster zone narratives could be documented using the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) or recorded for inclusion in the or the non-profit narrative project StoryCorps. These narratives may help illustrate the complex contestation of social subjectivities, victim subjectivities, and resistant agency within the disaster zone. In addition, usability studies could be performed on “institutional” technical genres such as victim compensation interfaces or informational portals. This would help address the limitation described above that CDA does not adequately consider “text consumption practices” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 90).

## Conclusion

The findings from this project, as summarized in this chapter and detailed at length in the three previous analytical chapters, for the first time constitute a robust understanding of the myriad discursive practices in the disaster zone context, including the constraints and affordances that disaster zone genres provide for disaster zone subjects. Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), in summarizing Fairclough’s CDA methods, wrote: “Every instance of language use is a communicative event consisting of three dimensions: it is a *text* [...]; it is a *discursive practice* which involves the production and consumption of texts; and it is a *social practice*” (p. 68). Through the analysis and coding of dozens of disaster zone artifacts—a selection of which were described in this study as representative discursive genres—I addressed each of these three interrelated dimensions of disaster zone discourses, from textual elements to production and consumption within the social contexts of the disaster zone.

Lastly, it should be noted that this dissertation is, itself, a critical discursive genre that now constitutes one of the Gulf of Mexico disaster zone genres. Both I as the author (producer of disaster zone discourse) and you as the reader (consumer of disaster zone discourse) are also now included within the disaster zone discourse community—a community that I have defined, per Swales (1988), through subjective participation in disaster zone genres. Any future discursive references or responses to, or critiques of, this dissertation, will thus also imbricate those genres and their authors and audiences in the disaster zone discourse community. It therefore follows that an important contribution of this study is the extension or expansion of the disaster zone discourse community to include rhetorical scholarship and scholars.

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## Vita

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Dr. Lambert was a teaching assistant for literature and writing courses at UT Austin, and upon graduating in 2005 taught English to high school and college students in Beijing, China. He later taught first-year composition and technical writing courses at UTEP and El Paso Community College. He served as a university writing tutor and co-facilitated a science writing workshop.

Dr. Lambert has worked as an Administrative Coordinator and a Research Coordinator for the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. He later served as Administrative Coordinator for UTEP's Rhetoric and Composition Ph.D. program and as Rhetoric Society of America Chapter Secretary. He was elected Graduate Senator for the UTEP Student Government Association, serving on several committees, and was named 2012 Senator of the Year.

Dr. Lambert has presented his research at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA), the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW), the Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP), the College English Association (CEA), and Teachers of English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL). He co-founded and co-edited the journals *Copper Nickel* and *Bat City Review* and was a reader for the journal *Río Grande Review*. He has also published a book chapter and a book review.

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