

Cristhian Welter

Metaphors We Drill By?

An Analysis of the Metaphors Used in the Deepwater
Horizon Oil Spill Discourse

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***An Analysis of the Metaphors Used in
the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill
Discourse***

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(B.A.)**

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German Summary / Deutsche Zusammenfassung

1 Introduction

Up to this point, the year 2010 has seen a seemingly unproportional share of environmental catastrophes, be they man-made or of natural origin. Incidents like the earthquakes of Haiti, Chile, and China in the first four months of the year and floods in Eastern Europe and Pakistan in the summer time constitute only some of the events that will be remembered by the world community for years to come. These catastrophes have left their marks on the lives of many people and have had a substantial impact on their futures. They have caused people to lose their homes, their jobs and most tragically, their loved ones. There are also, however, natural catastrophes in 2010 which were attributed to human error. As one of the bigger events of the year, the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill off the Gulf Coast of the United States of America on April 2010 can be considered as such an accident.

Also known as the BP Oil Spill, the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill has caused an ecological disaster of unknown magnitude. With five million barrels of oil released into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico since April 20, the oil spill has overtrumped the Ixtoc I Oil Spill of 1979 by approximately 2 million barrels as the “world’s largest accidental release” (Robertson, 2010). The accident was caused by an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform on April 20, 2010, killing 11 workers and injuring 17 others stationed there (Welch, 2010). The result of the explosion was a leak in the oil well and the consequent gushing out of oil into the Gulf. The British energy company, BP p.l.c., had been the operator and leaser of the drilling rig at that time. Various attempts were made by BP, as the only company with the necessary expertise and equipment, to cap the well – all of them without success. As of September 10, the well has not been sealed off permanently, only temporary solutions having been applied to limit the amount of oil releasing in to the Gulf as much as possible (Fausset, 2010). Fragile ecological systems, tourism and with it, the lives of people in the region who depend on the oil and fishing industry, have been damaged considerably.

In this respect, the institutions involved in this incident did not have a good standing in public. As the major party responsible for the accident, BP has been criticized heavily by the people and the government. The White House, although not directly responsible, is also held accountable for the disaster by many folks. The lack of sufficient safety regulations installed by BP and enforced by the government have put these two parties in a very negative light in recent months. These two organizations, BP more than