THE EVOLUTION OF A BEAT: A CASE STUDY OF CHANGES IN ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING FROM THE 1970’S TO TODAY AS EVIDENT IN COVERAGE OF THREE DISASTROUS OIL SPILLS

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements of the Degree

Master of Arts

by
Tamsyn Jones

Dr. Lee Wilkins, Thesis Chair

AUGUST 2006
The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

THE EVOLUTION OF A BEAT: A CASE STUDY OF CHANGES IN ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING FROM THE 1970’S TO TODAY AS EVIDENT IN COVERAGE OF THREE DISASTROUS OIL SPILLS

Presented by Tamsyn Jones

A candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

_____________________________________________________
Professor Lee Wilkins

_____________________________________________________
Professor Mark Ryan

_____________________________________________________
Professor Byron Scott

_____________________________________________________
Professor Bill Allen
Oran Mor

“In the morning
Raven reminded me
of the dream
of green hills
and trees
water whispering
as it flows over stones
wind whispering
as it blows through leaves
the song enfold us
life flows to its tune
stars dance to its rhythm
from the first breath
to the last gasp
its ancient melody
carries us on;
stand in silence
and listen.”

– Unknown Poet

my love and thanks to:

(. . . my father, for your constant good-humored support; you have always entertained my fancies . . . . . my brother, for all the tea and smoothies, and those late-night videos; you and kittens made life bearable . . . . . hannah, who has been there since the beginning; I couldn’t have done this without you; we shall both get to the end . . .
. . . uncle david, for sharing your haven by the River, and those echoing words of wisdom . . . . . george, for your prodding, your patient ears of a late eve rambling, & your certitude in my finishing . . .
. . . barry, my propinquitous friend over-ocean – for connecting me to something greater . . . .

&
. . . the little grey cat, my visitor from the shadows who always came at just the right time to make me laugh – magic spirit of the twilight . . . .)
This thesis has been a long time in the making, and I could never have gotten through its many whiles and whims without the encouragement, help, and support of many people. First, to my stalwart thesis committee – Lee Wilkins, Byron Scott, Mark Ryan, and Bill Allen: my deepest thanks for your endless patience, your perseverance through unwieldy drafts, and your constant good-humored support. My thesis has peregrinated through many obstacles, changes, and delays, but you all firmly believed I would get to the end, and without your faith (and tolerance for my numerous unorthodoxies), this thesis would never have seen the light of day. I am especially grateful to Lee Wilkins, my thesis chair, who has borne the brunt of my vagaries with this thesis. You have waded through countless pages and seen the best and the worst of my efforts. Somehow, you have always known how to set me straight. Thank you for your rigor, your motherly support, and for pushing me to do better. I have learned so much. I would also like to say a special thank you to Bill Allen, who came along just in the nick. Bill, I cannot express my thanks for all you have done. You were never too busy to share a moment of your time, offer words of wisdom, or set a wayward mind on a prudent path. Thanks for being who you are – you are the reason I am here today.

The wonderful, hard-working advisers and staff in the graduate Journalism office – especially Amy Lenk, Martha Pickens, and Ginny Cowell – deserve a special word of thanks as well. It is easy to forget the considerable amount of official, academic, and administrative paperwork generated during the course of a thesis program – as well as the many thorny problems with course registrations and bureaucratic matters. As one of the few environmental journalism majors lingering in the program, and one of those troublesome “unorthodox” graduate students, I quickly fell out of sorts with my graduate program requirements. I am sure this has caused the graduate Journalism office many headaches over the past few years. Thanks to you all for keeping tabs on me, helping me through many
bureaucratic hurdles, and always finding a way to sidestep some new snag. Thesis or no, without your help, I’m sure I would have slipped through the cracks!

Many thanks are also in order for the incredibly helpful and good-natured staff of the MU Interlibrary Loan office, who helped me track down countless boxes of microfilms around the country necessary for my research, and always found a way to extend my (habitually overextended) deadlines. I would also like to thank the MU Library more generally, for helping me keep crucial books checked out for many, many . . . many months. The Saint Louis University Library deserves a special word of thanks as well for allowing me to keep an indispensably useful book of theirs checked out for almost three years. Thank you also to the University of New South Wales Library staff in Sydney, Australia, for helping me find those Australian Journal of Communication articles, unavailable at my school, which I needed in haste my one free afternoon at the library.

To the lovely people of the Chthonic Clash Coffeehouse in Beacon, NY – thank you for creating such a warm, inviting, ambient place to be, and for letting me spend countless hours occupying space as I worked on some of the roughest parts of my thesis. Your camaraderie (and organic maple scones!) sustained me during my months working long-distance on this thesis out East – you have the best haven in the Hudson Highlands! Also, to the great people of the Peekskill Coffeehouse in Peekskill, NY – for that amazing table in the back nook, which I know I hoarded too often. Thanks for being so friendly and good-natured about my long hours spent inside – many hours of work were accomplished in your historic brick building by the River. To the staff and owners of Columbia’s Lakota Coffee and The Cherry Street Artisan, where I spent countless hours and days engrossed in thesis work of a late night or long, long day – before I left Columbia and after I found myself back again – thank you for not kicking me out, for your flexibility and openness to the student community. Many times, I found I could work nowhere else. And to my family and friends, near and far, thank you for everything.
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THE EVOLUTION OF A BEAT: A CASE STUDY OF CHANGES IN ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING FROM THE 1970’S TO TODAY AS EVIDENT IN COVERAGE OF THREE DISASTROUS OIL SPILLS

Tamsyn Jones

Dr. Lee Wilkins, Thesis Chair

ABSTRACT

To assess how environmental reporters have adapted to the changing rigors of environmental news, this thesis analyzes how environmental reporting has changed over three decades. Three disastrous oil spills throughout the beat’s history are qualitatively analyzed via comprehensive textual analysis in two quality newspapers, the Seattle Times and the UK Guardian. The chosen spills include: the 1978 Amoco Cadiz; the 1989 Exxon Valdez; and the 2002 Prestige. Oil spills are inherently complex, and thus are ideal as models of how environmental reporters dealt with a complex problem.

Results indicate a substantial improvement in quality of coverage between 1978 and 1989 in both newspapers, including a shift to focusing on systemic causes, a diversity of narrative themes, and local perspectives over official sources. The Seattle Times progressed from scant wire service coverage in 1978 to receiving a Pulitzer Prize for its 1989 spill coverage. The Guardian progressed from inconsistent reporting in 1978 to a cohesive reporting effort unified by probing reporting that examined deeper causes. In both papers, easy journalistic disaster templates were abandoned in favor of probing, independent reporting that examined maritime safety and the role of business and governments. The relationship between cultivation of regional identities and quality spill reporting emerged as an interesting result of this study. Stories cultivating regional identity tended to focus on systemic causes and develop richer conceptual frameworks for the spills. Quality reporting persisted through 2002, including additional efforts to improve. Overall, the results suggest that papers can markedly improve environmental reporting quality if attentive to reporting practices.
1. Introduction

Journalism plays an indisputably critical role in a free, democratic society. From the emergence of regular periodical publications and proto-journalists formally styled as “printers” in the 17th century (Raymond, 1999) to contemporary society’s belief in the vital role of this well-established “fourth estate,” reporters and writers dedicated to revealing truth to the public have functioned as necessary watchdogs of society. Throughout the profession’s history, journalists have served the citizenry by keeping tabs on the unfolding process of democracy and “filtering the mass of news to leave what is interesting, entertaining or relevant” (229). Adapting over time to scrutinize everything from politics and the economy to social and cultural institutions to popular currents in mainstream society, journalists have historically fulfilled an important role as champion of both the public and the principles of democracy. Often, this role has resulted in journalists influencing the policymaking process and functioning as secondary checks in society when rumors of wrongdoing, corruption, or threats to public welfare have motivated journalistic endeavors.

Since the Industrial Revolution, however, and particularly in the post World War II era, society has experienced an intensely rapid period of technological progress, virtually unrivaled by any other era of human history. The ecological ramifications of this continued explosion in discovery, development, and progress are enormous. Coupled with a figuratively shrinking planet and a burgeoning human population taxing increasingly finite environmental resources, journalists have now emerged as essential investigators of the human-environment relationship.

Since 1969, when the environment “exploded onto the front pages and the airwaves” (Sachsman, 1996) following the Santa Barbara Channel-Union Oil leak and the “environment” as a story finally “found its way onto the front-page agenda of the mass media” (244), journalists began and have continued to investigate and alert society to the myriad suite of environmental problems confronting it. Now after more than a quarter
century, environmental journalists as a breed of reporter have come to be recognized as a special sub-set of the profession of journalism.

Like their journalistic peers and forebears, environmental journalists today are capable of influencing governments and changing laws. Through their investigative work exposing threats to the environment, human health, and ecological systems, and informing an otherwise uninformed public, environmental journalists directly affect the policymaking process in this country (Smith, 1992; Sachsman, 1996). At the same time, as environmental issues have become more complex in society, environmental stories are more nuanced, less obvious, and inextricably linked with just about every facet of society. Today's environmental stories intertwine with domestic and international politics, business and economics, nature and conservation, and the technological and scientific spheres.

While the job of writing about today's environmental issues may be getting harder, it is more important than ever to foster an educated public capable of making informed decisions and questioning its elected representatives about policy decisions affecting its quality of life. Without environmental journalists, public understanding of important environmental risk and ecological issues would be underreported or left by the wayside altogether, and a dynamic level of public debate and inquiry would be eliminated from the pages of the mass media.

However, as Friedman (2004) and others have noted, while the specialty of environmental reporting has tremendously advanced since it came into being, environmental journalists continue to face challenges inside and outside the newsroom. Although the niche beat has become a well-established concept in the profession, environmental journalists still continue the struggle to justify their utility in society, as well as in newsrooms and the larger field of journalism.

In addition to the familiar challenges dogging environmental reporters since the beginning, environmental journalists may be particularly susceptible to a suite of external threats affecting the entire news media industry in this country. As early as the mid-1990’s,
Frome (1998) observed that “daily newspapers around the country have been going out of business, or merging, or ‘downsizing’,” which meant reducing staff to “the barest minimum” and “cheating the reader with a second-rate or third-rate product” (2). The process seems only to have accelerated in recent years. Today’s overarching media climate is beclouded by several ominous trends: increasing media consolidation, shrinking circulation sizes, a diminishing circle of dedicated readers, and a growing concession to advertisers and the “business model” of reporting, increasingly at the expense of more hard-hitting, controversial, or unpopular news coverage.

While journalists of all creeds are threatened by the prospect of shrinking newsroom resources, the practical realities of these trends as manifest in newsroom policy and managerial response may bode particularly ominous for environmental journalists. Despite the pervasiveness of serious environmental problems and the existence of “able reporters and editors [who] have done great work for the environment” (Frome 1998, 3), the environment beat is usually the first to be eliminated in the face of internal or external pressures on newsrooms. “[T]he odds are against them,” he says, and against the environment “getting a fair shake in the mainstream, for-profit media, as we now know them” (3). Does this corporate tendency have anything to do with the perceived quality or importance of environmental news coverage?

**Purpose of Study: Environmental Coverage of Three Oil Spills**

This study thus intends to contribute to a better understanding of the current status and quality of the field of environmental journalism by comparing news coverage from the early years of the beat with more recent environmental coverage and analyzing how environmental reporting has evolved over time. Specifically, this research will undertake a comparison of how journalists covered three major oil spills – each of which occurred at a different stage in the evolution of the environmental reporting beat as well as the culture at large – in an attempt to discover how environmental reporting has changed.
The start point is the 1978 wreckage of the oil supertanker **Amoco Cadiz** – the largest spill of its time and one of the world’s worst ecological disasters. Hundreds of miles of Breton coastline were polluted as 68 million gallons of oil oozing from the wrecked tanker formed an 18 mile-wide, 80 mile-long slick devastating to the region’s ecosystem and fisheries. Coinciding with the burgeoning environmental awareness movement and the emergence of environmental journalism as a recognized journalism specialty, this spill is an apt starting point from which to assess and track the evolving process of how journalists cover highly complex environmental stories.

Coverage of this spill will be compared to a mid-point: the 1989 **Exxon Valdez** spill in Alaska, the worst U.S. oil spill in history and the year’s biggest environmental story. According to Smith, the spill was also the biggest of any news story that year (Smith, 1992). At the same time, however, the **Exxon** spill also represents a classic example of crisis reporting – a serious complaint of many environmental news stories of the 1980’s and early 1990’s. Whether environmental reporters covered the **Exxon Valdez** differently than they covered the 1978 spill is one question this research hopes to answer.

The end point of the study is the 2002 **Prestige** oil spill off the Spanish Galician coast, one of the most recent catastrophic oil disasters and the worst ecological disaster in Spain’s history. Occurring nearly 25 years after the **Amoco Cadiz** wrecked itself off Brittany’s coast and assumed its place as the world’s second worst tanker disaster of all time (it is superseded only by the nearly 280,000 tons of oil spilt by the collision of the tankers **Atlantic Empress** and **Aegean Captain** off the coast of Tobago in 1979)¹, the **Prestige** spill moves the research lens into the contemporary era of environmental journalism. This work will attempt to discover whether there are noticeable differences between news accounts of the **Amoco Cadiz**, the **Exxon Valdez**, and the **Prestige** oil spills, and to articulate what those differences are.

By examining how journalists covered these three major oil spill disasters, this research will attempt to ascertain – through analysis of rhetorical, thematic, and visual aspects of news coverage – how well environmental journalists have learned to cover complex environmental stories over the past quarter-century. Because oil spills are such intricate disasters, resulting from a host of political, economic, technological, and environmental factors – and encompassing more than just ecosystems in their aftermath – they epitomize the difficulties of reporting on the thorny, many-quilled environmental stories of our time.

Analyzing coverage of three key oil spills that occurred over a 25-year swath of environmental reporting history will permit a greater understanding of the progress made by environmental journalists over the past 25 years in how well they report on the environment. Such analysis will also illuminate whether journalists have learned how to wrest from the gallimaufry of tangled complexity inherent to the socio-ecological issues of today insightful stories written with depth, context, and innovation. The results of this research may ultimately suggest something about the current status of the environment beat as well as its future.

**A Historical Approach to Analyzing Environmental Reporting**

In order to get at the heart of the question “how has environmental reporting changed?” a more comprehensive scope may be necessary. Despite some excellent academic work investigating agenda-setting, framing, and narrative elements of environmental stories, few indeed are the scholarly research efforts that have moved beyond a slice-in-time approach to directly compare present-day environmental news coverage to a historical context.

Pompper (2002) attempted to do this in her study of framing and environmental risk in U.S. tabloids. Looking at supermarket tabloids between 1983 and 1997, she attempted to determine how environmental issues were framed for consumption in the popular culture, as represented by “non-elite” readers in the U.S., those who tend to be “marginalized” or “low on the socio-economic scale.” Howenstine (1987) made a similar attempt in his study examining trends in environmental coverage between 1970 and 1982. Using a content analysis to analyze the

This finding has been corroborated by several scholars and researchers (Bruggers, Nieman Reports Special Issue, 2004; Detjen et al, 2000; Friedman, 1990; Friedman, 2004; Sachsman, 1996; Sachsman et al, 2002; Ward, Nieman Reports Special Issue, 2004), though the same researchers have also acknowledged continuing challenges. Based on their work, it would seem there is an ironic oxymoron inherent in environmental journalism: the caliber and quality of journalists has increased while quality of coverage has (generally speaking) fluctuated or changed little – at least in the span of time covered by those studies.

Perhaps this conundrum is related to the mode of research. Examining coverage over the span of a year may indicate the quality of coverage or trends implicit at that point in time. Similarly, comparing a short span of years – such as Shanahan and McComas’ (1997) comparison of television’s portrayal of the environment between 1991 and 1995 – may reveal a smaller sub-trend that, when put in the context of a greater movement, may very well turn out to be an anomaly. There certainly are benefits to the time-slice mode, namely, that it renders a snapshot of the status of things as they are right then. This may be useful if the point is to suggest ways for immediate reform. When trying to extrapolate these articles to make generalizations about the broader lifespan and trends of environmental journalism, many individual snapshots coalesced from disparate origins must be pieced together into some sort of synthesis in an attempt to draw conclusions. The results may not be entirely forthcoming – and perhaps even a bit misleading.

Adopting a research scope that tracks changes in environmental reporting across a wider historical context may permit a more accurate assessment. Indeed, Hamilton and Atton (2001) have observed that “differences in scholarly interpretations of a situation or event reveal the ways in which interpretations are shaped by historical contexts.” Brennan
(1982), in his study of television coverage of the oil supply crises of 1973–74 and 1978–79, found that one thing that was “clearly lacking” from t.v. news reports was historical perspective. Instead of providing “a perspective on international crude oil production, our domestic oil industry, and existing U.S. government policies” (vii), coverage ended up “contributing to the public confusion about the causes and solutions.” Wilkins (1989) describes such reportage as “knowledge without meaning” (32).

Thus, examining how environmental coverage of similar complex environmental events has changed across a historical context – represented in this research by three similarly destructive and complex oil spill events – will provide important insight into how environmental journalism itself has grown and changed since the first few pioneers of the environmental news concept stoked the burgeoning field into existence. The answers may ultimately help today’s environmental journalists understand the legacy of reporting they have inherited, and how best to tackle the gamut of growing environmental problems in need of the gifted journalist’s elucidation.

**Research Rationale: The Utility of the Oil Spill Example**

Oil is arguably one of the world’s most important global commodities. It is the source of economic livelihood for many people and holds sway over millions around the world who are dependent upon it for the most basic elements of daily life. From workers making a living in the oil fields and rigs to industrialized consumers who rely on oil for everything from transportation to clothing and containers, oil is far more ubiquitous in society than most people realize. Especially considering the volatile status of oil and the degree to which the present declines in global supplies have laid bare society’s addiction to and utter dependence on the substance, oil disasters that lose millions of gallons to the murky depths of the sea are not only regional ecological crises but global economic ones as well.

In a journalistic sense, oil spills are inherently complex environmental stories. As natural and industrial disasters, they are outside the normal journalistic routine (Smith, x).
Wilkins (1989) describes such disasters as “aris[ing] from the synergy created by highly complex, technological systems in which scientific knowledge and technological expertise are tightly coupled with economic and political demands in national and international settings” (175). Despite the indisputable complexity of oil spill disasters, there is the temptation to write about them in terms of familiar frameworks (Smith, 1992; Sachsman, 1996; Lasswell in Wilkins, 1989).

Smith (1992) says that toxic discharge from oil tankers tends to be described in terms of “impact, victims, blame, and efforts to clean up the mess” – a formula that blinds journalists to “relevant facts and issues” that delve deeper into context. Schlechtweg (1996) says that these frames may simplify the process of reporting complicated stories by supplying journalists with “ready-made conceptual schemes” for organizing the glut of information they are subjected to daily. However, he says that too often, relying on these ready-made frames results in obscuring, rather than elucidating, the important unique aspects of a news event, he says (257).

Oil spills are about effects on local wildlife and larger ecological systems; but they are also about effects on human communities and the failure of underlying political institutions or technological infrastructure. Spills tend to be protracted and messy, and they usually result in a head-on collision between nature and a historically environmentally destructive industry. Often, the political fallout of an oil spill devolves into a draw-out battle over liability and blame. With widespread public visibility – the worst spills often attracting a global audience – oil spills typically have long-lasting political and legal ramifications, from maritime law to environmental law to regulations on industry and international commerce.

Oil spills are also compelling visual stories, which makes them ripe for symbolic framing. As will be discussed later, studying how images and graphics were incorporated into stories will be an important part of this research’s analysis of environmental coverage of the spills. Spill images can be used to enhance or complement the written story; or, particularly graphic photographs can be used in ways that end up trumping the text. Depending on how
judiciously spill images are used, the full story of an oil spill may be obscured, or conversely, 
told more holistically. Thus, stated simply, oil spills have all the elements of a complex 
modern environmental story and are ideal as models for studying how quality environmental 
reporting relates to complexity of story subject.

Further, because oil spills of great magnitude have occurred at regular intervals over 
the course of the environment beat’s evolution, it is possible to compare coverage of such 
events over time – comparing apples to apples, so to speak – and to use them as microcosms of 
reportage at specific points of interest in time. By studying the evolution of the field since its 
initial explosive beginnings in the 1970’s to the present, specifically through the vehicle of the 
highly complex oil spill disaster, this research will attempt to determine whether or to what 
extent environmental reporting has changed.

Choosing Three Oil Spills to Study

Based on the above context explaining the usefulness of the oil spill example for the 
purposes of this thesis, the author endeavored to find three oil spills of enough magnitude to 
be widely reported and enough complexity to serve as convincing models of the challenges of 
environmental reporting. In order for consistency of analysis, the chosen spills also needed to 
be spread out relatively uniformly across the environment beat’s history. These criteria led to 
the selection of the three spills being studied for this thesis: the 1978 wreckage of the 
supertanker Amoco Cadiz; the 1989 grounding of the Exxon Valdez; and the 2002 Prestige disaster 
off the Spanish Galician coast. A more detailed explanation of these spills and their relevance 
to the research questions of this thesis is outlined below.

The Amoco Cadiz “was one of the most studied oil spills in history,” according to a 
comprehensive NOAA oil spill case history document prepared for the U.S. Coast Guard and 
updated annually as part of its federal mandate to provide the guard with scientific support 
for planning and responding to marine spill emergencies. On March 16, 1978, it ran aground 
three miles off the coast of Brittany, spilling all 68 million gallons of its light crude oil cargo
into the sea and polluting more than 200 miles of Brittany coastline. The environmental
damage was extensive, contributing to the classification of the spill as the world's largest
tanker disaster at that time. Currently, it ranks fourth on a list of all-time worst spills (a list
which includes not just tanker spills, but spills related to pipeline breaks, oil well spills,
drilling blowouts, storage tank breaks, and natural oil seeps, among others), according to the
NOAA case history report. At the time, it resulted in the largest loss of marine life ever
recorded from an oil spill: millions of mollusks, sea urchins, and bottom-dwelling organisms;
tens of thousands of birds, primarily diving birds; 9,000 tons of oysters. It was also the first
time in history that ecologically important estuarine tidal rivers were oiled3 (NOAA 1992, 24).
This disaster had such devastating consequences that it effectively jolted the world out of its
complacency about the destructive effects of oil spills and carelessness within the industry. It
also became the catalyst for a suite of regulatory changes in the marine shipping industry and
inspired the formation of several organizations worldwide devoted to promoting tanker
safety, tracking and cataloguing spill events, or overseeing regulatory affairs.

Twenty-four years and at least twelve major spills later, the Prestige – an aging vessel
built in 1976 – split in two and sank 155 miles off the coast of Spain on November 19 2002,
leaking 1 to 3 million gallons of heavy industrial oil (one of the worst types to clean) into a
biodiversity-rich area on which more than 60 percent of the local population depended for
fishing and livelihood. The spill caused the worst environmental catastrophe in Spain’s
history, and it forced Europe’s largest fishing port – the Port of Vigo in Galicia – to close,
crippling the region’s fishing industry. Currently, the Prestige ranks 20th on the list of worst
after the spill, said that “[in] ecological and socio-economic terms, the Prestige oil slick must
be considered one of the most damaging in the history of maritime transport, and one of the
most complex.” The report’s authors further note that “many authors rate it the worst since

3 Estuarine Tidal Rivers are areas where the mouth of a river meets an arm of the sea. It is rich in
marine and bird life and can provide important breeding and nursery habitat.
the Exxon Valdez disaster that hit Alaska in 1989.” Because of its large geological spread, the spill reached virtually all types of marine habitat. Hundreds of thousands of birds died over the course of several months following the disaster, and the World Wildlife Foundation’s authors state that the extent of damage to shorelines and near-shoreline plant-life was “comparable to that suffered following the Amoco Cadiz spill” (Garcia 2003, 6).

Part of the spill’s complexity – for journalists and investigators alike – stemmed from a complicated array of events and decisions that occurred before the tanker actually broke up and sank. The Prestige was a Greek-operated, single-hulled tanker flying a Bahamas flag with a Liberian owner which had been chartered by a Swiss-based Russian oil company. One can imagine the ensuing fiasco following this complicated lineage as everyone looked for someone at whom to point the finger of blame and responsibility. Though damaged nearly a week before it sank when one of its tanks burst during a storm, Spanish and Portuguese governments denied the vessel access to safer harbors within their boundaries. The Prestige ended up being towed around the Atlantic for days before the stresses of its injury caused it to break up and sink. The Spanish government, underestimating the potential environmental effects, chose to allow the leaking tanker to sink instead of salvaging it, making it a target for both media scrutiny and angry onlookers worldwide. Instead, the tanker shed more of its oil underwater – up to 125 tons per day – and continues to seep oil into the marine environment more than three years later.

The span of time separating these spills was punctuated by the United States’ worst ecological disaster, the ecologically devastating wreckage of the tanker Exxon Valdez. At just past midnight on March 24, 1989, the tanker, traveling outside normal shipping lands to avoid ice, ran aground on Bligh Reef in Alaska’s ecologically sensitive Prince William Sound. Within six hours of its grounding, approximately 10.9 million gallons of the vessel’s 53 million gallon light crude cargo had spilt into the waters of the sound causing widespread ecological damage. The Exxon Valdez wrecked just at the start of the bird migratory season, resulting in a severe loss of avian life. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that as
many as 390,000 birds died, along with thousands of otters and at least 200 seals. Ripple effects of the oil spill may have reverberated much higher up the marine species hierarchy to cause deaths in killer whales. In its comprehensive report, NOAA states that killer whale numbers declined noticeably a short time after the spill (NOAA 1992, 84).

Eventually, the oil from this spill damaged more than 1,100 miles of non-continuous coastline in the U.S. Almost 17 years after the disaster, environmental monitoring continues to find trace effects of the spill. Though the spill only ranks 35th in terms of worst oil disasters, it required the most expensive clean-up effort in oil spill history, according to the International Tanker Owner’s Pollution Federation (ITOPF), a London-based nonprofit involved in prevention and clean-up of marine-based spills. The costs will perhaps be rivaled only by those of the Prestige, whose clean-up efforts are still ongoing. And, because of the remoteness of the locale, the Exxon spill presented some especially difficult logistical challenges for clean-up crew and equipment delivery, which further entangled both cleanup efforts and attempts by journalists to convey the highly complex situation to the public.

While the circumstances for each spill were different (the Amoco Cadiz and Exxon Valdez ran aground; the Prestige was damaged during a storm), these spills nonetheless pose some intriguing questions about media coverage for scholars interested in environmental journalism and how environmental journalists use framing in the process of reporting. In each case, the environmental damage was great – particularly to important marine and fisheries areas. In each case, the tanker involved was a single-hulled ship – despite the fact that numerous spills in the intervening years had led to calls for industry reform and improved regulations. And in each case, a host of circumstances before and after the spills relating to the causes, the clean-up, and the socio-ecological effects rendered the spills highly complex affairs that challenged reporters to express the many different angles.
Table 1. List of oil spills being researched and relevant key information, showing each tankers’ name; the date of each spill and its location; and the type of oil spilt by the wrecked ships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tanker Name</th>
<th>Spill Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Amount of Oil Spilt (gallons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amoco Cadiz</td>
<td>March 16, 1978</td>
<td>France: Atlantic Ocean, off coast of Portsall, Brittany</td>
<td>68,668,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exxon Valdez</td>
<td>March 24, 1989</td>
<td>USA: Prince William Sound, Alaska</td>
<td>10,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige</td>
<td>November 19, 2002</td>
<td>Spain: Galicia</td>
<td>2,000,000+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of these characteristics, the three spills chosen for this research are ideal selections to serve as microcosms for the larger question of how environmental reporting has evolved and changed over time. In addition to this overarching research imperative, the spills present some intriguing sub-questions. The 1978 and 2002 spills both happened at points of time in relatively close proximity to a global oil supply crisis. The Amoco Cadiz disaster occurred just four years after the first oil supply crisis of 1973-74. Though collective memory of the oil shortage mini-crisis may have dimmed by the time of the spill, it is conceivable that its historical context will figure in coverage of the oil disaster. Similarly, the present hullabaloo surrounding speculation that global oil capacity has already peaked was in its beginnings in November 2002 when the Prestige wrecked. Gas prices were rising and have continued to rise – reaching new highs just recently in the wake of the Katrina hurricane disaster.

Thus, this research will examine whether these global contexts entered into coverage of the oil disasters. In the same vein, this research will examine whether the narratives moved beyond discussions of the regional consequences of the spills to explore the greater systemic causes and implications to those participating in the full chain of production and distribution: laborers, developing economies, First World consumers. Based on the research of scholars such as Wilkins (1989), Smith (1992), and Brennan (1982), it is believed that these contexts are less likely to have been broached by reporters of the earlier era of environmental journalism. Wilkins has noted that media across the board tend to report on technological
accidents as disasters, rather than as “the predictable malfunctioning of complicated systems” (Wilkins 1989, 172), and Smith (1992) has said that “news accounts of catastrophes focus on the kinds of drama, suffering and malfeasance that make good fiction” (156).

Other research questions will also fall under the umbrella of this research’s primary interest in how environmental reporting has changed. The Amoco Cadiz wrecked during the heyday of the nascent environmental movement, when environmental journalism was just taking off. How journalists of the time covered the catastrophe, and whether their relative inexperience with environmental issues affected quality or style of coverage is one question this research seeks to answer. By contrast, the Prestige spill occurred in the recent history of environmental journalism, giving the beat time to mature and improve. The literature suggests that noticeable differences will be observed between coverage of the Amoco Cadiz and coverage of the contemporary Prestige spill nearly a quarter century later.

In between, the Exxon Valdez wrecked during a boom cycle in environmental coverage, at a time when other noteworthy environmental issues, such as the Alar-on-apples scare and the conflict over logging in old-growth Pacific Northwestern forests, were being vigorously covered – perhaps “over” covered, as many researchers argue, to the detriment of quality depth reporting. Further, both the Exxon Valdez and the Prestige stories subsequently devolved into related coverage of legal actions against the tanker captains. In the case of the Prestige, another sub-current began to hold sway over the pages of the news media in the wake of the spill: namely, the political controversy over Spain’s disaster response and the role of Britain as safety inspector. This research will examine whether stories about the earlier Amoco Cadiz disaster are characterized by a similar attempt to report on other important angles of the spill, as well as whether the thirteen-year gap between the Exxon Valdez and Prestige spills resulted in further maturation of the environmental reporter’s approach to covering a damaging oil spill.

This research will also examine how news accounts treated the depiction of nature versus industry in each case, as several researchers have argued that the creation of easy
rhetorical frames and the reduction of complex situations into easy conceptual ideas of oppositional groups often undermines quality informative news coverage (Segal, 1991; Smith, 1992; Schlechtweg, 1996). Studying these three oil spills as models of highly complex environmental events will ultimately allow conclusions to be drawn about the progress made by environmental journalists over the past three decades.

**The Birth of Environmental Journalism**

Most media scholars would agree that environmental journalism only came into being in any significant way in the 1970’s (Detjen, Fico, Li & Kim, 2000; Berger, 2002; Howenstine, 1987; Lacy & Coulson, 2000; Sachsman, 1996). Before the advent of the broader environmental movement during that time period, the relationship between humans and the environment was scarcely contemplated by society – let alone by journalists. With the exception of a handful of notable early outliers and thinkers who published their concerns – mostly from the scientific disciplines, such as Rachel Carson’s landmark book *Silent Spring,* published in 1962, or Aldo Leopold’s almost revolutionary collection of essays amalgamated under the title *A Sand County Almanac,* published in 1948 – society and the mass media had virtually no concept of the environment as a topic of social, and therefore journalistic, importance. Before the end of the 1960’s, Sachsman (1996) says that newspapers and television stations “would cover a week-long smog alert or . . . a river that was on fire, but the story produced had no real ecological connotation” (241). Stories such as these were considered events, unlinked to any concept of environmental health.

However, as public concern over the environment escalated between the late 1960’s and early 1970’s (Dunlap and Scarce, 1991), the mass media began to treat the environment as a serious story. As the cultural environmental movement gained more widespread social appeal, the infantile field of environmental journalism began to gain credence and momentum. Inhabiting a symbiotic domain that overlapped with the broader social movement, reporters responded to and focused attention on environmental concerns in a way
like no other time before. As Berger (2002) notes, “Although environmental journalism has played a key part in driving environmentalism on the public agenda, it has also been driven by developments on that agenda” (8).

**Tracking Changes in Environmental Reporting**

Environmental journalism has come a long way since it first crept into the public radar in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. In 1968, only a single journalist was identified as a ‘specialist’ environmental reporter; in the short span of five years, the figure rose to 100 in 1973 (Berger, 2002), and by 1990 many news organizations that had previously given little thought to the environment had “staff devoted specifically to that purpose” (Friedman, 1990). Between 1988 and 1990 alone, environmental coverage had increased by 72 percent in small newspapers and broadcast environmental stories had increased from 130 in 1987 to 453 in 1989 (Detjen, 1990). When Friedman recently (2004) updated her examination of the environment beat to look at the decade of the 1990’s, she found that additional positive advances had been made in reporting quality. Environmental journalists “provided more intricate and less event-driven stories,” used a wider variety of sources, and began “completing more major enterprise and investigative stories” (Friedman, 2004).

Environmental journalists also diversified their subject scopes, looking at issues from land management to sustainability to endocrine disruptors, and more frequently availed themselves of graphics to help explain complex issues (11). Although the concept had yet to fully mature, Sachsman (1996) says that by the mid-1980’s – the journalistic era in which the Exxon spill occurred – more journalists began to appreciate and understand the importance of environmental risk communication, and tried to explain the human health aspects related to environmental issues. According to Sachsman (1996), “it no longer made sense to discuss environmental communication or environmental reporting in a vacuum” (249).

The progress of environmental journalism has been most clearly epitomized by its rapid rise in respectability and public visibility. Environmental stories today regularly win
prestigious awards – most recently, a 2004 Pulitzer Prize awarded to the Los Angeles Times for coverage of wildfires. Environmental journalists also have their own professional society – the Society of Environmental Journalists, launched in 1990 as a special professional organization devoted to the practice of environmental journalism and the concerns of the beat’s writers. The organization now boasts more than 1,400 members around the globe, ranging from professionals to academics and students.

The caliber of journalists covering the environment has also improved from the early, inchoate days of the field. In 1990, Jim Detjen, founder of the Society of Environmental Journalists and current Knight Chair of Environmental Journalism at Michigan State University, noted that in 1975 “few environmental reporters had taken a single course in ecology. Today many have taken advanced courses in biology, chemistry, law and investigative reporting” (74). Compared to times past, veteran reporter James Bruggers wrote in the 2004 Special Edition Nieman Reports that “journalists assigned to the beat today do a much better job than we used to of exploring these gray, nuanced areas of science,” and that “reporters are also more skeptical of information environmental groups try to feed them than they were a decade or two ago” (55).

**Over the Hill but not the Mountain**

Nonetheless, while the beat has matured over the past thirty-some years, it has faced an uphill battle and some formidable obstacles – as reporter Bud Ward put it, “several mountains and more than a few valleys” (Ward, 2004). Although faced with more complex stories that “aren’t cast in predicable contrasts,” environmental journalists today wrestle with many of the same challenges as they did thirty years ago and many of the same reporting peccadilloes persist. Crisis-reporting has been a consistent criticism of environmental journalism (Friedman, 1990; Smith, 1998; Daley and O’Neil, 1991; Naj, 1990; Liebler and Bendix, 1996). Even at some of the best and most respected papers, coverage is often “timid,” “crisis-oriented,” and “inconsistent” (Detjen, 1990, 74). This was apparent in the early days
of the field, and researchers have found that it persists in environment coverage today.

“Want to know when the next boom cycle for environmental coverage will begin?” Ward asked. “Determine the next environmental disaster – the next Exxon Valdez, Love Canal, Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, Bhopal, India, or the next Alar-on-apples scare . . . . Then look at column inches to swell” (Ward 2004, 59).

One criticism of environmental reporting has been a failure to cover a wide enough spectrum of environmental stories – especially stories that go beyond mere gloom and doom to examine proactive environmental efforts or positive achievements in environmental health and conservation. The media have been accused of not fully understanding the complex issues involved in environmental stories, of sensationalizing environmental problems, of misleading the public through unbalanced stories and T.V. images, and of framing environmental issues in ways that fail to properly articulate context to an even less informed public (Liebler and Bendix, 1996; McComas and Shanahan, 1999; Schlechtweg, 1996).

Of course, environmental journalists have been battling the same practical obstacles since the very beginning: competition with traditional beats; a limited news hole; the ambivalence (and sometimes outright hostility) of editors to environmental news; accusations of being “too green;” a growing tendency in newsrooms to lump environmental news with other beats; and the very cyclical nature of environmental news that challenges environmental reporters to sell editors on the more nuanced nature of longer-term trends.

Indeed, when Detjen et al. (2000) conducted a study examining the current work environment of environmental reporters and factors that might affect quality of environmental news coverage, they found that a significant number of environmental reporters experience newsroom-related constraints that they consider major – especially in the areas of budgetary resources and time. Many environmental reporters, the authors said, have reduced their commitment to the beat and see their news organizations doing the same. One in five of the reporters surveyed said that lack of interest by editors was a “major problem in
their newsrooms” (11) – though it should be noted that the study was originally conducted in 1995 and may be slightly outdated.

One continuing challenge has been the difficulty of ensuring at least some degree of scientific and environmental training for both reporters and editors. As environmental problems have become more complex, newsmakers have come to realize that reporting those problems requires a level of experience and education far above most, if not all, other beats. However, the virtual ubiquity of environmental currents in other beats has made reporter education on environmental issues and principles an almost impossibly gargantuan task. Throughout the 1980’s, Sachsman (1996) says that “the need for specialized environmental reporters remained clear,” but the environment had, by that time, “become a story for virtually every local beat and general assignment reporter.” Nothing short of “training all of them to be environmental specialists would do the trick,” he says (252).

This is not to say that numerous outstanding environmental reporters haven’t risen to the task. Bruggers (2004) acknowledged that “the beat is a tougher one today” (54). He and other veteran environmental journalists long for the old days to return, when “fanciful ideas like whether the state of Montana should bring back buffalo to its open ranges” (54) made debate about the issues seem cut-and-dry. Sachsman et al. (2002) credited environmental reporting specialists, where they exist, with making a difference, helping readers and viewers differentiate between environmental claims and legitimate threats, and overall, providing “a model of environmental reporting worth emulating by the general assignment reporters, government reporters, and local beat reporters who cover most of the breaking stories” (412).

Regardless, when Friedman (1990) took stock of the state of the field in 1990, she observed that “the environmental beat of the 1990’s is not very different from what it was in the 1970’s” (15). While papers printed more environment-centric stories on “environmental topics different and more varied,” she concluded that the quality of environmental coverage presented many of the same problems it did twenty years earlier. In 1993, an American Opinion Research Survey found that fewer than 4 in 10 reporters rated environmental coverage good
(Detjen et al. 2000, 3); and in 2000, Lacy and Coulson (2000) found that source use on the environment beat was similar to traditional beats, relying heavily on government and business sources (21).

This reality should be of interest and concern to contemporary environmental journalists, who must simultaneously defend their beats against a constant barrage of criticism, consolidating newsrooms and ambivalent editors, while also plying the turbulent seas of the intricate and multifaceted environmental story.

At the same time, while environmental journalists continue to wrestle with questions of how to improve the quality of their reporting, they must also tackle a growing mountain of increasingly worrisome environmental trends: the rapid loss of critical habitats around the world accompanied by a suite of mass extinctions of potentially critical species; a global energy crunch that threatens to tip public opinion in favor of expanding industry at the expense of environment; a growing worldwide population that bodes ill for wildlife and environment when development, water access, and poverty intersect; and a U.S. government more radically opposed to progressive environmental policy and action than any other since the beginning of the 20th century.

With the specter of global climate change looming ever more menacing on the world's horizon, and the official policy of the U.S. still disputing the now largely unanimous and increasingly urgent worldwide consensus on the realities of human effects on global climate, the need for quality environmental reporting that tackles these thorny issues is ever more essential. This makes the job of environmental journalists that much more difficult. But, as Lewis and Jhally (1998) observed, “fail[ing] to address current concerns and dissatisfaction with the media creates the risk of losing the political impetus that gives it its current purchase” (117). The results of this research will contribute to a better understanding of how well environmental journalists have dealt with some of that dissatisfaction as evident in how their reporting of environmental issues has changed over the long-term.
Framing theory and the related theory of agenda-setting will be the central media
theories guiding this research. While the two theories are closely related (Ghanem and
Hendrickson, 2003; Scheufele, 2000), there are differences between them. Framing theory is
interested in how particular issues are portrayed in the media, whereas agenda-setting is more
concerned with which issues get covered by media, and to what extent (Ghanem and
Hendrickson, 2003). Schlechtweg (1996) used Gitlin’s definition of media frames as
“persistent patterns of cognition, interpretations, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and
exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether visual or verbal”
(257). Drawing on Gamson’s and Modigliani’s (2003) definition of framing and its relation to
cultural resonance, Cann (1999) explained that media discourse can be defined as a “set of
interpretive packages that give meaning to an issue” and are “framed around a central
organizing idea.” Scheufele (2000) has stated that media frames serve as working routines for
journalists, allowing them to quickly identify and classify information.

Traditionally, framing has been treated as an extension of agenda-setting – as a way
to actually test agenda-setting effects – rather than as an independent approach to the study of
media effects. Scheufele (2000), however, argues that the three approaches to media effects
studies (agenda-setting, priming, and framing) should be treated as “related, yet different
approaches to media effects that cannot be combined into a simple theory just for the sake of
parsimony” (298). Recently, McCombs and Shaw (1998) suggested that framing should be
seen as second-level agenda-setting.

Over the past several decades, the two theories – beginning with agenda-setting,
followed by the development of the framing concept – have served as important theoretical
guides in mass media research. Within the journalism community, the important role of the
media as gatekeepers of information has been widely discussed. It is now a largely accepted
fact that the media, through its selection of and emphasis on certain news items, is successful
at intimating what is important to the public (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, 1993; Wanta & Hu, 1993; Ader, 1995). Editors, working with a finite amount of space and a limited publication time, make choices about the types of stories that get published in their newspapers. Reporters, with a closer connection to the citizens and exposure to an array of issues, make choices about what they think should be covered (though, editors do not always take their suggestions). What ultimately gets through the filtering process has the potential to influence thousands or millions of people.

In the environmental arena, the potential import of this media power is tremendous. Successful environmental reporting has exposed serious environmental health threats, influenced the policymaking process, and alerted citizens to environmental issues of imminent concern – from proposals for nuclear waste disposal sites, to pollution-related health problems, to the status and wellbeing (or lack of it) of critical indicator species in the environment. However, this same reporting also has the power to deflect attention away from issues and problems, obscure aspects of stories, overemphasize others, and mislead the public – whether knowingly or not.

Several researchers have acknowledged this by discussing framing in terms of its potentially disingenuous methods and effects (Pompper, 2002; Tankard, cited in Ghanem and Hendrickson, 2003; Cann, 1999; Bagus, 2001; Schlechtweg, 1996). Tankard has said that media framing can sometimes be like “the sleight of hand of the magician,” with attention being focused in one place “so that people do not notice the manipulation that is going on at another point.” Much of the power of framing, he said, comes from its “ability to set the terms for a debate or define a debate without the audience realizing that this defining is taking place” (quoted in Ghanem and Hendrickson, 2003, 11). This is often done by the use of a “daft metaphor, catchphrase or other symbolic device” (Cann 1999, 25).

Bagust (2001) directly addressed the media’s use of symbolic devices in his rather cynical discussion of the media’s collusion in the process of creating a “themed environment” and “mediated infotainment.” Writing about Australia’s recent fervor and debate over the
possible cloning of the Tasmanian Thylacine – an animal more commonly referred to as the “Tasmanian Tiger” and believed to have been hunted to extinction by the 1930’s (the last living Thylacine died in a zoo in 1936) – he says that Thylacines have become “one of the most spectacular and desirable sign systems of wilderness.” Partly through the media’s depiction of the animals and their treatment of the cloning debate, he argues that Thylacines have become mere “thematic commodities” of the “media / infotainment complex.”

While framing was not the explicit focus of his article, his argument unmistakably orbits around the role of framing in the Thylacine’s transformation into a “thematic commodity.” He specifically compares what is happening to the image of the Thylacine in Australian society and media with the media’s framing of a similar believed-to-be-extinct endemic species: the Wollemi Pine, an ancient tree thought to have died out at least two million years ago. In 1994, a small cluster of the trees was found to be surviving in a singular, isolated grove just west of Sydney. Bagust (2001) argues that the media’s subsequent framing of the trees as “living dinosaurs” allowed for a “compelling story” that has brought the trees to the global marketplace, “guaranteeing continued funding,” and thus making the trees thematically valuable. He concludes by saying that “the contemporary interest in the environment is largely based on a highly mediated (and increasingly profitable and commodified) representation of its most spectacular and appealing aspects” (10).

Schlechtweg (1996) provides a good summary of the potential power of media frames, arguing that the “associative logic” informing a news frame can be “a powerful ideological factor in the reporting of public controversies” (258). Looking at the operation of ideology at the other end of the journalistic process – the external effects of the finished product, as opposed to the in-house pre-publication process – Parameswaran (2002) states that “the mass media have become key sites where the misty smog that envelops the process of globalization is repeatedly manufactured and distributed” (312). Analyzing how globalization is portrayed in National Geographic’s 1999 “millennium” issue, she concludes that a “subconscious ideology”
is evident in the magazine’s text and photos, ultimately subverting its attempt to promote globalization and instead reinforcing a Euroamerican worldview.

This is not to suggest, however, that frames must therefore always be bad, deceptive, or used maliciously with the intent to mislead. Schlechtweg (1996) and other previously mentioned researchers note that frames help people cope with new, problematic or complex information, and further acknowledge that journalists may be unaware of the extent to which they are creating frames. In cognitive terms, research has suggested that the formation of conceptual frameworks may be necessary for most people to make sense of the complexity of the world.

Sheufele (2000) writes that “framing is based on subtle nuances in wording and syntax that have most likely unintentional effects or at least effects that are hard to predict or control by journalists” (309). Pompper (2002) also pointed out this probability, saying that many journalists disavow the notion of intentionally using news frames, but that many do agree that they “draw on collectively accepted images stored in the memories of audiences as storytelling devices” (113). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) commented that “frames should not be confused with positions for or against some policy measure” (4). Ghanem and Hendrickson (2003) concur, saying that media frames usually do not aim to present a “pro” or “con” view of an issue, but rather “define the terms of the debate” and “point to the central issues at hand,” albeit sometimes “subtly and sometimes completely unnoticed” (7). In the environmental reporting arena, they explained that environmental issues are often presented through a scientific, economic, or political frame.

In the case of the oil spill disasters in this research purview, identifying the sort of “storytelling devices” and frames developed in the news stories will be an integral part of the analysis. As Smith (1992) said: “Mass media have social and political power to the degree they set the agenda for public discussion about issues such as maritime safety, how wildfires should be managed on federal lands, and the seismic standards to which highways and bridges in earthquake-prone areas should be built” (30). While this research will apply the concept of
framing by qualitatively examining rhetorical aspects of the texts, agenda-setting theory will also be an important guide, as rhetoric and framing are very much bound together in the process of agenda-setting (Segal, 1991).

In the case of ecological disaster coverage, catastrophes of the magnitude of major oil spills which are “outside the journalistic routine” (Smith 1992, 2) thrust reporters into unfamiliar territory. At such times, journalists tend to create familiar frameworks or employ familiar symbols – a fact that may result in an unanticipated agenda-setting effect. Schlechtweg (1996) has argued that media frames often result in the “silencing [of] other explanations, arguments, and perspectives that “do not fit within the media’s framework of interpretation” (257). Sachsman (1996) elaborated on this possibility. “When there is an environmental dilemma, and the mass media define it as a crisis,” he said, “then the act of treating it as a crisis and putting it on the air or the front page sets the agenda in those terms” (253). The next section explores some of the scholarly literature related to agenda-setting.

**Agenda-Setting Research**

Several media studies directly examine the phenomenon of agenda-setting by the media (Cohen, 1963; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; McCombs and Shaw, 1993; Ader, 1995; Gooch, 1996; Scheufele, 2000; Kwanash-Aidoo, 2001). Much of agenda-setting theory is based on two critical agenda-setting studies. In his study of the agenda-setting effects of the press on foreign policy, Cohen (1963) argued that “mass media may not be successful much of the time in telling its readers what to think, but is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (13). Using his study as the basis for their research, McCombs and Shaw (1972) performed a critical agenda-setting study of the 1968 presidential election that empirically compared the relationship between media’s portrayal of salient campaign issues with the public’s perception of which issues voters said were the most important. They concluded that “the media appear to have exerted a considerable impact on voter’s judgments of what they considered the major issue of the campaign” (180).
A constant focus of scholarly media attention, the theory has been evolving and expanding. McCombs and Shaw (1993) noted that in its evolution over the past few decades, the agenda-setting perspective has provided a common umbrella for a number of research traditions and concepts in communication, including sociology, social science, and journalism subfields (60). In addition, the central question of the theory has progressed from “Who sets the public agenda – and under what conditions?” to “Who sets the media agenda?” (60).

Sachsman (1996) has suggested that public relations officers in local, regional, and national businesses and organizations – from companies and government entities to environmental advocacy and nonprofit groups – have often been the ones supplying information to the media, and therefore, the real “behind-the-scenes” agenda-setters (247). Frome (1998) has similarly commented that “government and industry spin doctors flood the media with press releases, briefings, background papers, leaks, and staged events” (6). Brennan (1982) has said that the content of coverage is “significantly influenced by the sources of information used.”

Of particular interest is Smith’s (1992) finding that coverage of the Exxon Valdez spill relied heavily on “government power elites with vested interests in how the spill was reported” (96). Although the spill had been “billed as a major environmental story,” he found that established environmental groups were cited only about one-third as often as government officials (96). Coleman and Dysart (2005) have said that source use is “one significant framing device” (7), and further noted a tendency for journalists to rely on official sources. Therefore, part of this thesis’ textual analysis will involve observation of who journalists turned to for information and quotes in their news accounts of the oil spills.

Following in the tradition of agenda-setting research, Ader (1995) examined the role of agenda-setting for the issue of environmental pollution. Looking at the New York Times’ coverage of four categories of environmental pollution from 1970 to 1990, she examined the relationship between media agenda, public agenda, and real-world conditions and found that agenda-setting was strongly supported (309).
Gooch (1996) conducted a study of environmental concern in the Swedish press and made two critically important comments about patterns of interest in the environment: first, that many environmental problems have become more abstract, and thus require that media images be suggestive and easily understood; and second that obtrusive environmental problems that readers can see, smell, and taste have a more direct impact on the public (109). He concluded that, although the mass media may not be able to instigate changes into how people think about issues, they have the ability to influence what those issues are.

In an attempt to counter some criticisms of agenda-setting, such as McQuail’s (1994) claim that the theory has difficulty in establishing a correspondence between the issues people consider to be important and the importance the media attach to those issues, Kwanash-Aidoo (2001) argues that a qualitative approach can bypass some of the limitations of the traditionally quantitatively-measured theory (522). Using qualitative methods to examine environmental coverage in the West African country of Ghana, he set out to find out which environmental issues were emphasized by the media and whether the issues were the same or different from those issues nominated by educated city dwellers (526). Comparing a document analysis of the 1997 PACIPE Media Report, which listed types of environmental issues covered by the media, with his interview and focus group results, he found that to a large extent, the media in Ghana do set the educated public’s agenda (533).

Speaking about the Exxon-Valdez spill, former democratic senator of Colorado Timothy Wirth (Wirth, 1990), who was interviewed by the Gannett Center Journal for its special environmental coverage edition, specifically attributed various political outcomes of the disaster (such as the passage of oil-spill liability legislation), as well as later coverage of smaller oil spills, to the agenda-setting effects of the media’s coverage of the Exxon spill.

“An event such as the Exxon spill focuses the media on the subject as well,” he said. “The attention given that disaster resulted in national coverage of a series of smaller spills

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4 Kwanda-Aidoo notes that the PACIPE is a regional technical assistance program for awareness and information on the protection of the environment aimed at environmental protection in six West African countries: Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Togo.
that, had they taken place a year before the Exxon disaster, might have only gotten local coverage, if any” (122), he said.

At the same time, however, a 2002 report published by the Oil Spill Intelligence Report (OSIR), one of the most respected sources of information worldwide on oil spills and statistics, noted that the news media may cover oil spills for the wrong reasons, thus possibly creating an unintended agenda-setting effect:

“The news media continue to focus on spills that impact local economies or affect popular tourist locations, since they generate publicity and interest on television and in newspapers, regardless of the true environmental impact of these spills,” the researchers wrote in their report (16).

The OSIR report further observed that in the early days of oil spill coverage “the news media were heavily biased toward incidents that occurred near large coastal cities,” and that 20 years later, “the situation has not changed much.” Although other spills occurring in less newsworthy places might be greater in volume of oil spilt or present a greater, long-term environmental threat, the reports says that these spills “are often overlooked, much as they were during the 1970’s” (16).

International news may be particularly vulnerable to an agenda-setting effect. Allan Mazur and Jinling Lee (Mazur and Lee, 1979), in their study of the infiltration of the global environment into the public’s agenda, observed that nearly all news of national or international scope is first brought to widespread attention by one or more of a small, central group of large news organizations including television networks, the major wire services, and the major newspapers. Every day, they claim, these organizations produce a pool of news from which thousands of local media outlets select their news of the day – thus creating a relatively uniform body of news on the national and international news fronts (682). This finding may be particularly important to the present study, given that two of the major oil spill events being studied were international news events, rather than immediately local to U.S. citizens.
Several researchers have also examined the media’s coverage of environmental issues using framing and narrative methods (Cann, 1999; Schlechtweg, 1996; Ghanem and Hendrickson, 2003; Liebler and Bendix, 1996; Durham, 1998). Cann (1999) took a qualitative approach to his examination of the Australian media’s response to French nuclear weapons testing in Polynesia between 1995-96 using a multi-pronged approach that included textual analysis as well as analysis of symbolism. Specifically interested in the intersection of cultural themes and symbols with media’s use of those cultural artifacts, he draws upon Gamson’s and Modigliani’s (1989) notion of “cultural resonance” to determine how media framed symbolic imagery related to the tests. Cultural resonance, according to Gamson and Modigliani (1989) refers to the idea that not all symbols are equally potent, and that those which “resonate with larger cultural themes” increase the “appeal of a package” – of which a frame is a central part (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, 5). What Cann (1999) found in his study incorporating this idea was that the symbolic features framing the media reports included “representations that Moruroa was dangerously close to Australia” and that “paradise was destroyed,” while images and language related to fear and the dramatic and dangerous included “fearful images of mushroom clouds with constant references to Hiroshima.” He concludes that the media reports were essentially “one-sided,” and prevented a fuller understanding of nuclear weapons.

Schlechtweg (1996) performed an in-depth analysis of how the radical environmental group Earth First! was framed in a one-hour broadcast of The MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour entitled “Focus: Logjam,” which ran on July 20, 1990. To accomplish his analysis, Schlechtweg (1996) combines textual analysis with cluster-agon methodology to assess media’s framing of the events of “Redwood Summer” – the name given to the summer of 1990 when Earth First! members tried to prevent logging of California’s redwood forests by blockading logging roads, climbing trees, and peaceful demonstrations. Schlechtweg (1996) explains how the group’s activities took place in communities “deeply polarized between
environmental activists and forest workers.” His reliance on textual analysis of both the transcript and videotape of the program is of particular interest because he provides a detailed illustration of the manner in which he applied methods of textual analysis. Those methods will be explored in more detail in the next section on methodology. For this section, his detailed exploration of framing is the main interest.

The video segment he analyzed included 98 editing cuts from the 9 min. 40 sec. “Focus: Logjam” news item. Using a qualitative approach that included paying special attention to how the program used camera angles, selected shots, and juxtaposed visual and verbal elements, his analysis weaves a composite picture of the symbiotic interaction of text and image in the frame-creation process. From the program’s initial introduction by MacNeil, which Schlechtweg (1996) said established a frame that Earth First! is different from “acceptable environmental activism,” to its “imaging” of key terms, Schlechtweg (1996) illustrates how a sense of “opposition” is fostered by the program’s presentation. This sense becomes an overarching framework of the newscast: “Once the initial oppositions are delineated and the adversaries named, ‘Focus: Logjam’ begins constructing the identities of the opposing forces,” Schlechtweg (1996) says. Ultimately, the newscast frames Earth First! as “a violent threat to the physical safety and livelihood of timber workers” and frames the controversy in a way that “excludes Earth First’s definition of the issues in dispute” (259).

Another television framing study by Liebler and Bendix (1996) took a quantitative approach to its examination of the degree to which television framed the controversy over old-growth forests and threats to the endangered Northern Spotted Owl. Analyzing four years of television news coverage from ABC, CBS, and NBC, the researchers found that the controversy was framed in terms of either “procut” or “prosave,” and that both procut and prosave proponents depended more on basic imagery than on citing research (55). They conclude that all three networks predominantly reflected a procut versus a prosave frame—a conclusion which mirrors Schlechtweg’s (1996) and other’s findings that the media tend towards the use of oppositional frames, especially where environmental issues are concerned.
Further, the researchers found that the exclusion of the scientific community’s voice, and the use of images that failed to correspond with the meaningful debates happening outside and overlooked by the media, meant that network television stations inadvertently reflected a bias favoring the timber industry.

Ghanem and Hendrickson (2003) used a content analysis in their framing study of North American coverage of environmental issues. They wanted to determine how media in the two North American border regions – the U.S./Mexico border region and the U.S./Canada border region – framed environmental issues, and whether coverage reflected the overlapping nature of ecologies and environmental concerns, rather than being constrained by artificial political boundaries. “The natural environment does not recognize political boundaries,” they say. Sometimes political boundaries bisect an otherwise single ecological unit – such as the various Great Lakes boundaries between Canada and the U.S., or the Gulf of Mexico between Mexico and the United States.

To answer their questions, they looked at two week’s worth of coverage in five newspapers, two each from the border regions (the El Diario de Juarez and El Paso Times; and the Detroit Free Press and the Windsor Star) and one from the U.S. interior (the Kansas City Star) in order to compare whether border region environmental coverage differs from that of the U.S. interior. What they found was an almost total absence of stories dealing with environmental issues across countries (27). Topically, naturally occurring phenomena got the most coverage, and especially stories related to weather and natural disasters. The authors note that “these topics are event-related rather than issue-related, and are thus much easier to cover” – a comment which echoes Wilkins’ (1989) assertion that the mass media tend to report disasters and crises as “discrete events rather than as ‘normal’ occurrences within certain technological and political systems.” For environmental news, this is especially problematic, because many environmental issues are more about underlying conditions (Smith 1992, 28) that still remain once an event has come and gone. In Ghanem and Hendrickson’s (2003) study, predominant story frames included “harm already inflicted” to
the environment, law, and policy. Only one story addressed environmental issues of cross-country concern, leading the researchers to conclude that “according to newspaper stories, environmental issues are contained within the borders of each country, a dangerous approach to environmental issues that transcend man-made demarcation lines” (27).

Durham (1998) conducted a study analyzing how the media created a news frame for the crash of TWA flight 800 in July 1996. Using a textual analysis to compare *New York Times*’ coverage with official sources’ depiction of the crash, he identified an ideological conflict that precluded efforts by reporters and investigators to unify the evidence into a meaningful frame (110). Part of this ideological conflict, he said, was related to reporters’ attempts to draw upon historical frames of other plane crashes, such as the 1988 crash of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. He argues that, important to this attempt at historical framing, was the inherent ideological view of the journalists approaching the TWA story that comparisons had to exist between the explosion of TWA and other planes that blew up. Headlines such as “The Fate of Flight 800: The history; Investigators see ‘Eerie similarities’ with other airlines that blew up” attempted to compare the historical contexts of other airplane explosions with the circumstances of the TWA tragedy. Ultimately, Durham (1998) concludes that the elusive evidence in the case of the crash, coupled with journalistic differences in approaching and identifying the available evidence, resulted in a “collective inability” to frame the cause of the plane’s crash.

His focus on the presence or absence of a historical context for the TWA stories is a precedent that is important to note for the purposes of this thesis, as it also intends to examine whether historical context pertaining to previous oil spills or supply crises figured in environmental coverage of the oil spills in question.
Telling Stories about Environmental Disasters

An interesting subset of some scholarly framing research has been to explore news as storytelling, and in some cases, where storytelling relates to the presence or expression of ideology. Scheufele (2000) argues that “ideological or political orientation of journalists” is one of at least five factors potentially influencing how journalists frame a given issue, along with “social norms and values” and “journalistic routines” (307). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) say that some frames resonate with “cultural narrations, that is, with the stories, myths, and folk tales that are part and parcel of one’s cultural heritage” (5). Pompper (2002) makes a direct connection between framing, ideology, and storytelling stating that “looking at the subconscious way frames are used in storytelling lends insight into how dominant ideology shapes news texts” (113). Daley and O’Neill (1991) argue that one way in which this subconscious ideology may creep into news texts is through selection of certain voices to tell the narrative of a story. Journalistic narratives can “valorize certain public voices and marginalize or silence others,” they say, allowing “some ‘competing’ narratives to become news” while precluding others (43).

In cases where stories are particularly complex or ongoing, research suggests that thinking in terms of storytelling may be more effective. To anthropologists, storytelling has been recognized as a means of perpetuating culture – a quite effective means, as evident by the success of various human societies with a purely oral tradition at transmitting cultural knowledge down countless generations. Citing media scholars, Pompper (2002) points out that news narratives, like other kinds of stories, “reveal much about how our culture makes meaning” (113). Smith (1992) argues that because there are so many different ways to tell a news story, journalists must strive to find a “cohesive and, if possible, compelling narrative” (23).

Because the oil spills being studied for this research were such highly complex disasters whose effects and clean-ups stretched across months and years, the literature suggests that compelling narratives exploring a diversity of themes would have been the best
way to write about the spills. Indeed, citing Iyengar, Smith (1992) said that viewers who watched “thematic” stories that focused on the contexts in which poverty, crime, and terrorism occur were more likely to have a better concept of how those situations are related to bigger social problems and institutions, in contrast to those viewers exposed to a more “episodic” treatment of news who sought merely to blame individuals directly involved with a situation (5). This next section explores some of the research related to news as storytelling.

McComas and Shanahan (1999) developed a theory about the role and impact of narrative cycles in the telling of environmental stories. Specifically examining the cycle of mass media attention to the issue of global warming, the authors argue that narrative factors play a role in how attention to environmental issues is constructed. They argue that, “for environmental issues, a narrative approach would hold that humans imbue environmental issues with meaning through the stories they tell,” and that “dramatic considerations guide media coverage of environmental issues.” Deconstructing the narrative cycle of environmental news stories, the authors reveal that, indeed, increased media coverage of an issue is accompanied by a greater emphasis on the dangers inherent in the problem, as in the case of global warming typified in their study.

Daly and O’Neill (1991) undertook a qualitative study of news narratives about the Exxon Valdez oil spill, specifically analyzing the competing narratives that characterized coverage of the spill in the mainstream press – represented by the Anchorage Daily News and the Boston Globe – and comparing it to spill narratives in the Tundra Times, a weekly paper published by and for Native Alaskans. Their study is of special interest because of the depth at which it analyzes both news narratives and coverage of the Exxon Valdez spill using textual analysis methods. Their study lends support to the idea of narrative environmental storytelling, but takes the notion a step further by suggesting that within the overall narrative framework of environmental news, multiple story lines and diverging narratives may be advanced. The study found that the concerns of Native Alaskans were marginalized in the
mainstream press in favor of reinforcing a capitalist ideology – a conclusion that echoes Parameswaran’s (1998) discussion of the skewed representations of a “Euroamerican” form of globalization she found was surreptitiously reinforced over a more inclusive representation in *National Geographic*.

Daley and O’Neill’s (1991) discovery that the disaster narrative was the first and most important story type also bolsters findings that reporters cling to familiar reporting frameworks and news values when faced with less familiar situations. Like Ader’s (1995) agenda-setting study of pollution, it supports the notion of environmental agenda-setting and reemphasizes the need for environmental reporters to strive for varied and in-depth news coverage. And put in context with McComas and Shanahan’s (1999) study, it suggests that environmental issues are ripe for certain types of storytelling. Their study further reveals that up through the time of the Exxon spill, reporters were still having trouble moving beyond the “disaster” frame in their approach to environmental storytelling.

As Smith (1992) found in his in-depth study of the Exxon spill, news stories about the oil spill focused primarily on the tanker’s captain, who had a history of alcohol problems; the Exxon corporation, which organized and paid for the cleanup and was accused of making slow progress; or symbolic images of oil-soaked birds and wildlife. Few stories “discussed the regulatory context in which the accident and cleanup occurred,” Smith (1992) said, which would have entailed a closer look at issues such as the Coast Guard’s lax enforcement of alcohol rules, reallocations in funding that had diminished the local Coast Guard’s ability to enforce safety standards, and actions by the State of Alaska that had cut and nipped at certain provisions or rules targeting tankers and spill cleanup in its creations of a sub-climate more favorable to the oil industry. Even fewer stories, he said, described the Exxon accident “as a by-product of a society hungry for energy under a federal government whose primary energy policy was to find, extract, and ship nonrenewable energy sources” (9). Daley and O’Neill (1991) similarly found that plenty of news stories portrayed “wildlife as pathetic victims” while failing to engender “any analysis of the system that unleashed the destruction” (46).
If disaster and crisis is the predominant depiction of the environment, then reporters may not be doing as well as they should at producing thorough, well-researched stories that go beyond this familiar and easily embraced environmental reporting theme. Among other things, this research will be examining thematic developments in the oil spill stories as part of its effort to determine how well reporters grasped the multitude of less-obvious angles related to the oil spill disasters.

**Summing it Up – Main Research Questions**

Having explored some of the significant scholarly literature relevant to the practice of environmental journalism, which will form an important backbone to this thesis, it is now possible to reiterate the primary research imperative of this thesis with greater clarity. As environmental issues have become more prominent and, arguably, more pressing in the world today, the need for quality environmental reporting capable of navigating the unique complexities of today’s environmental stories has never been more important. The literature has revealed that environmental reporting has, in general, been characterized by certain traits that have detracted from the overall quality of the reporting. While environmental reporting has evolved and improved in various ways since it first emerged as a realm of social and journalistic importance, researchers have nonetheless revealed continuing challenges. This study is interested in whether the narrower research scopes adopted for the bulk of scholarly research about environmental reporting may be skewing scholarly perceptions of the degree to which environmental reporting has improved.

In order to develop a more direct picture of how well environmental journalists have learned to cover complex environmental issues over time, this thesis thus intends to document how environmental news coverage has changed over the wider scope of the past three decades by examining coverage of three similarly damaging oil spill disasters, each of which occurred at a different stage along the trajectory of the beat’s growth and evolution, in two newspapers – the Seattle Times and the U.K. Guardian. A question such as this necessarily
includes within its penumbra several subsidiary research questions. Among these, this thesis will examine:

[1] whether reporters explored a more thorough range of news angles and narratives in the three spills. The literature suggests that oil spills tend to be portrayed as disaster events that fail to explore the deeper societal and systemic causes and implications of the spills. The literature further suggests that oil spills are particularly vulnerable to certain kinds of narrative framing, which prevents a fuller picture of the deeper socio-economic aspects of the spills from being explored.

[2] what sort of historical contexts, if any, figured in coverage of the spills, as well as differences in content of coverage between the two papers. A close cousin of this question is whether global contexts related to oil supply, global oil use, or oil incidents elsewhere in the world were incorporated into the oil spill stories, and if so, how these contexts figured in the storytelling or frame creation process.

[3] the tone of language used in accounts of the oil spill stories, and how tone may relate to possible frame creation.

[4] how nature and wildlife is portrayed versus industry and its representatives and whether coverage of the spills succeeds in avoiding the temptation to cast the spills as a conflict between two opposing forces. The literature suggests that to do this would require a more holistic approach to reportage that probes the less obvious but deeper-rooted political, social, and economic aspects of the spills, as well as the more easily seen environmental effects. However, the literature has also revealed that coverage of the Exxon spill focused considerable attention on the tanker captain and efforts to blame him for the spill – which deflected attention from the higher-up powers that were more directly responsible for creating the context in which the Exxon spill was able to happen in the first place. As part of this question, this thesis will examine thematic developments in coverage of the spills.

[5] whether coverage succeeded in probing some of the important global ramifications of the spills, such as, for example, the effects of potential legislation on other
maritime nations, the economic aspects of lost oil in an increasingly oil-dependent world, or
global effects of damage to important fishing areas responsible for a certain percentage of
seafood exports.

[6] whether reporters cultivated a sense of national identity in accounts of the
ecologically disastrous spills, and if so, through what intra-textual means. Some research
examining this topic has found that a sense of national identity has been cultivated in the
media through references to nationally recognized symbols, use of local colloquialisms or
dialect, evocation of a national language, or discourses referring to a shared culture or older
people. Given the magnitude of the oil spills in question, and the fact that each spill severely
affected areas known for specific regional identities or historic traditions, this thesis intends
to examine whether this possible sub-current surfaced in any of the oil spill stories.

[7] the use of sources in the stories and whether source selection had an effect on the
frames created by journalistic news accounts. The literature suggests that source use is an
important framing device, and it has been said that “sources often take a primary role in
shaping coverage” (Coleman and Dysart 2005, 7). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) have said
that “interpretive comments” which are “sprinkled” throughout news accounts in the form of
quotations help to tell a story and frame the information presented (17), and Stocking, cited
by Coleman and Dysart (2005), argues that there is a tendency among “a significant number
of journalists . . . reporting science stories” to limit themselves to a single source, even in
cases “where the controversy would seem to demand multiple sources” (7). Given these
observations, and the contentious nature of the major oil disasters being studied for this
thesis, an examination of source use will be an important part of this thesis’ study of how
journalists reported on the environmental disasters.

[8] the visual aspect of the news stories and the sort of images or graphics chosen to
accompany the oil spill news stories. With a kinetic power to encapsulate and dramatically
highlight certain visual aspects of the spills, photographs play an important role in the frame
creation process. The literature has revealed a tendency for journalists to focus on the
dramatic plight of oil-soaked birds and other more visually endearing marine animals as a means of illustrating the ecological effects of the oil spill disasters. However, the literature has also revealed that this tendency often results in a failure to adequately report on more difficult but arguably more important angles, such as the effect of oil pollution on primary producers in the food chain, like algae or marine plant life, or the underlying global or economic contexts which permitted the possibility of such devastating pollution events. As part of this question, this thesis will examine the interplay between text and visuals in the news stories.

[9] the use of language, vocabulary and storytelling devices or techniques employed by journalists to help tell the stories of the unfolding oil spill disasters. The literature has suggested that individual or cultural ideologies can infuse storytelling decisions, and that news frames may reflect a subconscious ideology. Because language is a fundamental by-product and integral part of culture, studying how it was used to depict and communicate information about the oil spill disasters will help tie together various sub-questions of this thesis, such as the relation of language to ideology and the possible creation of national identity. Examining language use will also offer critical insight into the frame-creation process in oil spill news accounts. Thus, examining the use of the language and storytelling techniques will be an essential part of this thesis' qualitative analysis of environmental news coverage and journalistic framing of the oil spill disasters.

Using a qualitative approach with framing as the theoretical backdrop, this thesis will probe rhetorical and textual aspects of the news stories and compare similarities and differences in coverage in the two newspapers in question in order to determine how environmental reporting has changed over time. Important textual criteria that shall receive particular attention will include: word choice and descriptions, source use, tone, headlines, collusion of text and images, rhetorical devices, and form (such as placement of information in the news stories). Focusing on changes in reporting style as evident through vocabulary choices, tone, and story focus may reveal a gradual familiarizing with the specific nature and
challenges of environmental news. The answers to all of these questions will lead to conclusions about how well environmental journalists covered the oil spill disasters, as well as how environmental reporting of such a complex event has changed over the larger scope of environmental reporting history.
This study intends to use the qualitative methods of rhetorical and textual analysis to track the evolution of environmental reporting as evident in oil spill news coverage over the years. Although the subject matter of environmental reporting studies has traditionally been explored using quantitative methods, a study seeking to explore changes in the craft of writing as evident in textual elements necessarily depends on qualitative methodologies (McKee, 2003; Schlechtweg, 1996; Pompper, 2002). In contrast to the dry, mechanistic approach of content analysis, textual analysis allows the researcher to overcome some of the impersonal limitations of attempting to quantify an artifact – namely, speech and communication – that is very much rooted in the qualitative nature of language and human culture. As Pompper (2002) said, “language is value laden.” Analyzing the values and ideologies latent in the culturally constructed qualities of language requires an ability to probe texts more deeply.

Textual analysis provides researchers with a means to discern contextual information not readily revealed by a quantitative study’s focus on numerical quantification of textual information, as well as implicit patterns and emphases of text (Führisch and Lester, 1996). Engaging researchers in what Hall (1975) described as “the long preliminary soak,” textual analysis draws upon the context of the surrounding elements of a text and permits a freedom to contemplate how various textual elements interact with each other, or with other textual elements such as images and graphics. This method also allows researchers to consider recurring patterns, placing, style, striking imagery, and tone, as well as “the structures of meanings and the configurations of feelings on which this public rhetoric is based” (Hall in Führisch and Lester, 1996, 29).

For researchers looking to answer questions of why and how, as opposed to the quantitative researcher’s limited focus on who or what, textual analysis allows researchers to break the surface of a text and probe the rhetorical techniques through which meanings are
produced (Bishop, 2004). And specifically for the focus of this thesis research, which seeks to explore qualitative changes to environmental reporting style across a 25-year time gap and answer questions such as how the news texts differ and whether coverage of complex environmental news has improved over time, this methodological approach will permit a deeper scrutiny of the most telling aspect of this change: the text itself.

While comparatively few studies of environmental reporting from a qualitative vantage exist – and fewer still the ones that employ textual or rhetorical analysis – a handful of pioneers sensitive to the merits of applying this approach have made some important inroads (Coppola, 1997; Brookes, 1999; Segal 1991; Fürisch and Lester, 1996).

Coppola (1997) performed a rhetorical analysis of a pollution prevention document in the state of New Jersey. Concerned that people’s awareness of environmental issues has not translated into environmentally-conscious behavior – despite ecological disasters such as Love Canal or the “burning” Hudson – she sought to explain the relationship between communication theory and an understanding of environmental discourse.

Drawing on the ideas of five noted theorists – James Cantrill, rhetorical specialists M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline Palmer, Niklas Luhmann, and Daniel O’Keefe – she pieced together a model for why environmental discourse seems to be unsuccessful at achieving its intended goals. Beginning with Cantrill, she draws a link between human psychology and language. According to Cantrill, the discourse of “well-meaning environmentalists is largely ineffective because it does not draw from an understanding of human psychology” (10). Most environmental advocates use rational appeals when developing their arguments, Cantrill says, giving their audience the facts and hoping people will understand and correctly interpret the evidence. This may be ineffective because, as Cantrill says, people interpret facts according to their preexisting ideas about the world and their representation of social and cultural settings (10). Thus, the lesson to be drawn is that environmental reporters must clearly explain the significance of the evidence to their audience.
And in fact, Coppola (1997) points to studies that suggest that the more informed people become about environmental problems, the more passive they become. If those writing and speaking about the environment took into account the cognitive disposition of the human psyche, they would realize that some language features often used in environmental discourse are ineffectual and work to retard intended goals of motivating the public. Using oppositional pairs such as “logger / tree-hugger” or “environmentalist / developer” are two such examples of ineffectual rhetorical categorization that can trigger a mindless response or predetermined bias, Coppola (1997, 11) says. Yet, as demonstrated earlier, creations of oppositional pairs is precisely what has happened in several instances — such as the spotted-owl debate and the newscast looking at Earth First! activities.

Similarly, Coppola (1997) points out that the environmental communicator’s reliance on a tone of “hopeless doom and gloom” has taken a toll on the public, and that strident environmental language and warnings have worn thin (11). Killingsworth (1999) agrees that “the alienated howl of environmentalist rhetoric may have lost some of its appeal in recent years” (14). These days, he says, rhetoric that “rages against the machine” may remind us more of the “terrorism and anti-technological manifest of the Unabomber” than the protest speeches of Earth First!-ers or the “whale-saving defiance of Greenpeace.” Their research suggests that tone is an important element of environmental communication. Part of the work of this thesis will be to watch out for how journalists use language to create a tone in their oil spill stories and news accounts.

Coppola (1997) then moves on to Luhman and draws a connection between “textual distractions” and Luhman’s idea that “the environment makes itself noticed only by means of communicative irritations, just as our bodies communicate to our consciousness through feelings of annoyance or pain” (14). In written or oral communication, the irritation, or noise, is anything that impedes the understanding of the message — and this could stem from inappropriate tone (semantic) or distracting grammar flows (mechanical).
Coppola’s (1997) perusal of theorists will serve as a useful guide for this research in that it highlights some telling aspects of a text. Of great interest to the thrust of this study of oil spill coverage, she has drawn together in one document several different lines of research that lead to a similar endpoint: environmental writers may be unaware of the degree to which they are enhancing or detracting from interest in or understanding of an ecological problem. Unwittingly, they may be setting a very different agenda from that which was intended.

While the nature of Coppola’s (1997) research focus (the pollution document) is of a different genre than a news article, her generalizations about cognitive processing and audience attitudes are transferable. The pollution prevention document, like a news story about a complex environmental topic, requires “cognitive complexity,” an “anticipatory structure that gives metacognitive clues revealing its organization,” and “an integrated whole-facility approach” (18). Similarly, news pieces about ecological effects of a major environmental disaster involve highly complex information, and require a structure that informs readers clearly but still entices them to navigate the entirety of the article. These news accounts must also have a holistic structure that is as all-encompassing as is necessary to foster understanding.

This research will attempt to discover whether the reporters of the oil spill stories succeed in using story frames that convey the complexity of the ecological situation. It will also investigate whether reporters adopted a “whole-disaster” approach, reporting with breadth and thoroughness, rather than succumbing to the tendency to cast the stories in familiar disaster frameworks.

**Lexical Legerdemain**

In a similar vein, Segal (1991) performed a rhetorical analysis of the language and conventions of environmental argumentation. Although she draws on some classical rhetorical theory, her incorporation of Aristotle’s artistic appeals of “logos,” “ethos,” and “pathos” into her analysis mirrors some of Coppola’s (1997) comments about the often
misguided emotional appeals of environmental advocates. Coming from the premise that environmental advocacy regularly sabotages itself by its own rhetorical features (1), she dissects the three artistic appeals and brings them into a contemporary context.

Emotional appeal is rife in environmental communication, she argues, and much of the argument takes place at the level of tropes and figures (2). In the realm of environmental advocacy, the prevailing trope is that “the earth is sick.” Segal (1991) points to phrases such as “healing the environment,” and “poisoning the environment” regularly employed by environmental advocates. The illness metaphor ultimately extends so that the planet can be imagined after a period of time to be not just ailing but dead (2). The same tropes appear often in journalistic accounts of environmental problems. In particular, for news accounts about ecologically devastating oil spills, where scenes of oil-soaked wildlife and clean-up crew slogging across oil-saturated beaches were the dominant visual representations of the spills’ effects, the literature suggests that the temptation for journalists to rely on such “sickness” tropes would be great.

The idea of catastrophe has certain sensationalist qualities that are appealing to journalists because of the presence of several news factors: shock value, pathos, numbers of people affected, timeliness, and possible future impact, to name a few. Smith (1992) argues that catastrophes are, in a larger sense, “part of a modern myth that focuses attention on natural powers beyond our control and on the blundering efforts of humans to deal with the fruits of the industrial revolution” (15). Segal (1991) argues that this idea of catastrophe may be successfully turned on end by politicians to suit their agendas, as she points out in her example of a statement made by George H.W. Bush during his presidency. In the 1988 presidential campaign, Bush announced that he was an environmentalist, then qualified the statement by saying “how much he enjoyed taking his grandchildren out camping” (2). Segal (1991) was particularly interested in the rhetorical nature of his statement because, as she described, “with it, Bush gently removed the environment from the centre of public life and pushed it to the weekends; he marginalized the environment issue and seemed to support it at
the same time.” Daley and O’Neill (1991) glommed onto a similar sort of phenomenon in their textual analysis of news accounts of the Exxon Valdez. Describing a photo that appeared in one of the papers they studied, they explain how the cutline to an image of a Coast Guard official cradling a dead, oil-soaked duck referred to the spill as an “environmental nightmare” – a description which, as Smith (1992) pointed out earlier, focused attention on the disaster and blame aspects of the spill, while rhetorically shifting the focus away from other potentially more important contexts of the spill.

Segal (1991) also demonstrates how textual analysis can be performed at a more macroscopic level by studying larger swathes of rhetorical structure, such as the lyrical structure of a sentence. In one place, she analyzes an entire sentence rife with harsh-sounding consonants and visually graphic images of violence against the earth where “human technomachines” that are “entirely out of control... guzzle and lurch and vomit and rip” across the “random crazy course” of the “once-blue planet.” In this case, Segal (1991) studies the interplay of all the lexical elements, from the use of alliteration to the sounds of the words themselves, and concludes that the sentence’s rhetorical features create a visually-stimulating sound that actually diminishes the rhetorical punch and point of the sentence. While there can be great creative literary freedom within journalistic writing – and journalists often make use of creative writing tactics to enhance the narrative appeal of their stories – journalistic values of objectivity and fairness would likely preclude a sentence such as the above from being written. Nonetheless, it is still useful to be aware of this more macroscopic approach to textual analysis in case such an approach may be needed for the present research.

Segal (1991) then goes into greater depth with her analysis, honing in on certain lexical and metaphorical features of environmental rhetoric. Environmental advocates rely on “values of mastery and growth,” and thus ultimately perpetuate some of the same values they seek to dispel – taking charge of the environment, only in a new way. Segal (1991) points to the rhetorical examples of declaring “war” on pollution, organizing a “plan of attack,” and preserving our future “investment” or “inheritance.” Each of these terms or phrases has been
deeply invested with idiomatic meaning and imagery. Segal (1991) uses these terms of examples of ineffective environmental rhetoric, because as she argues, “environmental advocates do not want to promote an image of human superiority presupposing a right to capricious or wanton use of resources.” Nor do they want to conflate environment with money – an image they want to reframe as sustainable progress, she says. Yet, therein may lie the paradox (and ineffectiveness) of their current rhetorical schema. While environmental journalists are not choosing sides when they write about an issue, and thus interested in trying to find the most successful rhetoric for argumentation, Pompper’s (2002) earlier statement that “language is value laden” resonates here as well, suggesting that even impartial journalists may unwittingly use value-laden terms in their narratives.

Giving substance to Segal’s (1991) observation, McKee (2003) argues that “there is a philosophical underpinning to textual analysis which suggests that even simple words and descriptions of the world are necessarily ‘texts’. . . . There are always many ways in which the same ‘truth’ can be accurately described” (142) – a notion which essentially underscores the fact of journalistic framing of news events. Language is a prime example of how truth can be relative and subject to interpretation. Depending on its context, a single word can take on vastly different meanings or convey vastly different truths. For example, in his analysis of the “Focus: Logjam” newscast, Schlechtweg (1996) argues that the program frames the conflict in such a way that ordinary terms like “livelihood,” “industry,” and “loggers” become value-laden terms in direct opposition to Earth First! and its environmental arguments in defense of the redwood forests. While these terms could have been used to name elements of the conflict in a more neutral way, Schlechtweg (1996) argues that the reporter establishes a context in which the “antagonist” Earth First! acts uni-directionally on the “protagonist” timber and mill workers. Thus, “the binary logic informing the frame constructs a cleavage between radicals and regular people” that ultimately imbibes the terms with unequal meaning and pits “livelihood” against “ecology” (274).
Words and the Power to Unify

Brookes’ (1999) textual analysis of British press coverage of the BSE/CJD beef crisis in late March 1996 takes Segal’s (1991) rhetorical process to the level of the newspaper, and also adds an important supplement to the scholastic backbone of this research: it takes the analysis to at least the same geographic region as the Guardian, one of the two research subjects of this thesis. Focusing on a week’s worth of articles, between March 20 and March 28, 1996 in five British tabloids (the Daily Mirror, the Daily Mail, the Daily Express, the Daily Star, and the Sun), Brookes (1999) is interested in the manner in which the textual organization of the newspapers functioned to foster a sense of national identity. He argues, and through the textual analysis seeks to prove, that as coverage of the crisis progressed, it evolved from a predominantly health crisis to a political story about Britain and the European Union, and that public health concerns were eclipsed by explicit questions of national identity relating to the beef industry and the economy, culminating in the ‘beef war’ (250).

Contextual references to the unfolding health crisis are integral to his analysis. As McKee (2003) states in his guide to textual analysis, “it is only when a text is put into a context that we can start to make guesses about the likely interpretations of particular elements within it” (145). Context ties down the interpretation of a text, rooting it near a particular point, place, or event. If a text is put into a completely different context, where it is interpreted alongside different texts, it will likely be interpreted in a completely different way (145). This seems a straightforward notion – and it can be. But where cultural values are involved, context can be much more clandestine because of the subliminal omnipresence of the elements of the culture in daily life. Take, for example, the idea of a politician shrewdly trying to reframe an environmental issue in terms of some other aspect of the socio-economic sphere. When the rhetorical context is altered from a focus on scope of ecological disaster to a focus on economics, aesthetics, or industry, the context for the environmental issue has been shifted.
McKee (2003) identifies three levels of context: the rest of the text; the genre of the text; and the wider public context in which a text is circulated. The more that is known about the context of a text at all these levels, he says, the more likely a person is to produce a reasonable interpretation of a text (146). This principle of analysis will be an important guide for the thesis research at hand. Textual analysis of the spill articles will look at the news page itself – the words and images in relation to each other. But, this research will also be aware of the larger context of the spill – the spill-related events or news happening in society that didn't show up in the news reports (or did, as the case may be), as determined by outside research and by comparing the two papers in this thesis purview for the aspects and angles of the oil spills that appeared in one paper versus the other. In addition, the important distinction that the stories in question are news stories, not advocacy communication, will likewise serve as an important contextual guide for this thesis' textual analysis.

Returning to Brookes (1999), it is important to note that he introduces another facet of the news artifact into his analysis – the news headline. While also reading the implied meanings of within-story elements, he uses the headlines as a means of tracking the shift in national focus that he saw playing out in the British national tabloids. Using the language of the headlines as a textual guide, he tracks how the various tabloids created different themes and news “hype.”

Brookes (1999) also looked at the strategy of vocabulary use in his research, and how word choice helped intensify the sense of crisis – as well as fostering a sense of national identity. Certain vocabulary choices emphasized negative emotions, like fear and confusion. Other choices emphasized risk, danger, and the unfamiliar. This finding reiterates both Coppola’s (1997) and Segal’s (1991) discussions of a noticeable emotional quality to discussions of the environment and its rhetoric. Brookes (1999) also found that the press engaged in what he referred to as a “rhetoric of animation” for the health scare, making use of image-laden terms such as “bugs,” melodramatic language referring “intertextually to horror and science fiction films,” and a “rhetoric of quantification” – all of which served to artificially augment
the sense of alarm. This finding is relevant to the present oil spill research because the literature suggests that journalists covering the oil spill disasters may have tended towards a sensationalist approach to news reporting that more narrowly focused on the drama of wildlife death and pollution.

Interestingly, Brookes (1999) also looked at the tabloids’ propensity to cite large numbers in a manner that increased the sense of alarm. One example he uses is the Daily Mirror’s headline “We’ve Already Eaten 1,000,000 Mad Cows.” Brookes (1999) argues that the rhetoric of that headline had the effect of casting BSE agent as “active, its human victims as passive or affected,” and by extension powerless (252). His analysis of numerical data and information during his textual analysis is worthy of noting for this thesis’ oil spill research, as the scholarly literature about oil spills and disaster reporting points to an overarching tendency of journalists to cite death statistics of wildlife and to emphasize volume of spilt oil. The manner in which the newspapers in question incorporated this data might have helped in the frame creation process.

Brookes (1999) also argues that communities and identities are “to some extent constructed through threats to the boundaries of those communities” (255). The rhetorical elements of the news stories – word choice, context, headlines, and vocabulary suites – function to unify a people around a disaster. Rhetorical strategies used within a text, such as a news article, are responsible for this effect. Brookes’ (1999) argument here resonates with this thesis’ focus because natural disasters can function in much the same way, as a rallying point for a people tied in some way to the epicenter of disaster. In Spain, for instance, entire villages dependent on fishing for their survival were in effect cut off from their historic livelihoods when the oceans became saturated with oil. Natural landscapes can become national icons, and a deleterious external threat can muster previously subsurface patriotism. Likewise, in addition to the 200 miles of Breton coastline that were polluted, more than 76 separate communities along the beach were affected by the Amoco Cadiz spill. This research will examine whether a theme of national tragedy was cultivated in press coverage of the
three oil spills in question. Brookes’ (1999) article may be a useful reference for such rhetorical clues during the process of textual analysis.

In Dhoest’s (2003) research on the Flemish media’s role in forming a national identity, Brookes’ (1999) analysis is extended to add a focus on the role images play in a media text to achieve this end. Although he uses popular Flemish television sitcoms as his media genre of inquiry, his rigorous adherence to the process of textual analysis is a good model of the method. Espousing a specific theoretical articulation of the relationship between media and national identities (254), he engages in what he terms a “holistic” analytic approach. Similarly acknowledging that “the limitation to textual information prevents a full understanding of the issues at stake,” he draws upon the greater contextual history of Flemish culture and identity to complement his textual reading. In a similar vein, this thesis acknowledges that the larger context of environmental history will be important for analyzing changes in how environmentally damaging oil spills were covered.

Throughout his analysis, Dhoest (2003) is on the lookout for four clues that suggest construction of national identity: 1) discourses that discuss a shared history; 2) discourses referring to a shared culture; 3) evocation of national language; and 4) discourses about a homogenous “old people” with a particular essential “national character” (256). Though he argues that “national identities are clearly social constructions,” he says that the media can function to obscure the fact that “Western nations are relatively recent polities” without truly ancient roots (in the sense of contemporary national boundaries and classifications). By acting this way, the media help to create a sense of allegiance to those boundaries and to foster a sense of national identity. In all three oil spills being analyzed for this research, the spills had dramatic effects on the historic livelihoods of fishing communities in the polluted regions of Brittany and Spain, and the territories of the native peoples of Alaska. National areas of great ecological significance were damaged in all three cases, and the spills all affected areas known within their national borders for the strength of their regional identities (Breton, Galician, or Indigenous). This thesis will examine whether environmental journalists
writing about the spills engaged in a similar evocation of “shared culture” and “national language” in their storytelling, and if so, whether such evocation led to the construction of some degree of national identity.

**Developing a Textual Analysis Approach**

Before beginning the textual analysis, it will be necessary to develop an approach or criteria that can be applied uniformly to the oil spill articles as they are read and analyzed in order to ensure that the research focus is maintained, and to also ensure consistency in reading across newspapers. Referring to the work and methodology of researchers published in the scholarly literature for guidance during this process will be particularly helpful. In some cases, researchers developed a textual analysis guide or coding scheme. Schlechtweg (1996), for instance, was specifically interested in the use of images, language, and sound in the “Focus: Logjam” newscast. To aid his detailed textual analysis of the program’s transcript and videotape, he made an index of key terms and images, then made an “exhaustive list” of the verbal and visual contexts in which the terms were used. While he makes use of some more complicated methodologies that will not be used for this thesis – such as cluster-agon methodology and cluster analysis – he provides a detailed illustration and explanation of the various steps involved in his textual analysis method. Some of these steps are relevant to the present research, and will serve as extremely useful guides for how to go about analyzing the interplay of visual and textual elements in the oil spill news stories.

In a similar nature, Dhoest (2003) developed a topic list based on his study of the Flemish sitcoms noting the use of recurrent themes and iconography, such as landscapes, customs and objects. As he scrutinized the sitcoms looking for these criteria, he “generated a lot of field notes,” which he said allowed him to reconstruct discursive patterns. Because his study was interested in examining how Flemish sitcoms contributed to the formation of national identity, his topic list included criteria such as the historical setting of the sitcoms, references to high or folk culture in the programs, and whether standard language or dialect
was used. These criteria served as the intra-textual context for his analysis, which he then supplemented with external historical and cultural contextual information. For the research interests of this thesis, a different sort of topic list would be developed focusing on different elements of the news texts that are relevant to print articles, journalism, and the oil spill stories. For instance, a topic list pertaining to the oil spill articles would pay attention to criteria such as: (1) word choice and how language is used to describe the oil spill disasters; (2) information that was included or excluded from news stories in the two newspapers; (3) how photos and graphics are used in conjunction with the text; (4) what themes are developed over the course of each six-month story set; and (5) placement of articles on the news page and their location within the papers (i.e., which section the articles appeared in), among others.

While there are differences based on the medium of inquiry, Dhoest’s (2003) study will serve as a good example of how to analyze a text for cues pertaining to national identity formation in the oil spill stories.

Perhaps more importantly, Dhoest (2003) defines a qualitative textual analysis of this sort as “a systematic interpretive approach looking for patterns and structures in a large body of text” (259). Where some variations in mode and approach to textual analysis may not be entirely relevant in all aspects to this thesis research, this statement by Dhoest (2003) provides a concrete methodological bulwark that can serve as an overarching guide referenced throughout the process of analysis so the research maintains a steady course. As Dhoest (2003) notes, while textual analysis allows researchers to take into account “the importance of textual elements, their relationship and context,” he notes that one of the weaknesses of this qualitative approach is “the lack of clear methods and techniques.” To deal with this, Dhoest (2003), citing Webster (1995), offers two broad principles of textual analysis that should help guide researchers: the research “must be systematic rather than speculative,” and it “must analyze the text as a whole” (259).

More along these lines, Daley and O’Neill’s (1991) study of differences in news narratives about the Exxon Valdez spill uses a textual analysis that is based around a
consistent, holistic approach to analysis, rather than the development of lists, schemas, or
coding schemes – though such studies are also systematic in their approach. Looking at
everything from individual words to sentences to photos and the placement of stories in the
newspaper layout, the authors seem to use their research question itself as the primary guide
to approaching the methodological aspect of the study’s textual analysis. By taking this more
generalized holistic approach, the authors were able to discover the news narratives that were
developed in their subject newspapers and to make conclusions based on their findings. Cann
(1999) similarly adopted a more generalized approach to his textual analysis of the Australian
media’s reporting of French nuclear tests. By “examining the language and imagery used in
media reports,” his textual analysis enabled him to discover that the media made use of fear,
scientific discourse, dramatic and dangerous imagery, and constant references to the size of
Hiroshima’s blast.

These studies are more representative of the methodological approach that will be
adopted for the present research. While the larger gamut of research illustrating the various
nuances and sub-species of textual analysis, as well as the high degree of complexity that can
be obtained using the method, will certainly inform and hone the approach taken by this
thesis research, the more generalized nature of the research question – which is interested in
observing how environmental reporting has changed over time as evident in textual and
rhetorical elements of the news stories themselves – is better suited to a more generalized,
holistic approach of this nature.

**Research Subjects: The Seattle Times and the Guardian**

The two papers selected as subjects for this research are the *Seattle Times* and the
*Guardian*, a U.K. paper. The reasons for this selection of subjects are twofold: relevance and
principle. On the first score, both papers are considered reputable newspapers which are
geographically located in proximity to at least one of the spills being studied – proximity
being one of several news values determining what sort of stories are likely to be reported by
the media. Both the *Amoco Cadiz* and the *Prestige* spills happened in European waters, off coasts or ports of immediate significance and consequence to certain countries of that area – particularly Britain, France and Spain. For this reason, the *Guardian* was chosen for its proximity to those two spills.

The *Seattle Times* was chosen over other regional papers as the regional representative for the *Exxon Valdez* spill because of its previous reputation for quality coverage of oil spills as exemplified by the Pulitzer Prize it won for coverage of the 1989 Exxon spill. Smith has argued that receiving such an award suggests a paper has adhered to “[reporting] ideals to which all journalists aspire,” thus automatically elevating such a paper to a special category of excellence – a representative of the best reporting has to offer. For this reason, faults, lapses or problems in reporting may be more easily attributed to causes other than mediocre reportage.

While many scholars focus on papers such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* because of their reputations as national agenda-setters and representatives of the elite press, these papers have no particular relevance to the oil spill disasters other than their role as U.S. national dailies of prominence. Because of this prominent reputation – and perhaps the concomitant ease of access to old articles and online databases – these papers may be overanalyzed by media scholars. This gets to the principle of the matter. Rather than applying yet another research lens to such papers, a focus on newspapers with greater arguable relevance, via news factors such as quality combined with proximity, may yield more telling results.

All newspapers adhere to paper-specific styles of reporting, via journalistic style, newsroom standards, rules or practices. As a result, newspapers may ultimately develop unique and independent intra-newsroom cultures, with discernable differences in the style of written output. This is certainly the case with *The New York Times*. While there is definitely some benefit to studying a paper such as *The New York Times*, which has a tremendous corpus of research available for reference and comparison, studying newspapers which have not been
as aggressively studied or typified may offer a fresh perspective on the subject of reporting practice, and may ultimately shed even greater light on the research questions at hand.

In making this decision, the precedent set by Smith (1992) in his determination of research subjects is being followed for this thesis. His two main criteria for paper selection were: 1) overall prestige of the newspaper in the U.S.; and 2) prominence of the newspaper in the city closest to the three catastrophes he studied. Because of the size and scope of his research, he looked at both the New York Times and the Washington Post as representatives of prestigious East Coast national media; and he chose the Los Angeles Times as the West Coast national representative in that regard. However, he writes that “because the Seattle Times won a Pulitzer Prize for stories about the spill,” he felt it worthwhile to examine oil spill stories from that prestigious regional paper. The same principle has guided the selection of media being examined for the present research undertaking.

Founded in 1896 by Alden J. Blethen, The Seattle Times Company is a locally owned, private and independent news and information company that is still family-owned (now in its fourth and fifth generation). It is the largest locally-owned and operated metropolitan newspaper in the United States. The Seattle Times, its flagship newspaper, is the largest daily newspaper in Washington state and the largest Sunday newspaper in the Northwest. The company describes itself as “Well respected for its comprehensive local coverage . . . . [and] recognized nationally and internationally for in-depth, quality reporting and award-winning photography and design.”

For the same reason, the Guardian is a worthwhile publication to explore. The paper has won several awards, including a 2000 British Press Award – the U.K.’s equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize – for online journalism. Though older than the Seattle Times, the Guardian shares a similar history with the Washington paper. It was founded in 1821 by John Edward Taylor with the intention of “promoting the liberal interest in the aftermath of the Peterloo

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5 From the Seattle Times’ history, published by its parent company The Seattle Times Company on its webpage. [http://www.seattletimescompany.com/communication/overview.htm](http://www.seattletimescompany.com/communication/overview.htm)
Massacre and the growing campaign to repeal the Corn Laws that flourished in Manchester during this period.\textsuperscript{6} Under the editorship of C.P. Scott, the paper gained national and international recognition. Scott held the post for 57 years from 1872 and wrote a line indicative of its pledge to uphold the principles of the founder for an article written to celebrate the centenary of the paper: “Comment is free, but facts are sacred . . . . The voice of opponents no less than that of friends has a right to be heard.”\textsuperscript{7} Though the paper went through a period of flux, including an uncertain future on the national market in the 1960’s, Alastair Hetherington, the editor at this time, remained a staunch advocate of the Guardian’s independence, and the modern paper says that it owes much to his leadership and vision during this period.\textsuperscript{8}

It is important to note that the paper is considered liberal and left-wing within the U.K. While this reputation may influence the paper’s overall content and predispose it to more left-oriented editorials, the paper nevertheless maintains an excellent reputation of reporting within Britain. As such, it is believed that Smith’s (1992) principle of studying “papers of prominence” is being upheld by looking at the Guardian’s coverage of oil spills.

Although the papers belong to different countries, it is believed that this should present no disconnect for purposes of this research. As Western, industrialized, English-speaking countries with a long history of kinship, there is some degree of cultural similarity between the United States and Britain. Indeed, Hamilton and Atton (2001) have stated that “the common roots of the US and the UK in Anglo social, political, and economic traditions and practices help explain some important commonalities between the two alternative-media literatures.” Where there are differences in style or cultural attitudes – such as, perhaps, different cultural attitudes towards environmental issues harbored by the British – a side

\textsuperscript{6} From the Guardian’s published history of itself on its webpage. http://www.guardian.co.uk/information/theguardian/story/0,12002,1038110,00.html
\textsuperscript{7} ibid
\textsuperscript{8} ibid
effect of this research may be to reveal those differences during the process of analysis, or
conversely, to discover that certain principles of environmental reportage are shared.

Studying these two newspapers will provide a unique vantage point from which to
observe the unfolding process of how environmental reporting has changed over time.
Differences in environmental coverage between in 1978 versus 2002 may be more easily
attributable to factors such as the beat’s relative newness or maturity, rather that the papers’
overall quality of reportage.

**Archive Access and Research Scope**

Archive access for the 1978 and 1989 spills presented the greatest challenge for
acquisition of necessary research material. Though initially a challenge, old microfilmed
articles from the *Seattle Times* and the *Guardian* have been obtained through use of the
University of Missouri-Columbia interlibrary loan system. A research scope of six months
has been determined for each oil spill event in the two papers. Here again, this author is
following the precedent set by Smith (1992), who acknowledged that he would be “unable to
look at all of the stories written about each event,” and thus decided that he would “examine
those [stories] published or broadcast during the initial coverage period” (16). For the *Exxon*
spill, Smith (1992) observed that the six-month interval between March and September 1989
represented the first season’s cleanup attempt; as such, he argued that it was a natural way to
reasonably delimit the size of the research scope.

Thus, this present research will examine news articles between March 16, 1978 – end
of September 1978 for the *Amoco Cadiz* spill; March 24, 1989 – end of September 1989 for the
*Exxon Valdez* spill; and November 19, 2002 – end of May 2003 for the *Prestige* spill. To date, all
of the articles have been gathered and printed from microfilms save for September 1989 in the
*Seattle Times*, and hard copies from microfilms of the 2002 dates in both papers. Logistical
difficulties gathering the articles from microfilm – such as restrictions on where the
interlibrary loan system permits microfilm use, and unrealistically short check-out times –
have caused unavoidable delays in the gathering process. However, it should be noted that
articles pertaining to the 2002 Prestige spill can be gathered online, via the newspapers'
websites, or via the research tool Lexis-Nexis.

To ensure that all the text is at least available to read, the online material has been
printed out. However, a search for relevant Prestige articles on the Guardian's website failed
to turn up at least one article in which the Prestige ship was mentioned in the hard copy on
microfilm. Given this error, and the fact that online content fails to provide important
contextual clues – such as an article's placement in the paper, the page or section in which it
appeared, headline size, use and placement of images, and other such visually contextual clues
about the an article's intra-paper environment – it is hoped that hard copy versions of these
articles can be obtained for the sake of consistency and more solid rhetorical analysis across
all three spills and date ranges.

The news items analyzed for this study include all news articles specifically about the
spills in question, as well as editorials or opinion pieces related to the spills written by
editorial staff at the papers. Reader letters or articles not specifically about the spills were not
directly analyzed. However, some of this adjunct material – such as stories about other oil
spills that occurred during the same interval of time as the spills in question, or general
threads about oil pollution or regulatory developments in the maritime industry – was printed
for use as general reference or context. In particular, the smaller spill of the Greek tanker
Eleni V occurred near Britain's Channel Islands just weeks after the Amoco Cadiz disaster.
Several of the Guardian's stories about this spill make reference to the Amoco Cadiz, and for a
period of time, Guardian coverage of the Amoco Cadiz spill was superseded by coverage of the
more local spill. While this thesis will not perform a textual analysis on this material, having
it on hand may still be helpful for explaining some of findings of this analysis, as well as the
intra-paper subject contexts contemporaneous with the oil spill stories. Additional slightly
incongruous material included stories originating from wire services that were printed in the
papers. Particularly in the case of the Seattle Times' coverage of the 1978 Amoco Cadiz spill,
wire service reports were used most of the time – the exception being a few editorials written by the paper's maritime section editor. The fact that the Seattle Times used wire service news accounts of the Amoco Cadiz spill instead of its own reporters is, by itself, important contextual information about the paper's approach to coverage of the spill.

The decision about what type of articles to include for this thesis mirrors Ghanem and Hendrickson’s (2003) decision about what type of articles to include in their study of North American environmental news coverage. While there are some noticeable differences between their study and the present research – namely, that their study is primarily quantitative in nature and uses a content analysis to examine the effect that national boundaries have on coverage of environmental issues – their study has some similarities in that its overall goal was to examine how environmental issues relevant to the North American border regions were covered in the media. For their study, they looked at several textual criteria, including: date, section, page, length, whether the story was news or opinion and the source of the story (reporter, wire, unknown or citizen) and absence or presence of a photograph. Similarly, Brennan (1982), in his study of the oil supply crises of the 1970’s, chose to include all stories pertaining to the term “energy crises,” with the exception being that stories about other kinds of fuels were excluded. The following table displays information about the number of stories printed for examination by year for each paper and spill:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Number of Stories in Study Scope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.K. Guardian</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Times</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. Total number of news items analyzed in the Guardian and Seattle Times for each spill in the study scope.*
Summary

In general, this overview of relevant literature suggests some key research directives: the depiction of environmental and ecological issues requires more earnest analysis, and studies specifically examining the tradition of environmental reporting should be a research imperative for those seeking to enhance the profession and surmise its status in society – indeed, for anyone seeking to better understand the evolving profession of journalism and the unique rigors of the environment beat. While there is much yet to be done to this end, research attempting to move beyond a slice-in-time approach to environmental media research to capture a sense of the broader evolution of this small but important reporting niche will add another layer to this growing body of environmental media research, as well as a much-needed historical perspective.

The complex penetration of environmental issues into other socio-economic and political spheres renders the environment a difficult, but important, question of media research. Uncovering in a meaningful way how significant environmental issues are created by or related to political and economic factors and agendas, such as the pressures created by oil and other environmentally taxing global commodities, is essential, both to the future of environmental discourse and to media research about how one nuance or another emerges more vigorously in the press.

Like all studies, however, which must be limited by time and space, this thesis has its share of research limitations. Most notably, this thesis is focusing only on the textual elements of the oil spill stories, and not on the audience effects or perceptions of environmental coverage – an important indicator of how good a job reporting does at informing the public. While agenda-setting theory is influencing the theoretical backing of this research, public attitudes about the oil spills in question are not being studied for evidence of how reporting might have set the public’s agenda for the spills, either in relation to the spills themselves or to other environmental issues.
A similar limitation to this study is its exclusion of opinions from journalists about their perceptions of how these spills were covered and how they represent change in environmental reporting over time. Ideally, a study including interviews or surveys of journalists about coverage of the spills would be combined with analysis of the news stories to determine how the results of the textual analysis compared to journalists’ own perceptions of the quality of their reporting. Results from such a study would illuminate more clearly where the disconnects are between practice and perception and would point to more specific areas where environmental reportage was in need of attention.

Finally, the sample size of newspapers examined for this study (one U.S. paper and one British paper), is a limitation in that the results cannot be said to be truly representative of the changes in environmental reporting as a whole across the nation. Although the papers may serve as case studies of the field’s evolution in a general way, to truly develop a picture of how environmental journalism has evolved over time, a larger sample of newspapers from different parts of the country would need to be included in a study of a similarly comprehensive nature so as to more fully encapsulate and characterize the burgeoning field of environmental reporting in its entirety.
3. **Amoco Cadiz — 1978’s “Monstrous” Disaster**

The wreck of the *Amoco Cadiz* was one of the most studied oil spills in history. For a time, it earned the dubious distinction of ranking as the world’s worst oil spill on record, as well as the worst ecological disaster caused by an oil spill. Surprisingly, for all the scientific scrutiny the spill received, its indelible imprint on the memories of the maritime and oil industries, and its ramifications for legislation and the formation of new organizations dedicated to tanker safety and spill prevention, the media’s coverage of the world’s fourth-worst oil tanker disaster has never been studied until now. Like a great archaeological monument forgotten by time – or the ruins of a sunken tanker lying on the floor of the sea responsible for its demise – the *Amoco Cadiz* has for a quarter century escaped the notice of researchers interested in journalistic reporting of technological and environmental disasters.

The results of such study have proved illuminating – even surprising at times. The *Guardian’s* coverage in particular evades easy description. While the paper engaged in some of the same reporting patterns discerned by researchers such as Smith (1992), Wilkins (1989), and Daley and O’Neill (1991) – for instance, a tendency to rely on government and “official” sources and to personify the wrecked tanker as a dying beast as it was slowly consumed by the sea – other common (and commonly criticized) spill reporting habits, such as the tendency to focus on the tragedy of oiled seabirds and wildlife and to use frames enhancing that theme, were not readily observed in the *Guardian’s* coverage.

One particularly interesting aspect of the *Guardian’s* reportage was the manner in which a single story succeeded in weaving together local and international narratives. Through a combination of headline use and style, intra-story transitions and intra-column “teases” to spill stories in other sections, quoting of sources invested with authority on both fronts over time, and a particular narrative style not observed in the *Seattle Times’* wire reports, many *Guardian* stories about the spill move almost seamlessly between narration of
growing British concern over the increasing likelihood of break-away oil pollution to the Channel Islands and continued narration of events unfolding along the Breton coast.

**The Guardian**

Over the course of the *Guardian’s* reportage between March 18 and September 16, 1978, the paper published a total of 35 stories about the spill, though the majority of stories were written in the first two weeks following the spill. Of the total stories, the first 22 – or about 61 percent – were written between the paper’s first spill story on March 18 and March 31. No stories were written about the *Amoco Cadiz* during the entire month of April. In May and June, the paper published 6 stories – or about 17 percent – each month; 1 story in July, none in August, and 1 story in September.

**Story Frames**

Throughout coverage three key frames emerged, along with an array of narrative themes. Frames included: a pollution disaster frame; a threat to Britain frame; and “man versus sea” frame. Frames typically operated as the background canvas of the unfolding story of the spill, while the diversity of thematic developments were the vivid details through which the frames established their presence.

**Pollution Disaster Frame**

Throughout most of the paper’s coverage, one enduring frame reigned at a meta-level: that of a pollution disaster of monumental and almost superhuman proportions. While the paper constructed the spill as a “pollution disaster” rather than an explicitly “environmental” or “ecological” disaster, the pollution disaster frame included effects to more than just beaches and rocky shores or the ocean in general by “polluting” it. Communities dependent on fishing for their livelihoods, as well as to birds, shellfish, and tourism-dependent economies, were portrayed as affected by the spill.
Headlines such as the paper’s Day 1 heading “Oil Spill Threat to Coasts” and Day 6’s “Tanker's Entire Load Spills into Sea” focused attention on the threat of oil, compounded by the magnitude of volume spilt. The lead sentence of the first spill story, which described how “France faced its worst oil pollution disaster last night” (March 18, 1978, pg. 1), immediately defined the spill in terms of its size and pollution potential. Regular updates about the growth of the slick as ocean currents spread it along the Breton coastline helped focus attention on the magnitude aspect of the spill, which seemed to amplify exponentially as the numbers increased or the area covered by the spill widened.

The other disaster components were interjected when reporter Paul Webster described in the paper’s fifth story on the spill how “the disaster . . . has already clogged thousands of seabirds, killed oyster and shellfish beds, and damaged Brittany’s prosperous tourist industry for the next few years” (Thursday March 23, 1978, pg. 1). Later stories explored the economic aspects of the disaster in more detail, or referred to a “second catastrophe” – that of the spill’s devastating effects on regional economies. More specific numbers were also referenced for estimates of bird, shellfish, and lobster loss.

Subsequent stories elaborated on the initial pollution frame. Reporters documented the spread of oil in early reports, and by Thursday, March 23, as the headline “Tanker’s Entire Load Spills into Sea” emphasized, the spill had officially come to “[mark] the world’s worst oil pollution caused by a tanker” (pg. 1). That same day, in a story in the “Technology” section providing an insightful discussion and explanation about the different types of oil dispersants and the origins of the “use / don’t use” dispersant debate, the spill finally attained its supernatural status when Guardian reporter Gillian Linscott, using all-caps, referred to the spill in her lead sentence as “MONSTROUS.”

While the paper ducked back and forth between an interest in local concerns and unfolding events in Brittany, the “pollution disaster” frame always hovered in the background. Within this frame, reporters made frequent references to “worsening pollution,” a “huge and growing oil slick,” “beaches [being] bathed” in oil, and wrote often bleak
descriptions of the “inevitability” of widespread pollution from the spill succored by ferocious winds and wretched weather. Later stories after the first month of reporting probed other angles of the spill during the remediation and clean-up phases, but still maintained the “pollution disaster” frame via flashback references to the spill in context of new story angles. For instance, a story on May 8, 1978 with the headline “Tanker Captain Blamed for Oil Disaster,” suggests the continuity of the frame via the headline itself and in the lead paragraph of the story, which described how a “top-level report by the French Government” blamed the Amoco Cadiz’s captain, Pasquale Bardari, for “causing the worst ever oil pollution disaster” (pg. 30).

Both earlier and later stories seemed at times to have an almost phantasmagoric quality as reporters described a lurid but unstoppable play-by-play of events. As the calamity unfolded, the world could only sit and watch as the roiling ocean caused “new breaches” (Tuesday, March 21, pg. 24) in the tanker under the force of fierce winds and overnight storms. At times, reporters seemed like mere documenters of the disaster sitting by on the sidelines. For instance, in a story on Wednesday March 22, which made reference to a “new flood of oil” coming from the tanker, Paul Webster used the word “now” in three consecutive paragraphs as he described the next brick to fall in the seemingly unstoppable chain of disaster events.

Prospects for recovering oil still inside the undamaged storage tanks seemed bleaker by the day, adding a palpable ethos of urgency to the situation. Eventually, this culminated in the grim realization that, with the continued pelagic maelstrom and the oncoming spring high tide, there was little that could be done to mitigate the oncoming disaster. The high tide was a grave worry to authorities and Breton fishermen because the tides would ensure that any oil not collected would be washed ashore to devastating degree instead of breaking up at sea. Guardian reporters picked up on this ethos of urgency in their stories, and thus, the high tide symbolized the pinnacle of the pollution disaster frame, which accentuated the emphasis on the magnitude of the spill. While different themes emerged on any given day, the “pollution
disaster” frame was always a backdrop. However, within this overarching frame, a strong sister frame and several reporting themes achieved a hearty presence.

**Threat to Britain Frame**

An almost equally omnipresent frame was that of the threat to Britain – and after the fourth story on Wednesday March 22, the threat to the British Channel Islands primarily – as a result of possible break-away pollution from the main Breton spill. This frame was also established immediately when Paul Webster reported in the lead paragraph of the first story on Saturday March 18, 1978 that “Britain was alerted in case of wind and tide changes which could cause greater damage to the south coast of England than the wreck of the Torrey Canyon.” As part of this frame, the Guardian at times described, almost to a point of minutiae, the government’s planning and preparedness measures, such as “specialty teams . . . trained in anti-pollution tasks” (pg. 1)

However, by the Guardian’s second story on Monday March 20, the focus of the pollution threat had switched with increasing concern to Britain’s Channel Islands, which include the main island bailiwicks of Guernsey and Jersey – located over 70 miles from Great Britain, but just a few miles from the French coast (see map).

The history of British claims to the Channel Islands goes back to the time of William of Normandy’s conquest of England. Originally, the Channel Islands were part of Normandy when William invaded and captured England in 1066. When the king of France later invaded and captured Normandy in 1204, the Channel Islanders chose to stay subject to the Crown of England. In return for their loyalty, the Islands were allowed to retain their
own government. Even today, the Channel Islands are not legally part of the United Kingdom or the European Union, though there are links between the governments of Britain and the Islands, and Channel Islanders are full British citizens. Thus, the Channel Islands, while a part of Great Britain historically, have retained a unique regional identity encompassing aspects of their culture, their historical languages and accents, and their systems of governance – a fact which, as will be discussed below, came through at times in the Guardian’s reportage. Nonetheless, as a possession of the British Crown – officially a “Crown dependency” – threats to the Islands were considered threats to Britain, and the Guardian’s coverage via the “Threat to Britain” frame demonstrates this via its greater local interest and stake in the possible outcomes of oil migration and pollution of the Channel Islands stemming from the Breton disaster.

Throughout the unfolding course of the spill’s dramatic genesis and eventual conclusion, the focus on the threat to Britain maintained, arguably, a more direct presence in Guardian stories than the omnipresent parent “pollution disaster” frame. Virtually every story over the 6-month interval carved a local angle out of developments at the larger French level – sometimes with a display of great narrative dexterity at integrating the international and local island angles. Local angles focused particularly on the potential harm to the unique fisheries and tourism of the Channel Islands, the damage to fishermen once oil reaches the Islands, and the mitigation efforts of the British government and Channel Islanders.

For instance, a story by Philip Jordan, reporting from Brest on Saturday March 25, used its lead paragraph to seamlessly introduce both the “pollution” and “threat to Britain” frames, as well as the local and international angles: “The huge oil slick from the wrecked tanker Amoco Cadiz reached within 25 miles of the Channel Islands yesterday as the international team fighting the oil threw new reserves into the battle” (pg. 1). This opening sentence ensured that the Guardian’s readers were keyed into the local angles of immediate interest to them, while giving Jordan the ability to slip back and forth between Brittany and developments on the home front.
The use of front page or intra-column “teases” to other spill-related stories, as well as a clever use of multiple headline and sub-heads – which in the Guardian are actually underlined over top of the main heading and are frequently closer to complete sentences – functioned in a similar way by providing a semantic agility to navigate between the differing layers of the spill story. The Guardian’s second story on Monday March 20 is a perfect example. The primary headline for the day’s story – “Row Grows Over Delayed Tanker Alert” – indicates a primary focus on the Breton angle. The story appears on the paper’s back page, which in terms of the human mechanics of reading a newspaper, is a strategic place in a side-fold paper like the Guardian to put news items which were important but didn’t fit or quite belong in one of the interior sections. In the case of Amoco Cadiz stories, the back page was one of the main locations where spill stories appeared.

On the front page of the day’s paper, however, the paper inserted a prominent tease on the “News in Brief” sidebar with a large heading entitled “Oil Slick Drift Towards Britain.” The tease, which had the largest font size of all the other teases and occupied the first slot, simultaneously suggests the local angle while tempting readers to flip to the back, where the main thrust of that particular story was on Brittany. At the same time, the superscript text over the main headline merges both the local and the Breton aspects: “Heavy seas pound Amoco Cadiz as oil slick moves towards the British coast” (pg. 24). Thus, the Guardian integrates two of the main spill frameworks while creating for itself the reflexive ability to navigate easily between the two primary geographic locations affected by the spill (for example, see #1 in Appendix).

Of note, however, is the fact that despite the palpable presence of the “Threat to Britain” frame, whenever a truly somber or critical event happened on the Breton front, the Guardian immediately turned its undivided attention back to Brittany. Between the second and fifth day’s stories, the Guardian meandered through various angles, from the spread of oil and official response in Brittany, to concerns in Britain about pollution migration, to commencing discussions about possible charges against the Amoco Cadiz’s captain. However,
when the tanker finally sheds its entire remaining cargo by Day 6 and the full gravity of the situation was suddenly, shockingly apparent, the paper dropped all and returned with great solemnity to the shores of western France, its opening sentence stating with lyrically somber simplicity: “The broken wreck of the Amoco Cadiz, it decks awash with heavy seas, last night marked the world’s worst oil pollution caused by a tanker” (pg 1).

**Battle Between Man and Sea Frame**

A third frame which co-existed, often simultaneously, with the other two frames was that of an epic battle between man and a powerful pelagic foe. As the heading suggests, this frame highlighted the unusually extreme weather and ocean conditions at the time of the tanker’s grounding, which persisted through the critical period immediately following the spill. The frame also cast the inability of the French and British authorities to do anything to contain, ameliorate, or prevent further spillage, not as the fault of the authorities, but as the result of the powerful, potent – sometimes perverse – and furious forces of nature.

References to the bad weather began in the Guardian’s first story, when reporter Paul Webster reported that “high winds and strong currents set back attempts to contain the tanker’s 230,000 ton cargo of crude oil” (Saturday March 18, 1989, pg. 1). The subject soon became a continuing theme of news coverage. The duplicity of the perpetually “heavy seas,” “strong winds,” and “dark waters” in hampering the authorities’ desire to start tackling the slick, and a seeming transmogrification of the spilt oil into an ocean-dwelling organism of roguish intent, resulted in the introduction and subsequent amplification of strong battle imagery (*see #’s 2, 4, and 5 in Appendix*). The spill thus became an epic battle between a valiant armada of brave seamen engaged in a futilely Sisyphean struggle against a Herculean Sea God of superhuman strength. The 125-mile long slick was “massed” against the Brittany coast, and the authorities are repeatedly described as “attacking” or preparing to attack the slick.

The “man versus sea” frame functioned at times to justify the continual impotence of humans to curb the spill or even to enact their counter-spill plans and was the main precursor
to the development of the battle mentality and imagery. By Tuesday March 21, the first reference to a “battle” was introduced by reporter David Fairhall who mentioned how “Guernsey harbour authorities were preparing for an early siege by the oil” (pg. 24) and then paraphrased a source as “predict[ing] . . . that the main battle, if it is ever fought, will be waged in mid-Channel” (pg. 24). The statement conjures images of Britain’s naval past and prowess and planted the early seeds for a battle framework to take root (see #3 in Appendix).

Subsequent stories invoke the “battle” frame in various contexts, from descriptions of efforts or thwarted attempts to start mitigating the oil’s spread to explanation of why it was “urgent” that the “emergency team” “attack the slick” as soon as possible (Saturday March 25, 1978, pg. 22). Stories repeatedly described citizens, authorities, or the assembled fleet of oil-fighting vessels as “attacking” the slick or “renewing the attack” on the slick. Over time, the continued references to how an attack was “renewed” only served to underscore the failures of humans and the system – though the weather bore the brunt of criticism.

Later stories perpetuated a battle framework, but with a different nuance invoking more literal images of war and things military, in relation to a debate over whether to bomb the wreck of the Amoco Cadiz in order to accelerate the release of oil still on board. The headline for Thursday March 30, now almost two weeks after the initial spill, heralded the final answer to the bombing debate: “French Helicopters Bomb Amoco Wreck.” The story provided details and technical language pertaining to the logistics of bombing the wreck, opening with a mention of the “depth charges” dropped by helicopter on the wreck and then describing, in acute almost militaristic detail, the proceedings just before the bombing of the tanker: how the French helicopters were “put on standby . . . ready to home on the wreck” and how “[j]ust after 3 p.m. the three Super Frelon helicopters, flying in a squadron with three Alouette 3 spotter helicopters, soared over the wreck” (pg. 22).

Two more later stories continue the “battle” frame, but in the new contexts of the continuing clean-up efforts six weeks after the spill and the related economic repercussions as a result of the “oil’s terrible toll.” One of these later-phase stories stretched the frame into the
realm of the metaphorical, all-encompassing by discussing the European community’s concern over rising incidences of tanker accident and examining the *Amoco Cadiz* in context with two other spill disasters.

The three primary frames developed over the course of the *Guardian’s* coverage conform to classic spill disaster narratives. However, while their use suggests that the *Guardian* fell prey to the same reporting peccadilloes described by the scholarly literature, the story of the *Guardian’s* spill coverage doesn't end with its predictable frames.

**News Angles and Thematic Developments**

Where the *Guardian* stands apart and breaks from the norm in its coverage may be in its sometimes surprising and perspicacious commentaries and its diversity of themes. Over the course of six months of coverage, several themes and news angles were observed in the *Guardian’s* coverage of the *Amoco Cadiz* oil spill, spanning topics related to the spill on several fronts. Stories covered angles ranging from the immediate breaking developments of the spill to angles exploring important social, economic, and ecological topics. A few stories touched on longer-term issues pertaining to safety and liability. Not all themes were developed by reporters devoting entire stories to the subjects. However, the topics were usually referenced enough times throughout the full course of coverage, with some garnering headlines, that their existence was analyzed in aggregate.

Some themes were closely tied to the creation of story frames, such as the “Bad Weather / Fury of the Sea Gods” theme which was related to all three of the spill story’s main frames. Other themes were large enough that they produced their own sub-themes. The “Threat to Britain” theme was both a theme and a frame. This duality was possible because the focus on the risk to Britain and the Channel Islands was such an important news angle that it featured as a continual thread, interwoven with the larger spill narrative. In aggregate, though, the fear of damaging pollution to the Channel Islands’ unique shellfisheries and tourism hotspots meant that the overarching “pollution disaster” frame
became linked specifically with its potential to impact the Islands, thus allowing the Amoco Cadiz spill to be framed as both a pollution disaster and as a “Threat to Britain” (for examples, see #’s 1, 4, 5, and 6 in Appendix). A few of the Guardian’s themes are highlighted below.

**Bad Weather Theme**

This theme was related to the “battle between man and sea” frame observed in early Guardian stories. The theme highlighted the persistent terrible weather, which thwarted the best efforts of humans to contain the growing slick and became a justification for the failures of human action. After the tanker’s full load had washed into the sea, Britain’s Minister of Trade was quoted saying: “Everything that can be done is being done” (Saturday March 25, 1978, pg. 1).

The repeated descriptions of the rough seas and wrackful weather over the course of coverage contributed to the sense of an epic battle between man and sea. Many of the authorities’ plans were continually delayed by defiantly bad weather. Reporters noted more than once that unless the weather changed, oil would travel to the Channel Islands or prevent the carrying out of an otherwise cohesive plan to circumvent the spillage of remaining oil. When a story on Saturday March 25 quoted Captain Stephen Pascoe, captain of the spraying tug Calshot, saying how “the spraying has been really hard work because of the weather” (pg. 22), the “battle” frame was given strength and credence by the authoritative statement of the experienced mariner. A story on March 27 finally referred to the weather as “abnormal,” essentially laying the ultimate blame and guilt for the Amoco Cadiz disaster on the weather coupled with the tremendous size of the tanker.

By the following week on Wednesday March 29, the superhuman power of the sea was finally affirmed when Philip Jordan wrote in his lead to the day’s story: “Rough seas yesterday smashed in half the already-severed hull of the grounded supertanker Amoco Cadiz. Thus the weather, which foiled an attempt by French navy frogmen to dynamite the tanker, has now achieved what the explosives were intended to do” (pg. 24). The statement’s
strongly suggestive prose and harsh imagery, contrasted with the seemingly effortless ability of natural forces to achieve a destructive feat more powerful even than human explosive technology, elevated the weather to superhuman stature and forced humankind to acknowledge the supremacy of this mighty pelagic power.

**Threat to Britain Themes**

This theme emerged as a staple of the *Guardian’s* coverage. In earlier stories leading up to the breakaway slick which eventually made it to the Channel Islands, the focus was the potential of the pollution threat. Practically every story written during the initial suite of post-spill stories worked in a local Channel Islands angle. Similarly, many of the paper’s headlines mentioned the Channel Islands in some way, whether uniquely or in context with the larger Breton spill. In the climate of concern over possible pollution of the Islands, two sub-themes branched out of the main “threat to Britain” theme.

**Reassure Britain – Credible Government, Hearty Natural Lands**

British concern over the threat of pollution to its Channel Islands was so strong that the *Guardian* developed a “reassurance” sub-theme. Even as the possibility of some degree of oil pollution seemed more inevitable, reporters and authorities looked for ways to reassure the British people by emphasizing British preparedness, enhanced by the credibility of British experts and the heartiness of British natural areas to rebuff an assault by oil. Reporters described – often going into great detail – the preparedness of the British government, the various lines of defenses, the hefty supplies of detergents and the Royal Navy’s “fleet of specially equipped fishing boats,” and overall making the government and first responders seem very busy preparing for even the smallest slick (*see #’s 1, 2 and 5 in Appendix*).

A story on March 27 described how “stockpiles of dispersant were being lashed to the decks of large tugtenders and smaller tugs” (pg. 1). The language suggested a gallant crew of sailors energetically preparing for a naval war. An earlier story from March 20 included a paraphrase of the British Department of Trade asserting that, in the event of a bigger threat
“the Department of Trade would commandeer vessels and equipment from wherever necessary” (pg. 24). Such rhetoric employed by Guardian reporters accentuated a sense of dogged preparation on the part of the government.

The Guardian also used sources who were either experts on oil, community leaders, or experts within their particular trades to help reassure the British people. Dr. Molly Spooner, a British marine biologist and an authority on spills, was used in several stories to reassure Channel Islanders about the remote chances of large-scale pollution and given considerable space in full quotes to express her expert conclusions. For instance, a March 28 story focused exclusively on French bombing preparations included an unusually prominent tease featuring a full sentence paraphrase of Spooner denouncing the chances of large-scale pollution of the Islands as “extremely remote” (see #6 in Appendix). The expert opinion of Guernsey’s tourist director was also sought to reassure people about the sanctity of their holiday plans. The source emphasized that he had “heard of no holiday cancellations” (Saturday March 25, 1978, pg. 20) and reassured people that there was no need to cancel their plans “because the oil is a sufficient distance away, and anyway, the normal contract arrangement with hotels would apply” (pg. 20).

The obvious intent here was to offset worry about the economic loss to local businesses, which thrive on island tourism. The use of the phrase “and anyway” in particular dismissed the potential oil threat and downplayed the disastrous situation unfolding on the shores of Brittany. The threat of oil was further downplayed when the tourist director was again paraphrased saying he would “be surprised if the oil, if it came, hit beaches on a triangular island.” The addition of the extra “if it came” phrase – and it is unclear from the paraphrase whether the extra “if” statement was part of the paraphrase or added by the reporter – emphasized the “if” part of all the conjectures and prognostications about oil hitting the Islands. The heartiness of the Island’s natural defenses was also invoked as a further reassurance: “Any oil would be sucked in by the 20 sewage carts and blotted up by seaweed and bracken” (pg. 20).
These reassurances were not altogether successful, though. Islanders still “fear[ed] a deluge” and made preparations to ensure complete readiness it, and there is a sense of inevitability about its arrival. Eventually, the reassurances all amounted to naught, however, because oil eventually did reach the Islands, though in smaller quantity. This did not stop the Guardian from trying to quell British concerns about threats to the unique farming, fishing, and tourist areas of the Channel Islands from the splattering the Islands did receive. The hearty natural defenses of the island were again referenced as reassurance: “But since the beach acts as a trap for much of the flotsam and jetsam around the island the amount of thicker oil splashing the rocks there to a width of about 30 yards is not considered a threat but a minor problem” (Thursday, March 30, 1978, pg. 22).

Responsibility for Spill Theme

A culpability theme does appear in the Guardian’s coverage of the spill. However, the Guardian does not pursue this theme to the exclusion of others, nor does it come across as unduly transfixed by the blame controversy. As the opening lines of a Guardian editorial published on Thursday March 30 indicated, the paper strongly disapproved of such a practice. The editor, unnamed, stated: “The temptation instantly to criticize (with added hindsight) the master of a shipwrecked vessel is always strong and should always be resisted” (pg. 14). This philosophy of resisting the temptation to latch onto this theme, to the exclusion of other newsworthy angles or institutional causes, bore out in analysis of Guardian coverage.

The first mention of any controversy about the role of Captain Pasquale Bardari, the captain of the Amoco Cadiz, appeared in the Guardian’s second story on March 20, titled “Row Grows Over Delayed Tanker Alert.” Despite the headline, the story’s first half was devoted to updating readers on the status of the spill. The idea of controversy was mentioned only in passing in a single sentence: “Controversy over responsibility has caused several reactions” (pg. 24). The story then allotted just two additional paragraphs to the issue, one each for a different source to provide background details about the nature of the “row” – which centered
on allegations that the captain delayed notification of French authorities until it was too late.

The rest of the story was about other unrelated nuances of the spill story. The theme largely disappeared until almost a week later, when a story with the headline “Radio Tapes Renew Argument Over Distress Call,” published on March 27, presented new information about a conversation between the two captains – Captain Bardari and Captain Harmut Weinert of the tug Pacific – that was picked up by a radio ham.

Of note, however, was the occasional register of sub-surface support for the Amoco Cadiz captain in the Guardian’s treatment of the theme. The sub-head to this March 27 story noted: “Italian captain’s diary of events is confirmed by the Germans’ account of how they fought to save the ship” (pg. 3), and the story itself ended by noting that, despite the disagreement over certain details, “the German [tug] firm agrees with the contention that the Pacific alone was not going to be able to handle the Amoco Cadiz . . .” (pg. 3). This sense of subsurface support for the tanker captain was observed in other stories as well – in particular, a Guardian editorial on March 30.

The editorial, titled “Don’t Haggle, Call a Tug,” seemed to sympathize with Bardari and express great respect for his profession’s customs, traditions, and hazards. The editor wrote that “those who were not on the bridge in the time of trouble have no business to intervene until the inquiry is over” (pg. 14). While the editorial still offered stern assessment about the ultimate effect of the two captains’ dispute over a salvage contract and subsequent delay in getting the necessary help, the editor made a point of commenting that “it is the custom and practice of seamen in distress who need salvage to bargain with their salvors, and this is what Captain Bardari seems to have done” (pg. 14). The editor further suggested that Captain Bardari was a competent navigator and did not allow the tanker to ground itself out of recklessness: “Unlike the master of the Torrey Canyon, Captain Bardari knew exactly where he was, which was in the right place” (pg. 14). Use of the word “they” in the statement “If they wanted to save the ship they should have called for every available tug in Brest to come to their aid” subtly shifted the onus of blame for the accident from Captain Bardari to
include a shared responsibility between the two captains involved. A later story referred to the criticism of Captain Bardari as “much of it of the armchair variety” and emphasized the “highly competent” and “extensively trained” (Monday June 12, 1978, pg. 4) crew. While this sense of subsurface support for Captain Bardari came across at times, it did not interfere with objective coverage of the inquiry proceedings.

Most of the stories about Captain Bardari appeared in later coverage, beginning in May 1978, after the worst of the spill had happened and a theme focused on attempts to bomb the tanker had finally concluded. During the month of March, when the majority of Guardian spill stories were written, only three stories appeared with headlines pertaining to the “responsibility” theme. By way of comparison, between June 12 when the story “Tanker Inquiry Faces Key Questions” (pg. 4) appeared and the end of Guardian coverage on September 16, six stories focusing on the inquiry proceedings appeared in the paper.

The Guardian explored various aspects of the technical questions related to the potential steering mechanism failure, probed the “key questions” (June 12, 1978, pg. 4) involved in the inquiry, and provided an opportunity for both captains to give their sides of the story – each in separate stories. The resolution to this theme was left dangling until July 1, 1978 when a story entitled “Amoco Cadiz Owners to get £60M Pollution Bill” explained that “the [French] senate committee was unable to confirm whether there had been a long bargaining session . . . or whether this had sabotaged the tow” (pg. 22).

**Additional News Angles and Threads**

Several other themes undulated throughout Guardian coverage of the spill, overall indicating an attempt to probe more than just the surface facets of the spill. The paper had reporters covering the spill on location in Brittany, the Channel Islands, and at home. In some cases, reporters wrote highly probing pieces, such as a Guardian story on March 28 titled “France Counts the Cost of Black Easter” that put in perspective the spill’s numerous effects on the “little communities” of the affected region (pg. 17). However, given the spread of
reporters, there was also a noticeable inconsistency in the depth of reporting, as well as times when the treatment of an angle didn’t quite go far enough. In the referenced March 28 story, for instance, while the Guardian provided excellent context and detailed information about effects to a range of industries, such as oyster and sea weed farming and tourism, the story did not include interviews with individual, named villagers or fisherman (see #7 in Appendix).

No Fear of Scientific Concepts

Nonetheless, there was still a level of sophistication evident in the Guardian’s reportage. The fact that there is evidence of an attempt to explore or touch on larger questions related to the spill, though at times scattered or incomplete, was still notable. One example is the paper’s occasional broaching of scientific concepts – such as a discussion of the effects of oceanic action on “hydrocarbons,” the idea of water bodies renewing themselves, scientific discussion of a killer seaweed that appeared a few weeks after the spill, or full articles devoted to discussing different types of oil and their characteristics. The paper also went into a significant level of detail about biological concepts.

The “cost of Black Easter” story cited above is one example. The reporter, Philip Jordan, wrote about the effects of the Amoco Cadiz’s particular type of oil on marine life and birds. The story drew on the historical context of the Torrey Canyon to help explain the present effects to bird sanctuaries and then provided an abridged discussion of the effects to the trophic cascade of organisms in the ocean as a result of particular characteristics of the Amoco’s oil cargo mixed with water. Jordan wrote that “. . . the lightness of the oil makes it emulsify more easily with sea water under wave action and the effects of dispersants.” The interesting biological discussions followed: “This is said to make it more dangerous since it is easier for animal vegetable life, particularly plankton – one of the basic foodstuffs of the ocean – to assimilate it. The plankton is eaten by fish, which are in turn eaten by sea birds and thus the entire food chain on the coast is at risk” (pg. 17)
A story from June 17 titled “French Count Cost of Amoco Cadiz Spill” brought up the concept of natural aquatic replenishment in a paragraph informing readers about the convening of a meeting of “20 coastal states” to discuss pollution in the Mediterranean.

Another example of the paper’s readiness to broach scientific concepts can be seen in a March 27 story. Reporter Michael Morris introduced a theory about why oil-affected birds were appearing near the Channel Islands when oil had not yet reached the Islands. Using a vivid simile to illustrate the concept, he wrote that “the theory is that birds have mistaken the band of oil for the plankton to be found off the French coast and hastened to it like moths to a flame” (pg. 20).

**Ecological Angle**

The *Guardian’s* approach to the ecological angle of the spill is also interesting. The paper did not hone in on the tragic symbolism of oiled birds and wildlife or publish more sensational headlines pertaining to oiled wildlife. Nor did the topic garner particularly explicit attention via full stories devoted to it, headlines indicative of the subject, or photographs – there being, in fact, just one photograph of a man carrying a dead bird dangling from his hand (see #1 in Appendix). However, the ecological aspect did not come across as forgotten either.

The first major mention of ecological effects appeared in the *Guardian’s* fifth story on Thursday March 23. Halfway through the story, the reporter devoted two full paragraphs to a mention of oyster and shellfish deaths and the bird sanctuaries that were polluted by the spill, providing more specific information about the bird refuges:

“Of the 25 bird sanctuaries on the Brittany coast more than half have been polluted. Trevor Island, sanctuary for more than 2,000 terns, is said to be covered in oil and few birds have been saved in any sanctuary despite the efforts of hundreds of volunteers” (pg. 1).

The attention ended there until the subject of birds was revisited four days later in a March 27 story about Channel Islands preparations for an expected slick. Reporter Michael Morris
introduced the subject by contrasting the “impatience” of the navy to get to work on the slick with the amount of work already facing the “team of more than 90 residents who have volunteered to treat oil-contaminated birds” (pg. 20).

None of the headlines during the study interval had an explicitly environmental thrust, though the aspect appeared once in this “superscript” story sub-head: “Favourable winds are sheltering the Channel Islands from the tanker spillage. But fishermen and bird lovers fear the worst.” The heading spanned two stories from March 27, as well as the entire width of the paper’s left page (see #5 in Appendix). Rather, the ecological dimension of the spill is maintained at a low simmer throughout stories, via references scattered in quotes, scene descriptions, sub-headings, and some more substantive sections of stories about it.

**Systemic Roots of Major Oil Spills**

Another noteworthy aspect of the Guardian’s spill coverage was its attention to greater systemic causes or perspectives on the Amoco Cadiz spill. No stories were explicitly devoted to exploring the greater socio-economic aspects of oil spills, such as the growing oil consumptiveness of humankind or the politics of oil involved in its importation or shipment. However, the Guardian did broach systemic issues in hints and snippets, sometimes through sources or selection of specific quotes, sometimes in referencing a global context, and other times in editorial statements.

In one story published on March 25, the Guardian suggested the existence of problems within the larger shipping industry by quoting a local Breton mayor (see #3 in Appendix). The reporter first commented:

“What has brought the people out onto the streets of Brest – as they never came out in the streets of Penzance in 1967 during the Torrey Canyon disaster – is that despite knowledge of the potential danger oil tankers bring nothing had been done to keep them away from the coast” (pg. 15).
The statement was followed with a quote from the local mayor which implicitly criticized the maritime regulatory system: “As one local mayor put it: ‘The 11 years since the Torrey Canyon have been marked by the same hapless system of improvisation’ ” (pg. 15).

An editorial published on Tuesday May 9 with the heading “Europe on a Sea of Sludge” offered probably the strongest suggestion of problems within the maritime shipping industry. Of all the instances where the Guardian verged on the threshold of deeper analysis of the systemic causes of oil disasters, this editorial came closest to expressing an understanding of the inevitability of tanker spills in the current socio-economic world. The unnamed editor of the piece began by pointing to the bureaucratic obstacles usually implicated in delaying proactive change within the industry:

“Think of a way to stop oil pouring on to the beaches of Europe and a dozen objections will immediately be raised. Ownership, registration, charterer’s interest, responsibility at law, territorial limits, salvors’ rights . . . the card indexes and legal precedents that have to be consulted every time an accident occurs are so large that the damage can be done before action is taken to prevent it” (pg. 10).

This statement also seemed to suggest the sort of stumbling blocks and themes which grew out of the Amoco Cadiz incident. The editor then illustrated, referencing recent examples from the Torrey Canyon, Eleni V, and Amoco Cadiz, how some of the bureaucratic bickering and obstacles translated into botched, delayed, or confused ways of dealing with the disasters when they happened. In a statement strongly denunciating the inherent potential for damage within the oil industry, the editor both recognized this destructive potential while also implicating governments in the persistence of oil pollution problems for failing to devise ways of dealing with an expected and inevitable by-product of the industry: “No other industry causes such widely felt environmental damage. But in spite of all the expertise built up, especially in Britain, since the Torrey Canyon nothing fully effective is done to stop the steady devastation of Europe’s shores” (pg. 10).

The editor’s next paragraph then suggested that the increasing quantity of oil being moved around the globe was also partly responsible for these inevitable pollution incidents:
“Undoubtedly better standards of navigation and tighter policing of sea lanes could reduce the risk of accidents. But the risk cannot be eliminated. As more and more bulk oil and its derivatives travel round the world the diminished risk to each vessel may well be more than compensated by the total of vessels and the size of their cargoes . . . . It is a safe assumption that the thousands of marine spillages (some slight, some disastrous) since Torrey Canyon will be matched by thousands in the future” (pg. 10).

Drawing on contemporary North Sea oil context – a regular news subject observed in the Guardian during gathering of Amoco Cadiz stories – the editor again hinted that the increasing quantity of oil being produced would only increase the likelihood of spill disasters like the Amoco Cadiz:

“. . . as the North Sea comes into full production the accident rate at the well-heads is liable statistically to approach that in the Mexican Gulf, where roughly three major accidents occur every year . . . . The 1½ million tons of oil which travels through the English Channel every day, plus the large volume on other sea routes, needs the equivalent of a council of war to decide instantly what to do in an accident . . .” (pg. 10)

The editor further suggested that tanker disasters are inevitable outcomes of such a complex technological and global system, rather than random disaster events which take everyone by surprise. While this editorial could have been a good place to start a more thorough investigation of the subjects raised in periphery in the editorial, the analysis of systemic causes of oil spills does not get much further than this.

**Fostering of National Identity**

In several places, Guardian stories suggested a unique regional identity possessed by the people of western Brittany and the Channel Islands by emphasizing the uniqueness of regional livelihoods, by referencing certain local manners of speech, or by suggesting the presence of an older folk knowledge which drew on wisdom of the sea (see #3 in Appendix).

Stories describing the threat of oil to the Channel Islands emphasized the feared impact on important local industries – primarily fishing and tourism – which were depicted as unique to the region. Reporters described how the oil threatened a £1 million a year fishing
industry primarily based on shellfish, crabs and lobsters, as well as a unique “new regional experiment to cultivate abalone in island waters” (Wednesday March 22, 1978, pg. 1) on Guernsey. Reporters also made a point of mentioning how farmers on the island of Lehou, a small Channel Island just off Guernsey, “were penning a famous breed of sheep which grazes on seaweed in case the weed becomes contaminated” (Monday March 27, 1978, pg. 20).

As the debate over use of dispersants heated up – Britain, strongly advocating use of dispersants, most of the Channel Islanders strongly opposing it – Guardian reporters depicted a sense of divisiveness between what the Channel Islanders knew and understood based on their traditional experience of the sea and what the British government believed was best to win the battle against the oil, thus pitting regional knowledge against that of the authorities.

In this struggle for traditional culture against a distant government with little understanding of regional ways of life, the Breton fishermen and the Channel Islanders were united by a strong bong of fraternal commonality. In Brittany, the people's livelihood was also of the sea and Guardian stories portrayed both the Bretons and the Islanders as clinging to an older way of life based on the sea and traditions that seemed to have remained unchanged for countless generations. To construct this impression, Guardian reporters depicted the fishermen as possessing a kind of ancient folk knowledge. Describing local response to the dispersant debate, Morris wrote of the Guernsey fishermen:

“While 40 varieties of dispersant are being piled ready on the jetties of Guernsey’s capital, St. Peter Port, the fishermen are saying: Let the oil, a natural product, come ashore and mop it up. It may damage the tourist industry for six or seven months, but the holidaymakers would come back. Use detergent, as they prefer to call it, and marine life, as well as the livelihoods of the fishermen, will be ruined forever” (March 25, 1978 pg. 22).

Referencing the local speech – “detergents” as opposed to “dispersants” – and highlighting the Islanders' view of the oil as “a natural product” framed the Channel Islanders as more primitive and folksy, akin to indigenous peoples elsewhere around the world. The Breton fishermen were similarly portrayed. In a story published the same day, reporter Philip Jordan referenced the collective ancient wisdom of the Breton fishermen in a similar way:
“Those who live off the sea are convinced that it is its own best cleanser. Their leaders insist they should rely on: ‘A principle as old as the sea: that what floats will come ashore. The oil will pass, it is not necessary to break it up.’” (Saturday March 25, pg. 15).

The passage’s phrasing suggests that the fishermen’s ancient folk wisdom is outside the realm of modern knowledge, wrought by the process of scientific inquiry. The story immediately followed the above passage with a long paragraph of scientific corroboration from the Institute of Marine Biology, which provided a scientific explanation of how spraying of dispersant would hurt the ocean ecology (see #3 in Appendix). Science thus validated what the fishermen gleaned from “age-old experience.” However, the juxtaposition of “sea wisdom” with scientific rationale specifically highlighted the different mindset of the fishermen, portrayed as adhering to an older folk sea lore possessed by a distinct group of people whose lives had been intricately bound with the sea for time immemorial.

Guardian reporters also developed a sense of regional identity by describing the anger of the Channel Islanders and the people of Brittany towards their governments. The British and French governments were at times depicted as paternalistic and more interested in succoring the tourist industries through the injuries sustained by the oil disaster – and thus the tourist dollars – than in helping to offset an impending crisis to the livelihoods of regional fishing communities. A story from March 27 captured some of this regional angst (see #5 in Appendix). Morris recounted how Islanders looked sarcastically upon the assurances of the British government – particularly the British transportation minister – and ended with this observation: “After the meeting Mr. Peter Bougourd, Secretary of the Guernsey Fishermen’s Association, said that the kind of assurances offered by Mr. Davis, who visited the island, made them think of him as ‘Mr. Whitewash’” (pg. 20).

The Guardian’s description of Breton anger also constructed the impression of a distinct Breton regional identity. A story from March 25 highlighted the sense of alienation felt by local fishermen, directly stating that “the shock of the tanker disaster has turned to anger” (pg. 15) directed at the French government. The story also captured a sense of
government favoritism for tourism over fishing felt by local Bretons by pointing out that use of dispersants was one reason fishermen were angry, because the chemicals would “help to clean the sea for the 1.1 million holidaymakers expected each summer” (pg. 15), but would destroy their own livelihoods in the process. This sense of collective embitterment expressed by Bretons towards the government further stressed their regional identity.

In addition, the story specifically quoted a popular regional newspaper – *West France* – criticizing the French Prime Minister, Mr. Raymond Barre, and scoffing at his sympathy for the Breton people. This was the only time in any of the Guardian’s stories that such a source was used. As a familiar voice of the local people, the paper’s sentiment that “If you live in Brittany, you are not in France” (pg. 15) expressed a powerfully direct statement of separate and independent regional identity. More local voices filled the story text, further emphasizing collective regional anger and identity. Several village mayors were directly quoted, including the mayor of the village of Ploqdalmezeau who was cited referring to “his people” and their anger. The same mayor was also portrayed as possessing some of the same folk knowledge as the fishermen. He is quoted as saying: “They [the authorities] have not learned from the Torrey Canyon or later catastrophes. It is as if they were ignorant of the wind, the sea in fury and the currents . . . .” (pg. 15). Unlike the other French officials, this local mayor possessed some of the same older wisdom that all Bretons must possess.

Breton identity was also fostered by emphasizing the fellowship of the Breton people. Beyond collective anger, reporter Philip Jordan depicted them as united on other fronts, including the widespread belief among the Breton community that the American owners of the tanker should be cleaning up the mess, and their sense of certitude that it would probably be they, not the French government, who would end up taking care of their region. Jordan emphasized their numbers – “a good many thousands of . . . fellow Bretons” (pg. 15) – to convey Breton fellowship, and also wrote about Breton belief in their figurative abandonment by national government: “One thing is certain, the Bretons feel: Paris won’t help” (pg. 15).
The sentence strongly bespeaks a regional Breton identity by differentiating between the people of Paris and the people of Brittany.

**Fostering a British Identity**

In two places, the *Guardian* invoked a British national identity more generally by referencing a major national landmark or unique British firefighting vehicle, known as “Green Goddess.” In the first instance, reporter David Fairhall wrote in a March 21 story: “Unless the weather changes the oil is expected to reach the Channel Islands by tomorrow and – just possibly – the Cornish beaches on Friday. Air patrols reported the slick 70 miles off the Lizard” (pg. 24). The “Lizard” refers to a peninsula and a special heritage coastline running along the very southwestern part of Cornwall known for its spectacular coastal views, its unique ecology and geology, and the treacherousness of its craggy coastline to passing ships. The Lizard is also steeped in ancient history and myth. Thus, to many Britons, the Lizard is a nationally recognized icon (*for example, see #2 in Appendix*).

In the other instance, a story on March 27 by Morris described the flurry of preparations underway in Britain in the event of oil approaching the island. As part of the “Threat to Britain” frame and theme, this section of the story sought to illustrate flurry of activity, including the mustering of vessels and ships and the competence with which the British were orchestrating preparatory measures on the Channel Islands and the British coast. Within this context, Morris reported how “Green Goddess fire engines are standing by on Guernsey and Jersey, ready along with sewerage carts, to suck up the oil when it comes” (pg. 20). The specific naming of the type of fire engine – now revered throughout Britain, much the same way that Model T’s are associated with the American spirit, and fondly recollected
as a British icon – instead of a more general term suggests a Guardian intent to appeal to a sense of British pride in this context, and to enhance the theme of British stoutness and preparedness (see #5 in Appendix).

**British Identity through French Criticism**

It can also be argued that a sense of British national identity was fostered in Guardian stories by an occasional current of criticism or condescension of the French, particularly in the first week of coverage after the spill. Stories never overtly criticized the French, but narrations sometimes set up a contrast between an official French view and a subsequent description of implied reality, as in this example from March 21: “The official French view was that no further spillage likely. However, a force seven south-westerly wind was driving a heavy swell on to the rocky coast where the Amoco Cadiz is lying . . .” (pg. 20). The sentence subtly contradicts the French by insinuating that despite the “official French view,” the rough conditions by the wrecked tanker could very well induce more spillage.

Some Guardian stories also used qualifiers when referring to the beliefs of French authorities. A March 23 story focusing on a dispute between the British and French over the handling of the spill and whether to use dispersants used the qualifier “claim” to describe French concern over the use of dispersants: “The French claim to be worried that the chosen dispersant might do more harm than good” (“Britain’s Battle for the Beaches,” pg. 15). Instead of simply stating that the French were worried, the use of “claim” bears the subtle tinge of condescension and suggests that French concern was less substantiated than British beliefs to the contrary. The qualifier “apparently” was used later in the same article to describe “simple confusion” over the differences between the older dispersant and a new one, believed to be less toxic, that the British wanted to use on the Amoco Cadiz spill. Suggesting that the French didn’t understand the differences between the two chemicals, the reporter wrote that “simple confusion . . . is believed to be the reason for French objections to the use of dispersants.” She then wrote almost dismissively, as if waving off a humorous
misunderstanding, “They apparently thought that Britain was planning to use the toxic product” (pg. 15).

The subtle current of criticism and condescension was also found in the Guardian’s use of certain quotes. A story on March 25 cited Stanley Clinton Davis, the multifaceted favored source of most early spill articles, as “declin[ing] to make a judgment about French efforts to fight the slick, but said that the most immediate lesson was the need for international action” (pg. 1). While the paraphrase does not directly criticize the French, it hints at the delay caused by disputes over the spill’s handling by suggesting the need for “international action,” thus implying that the French were not doing the best job.

Later in the article, Davis was paraphrased as having the sentiment that “French action about their beaches is their business” (pg. 1), again implying inferior action by the French. The statement suggested that it wasn’t the business of the British to interfere if the French didn’t mind dealing with unnecessary pollution of their beaches. Davis then “refused to be drawn on suggestions that only about five French vessels were seen from a helicopter in the area of the slick – and not actually tackling it” (pg. 1). The statement was written so as to present the outward indication of conciliatoriness, as though the British didn’t want to lower themselves to petty criticism. Between the lines however, there is a strong suggestion that the French were just sitting around doing nothing while the competent British were doing all the proactive thinking in stories up to that point.

**Storytelling Devices and Language**

Evidence of storytelling devices abounds in the Guardian’s coverage of the Breton spill disaster, making Guardian stories particularly colorful. In numerous places, the paper made use of anecdotes, poetic language, alliteration, metaphors and similes, narrative-style prose, vivid imagery, and scene-setting narrative descriptions to help convey the multifaceted array of angles and developments associated with the unfolding spill story (see #’s 3, 5, 7, and 8 in
While a hard writing style was more common towards the end of coverage, many Guardian stories contained some type of narrative flair.

A few early stories helped to create a picture of what the experience of the spill must have been like for Breton villagers, while dually framing the spill as a major disaster, by referring to the oil spill in terms of its strong smell and including rich quotes from villagers describing their “nausea” and “eyes . . . red from the fumes” (March 18, 1978, pg. 1). Other stories (#5 in Appendix) included small descriptive details not often seen in news writing, causing some stories to be more reminiscent of the narrative style of books, such as Morris’ story from March 27 which described British Captain Larry Corner as “the phlegmatic officer in charge of Britain’s efforts” (pg. 20).

A motley assortment of adjectives and vocabulary evocative of certain themes or frames – particularly the “man versus sea” frame – appeared in stories and contributed to the formation of story frames. Lyrical, descriptive imagery was used often to describe the wrecked tanker, volunteers working, bird habitats or village landscapes, or the natural setting of the ocean or weather. A story from March 30 described how a helicopter flew “over the wreck as it heaved in heavy seas on the reef” (pg. 22), evoking the bad weather theme. Jordan’s story from March 28 (# 7 in Appendix) described the “pink granite rocks” near the Breton town of Tregastrel where sea birds used to nest before the Torrey Canyon disaster oiled them. The description of the scenery in contrast with the oil devastation accentuated the pollution frame and highlighted the ecological angle. Another story by Jordan on March 28 opened with an anecdotal narrative which strongly evoked regional identity while coalescing several themes:

“Every window in the French port of Brest which is the centre of the oil stricken region, carries the same message: ‘After the black tide tomorrow. And then we will start to recover from the detergents.’ For if the local people are angry that oil should have been spilled in the first place they are equally as furious that the French have given in to British pressure to use chemical dispersants” (pg. 15).
Oil imagery was particularly varied and vivid in *Guardian* stories. The descriptiveness of this imagery helped to frame the spill as a pollution disaster and played a role in the augmentation of certain frames and themes, in particular the battle frame and the bad weather theme. In many stories oil was referred to by a diverse suite of descriptors, including “black sludge,” “thick oil,” “black ooze,” a “thick gunge” or a “light film,” and as a “black tongue,” among others. In one story, a reporter described the “huge geysers of oil” that “immediately began to shoot from the wreck, forced out 30-ft. waves...” (Thursday March 30, 1978, pg. 22).

Some of the *Guardian’s* oil imagery anthropomorphized it, depicting it as a wily, roguish sea creature with mischievous, machinating intentions. A story from March 29 wrote how oil was “believed to have escaped from the ship” (pg. 24), as though the oil had specifically plotted to escape. Another story from March 29 described the oil’s swift movement toward the Islands and used language and imagery that was heavily implicated in conjuring the battle theme and frame. Instead of describing the slick as simply moving in the direction of the Channel Islands, the reporter chose to describe the oil as “point[ing] out a black finger towards the islands,” thus ascribing human-like qualities of free will and ill intent. The combined effect of this description with evocative narrative of the slick’s merger with a larger slick recently detached from the coast visually suggested the movements of a sinister pod of dolphins, and thus framed the slick specifically as a threat to the Channel Islands which needed to be counter-attacked.

The tone of Guardian stories also varied, sometimes noticeably mirroring the mood of a story’s subject. Stories ranged from the occasionally somber or bleak, to condescending (as in stories subtly criticizing the French), to introspective, to occasionally humorous or piquant, as in a March 29 story by Jordan wherein he described how the “newly strengthened control system for shipping round the Breton coast saved its first customer when the 7,500-ton Cuban ship Twentieth Anniversary broke down three miles off Portsall” (pg. 24). The phrase “saved its first customer” was somewhat playful in its treatment of the regulatory context and added...
a bit of levity into narration of the predominantly gloom-ridden spill disaster story. Because
the tone of Guardian stories was so perceptible when it deviated from hard news style, story
frames and themes were often promulgated without sensationalism by the sense of
seriousness, mild sarcasm, or reflectiveness perceived in the writing.

Sources

The Guardian's use of sources in its spill stories largely mirrors observations about
how media typically use sources in disaster reporting. A few sources emerged as frequent
characters in the stories, most notably, Mr. Stanley Clinton Davis, Britain's transportation
minister. Davis was used most often in earlier stories as the fall-back source for everything
from assessments of the spread of the spill and its potential impact, to commentaries about
Britain's response and preparations, to ecological aspects, to statements about the threat to
Britain, to quotes offering generic perspective or information.

Guardian coverage displayed a definite tendency to use official sources. However,
some stories also displayed a tendency to include a variety of sources, even if only
paraphrased or unnamed. Depending on the thrust of the story, sources often derived from a
subset of people more directly related to that thrust. For instance, when stories focused on
fishermen in the Channel Islands or Brittany, the majority of sources were culled from local
people, such as fishing cooperatives, unions, or the local tourism industry (see #’s 3, 7, and 8 in
Appendix). Several stories used unnamed sources, identified by their company or the office to
which they belonged. However, the paper still made an obvious attempt to include a variety
of voices in a majority of its stories.

Stories typically contained at least one official bureaucratic source. Several stories
paraphrased or quoted collective groups, such as “Breton fishermen,” “villagers,” or
“maritime authorities.” Environmental sources also appeared in coverage and included
science experts, marine biologists and ecologists, and representatives from the Royal Society
for the Protection of Birds. However, in the overall scope of the paper’s 35 stories, their
numbers were fewer than those of official sources. The overall diversity of sources suggested an attempt to achieve some balance, but it was observed that at times, British sources were favored over French sources. At the same time, however, the focus of the story sometimes was the determinant of where most sources came from. The Guardian stories examining clean-up efforts at a more local level drew heavily from Breton sources, citing local mayors, collective villagers, fishermen, a local Breton paper, or French authorities. Likewise, in describing some of the difficult containment efforts experienced by British vessels battling the slick, the Guardian quoted tug captains and officials of the Royal Navy.

One striking omission was commentary of local people. No individual voices of fishermen, residents, volunteers, local by-standers, or tanker crew appeared in Guardian stories, though as noted, these groups were often cited collectively, for instance as “the villagers of Portsall” or the “fishermen of Jersey.” While the inclusion of individual local voices would have provided rich contextual nuances and information, this preference for citing local sources collectively instead of individually at times helped to enhance the Guardian’s articulation of regional identity. Because official sources – which symbolized national authority, interests, or perspective – were more prevalent in stories, citing regional voices in collective groups helped to crystallize the divide between government and regional perspective by bolstering the backbone of a regional point of view with the perceived weight of a distinct group with a different stake in the disaster. However, in order to provide richer context gleaned from individual experience, the Guardian would also have needed to include some individual voices instead as well.

Images and Graphics

A total of 11 photographs and 2 graphics appeared in Guardian coverage during the study interval. Overall, images did not emphasize the pollution aspect of the spill. Further, because images were often printed out of context with a story focus, they usually exerted
little or no effect on story framing, instead standing alone and functioning as independent visual context.

The only photograph of a dead animal appeared in the paper’s second story on March 20. The caption to the photograph, printed next to a second photo depicting helicopters flying over the still intact tanker, stated without embellishment: “AMOCO AFTERMATH: A dead sea bird killed by oil on the beach at Portsall; helicopters fly over the crippled tanker” (pg. 24).

Nor did the Day 1 front page story show an image of the wrecked tanker, but instead printed a respectable head-shot of Pasquale Bardari, head a-tilt as if answering a question. The image did not show the captain in his officer’s uniform and perhaps was an early cue indicating the sub-surface sense of support for the tanker captain cultivated in later stories.

Contrary to this thesis’ expectation, the first tanker image didn’t appear until the paper’s second story, three days after the spill. It showed the tanker in a larger context with a helicopter flying over the wreck surveying it (see #1 in Appendix). The second tanker image appeared three days later, on Thursday March 23. Again, this image showed the tanker from a unique vantage – from above as its decks swam in ocean foam and waves. A prominent view of the “Amoco” emblem flag was visible in the photo’s left corner, drenched and sinking in the water. The photo did not sensationalize the message by highlighting spilt oil, pollution, or wildlife, and the angle of the shot is unique. While the image is evocative and mildly epic in its depiction of a great vessel sinking in the sea, it was a fitting accompaniment to the somber story, and thus did not come across as attempting to aggrandize the impression of the tanker’s size.

Several of the images seemed out of place in the context of the stories they appeared with. For example, the paper’s the Guardian’s seventh image, depicting several volunteers in protective gear at work cleaning up a beach in Brittany, bore little relevance to the story text. The caption read simply: “The big clear-up continues in Brittany yesterday” (Monday March 27, 1978, “Radio Tapes Renew Argument over Distress Call,” pg. 3). Yet the story in which it appeared was almost entirely focused on the evidence contained in radio tapes of the two
captains’ conversation. As a stand-alone image, however, it provided the first visual perspective on what an oiled beach looked like and was thus informative on its own, functioning as its own individual element in the story. This displacement from more relevant textual context helped to ensure the image did not over-accentuate the pollution frame.

The first graphic published by the Guardian—a map showing the spread of oil along the Breton coastline and the location of the wreck—didn’t appear until May 10, almost two months after the tanker went aground, suggesting a less refined coordination of the visual and textual components of reporting the disaster (see #8 in Appendix). However, the graphic is still informative and relevant to the story’s context, which went into depth exploring the difficult clean-up effort. In this case, the graphic subtly enhanced the story focus—which described in poignant, at times eloquent, narrative detail the painstaking process, frustration and incessant tedium of the clean-up work—by visually magnifying the narrative detail and conveying a sense of the enormity of the task ahead. The labors of volunteers painstakingly throwing each rock back into the ocean seems a Sisyphean task when the map graphic is consulted and one sees the bolded long, black line representing all the oiled beaches that must be thusly cleaned.

The only other graphic in the Guardian’s suite of stories appeared on June 21 in a story headlined “Tanker Captains’ Row Lost Vital Hours” and was also directly related to a subtle promulgation of one of the Guardian’s themes. The story was among those which suggested a subliminal sentiment of open-mindedness to the tanker captain’s situation and the graphic bolstered this by serving as evidence backing up the captain’s statements. The story revisited the controversy over responsibility by presenting some of the facts and assessments—primarily Captain Bardari’s side of the story—surrounding the argument between the two captains. Within this context, the graphic—showing a close-up of a portion of a log kept by the tanker’s safety inspector—highlighted snippets of the log that supported the claims made by Captain Bardari in his rendition of events (see #9 in Appendix). Thus, the graphic in this case also colluded with the text to enhance one of the Guardian’s themes.
In one instance, the *Guardian* appeared to include a photograph solely for the purpose of enhancing a news angle that otherwise had little direct relevance to local British affairs. The image in question – the last of the *Guardian*'s photographs, appearing in its 26th story on May 17 – displayed a head shot of the British chairman of the Liberian-sponsored inquiry. The chairman played a very minor role in the *Guardian*'s story about the inquiry, and it is thus surmised that the image was included specifically to add emphasis to the local British angle of the inquiry – the fact that it was held in London and being chaired by a Briton.

**Summary**

*Guardian* stories during this early period demonstrated a mix of conventional reporting of spill disasters and some greater sophistication in narrative style and depth of coverage. The predominance of traditional frames for the disaster indicates an adherence to some routine aspects of disaster reporting. However, the fact the paper maintained steady coverage of a diversity of spill-related themes across several months also indicates that the *Guardian* recognized and attempted to probe the deeper complexity of the spill. The paper’s source use promulgated a primarily official view of the disaster for stories about threats to Britain’s Channel Islands. However, the paper also displayed greater critical reportage of the Breton angles, often quoting several local Breton sources over more distant French national officials. The paper also engaged a variety of engaging narrative tactics, as well as highlighting the regional identity of affected fishermen. Overall, the mix of some excellent instances of reportage with more “routine” examples suggests that some individual reporters were ahead of their time in understanding the deeper reporting required to avoid simplistic or sensationalized spill coverage, but that widespread editorial encouragement of such writing practices was not yet a fully established news value at the larger organizational level. Editorial attention to deeper systemic issues, however, along with the paper’s longer-term attention to the spill, also indicates that as a whole, the *Guardian* placed more news value on
the significance of environmental events, and was perhaps ahead of its time in recognizing the deeper complexity of environmental problems.

**The Seattle Times**

In contrast to *Guardian* spill stories, the stories published by the *Seattle Times* are more brusque and hard news-oriented throughout most of coverage and display less complexity. The *Seattle Times* printed just 12 stories about the *Amoco Cadiz* spill during the study interval, all but one during the month of March. The last spill-related article – an editorial by Glenn Carter, the *Seattle Times*’ maritime editor and the only article written by a *Seattle Times* writer – appeared on April 2. As most of the spill-related developments had happened by the end of March, the paper didn’t miss any major developments in the spill story, save for the proceedings of the Liberian-sponsored inquiry and its outcome.

The story of the *Amoco Cadiz* spill was not a front page story for the *Seattle Times*. The paper’s first story on the wreck was the only time that the *Amoco Cadiz* story made it to the front page. The other 11 stories all appeared in the paper’s Maritime section. Between Friday March 17 and Friday March 24, the paper ran one story per day on the spill. After a two-day gap over the weekend, three consecutive stories appeared between Monday March 27 and Thursday March 29. Two days later, on Sunday April 2, the paper ran its last article related to the *Amoco Cadiz*. The stories are all wire stories, save for the last day’s editorial, and come primarily from the Associated Press and United Press International, though one story came from the *London Daily Telegraph* and the lead story on Friday March 17 is listed as “compiled from news services.” One story was dually written by the A.P. and UPI.

**Differences between the Seattle Times and the Guardian**

Most *Seattle Times* stories were short – especially in comparison to the varied lengths of *Guardian* stories – and displayed a tighter, more abridged structure. Information was more tightly packed into the wire stories, especially the first few stories, which were characterized
by a detached, matter-of-fact tone and a hard news style with little narrative “extras.” While the middle portion of Seattle Times stories became more dramatic in overall style, brevity still reigned and the last two stories resumed their strictly hard, matter-of-fact tone.

In contrast to the Guardian’s first story of its spill series, which began with the declaration that “France faced its worst oil pollution disaster last night . . .”, the Seattle Times made no judgments about the magnitude of the spill, merely stating matter-of-factly that “The American supertanker Amoco Cadiz, carrying 63 million gallons of oil, broke in two on rocks off the French coast today and was polluting beaches and fishing grounds with oil” (pg. 1). At the same time, however, Seattle Times stories tended to be more evocative of the biological damage and to use imagery in ways that aggrandized the magnitude of the disaster (see #11 in Appendix).

It may be noteworthy to observe that the wire stories relayed the information about the volume of oil on board in imperial units, perhaps for the American audience, instead of metric – although a few inconsistencies in this pattern were observed, with a couple stories “forgetting” to translate the numerical information and one story providing both.

Also in contrast to the Guardian’s immediate declaration of the spill as “France’s worst,” the Seattle Times’ first story on March 17 noted merely that “The wreck has the potential to be the worst tanker spill on record” (pg. 1). However, although Seattle Times’ wire stories were more initially cautious about making a value judgment about the spill’s rank or magnitude than the Guardian, its Day 1 headline was more evocative of disaster than the Guardian’s. Where the Guardian’s Day 1 headline billed the tanker spill more modestly as a “threat to coasts,” the Seattle Times’ lead story, titled “Giant Tanker Splits off France,” invoked a quantifying adjective, and thus still framed the spill in terms of magnitude.

Further, unlike the Guardian’s Day 1 image – a small, unobtrusive head shot of the captain – the Seattle Times published a looming, unmistakable image of the tanker sticking like a surfaced submarine or beached whale out of the water. The photo spanned about 75 percent of the width of the newspaper and was disproportionately large on the page compared
with the story – which garnered a modest 10 paragraphs in a right-side column (see #10 in Appendix).

**A Generic Pollution Disaster Frame**

Unlike the *Guardian*, which developed multiple frames for the spill story in its coverage, the wire reports published by the *Seattle Times* express essentially one generic “pollution disaster” frame. This generic frame emerged in the first story, with the initial mention of pollution of beaches and a mention of the speed at which oil spread towards the coastline. The frame is cultivated in subsequent stories by a more dramatic emphasis on ecological damage and use of language and imagery more evocative of the spill’s magnitude, as illustrated in this opening line to the paper’s second story on March 18: “A huge and growing oil slick seeping from the wrecked supertanker Amoco Cadiz washed up on miles of Brittany shoreline yesterday in what was potentially the worst ecological disaster ever on this spill-plagued coast” (pg. B10).

The wire stories published by the *Times* were also less concerned with differentiating between regional effects. The spill was a generic disaster which affected a basically homogenous area. The lead story mentioned potential threats to the “lobster-rich coastline,” intimating that lobster was an especially important marine commodity which might be negatively affected, but obscuring the wider berth of marine species cultivated, and thus the greater scope of economic damage to fisher-folk. The story also did not identify Brittany as the affected region of France near the epicenter of the disaster, but instead referred more generally to the “French coast” (pg. A1).

In addition, no mention was made of the threat to the Channel Islands until the fourth story on March 20, and then, only in a brief reference to how the British sent help after “the weather bureau reported that southwesterly winds were driving the vast oil slick up into the English Channel, possibly threatening the Channel Islands” (pg. A20).
**Emphasis on Biological Damage**

*Seattle Times'* wire stories tended to hone in on the environmental aspect with a more graphic tint. The paper’s second story reported in more lurid fashion that “fish were spotted floating belly-up in the besmirched waters off the tiny fishing port and summer resort of Portsall” (pg. B10). Stories also used dramatic language that highlighted the ecological consequences of the spill with a touch of sensationalism not seen in the *Guardian*. The paper’s fifth story, for instance (see #11 in Appendix), noted the effect on “uncounted birds, oysters, fish and other wildlife” as a result of a “mass of sludge” (pg. B8).

Stories often coupled mention of the magnitude or spread of the slick with a mention of the ecological damage – often emphasizing wildlife deaths. For instance, the paper’s short fourth story on March 20 ended by focusing on the great harm wrought to wildlife and investing the slick with the glimmerings of anthropomorphic qualities: “The vast slick, 12 miles wide, has killed thousands of sea birds and is menacing the region’s vital tourist, oyster culture and fishing industries in what could be France’s worst ecological disaster” (pg. A20). As evident in this example, stories that mentioned wildlife effects did not provide a more in-depth explanation of the larger context of ecological effects. In fact, it was not until the ninth story that specific numerical information about numbers of birds killed was offered. However, the data provided had the effect of emphasizing the tragedy of the deaths.

**Evocative Imagery**

By the *Seattle Times'* fourth wire story on Monday March 20, the detached tone began to fade and imagery began to partake of more visually-oriented language to describe the oil, such as describing how “50 miles of Breton beaches” were “already awash with black tar” (pg. A20). The spill officially became the “biggest oil spill history” in the *Seattle Times'* fifth story, with the declaration came more liberal use of visually suggestive adjectives to describe the oil and other imagery, a trend which persisted until the tenth story on March 28, when the wire stories toned down the more evocative rhetoric and again became more detached. Thus, oil
“spewed” and “jets” of oil “spurted” or “gushed” from the tanker, and imagery became anthropomorphic in some places – the tanker “broke its back,” for instance (Friday March 24, 1978, pg. C5) – with occasional emphasis on the supernatural, wrathful power of nature.

Source Use

The first half of Seattle Times stories were sparse on quotes, and as of the paper’s fifth story, no sources were even partially quoted. It is not until the paper’s sixth story on March 22 that the first full quote of any source appeared in coverage, in this instance an unnamed source quoted describing the rollicking conditions inside the tanker’s holds. The seventh and ninth stories contained the most sources seen in any published by the Times. These stories each contained four sources. The seventh story was unique in that came from the British paper the London Daily Telegraph, and thus included unique sources seen nowhere else. The ninth story paraphrased a source and directly quoted more sources than any previous story – three sources – though only two were named directly.

Most sources were of the government or official ilk, and were of the typical sort, ranging from “maritime authorities” to “oil-pollution experts” to “Amoco spokesmen” to spokesmen for the tanker owners. In the few instances where a source was mentioned individually by name, the source represented an official or government source. A couple unique sources did appear, though, such as the Center for Short-lived Phenomena, a Boston-based organization cited in the fifth story to verify that the spill was the largest in history.

Story #7 – A British Flair

The Seattle Times’ inclusion of a London Daily Telegraph story on Thursday March 23 is worth mentioning because in virtually all aspects of reportage this story differed from the other wire stories published by the Seattle Times (see #12 in Appendix). In many ways, certain characteristics of this story more closely emulated aspects of the Guardian’s reporting style – suggesting similarities in the British journalism writing style. In particular, this story was
more vividly imaginative in its framing of the spill as being of an almost otherworldly nature. Both the bad weather and the strength of the sea were emphasized, as in the Guardian.

This story was also the only instance where any sense of regional folk identity came through in Seattle Times wire stories. It briefly invoked the knowledge of local fishermen to validate what the authorities had blamed on the weather: “Even if the weather had allowed the work to be carried out, local fishermen say a channel would have been impossible to find” (pg. D2).

The story further evinced some of the liveliness seen in Guardian stories in its use of wry or mildly piquant language. The story advanced a new minor angle – namely, that all the oil sucked up by spill workers might still be useful if taken somewhere and refined. Though the question was a newsworthy angle to pursue – where did all the recovered oil go? – neither paper attempted to answer it. However, like the Guardian, this wire story broached the subject in a colorful fashion with a hint of wryness, noting that “the liquid is being taken to a Brest refinery to see whether it will produce anything of use” (pg. D2). The description read almost as an expression of disgust towards the oil. The descriptive flair was seen again in the midst of image-laden narration when the story described the pumping operation as “almost ludicrous . . . against the backdrop of the seas pounding into the harbour” (pg. D2).

**Seattle Times Editorial – an American Focus**

The last article published by the Seattle Times, the paper’s maritime section editor entitled “Wires Crossed on Amoco Cadiz,” was the first time that a true Seattle Times voice is heard on the Amoco Cadiz spill. However, the editor, Glen Carter, used his editorial to focus on the media’s misleading tendency to refer to the tanker as “American,” rather than on the effects of the spill in Brittany or larger systemic questions (see #13 in Appendix). The editorial implicated the wire services in perpetuating the error and seemed more concerned that the misconception about ownership could cause a sense abroad that the United States was lax about environmental standards. The editorial included a long excerpt from a Transportation
Institute letter clipped by the editor: “Notwithstanding press reports that refer to this ship as the American vessel Amoco Cadiz, this vessel is not American. It does not fly the American flag, is not manned by American workers, does not pay American taxes and is not required to incorporate American environmental and safety standards.”

No other news, information or updates of continuing clean-up efforts or spill proceedings in Brittany were mentioned. As this was the last story published about the spill, the lingering message was one with an American focus subtly suggesting a strong environmental record in the United States. On Friday March 31, the Seattle Times did publish an article using the context of the Amoco Cadiz spill to examine the potential for oil tanker pollution in Puget Sound. The article, also written by Glen Carter, was longer and more probing than any of the wire stories about the Amoco Cadiz.

**Summary**

The Seattle Times’ scant coverage of the Amoco Cadiz spill and its less scrupulous selection of wire stories to represent its journalistic voice suggests that at this time the paper did not consider oil spills – or at least, oil spills outside its home territory – as important environmental events worthy of more probing coverage. While the paper used wire reports that were initially more circumspect about the magnitude of the spill, the same wire reports also conformed to other routine tendencies of news media covering disasters, such as emphasis of drama and simplistic reporting that fails to examine significant underlying causes. The fact that none of the Seattle Times’ wire stories explored systemic problems related to oil, and the fact that the paper’s only in-house writing on the spill emphasized an American point of view, suggests that in 1978 the paper had an ill-formed view of the newsworthiness of international environmental problems. It also suggests that the paper had not yet come to value the specific challenges of producing quality environmental reporting about an oil spill disaster, or the depth of reporting needed to effectively explore a spill’s distinct complexities.
4. Exxon Valdez – Worst Oil Spill in U.S. History

When the tanker Exxon Valdez grounded itself on Bligh Reef in the minutes after midnight on March 24, 1989, it gripped the nation, sent shockwaves rippling around the globe, and drove a fatal stake into the hitherto burnished image the oil industry had successfully created for itself after years of extracting and shipping oil from Alaska without major incident. Journalists from around the country flocked to the small town of Valdez, Alaska and neighboring towns to cover the spill – which was an unequivocal disaster. Oil from the spill eventually fanned out to encompass an area larger than the size of Delaware and oiled more than 2,200 miles of non-contiguous Alaskan coastlines – many of them inious, inaccessible, and ruggedly rocky. Many thousands of animals up and down the Alaskan ecological food chain perished, from plankton and kelps, to fish and birds, to bear and whales – not to mention sea lions and endangered sea otters, which became favored symbols of the tragedy for many in the media. In addition, communities largely or wholly dependent on fishing or wilderness tourism were devastated by the spill.

Nonetheless, while the spill’s intrinsic scope was indisputable, the circumstances surrounding the tanker’s grounding and its aftermath lent it particularly well to dramatic portrayals of catastrophe, devastation, and conflict. Smith (1992) has observed that the Exxon Valdez was both the largest environmental story of 1989 and among the biggest of all news stories that year. People were outraged that a disaster of such magnitude should have sullied what was perceived as among the last pristine wildernesses in the world, and further by the ensuing botched clean-up effort. The spill received regular attention through the end of the first season’s clean-up in mid-September, when Exxon had to capitulate to the oncoming Alaskan autumn tempest and cease its first season’s cleaning efforts. However, Smith (1992) also noted that coverage of the Exxon Valdez story persisted for years afterwards, tracking the proceedings of a year-long investigation into the events surrounding the spill and follow-ups on the environmental condition of Alaska.
Despite the glut and furor of media coverage, researchers (Smith, 1992; Daley and O’Neill, 1991; Beresford, 1996) have observed that most coverage of the spill tended to focus on a narrow subset of themes, such as the charge of drunkenness against the tanker captain, the ineptness of the spill response, the threats to fish and wildlife, effects on the livelihoods of fishermen, and criticisms within and without Alaska against Exxon for its clean-up efforts. While these themes indeed merited media attention, their treatment in a majority of media outlets studied by researchers — and especially mainstream media, which Smith (1992) criticized in general as following a “pack mentality” in regards to the Alaska spill — was at surface level only, operating within a scope which implicitly acquiesced to the idea of the tanker’s grounding as an unanticipated and apocalyptic disaster. In addition, critical assessments of spill coverage in hindsight have charged that the media’s focus on these easy “cultural stereotypes” ultimately rendered the mainstream media complicit in distracting attention from the less obvious but more important role of the oil industry, the U.S. Coast Guard, and state and federal governments in creating the crumbling social, safety and legislative framework in which the grounding of the Exxon Valdez on a night of bad fog and unusually heavy ice floes was an inevitable disaster waiting to happen.

As this study’s textual analysis found, however, none of these charges held true in the case of the Seattle Times’ and, to a lesser extent the Guardian’s, coverage of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Where other media coverage failed to examine these themes within the larger and more deeply rooted contexts of deteriorations in maritime safety, public policy, regulatory contexts, and the more nebulous penumbra of social complacency towards the oil industry and the nation’s thirst for cheap oil, the Seattle Times in particular stands out for its superb and informative spill coverage in which these themes were an integral part of the news focus, forming a significant percentage of total stories written and often probed in depth in relation to the other unfolding nuances of the spill story. Because of the Seattle Times’ conscious effort to grapple with these deeper contextual themes, the spill was thus framed as more than just the environmental catastrophe it was, but as the culmination of a decade-long process of
systemic corrosion in which governments and corporations were both responsible for the drastic declines in maritime safety and standards. Further, although the spill happened essentially in the paper’s back yard and its widespread ecological and economic effects struck a chord of deep concern for Washingtonians confronted with the possibility of a similar disaster happening in the heavily oil-tanker trafficked Puget Sound, the Seattle Times succeeded in capturing the real tragedy experienced by Alaskans and the complicated tangle of emotion, fact and prevailing confusion without falling into sensationalism.

The Guardian also produced a respectful suite of stories that skirted sensationalism while touching on deeper systemic roots of the spill and framing the disaster as a by-product of corporate and government irresponsibility and ineptitude. The Guardian’s coverage was not nearly as compendious as that of the Seattle Times, and differences were observed in use of language and story nuances adopted. However, the number of in-depth stories written by the paper – a sizeable percentage of which were written from first-hand accounts of Guardian correspondents on location in Alaska – and the depth of attention to systemic aspects was a surprising discovery of this thesis’ analysis. In addition, the analysis found that Guardian reporters overall wrote about several news angles with a degree of delicacy, sophistication, and sensitivity to the many nuances and emotional aspects of the spill. Considering the fact that the spill was not local news for the Guardian, the paper’s relatively extensive attention to the Alaska spill was another surprising find of the textual analysis.

The next section explores the results of the textual analysis in more detail, along with some of the features of reportage in the Guardian and Seattle Times that characterize the papers’ approach to reporting the spill and also helped the papers avoid the temptation to report on the Exxon Valdez as yet another cycle in the great “modern myth” of catastrophe in which humans wrestle with primeval forces beyond their control.
It is easy to see why the Seattle Times won a Pulitzer Prize in 1990 for its coverage of the Exxon Valdez spill. The paper published an impressive suite of stories during the six-month study interval, totaling more than 115 stories between Friday March 24, 1989 and the end of September 1989. Between March 24, 1989 and June 8, 1989 the paper published a total of 102 stories which were analyzed for the research purposes of this thesis. The paper also published an assortment of related contextual stories about oil, rising gas prices, Washington State’s concerns over a similar disaster, and various editorials and commentaries about the Exxon Valdez disaster not written by Seattle Times editors or regular contributors. These were not analyzed for this study, but were noted as significant indicators of the Seattle Times’ extensive coverage of the spill and its related offshoots.

Of the total stories between March and June, the highest number were published in April – 47 stories, or about 45 percent. As there were no stories directly about the Exxon Valdez after April 11, 1989, this percent represents extensive Seattle Times spill coverage within the first two weeks of April. However, in the immediate aftermath of the spill, the paper published 21 stories in the first week alone after the spill, the last week of March. This number represents about 21 percent of the Seattle Times’ total spill coverage between March and June. In May, 33 stories, or about 31 percent, were published, and 3 stories were published in the first week of June 1989.

In addition, for two weeks between March 26 and April 7, each day’s newspaper contained at least two or more stories about the spill, accounting for 59 of the paper’s total Exxon spill output through June 8, 1989 – or about 56 percent of stories written. The overwhelming majority of stories appeared on the front page with secondary and continuation stories appearing in a special “Valdez Disaster” section the Seattle Times had created as a means of organizing and concentrating spill-related stories. Frequently, two spill stories appeared on the front page with jumps to inside pages, usually to the special Valdez
section located in the “A” section of the paper. The highest concentration of stories on a single day – 8 stories – occurred on Sunday April 2, nine days after the initial grounding. The second highest concentration of stories for a single day – 7 stories – occurred later that week on Friday April 7, 1989 (see #19 in Appendix). However, it was common to see a paper with 5 or 6 spill stories on a single day throughout the first month and a half of spill coverage. Except for the last 8 stories between May 21, 1989 and June 8, 1989 (accounting for spill story numbers 95 through 102) when just one story appeared per day, daily papers with multiple stories were commonly observed.

Themes and News Angles

One noticeable aspect of Seattle Times spill coverage was the far-ranging scope of themes and news angles covered by the paper. News stories encompassed all the major themes which surfaced naturally as a result of developments in the unfolding spill disaster, including: reporting on the size of the spill and threats to fisheries in the wake of the growing spill; the frustration and anger of residents, local government, and fishermen over a slothful start to clean-up efforts; and the potential role of the tanker captain, Joseph Hazelwood, among others. The paper also produced several deeply informative stories about ecological aspects and threats to the Alaskan environment; the struggles and the situation from the vantage of local fishermen and business owners; as well as highly probing pieces exploring historical, systemic, or regulatory contexts of the spill.

The only news theme which was notably absent in Seattle Times coverage was exploration of the effects of the spill on Native Alaskans. Aside from a couple brief references to indigenous Alaskans in passing, no story focused on their experience or sought their perspective on the spill or its effects to their way of life.

Systemic Causes a Mainstay of Reporting Themes

However, unlike other national media reporting on the spill, the Seattle Times did not make the “stereotypical” themes the centerpiece of feature-length stories or the primary
subject of stories, but rather, wasted no time in broaching the historical and systemic roots and contexts of the spill. By Sunday March 26, 1989 – two days after the spill went aground, officially at 12:27 a.m. on Friday March 24, 1989 – the paper published two stories, one a front-page piece by Bill Dietrich, who would later be among the Seattle Times reporters to receive a Pulitzer Prize for his stories, titled “Anger, Frustration in Valdez” (see #14 in Appendix) and a second story by Ross Anderson, another of the core prize-winning reporters, titled “Fishermen, Environmentalists Tried to Block Oil Port,” which explored the historical context of opposition to the building of a major oil port in Valdez, as well as some of the flaws in oil company predictions of the statistical probability of a major spill the size of the Exxon Valdez.

The next day, on Monday March 27, the paper published a story, again by reporter Bill Dietrich, titled “Valdez Drowning in the Oil that Feeds It” (see #15 in Appendix) which examined the irony of Valdez town’s “love-hate relationship with Big Oil” (pg. A4) and the economic boon of oil in ironic juxtaposition with the natural ecological uniqueness of the region and its near equal contribution to the Alaskan economy. The story also provided substantial historical context for the smaller spills and intimations that a large spill was bound to happen one day, such as detail about how much of the Alaska tanker fleet was beginning to show signs of wear and minor cracks from repeated buffeting by the harsh seas of the Gulf of Alaska. The story began to skirt deeper systemic issues via quotes and context, such as the supremely ironic context that local Cordova biologist Riki Ott had only just warned the Valdez city council the very night of the spill that “it was not a question of if but when” a major spill would occur in Prince William Sound (pg. A4).

By Tuesday March 28 – just three days after the spill – the paper published its first full-length feature examining underlying systemic problems such as cuts in spill workers, equipment and budgets that had been a decade in the making. To present the story, reporters Dietrich and Anderson interviewed retired and ex-Coast Guard and Alyeska Pipeline consortium officials for their first-hand accounts of the slow process of deterioration.
Stories of this nature, which focused on deeper systemic and institutional causes of the spill, comprised a significant percentage of Seattle Times stories. According to Beresford (1996, 72) the Seattle Times stories selected by the Pulitzer Prize committee were distinctly different from stories written by other news media in that they focused attention on oil transportation safety, public policies in effect when the spill occurred, social and regulatory contexts, and the historical connection between Alaska and the oil industry.

On some days, stories of a systemic nature followed one after another in succession. Between Tuesday March 28 and Wednesday March 29, three stories of a systemic nature were published, two of which were published on the same day. The first, the paper’s first editorial by a Seattle Times editor titled “Plans for Alaskan Refuge Run Aground in Valdez,” broached systemic issues in the context of increasing criticism about the proposal to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to drilling in the wake of the Exxon spill. The editorial trenchantly played on words and concepts related to the oil spill and was unabashedly critical of Exxon. Playing off of the profit motive of the oil industry, the editorial opened with the line that “legislation to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration is coated with the same 10 million gallons of North Slope oil that fouls Alaska’s Prince William Sound” and continued with the suggestion that the reality of the oil industry is at odds with “years of industry propaganda.” After discussing the history of supertanker spills and the empty promises of industry, the editor made a statement that directly addressed one of the biggest underlying causes of oil accidents – the public’s demand for oil: “The question is really a moot one,” the editor wrote after posing the question of how much oil Prince William Sound can absorb, “because the world has already said that keeping the petroleum flowing is more important than Alaska’s environmental Soundness” (pg. A10).

On Friday March 31, one week after the spill, the paper published another full-length story with the headline “The ‘Screw-Ups’ that Led to ‘Alaska’s Chernobyl’” which focused on the deeper decade-long process of deterioration in institutional safeguards against oil spills. The story took an in-depth look at the relationship between the state of Alaska and the oil
industry and how that relationship over time had contributed to a slow weakening of the structures that were supposed to have prevented a major oil disaster.

Using strong narrative storytelling elements to introduce and tell the story, Anderson used his observations during an interview with Richard Fineberg, oil and gas advisor to Alaska governor Steve Cowper, to strengthen the weight of the information that ultimately emerged from the story’s narrative. Describing how an exhausted Fineberg “held his head in his hands and tried to contemplate why it took days to accomplish what should have been done in hours,” referring to the critically slow mustering of materials and men to start containment of the spill, Anderson used this observation to segue into his systemic analysis, which became a probing look at the checkered history of the oil industry’s penetration into Alaskan economy and politics.

In a manner typical of other Seattle Times stories, Anderson successfully drew together historical and contemporary contexts and used a contrast technique that, as will be discussed more below, augmented the import of information without exaggeration:

“For more than 15 years, the state has been getting fat off its share of North Slope oil profits . . . . Oil has built school, parks and highways. Oil has reduced the tax bill for the working man and fattened the campaign war chests of pro-oil politicians. Now oil has inundated one of the state’s natural wonders and is threatening neighboring fjords” (pg. A8).

Even stories not specifically about an examination of a meta-systemic issue – such as a story from Sunday April 2 titled “Estimated $42 Billion in Oil Firms’ Profits Angers Alaskans” – incorporated context of a deeper systemic nature. Anderson’s April 2 story, for instance, takes a probing look at how Exxon had resisted more costly safeguards, such as a full-time oil response crew or double-hulled tankers, which tallied together would still have cost the corporation far less money than the cost of cleaning up the damage of its single-hulled tanker Exxon Valdez, which was supposed to be a state-of-the-art tanker and the pride of Alaska’s tanker fleet.
Stories of this nature continue to appear in Seattle Times coverage throughout the longer-term sweep of news coverage. A story on Sunday April 2 titled “Safety of Area of Tanker Spill is Disputed” subliminally disputed the prevailing stereotype that the tanker captain was the main spill culprit by opening with the contradictory testimony of experienced mariners who said that the area where the Exxon Valdez grounded was a “high-risk navigation area” (pg. A1) and implicating the Coast Guard as part of the underlying problem for inadequate radar coverage. The story – a three page in-depth feature – then spent a substantial amount of time exploring the “private guilt” of Valdez residents, who had eagerly welcomed the oil industry, and tackling the nebulous reporting angle of Valdez’s “unusual history.” It also looked at how oil money had managed to weevil its way into the Valdez economy, boring with it an “ill-defined” and “unsettled” (pg. A6) wedge of greed, guilt, and community conflict.

Another story by Dietrich published on Sunday May 18 reexamined the context and story of the Exxon Valdez’s grounding in anticipation of federal hearings which were set to begin two days later. The story, titled “Replaying the Valdez Disaster,” was a perspicacious example of reporting which brought everything together – clear explanation, context, and historical perspective – in a way that made the systemic failures discussed seem obvious and undeniable (see #20 in Appendix). The story successfully interwove narration of the historical context, by opening with a historical context lead that flashbacked 12 years to the beginning of the Port of Valdez, with a replay of the night of the spill so that all the major systemic and regulatory details coalesced into a succinct, coherent whole.

The narration itself is outstanding. Dietrich opened by writing: “For 12 years, a fleet of about 70 oil tankers had steamed in and out of Alaska’s Port Valdez without serious mishap, making the voyage 8,548 times.” He then proceeded with a powerful narrative based on extensive reporting, which picked out essential small details of story and place, that took readers about as close to the hours before the spill as they might have gotten had they been members of the Exxon Valdez crew themselves. “So there was no special attention paid March
as the tanker Exxon Valdez settled low in the water as it was pumped full with 52 million
gallons of Alaska crude,” the story continued. The narration that followed brought the entire
story of the spill into the space of a feature story without sacrificing scope, facts, or
perspective and clearly framed the spill as a corporate, legislative, and systemic failure which
could have been greatly ameliorated had all the cogs been functioning as they were meant to.

A Diversity of News Angles

In addition to the attention to systemic issues, which were a noticeable feature of
coverage, the Seattle Times reported on a huge variety of angles related to the spill (for example,
see #19 in Appendix). Reporters developed several unique news angles, such as legal angles
exploring a phenomenon of prospecting lawyers hunting for spill victims to represent, and
often approached the predictable themes in far from predictable ways, for instance, by
drawing on first-hand perspectives of local people, crew of other oil tankers, or a variety of
other sources outside the normally available ones. As Smith (1992, 101) pointed out, more
than two-thirds of Seattle Times sources were “unique to that newspaper.” In addition to the
usual suspects of spill reporting themes, the Seattle Times also reported on business,
legislative, federal government, and sports angles (see #21 in Appendix).

The Seattle Times was also found to have covered certain themes or important
considerations which researchers have found to be absent or reported on in misleading ways
in other news media accounts of the spill. For instance, ecological angles covered by the
general press-at-large tended to focus on the elements of Alaska’s complex ecological system,
such as dead birds and mammals, that Smith (1992, 166) has said were “only the most
telegenic parts.” Marine biologists, however, have said that mussels and barnacles may have
been “more important as victims,” but were “less interesting to journalists” (167). Similarly,
another ecological nuance neglected by most media was the long-term threat to some parts of
the system as a result of immediate effects of the oil – such as the effects on endangered eagle
populations in the years after the spill, as eagles mate for life and a bird who lost a mate to oil
poisoning would never rear another chick. Smith (1992) also noted that the real threat from petroleum toxins may have been the long-term effects of present spill mortality in some parts of the ecosystem which couldn't be predicted or measured except through long-term studies. As Smith (1992) found, however, what the media depicted tended to be death statistics of favored symbolic and anthropogenic creatures which were less critical to overall ecosystem stability and tended to be disproportionately represented by the excessive media attention.

The Seattle Times, however, covered all these nuances. A story on April 6 titled “Nature May Help to Mitigate Spill” discussed the role of nature in purifying itself as well as the possible long-term negative effects of cleaning methods being pushed because of their immediate results. The story, by Dietrich, also explored the uncertainty over effects of the oil on different elements of the ecosystem, providing scientific perspective and writing about the potential long-term effects of oil on the intertidal zone animals and specifically addressing such overlooked species as clams, oysters, limpets, mussels, and worms (see #18 in Appendix).

Beyond this, typical themes were treated with sophistication, and the dramatic elements of the spill story which researchers have described as hindering complete, informative coverage in other news media actually served as invitations to look at unlikely nuances of the spill story in the Seattle Times. For instance, one recurring theme in Times stories was the dogged and unrelenting efforts of fishermen on the Alaskan island of Cordova, about 25 miles southwest of Valdez, to protect an important salmon hatchery at the harbor-side town of San Juan threatened by oil migrating from the main spill. Using this news angle, Seattle Times reporters broached many different news angles in the process of following it over the weeks after the spill. The San Juan focus was used as a means of writing about the failures of the Exxon-directed clean-up efforts and the empty promises of Exxon to send help and supplies, as Exxon and other oil-experts were described as critical of the San Juan port fishermen and as doubtful of the possibility of the fishermen’s success acting on their own. Because the San Juan fishermen had to take their own initiative to protect their hatchery, one of the largest salmon hatcheries in the world, reporters touched on the clean-up angles with its botched and
beleaguered coordination which stymied volunteers and workers everywhere from insufficient management and inadequate supplies. The story also encompassed ecological implications and the role of fishing in the economy, and the complicated lineage of oil clean-up supplies and their use through the perspective of fishermen who had to learn “on the spot.”

Other news angles which appeared in Seattle Times stories were various and sundry and included:

- **Exxon** Stories about Exxon examined its orchestration of the spill response and its refusal of help and supplies even though its own supplies in Alaska were woefully inadequate. Other stories described what were implied to be bribes to fishermen to keep quiet with the media, and charges that Exxon never intended to clean up the spill. Later stories about Exxon focused on the corporation’s upcoming annual shareholder meeting in Parsippany, NJ. A major feature appeared in the Business Section describing the meeting, in which protestors and some shareholders were calling on chairman Lawrence Rawl – described as “singularly unrepentant regarding the oil spill” by a source interviewed by Seattle Times business reporter James E. Lalonde (Sunday May 14, 1989, “Meet Me in Parsippany,” pg. E1) – to resign, and Exxon made the symbolic gesture of promising to appoint an environmentalist to its board (for example, see #19 in Appendix, top story – “SO56”).

- **Spread and Scale of Oil Spill**: This angle, while popping up in other stories of different thematic nature by way of context, tended to be less directly emphasized in the Seattle Times. When it did start appearing, it was often in the context of reporting on the oil’s unexpected migration far from the epicenter of the spill and the threats to Alaska’s Kenai Fjords National Park, over 125 miles from Valdez, or Katmai National Park’s beaches, up to 625 miles away, as a result. Stories such as Bill Dietrich’s May 5 story titled “90% of Katmai Park Hit by Alaska Oil Slick” (Friday May 5, 1989, pg. A5), or Mary Ann Gwinn’s April 9 story titled “Doom Stalks Alaska’s Migrating Waterfowl” (Sunday April 9, 1989, pg. A8) about the bird death toll in Kenai National Park, expressed this focus.

- **Tourism** Stories of this ilk included speculations about the effects of the spill on tourism, narrative pieces exploring effects felt so far by various tour guide operators – including a long feature on Sunday April 4 in the Travel section in which reporter Carey Quan Gelernter interviewed several Alaskan tourist operators and found that some had still seen good business after the spill (see #21 in Appendix). A story on Wednesday June 7, 1989 in the Sports section examined effects of the spill on wildlife sport tourism specifically.
• **Legal/Legislative:** Headlines such as “Legal Action over Spill to be Costly, Complicated” (Wednesday April 4, 1989, pg. A1) and “Proved Claims Will be Paid” (Tuesday April 11, 1989, pg. A1) signified stories of this genre, which included discussions about the cost of insurance claims, the suits already filed by fishermen, concern over Exxon’s sincerity about paying whatever necessary to compensate those affected, and related nuances.

• **Moving the Tanker:** A story on Monday April 3 titled “Tanker Going to Portland? States’ Officials Concerned” introduced this angle as talk of what to do with the wrecked tanker and how to remove it from the reef began to circulate more regularly. Stories of this nature tracked efforts to re-float the *Exxon Valdez* and subsequent concern and debate – particularly in the states of Oregon and Washington – over where it would be towed.

• **Clean-Up:** The rescue and clean-up efforts and challenges comprised a news focus which included stories about such diverse issues as a one-of-a-kind oil skimmer loaned by the Russian government and the “Clean-up Gear [that went] Nowhere” (Friday March 31, 1989, pg. A8), as well as the practical challenges of feeding and housing the surfeit of volunteers who rushed to Alaska. One nuance of this angle was the economic profiteering of some Valdez residents who were charging double and triple the usual prices for motel space and rooms in bed and breakfasts (for examples, see #’s 15 and 17 in Appendix).

• **President Bush / Federal Government:** Though a more minor angle overall, stories such as the front-page piece from Friday April 7, titled “Bush Orders Troops to Aid Oil Cleanup” examined the federal government’s role in the aftermath of the spill, including its eventual involvement, as well as its noticeable lack of involvement in the critical days early on in the spill. Stories of this angle reported on the logistical problems resulting from President Bush Sr.’s refusal to declare a national emergency and the almost inane bureaucratic glitch as a result that the U.S. Navy was thus unable to legally fly essential equipment, already gathered and waiting to dispatch, out to the spill site which might have aided containment of the slick. One story from Friday May 5 also reported on Vice President Dan Quayle’s visit to Alaska in the stead of President Bush to survey the damage. The *Seattle Times* displayed a subtle criticism of the Federal Government in this story via its description of Quayle and his wife “don[ning] plastic suits to keep their blue jeans and tennis shoes clean during a brief visit to Smith Island” (May 5, 1989 “No One Gets Off Hook on Spill, Quayle Says, pg. A1), one implied image being that of the contrast between mud and oil-covered workers toiling daily with the cursory, superficial attention given the spill by the nation’s leaders.
Spill Inquiry: Stories about this angle reported on the proceedings of a National Transportation and Safety Board (NTSB) inquiry into the spill and the testimony of various parties, such as the *Exxon Valdez* crew and the Coast Guard.

Within these broad categories, many side angles and related nuances were reported on by *Seattle Times* reporters.

**Storytelling, Avoidance of Sensationalism, and Reporting Techniques**

Another noticeable element of *Seattle Times* stories was the lack of overblown drama or superficial sensationalistic qualities. Despite the magnitude of the spill, the Day 1 story heading, for instance, is matter-of-fact (“8-Million Gallon Alaskan Oil Spill”) and the story itself is judicious and circumspect. It refrains from making a value judgment about the rank of the spill and incorporates historical context while objectively describing the current situation. Throughout its suite of spill stories, the paper manages to successfully tread the delicate balance between conveying the enormity of the situation in Alaska and avoiding the threshold over which narration of the spill segued into sensationalism and melodrama under the weight of the scope, emotion, and conflict which were, by themselves, real but powerful elements of the story.

How the paper managed to avoid the stereotypical and succeed at producing such informative pieces where other media failed may be in part the result of management and reporting techniques combined. Smith (1992, 101) said that interviews with *Seattle Times* reporters and editors identified a “substantially different approach” to reporting and identifying news sources. According to Smith (1992), “the *Seattle Times* relied primarily on the wire services for information from press conferences and official sources, and let three of its four primary reporters assigned to the spill know that they were not expected to file daily stories” (101). He noted that this policy freed the spill reporters from the constraints of daily news deadlines, allowing them to “seek information outside Valdez, and thus go beyond the official information sources,” as well as to spend considerably more time doing research. The coordination of the *Exxon Valdez* reporting effort may also have played a role. In a *Seattle*
Weekly story published on February 5, 2003 about the retirement of longtime Seattle Times editor Alex McLeod, reporter Philip Dawdy noted that David Boardman – the paper’s assistant managing editor for investigations, business and sports and a possible contender for taking over McLeod’s position as managing editor – had been widely credited as being the force behind the Seattle Times’ selection as the winner of the 1990 Pulitzer Prize as a result of his coordination of the spill package and reporting efforts.

**Narrative Storytelling**

Style, organization and reporting tactics within stories also seemed to help the paper avoid the traps of sensationalistic reporting. Daley and O’Neill (1991) have suggested that development of meaningful narratives may be necessary to foster more thorough understanding of a complex situation. An overwhelming number of Seattle Times stories of every theme and news angle were characterized by extensive use of narrative storytelling techniques, narrative-style writing, and storytelling devices such alliteration and descriptive similes and metaphors (see #’s 14, 15, 17, 19 – “So58” – 20, and 21 in Appendix). This narrative and literary-style approach became a central means by which reporters dealt with the difficult, complex, and emotionally charged aspects of the spill. Many stories used scene-setting, historical, and anecdotal leads and narrative-style details within stories, including dialogue between those in a given scene or observations of gestures and the behaviors of sources.

Many stories also embedded the story focus within the experience or viewpoint of a main character – from volunteers to fishermen to political coordinators or officials. Together, these stylistic approaches helped to humanize the spill and conveyed the magnitude of the situation by showing it through the eyes of those actually experiencing its many facets. Using the words of a diversity voices to describe the experience of difficulty or drama served as a direct translation of a first-hand experience and diffused the potential for subjective sensationalism. A typical result of the alternative approach – reporters searching for ways to translate their personal second-hand perspectives or observations into objective accounts –
may have been the use of more evocative adjectives and an artificially augmented sense of drama, which was not found in Seattle Times stories.

One of many examples of the narrative approach can be seen in a story from Sunday March 26 with the headline “Fishermen, Environmentalists Tried to Block Oil Port.” Reporter Ross Anderson opened with an anecdotal lead: “When the oil companies proposed to build a huge oil port at Valdez, on Alaska’s Prince William Sound, Knute Johnson was one of the Alaska fishermen who traveled to Washington D.C. to stop them” (pg. A8). Anderson acquired a copy of Johnson’s testimony and used Johnson’s story as a way of interweaving contemporary context with a historical perspective on the debate and eventual construction of the oil port. A story by Bill Dietrich the next day, Monday March 27, also used an anecdotal lead approach via Valdez mayor John Devens as a way of delving into the thorny question of Valdez’s “love-hate” relationship with the oil industry (see #15 in Appendix).

Another story from Monday April 3, titled “Tough Lesson: ‘To Prepare for the Worst’,” is almost entirely a narrative piece of the sort that might be found in a novel or literary magazine. Reporter Ross Anderson used volunteer Kelly Weatherling to help illustrate not just the overall challenges of being a volunteer or the standard journalistic template of describing the toilsome work, but the hazier nuance of how volunteers often had to find their own solutions on the ground, engage make-shift resourcefulness, learn on the spot, and become their own experts. The story opened with a quote-directive from Weatherling, a four-day “expert” of the animal rescue effort who was providing a brief training session to new fisherman volunteers about how to collect sea otters: “‘Sea otters have to be approached very quietly,’ Weatherling advises his motley crew of volunteers. ‘Pick them up by the tail and watch out for the front claws. They’ll hiss at you. Get them into the cage as quickly as you can. They’ll settle down.” (pg. A7).

The story itself relies heavily on quotes of this nature from Weatherling, as well as questions from the volunteers in the form of dialogue. For instance, Anderson included a
section of dialogue between volunteers and Weatherling that, by its style, minimizes excess journalistic description and conveys more information in less space:

“What is the mortality rate? a fisherman asks.
‘Not too bad, if you work fast,’ says Dave LeBlanc, a Canadian volunteer who learned his skills on the beaches of Vancouver Island after the major spill off Washington’s coast in January. ‘They die of hypothermia or of the effects of ingesting the oil.’

How do we communicate?
‘Don’t depend on the radio,’ Weatherling says. ‘It’s total chaos out there—everybody cutting in on everybody else. The only solution is to stay together, solve your own problems, make your own solutions.’” (pg. A7)

When Anderson narrated an observation, his use of small descriptive details played off the quotes and helped to create a very convincing narrative that was far more effective at capturing a sense of the experience on the ground than the sort of omniscient storytelling that relies primarily on a reporter’s translation of observations. The result was a very real story that captured the experiences of the participants through their own eyes and voices and helped the Seattle Times avoid sensationalizing the drama-prone elements of the story (for example, see #17 in Appendix). There is drama inherent to the story, but it becomes a much more genuine drama as told by Times reporters via narration of this sort.

Narrative elements were also frequently found in stories of a more news-oriented, matter-of-fact nature. In a story published on Sunday April 2 by Anderson and news services, titled “Devastating Toll of Wildlife Observed as Spill Spreads,” several narrative features were interspersed with tight news-style reporting. The story, which focused on the effects on wildlife across the affected area as the first large numbers of dead animals were found, dashing hopes that the death toll might be less than feared, tackled a wide range of scientific and economic angles, from explaining how oil ultimately kills eagles to examining the economic effects of increasing likely fisheries closures. Interspersed with the recounting of news, Anderson found several places to interject narrative and help create a sense of place. For instance, after a paragraph describing the movement of the bulk of the slick towards Cordova, Anderson wrote: “In a stillness broken only by the croaking of ravens in Cordova, a few otters soaked with oil paddled listlessly offshore” (pg. A1).
Later in the story, after describing the assortment of “several hundred scientists” from various agencies and Exxon Corp. that had begun coordinating damage assessments via “seven fields of research,” Anderson contrasted the scientific coordination with the less official mobilization of fishermen using a narrative style that vividly depicted the scene in Cordova: “In Cordova, a sleepy land and sea-locked fishing village, things normally don’t come alive until the herring runs get under way in mid-April. But yesterday, fishermen were fully mobilized to save their livelihood” (pg. A11).

In one story, Seattle Times reporter Mary Ann Gwinn – another of the Pulitzer Prize-winning reporters – actually used the first-person to write her story, titled “Mournful Cry of a Loon Echoes Through a Land Devastated by Oil Spill.” The story, an early-week piece from Tuesday April 4, was a narrative account of the reporter’s own experience traveling with a former veterinarian and current Audubon magazine photographer to Green Island in the Sound. While the story subject was ripe for symbolic framing, as Gwinn told it, there is no hint of sensationalism, but instead a sense of genuine experience that managed to capture larger issues through the telling of a small event. In this case, use of the first person allowed Gwinn to negotiate the nebulous line between narrative observation and sensationalistic inflation of drama. Far from being a story merely about the saddening death toll of wild animals and birds, the story interspersed facts about the clean-up with poignant, powerful description of the scene and her experience on this particular beach. Ultimately, the story was about a loon that the two ended up catching and taking to a rescue center and the deeper philosophical questions that her experience of the beach inspired.

Because the narrative was in first-person, Gwinn had more liberty to express her personal impressions and experience – a freedom which, as it came across in her story, helped to avert sensationalism by allowing her to become invested in the experience as a human being, rather than a superficially impartial observer who had to rely on language alone and third-person detachment to recreate the scene. Gwinn’s personal opinion that “It was hard to believe that we could fly 60 miles, land and walk right into the ruination of a landscape, so far
from that broken boat” (pg. A1) augmented the vividness of her description a paragraph later of a “black lump” that “detached itself from three or four others bobbing in the oil-streaked water” and “staggered up the beach” where she “watched it climb a snowbank and flap into the still center of the woods.” The dialogue that ensued with the Audubon photographer Tony Dawson further educated about the biological underpinnings causing such a reaction without need of language that might sensationalize.

The reality of the scene and the visceral reactions of Gwinn herself are narrated in a way that is captivating, and the way in which the story is told is more reminiscent of a book chapter. The main character of the story – a loon that called from the woods and eventually ran out onto the beach – became a vehicle through which Gwinn ultimately got to a question much deeper but little explored in news media accounts: what was the point of all the efforts at animal rescue when so small a fraction of the affected wildlife treated actually survived? The details and narration of her experience immobilizing the loon while Dawson fashioned a make-shift strap from a camera lens to protect the bird’s wings, feeling “its warmth [and] energy” (pg. A8) allowed Gwinn to express by illustration the true point of the rescue efforts – to give humans a symbolic sense of purpose in the midst of such unstoppable disaster:

“Afterward, we talked about whom bird rescues help more, the rescued or the rescuer. Most rescued birds don’t make it. And tens of thousands more from the Valdez spill will die before they even get a chance.

“I know only that the loon told me something that no one other thing about this tragedy could. If only we could learn to value such stubborn, determined life. If only we could hold safe in our hands the heart of the loon.” (pg. A8).

While this was the only first-person narrative account found in the stories, the kind of narrative approach to reporting seen here continued throughout the bulk of the Seattle Times’ coverage and was a mainstay of the paper’s stylistic treatment dealing with the many difficult and ill-defined concepts and nuances of the complex spill story. There are far too many examples of the narrative style to recount, indicating that the Seattle Times understood the complexity of the situation and the need to move beyond typical journalistic frameworks in order to effectively report on the spill. However, one ultimate effect of this narrative
approach, which often resulted in revealing latent or obscure details, was to unveil deeper problems, nebulous nuances, and vexing issues related to the spill. Even more, this narrative approach helped to frame the disaster as more than just an event-driven environmental disaster, but as a by-product of a complex system in which increasingly progress-driven human society, corporate culture, and complex technological systems clash and collide, revealing sometimes glaring weakness in the underlying structure of the overall system.

**Bullet Lists**

The complexity of the spill meant that *Seattle Times* stories had to juggle a lot of information and many different, and oft-times confusing, strands of the spill story. In addition to the narrative technique, the *Seattle Times* used bulleted lists throughout its suite of stories as a means of organizing story content (see #’s 14, 16, 18 and 20 in Appendix). The bullet points helped to arrange large chunks of text into a user-friendly format that were easier to process than wading through lengthy blocks of text. Bulleted lists typically contained one to two paragraphs, sometimes more, as opposed to single sentences and reporters used them to organize many different kinds of information. One early story used a bullet list to organize a background explanation of the known events just prior to the spill (#14 in Appendix). Another story from the first few days of coverage used a bulleted list to highlight cuts by the Alyeska Pipeline Co. which left Valdez ill-prepared to cope with the spill in the critical few hours immediately after it happened. In this case, the list allowed the eye to instantly visualize the number of cuts in crew and equipment at a glance.

One example of a bullet list which illustrated their efficacy quite well appeared in a story from Friday March 31, a week after the spill, titled “Oil Spill: One Week of Frenzy” (see #16 in Appendix). The story itself was an analysis of the week’s events and how it was possible that the “best efforts” of oil-industry experts and government officials were so “woefully inadequate.” Reporter Dietrich analyzed how it was that all the frenzy on the shores had amounted to “little tangible effect at sea,” (pg. A1) and peeled away some of the various
excuses to look at underlying causes. In this case, his bullet list organizational approach was particularly effective. He introduced the list with the sentence: “But behind the physical dimensions of this calamity are a series of human errors and miscalculations with no excuse. Consider:” (pg. A6) and then, after asking readers to mull over the information he is about to present, presented seven lengthy bullet points highlighting the various incongruities implicating everyone from Exxon to the Coast Guard to the Alyeska Pipeline Consortium. The list also incorporated historical context and interviews with various sources expressing confusion over why the tanker only had a single hull and why safety measures that were touted as the strongest in place in the 1970’s had suddenly been abandoned or stopped.

**Contrast Technique**

Another reporting technique that added style, power, and sophistication to Seattle Times stories and helped reporters dodge the snare of sensationalism was the placement of contrasting information – in particular, quotes from sources that contrasted with an observational reality, a scenic description that contrasted with a different scenic description, or a historical reality that contrasted with a present reality – in immediate proximity (see #16 in Appendix). In this way, reporters let the weight or power of facts and information speak for themselves without need of additional commentary. For instance, a story from Thursday March 30 titled “Bush Team Cites Progress; Activists Outraged” opened with a cleverly subtle contrast in the lead sentence that required no further explanation from Dietrich: “Just hours after Exxon executives conceded they were losing the struggle to contain an oil slick that now covers 575 square miles in Alaska’s Prince William Sound, Bush administration officials said the cleanup was going better than they had expected” (pg. A1).

Another example of the contrast technique appeared in a story from April 6 titled “New Cleanup Controls Sought” via juxtaposition of a quote with the statement of a fact afterwards. An Exxon spokesman, stating he believed Exxon was best suited to organize the cleanup, was quoted saying, “We gathered all the resources and organized the cleanup . . . .
We think the most effective and efficient way to carry out this cleanup is to continue” (pg. A1). The quote is followed with the statement that “Exxon’s only notable success so far in the disaster occurred yesterday morning when it managed to refloat the 987-foot Exxon Valdez, grounded on Bligh Reef since March 24” (pg. A1). The contrast between Exxon’s claims and the statement of its singular success carried with it the implicit message that Exxon was not succeeding where it really should have been – at containing the spill and organizing effective clean-up. This technique also had the effect of subtly framing Exxon in a negative way, as unprepared to deal with the staggering mess of its own ill-preparedness.

Another example of a subtle framing effect portraying Exxon negatively as a result of the contrast technique was seen in a story from Friday March 31, with the headline “Cleanup Gear Goes Nowhere.” The lead paragraph, by reporter Eric Nalder, stated: “As weary crews fight a losing battle against an ugly oil spill spreading over Alaska’s Prince William Sound, dozens of oil-skimming boats and machines remain docked and warehoused in cities up and down the West Coast” (pg. A7). The lead itself is a self-contained indictment against Exxon. The contrast suggested that the “weary crews” were slogging away at hard manual labor while the greater force of mechanical energy bound up in the “dozens” of oil-skimmers sitting idle was being squandered by Exxon. The next paragraph provided an extension of the contrast, stating that “Exxon Corp. . . . declined and even ignored offers for some of the equipment that could have blunted the impact of the spill on the environment” (pg. A7).

Images and Graphics

In addition to the paper’s wide-ranging scope of thematic news coverage, the Seattle Times also made extensive use of visuals, such as photographs, maps, and detailed graphics, as part of its effort to report on the spill. The paper published a total of 64 photographs, maps, and graphic images between March 24 and June 8. In terms of the total number of stories published during the same interval, this indicates that the Seattle Times included a visual element in about 61 percent of its stories during that time. Multiple visual elements often
accompanied a single story, or in cases where a main story and a secondary or third spill-related story appeared on the same page, were sometimes used as visual separators between two stories.

Images focused on a number of themes and often occupied prominent places on the story page. The subject of images ranged across the spectrum of news angles, depicting everything from scenic views of the Alaskan landscape, to various shots of the Exxon Valdez tanker, to fishermen and volunteers in numerous contexts, to Exxon and government officials, to animals and wildlife in equally numerous contexts, to an assortment of miscellaneous images that can’t be easily classified – such as a photo that appeared on Thursday April 6 showing a sea plane parked on an oily beach. The story itself, titled “Nature May Help to Mitigate Spill” by Dietrich, tackled the job of contextualizing the role of nature in the clean-up efforts and trying to convey that oil, while assuredly an “ugly nuisance for years to come,” was also not necessarily as toxic as some believed, owing to the natural processes which break down the most toxic parts at sea. Thus, the image of an idle floatplane combined with the text exerted the very subtle framing effect of augmenting the suggestion that nature will over time clean the spill, and in some cases perhaps better than humans (see #18 in Appendix).

In fact, images tended to focus on contexts, rather than objects (see #’s 16 and 19 in Appendix). Very few stories focused on the Exxon Valdez’s captain, Joseph Hazelwood, but several photographs showed, for example, fishermen at work fashioning booms to protect a hatchery, or volunteers building cages to house rescued otters. Images showed job seekers crouched in a hallway waiting to be hired out as paid clean-up crew as part of a story about the tripling of Valdez’s population in the wake of the spill, or depicted residents or locals at a town hall meeting questioning Exxon spokespersons about the spill. While birds and wildlife did appear in several of the 64 images, it is worth noting that very few focused solely on oil-drenched animals as main characters. Animals were usually seen in context with other angles, such as with veterinarians treating them at local wildlife clinics. One image showed a
fisherman-turned-wildlife collector walking on a beach carrying a dead otter, but the focus isn’t so much the dead otter as it is the entire context of the scene and the volunteer’s role working as one tiny fraction of the overall effort to deal with the vast pollution. Some contextual images showed Exxon officials testifying at the spill inquiry or in their offices in positions indicative of stress or worry.

It is important to note that *Seattle Times* images did not come across as sensational, overly dramatic, or as attempting to express the subtle political or personal viewpoints of the paper’s staff or editors. While the editorials left no question as to how the *Seattle Times* managers and editors felt about the spill or Exxon’s job handling it – as well as a couple political cartoons that appeared on the editorial page – images tended to be informative, interesting, and diverse, and they attempted to complement the overall suite of spill stories by offering an assortment of windows into the isolated and inaccessible world wherein the spill took place.

**Detailed Maps**

Maps were also frequent story accompaniments and were often highly detailed and informative as well (*see #’s 14 and 16 in Appendix*). Maps regularly appeared with images as part of the visual package for a particular story. In some stories, maps were essential for providing immediate visual information or orientation that would have been hard to glean or process quickly from text descriptions also. The majority of maps also tended to be unique maps created specifically to accompany the focus of a particular news story, though a few stories used the same generic map of Alaska showing the location of the wreck, the oil pipeline and the town of Valdez.

**Graphic Images**

Use of detailed graphic images was also found to be a common visual reporting technique in *Seattle Times* stories. Graphic images were chosen to illustrate important nuances or angles of the spill where a visual representation offered more clarity than verbal
description alone. Frequently, the graphics were so highly detailed that they essentially functioned as mini-stories in their own rights. For instance, a large split graphic published with the paper’s third story on Sunday March 26 included a map of Prince William Sound in the top half and a cross-sectional graphic representation of the tanker in the bottom half illustrating the orientation of the oil tanks in the hull and the ones which were believed to have been torn by the reef. The map part showed all the key orientational details, such as the location of Valdez in relation to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, the village of Tatitlek, occupied primarily by the Chugach Alaskan native tribe, and the Columbia Glacier, which had shed an abnormal amount of ice into the Sound. An accompanying paragraph of text provided contextual information about the spill and explained the relationship of the place details shown on the map.

This particular Day 3 graphic appeared at the bottom of the front-page portion of the story in which it appeared, titled “Anger, Frustration in Valdez” with the subhead: “Residents, environmentalists criticize delays in cleanup; human error blamed for spill” (see #14 in Appendix). A large vertically oriented rectangular picture appeared to the right of the story, illustrating the oil coming from the tanker with the Alaskan wild horizon in the background. Under this image, a large text box appeared with historical context information titled “Worst Oil Spills” highlighting the worst U.S. spills since 1976. In the middle of the text portion, a large tease box pointed to a historical context story inside about fishermen’s efforts to resist the building of the port at Valdez. In fact, the graphic or visual portions of the front page story display occupy more space than the text itself. The entire package – story text and right-side scenic graphic – is essentially bounded by the large headline above, which spreads across the entire “box” allotted to the story. The overall effect of all the elements is to provide instant orientation and information obtained from the eye’s perception of the graphics and large headline, which is then honed by the sub-head, indicating anger over delays in cleanup, and the story itself.
Another example of a highly detailed graphic was seen on Friday March 31. Seattle Times graphic journalist Randee S. Fox created a large graphic map with the heading “Oil threatens fish, mammals, birds and plants.” The graphic appeared under an unusual photograph of a close-up hand coated with oil, a contextual photograph illustrating the consistency of the oil, and the water-beach interface in the background (see #16 in Appendix). These images accompanied Dietrich’s front-page, one-week update and retrospective of the spill. While Dietrich’s story canvassed many angles of the spill story and used a bullet list to recap the various errors and systemic flaws, Fox’s graphic map highlighted the ecological aspect and provided context and information not contained in the story.

The graphic also had its own tease to its continuation on page A6. The front-page graphic occupied the most space of any of the front-page spill story elements – including the feature story by Dietrich. However, because of its design and its intent to explain in more depth about how the slick was affecting wildlife, the graphic continued inside with a long, vertical strip box entitled “Endangered Animals.” This graphic box contained 11 sub-boxes each representing a different animal, save for the last box which was titled “Habitats” and explained about the importance of different habitats to the imperiled animals and how those habitats were being threatened by the oil. The list of animals was diverse and even differentiated between seabirds, shorebirds, and waterfowl, as each group had different ecological constraints and possible effects as a result of the oil.

Summary

The Seattle Times’ multi-pronged approach to reporting the Exxon Valdez spill, as revealed by this study’s textual analysis, sets the paper in a category of excellence far apart from other news media. The paper’s coverage is particularly distinctive for specifically engaging with the greatest frequency those reporting tools which researchers (Smith, 1992; Daley and O’Neil, 1991; Beresford, 1996; Wilkins, 1989) have found to be essential to quality reporting of complex story subjects – tools such as narrative storytelling that focuses on
contexts rather than a litany of facts; systematic immersion within the story subject; treatment of images and graphics as vehicles for conveying context, rather than snapshots; and a focus on systemic rather than event-driven news frames. By diverging from the “journalistic norm” in its philosophical and practical approach to writing stories about the numerous angles and nuances of the spills, the Seattle Times successfully dodged the reporting traps that often result in shallow, stereotypical treatment of disasters to produce instead a suite of highly informative stories.

**The Guardian**

Between Saturday March 25 and Tuesday September 19, 1989 the Guardian published a total of 27 stories directly about the Exxon Valdez oil spill, plus several stories of related contexts about North Sea oil development or different U.S. oil spills which occurred after the Exxon Valdez. The majority of Guardian stories appeared in March and April, with stories totaling 6 and 11 – or about 22 percent and 41 percent – for each month respectively. A total of 4 stories were published in May, 1 story in June, and 2 stories in July. No spill stories were published in August, but 3 stories – or about 11 percent – were published in September, the end of the thesis study interval.

Despite the fact that the Alaska spill story was an international news event for Guardian readers in the U.K., the paper devoted space to the spill story almost every day, especially in the first two and a half weeks after the accident, or after a new development in the cleanup or inquiry. Between Saturday March 25, when the Guardian ran its first story about the spill, and Saturday April 1, 1989, the paper published a spill-related story every day save Sunday March 26. Regular, almost daily coverage of the spill continued into the first two weeks of April, with a spill-centered story appearing almost every day between Monday April 3 and Monday April 17. On April 3, the Guardian published two spill-related stories – notable, because it is the only time throughout the six-month study interval when the paper
ran more than one story per day on the Alaska spill disaster. One of these two stories was an international story by a Guardian correspondent in Alaska, and the second was a piece by the same reporter which appeared in the “Comment & Analysis” section of the Guardian newspaper.

The majority of Guardian stories – 17 total, or about 63 percent – appeared in the International section of the newspaper. Of the remaining stories, 4 appeared on the paper’s Back news page, 3 appeared in Comment & Analysis, 2 in the Financial section, and 1 in a newly created permanent Environment section of the paper that the Guardian had recently introduced.

It is also important to note that the Guardian had correspondents on location in Washington D.C. and New York, as well as Alaska, allowing the paper to do more by way of context and nuance reporting than reliance on press conference accounts, wire services, or press releases would permit. As this study found, the Guardian went beyond the generic event-driven disaster framework to suggest a deeper systemic problem in which the spill was a by-product of America’s profligate energy consumption, federal government and industry arrogance, and citizen lust for cheap oil.

**Themes and News Angles**

The Guardian followed all the major thematic developments of the unfolding spill disaster – emphasizing local British angles or context where possible – and also developed a few side angles that were not seen in Seattle Times news stories. While the Guardian did not develop news angles to the extent that the Seattle Times did, its 27 stories succeeded in capturing the complexity of the spill story, providing informative context, and expressing some of the deeper issues related to the spill, including some of the systemic underpinnings of the disaster and the meta-context of an oil-dependent American society and economy.
In addition to the systemic frames, the Guardian also framed the spill in terms of its environmental impact and potential ecological ramifications. Where the Seattle Times’ first spill story focused more on constructing a historical context for perspective on the spill’s size, comparing the Exxon Valdez with a 1984 spill which had previously been the largest on record, the Guardian’s first story immediately presaged the spill as an environmental disaster. Its headline – “Giant Oil Spill Hits Alaska” – was qualified by a superscript subhead in smaller font which retooled the spill in environmental terms: “Ecological Catastrophe Feared.”

Martin Walker, the Guardian correspondent in Washington D.C., opened with a lead which captured the sense of a fragile, pristine environment blotted with the “ominous dark stain” of oil (Saturday March 25, 1989, pg. 24), and in its second paragraph paraphrased “environmentalists” – its first source – speculating about the potential environmental damage. It is also interesting to note that the reporter immediately honed in on the potential threat to whales, stating that the spill occurred in “rich fishing waters . . . close to the migratory route of 13 species of whale” (pg. 24), suggesting a more encompassing ecological frame in which the damage would be to more than just the usual fish and birds, but to the larger ecological system.

The spill also had the potential to affect not just Alaskan birds, but birds around the world, causing reverberations from the disaster to ripple outside the remote Alaskan nook nestled near the Arctic and across the globe, according to a story from Monday April 17. In a highly narrative piece full of context and more probing ecological analysis, headed “Oil Holocaust Awaits Birds of the Alaskan Spring,” reporter Martin Walker depicted a scene in which the Exxon Valdez spill forebode a potentially apocalyptic end for a huge diversity of birds converging on the food-rich beaches of the Copper River Delta. “The birds are coming from all over the world,” he wrote, “from the China Sea and the Caribbean and the Galapagos Islands; the Arctic tern are flying 12,000 miles from Antarctica” (pg. 8). In all, “some 427 bird species” had been logged by ornithologists. In this story, the spill is thus framed as a
potential disaster of ecological dimensions far wider than imagined. The fact that “even a small speck of oil on the feathers” would most likely be fatal, from ingestion while grooming, posed a portentous prospect with worldwide implications: that “a frightening proportion of the rarest bird life of the northern hemisphere” would be lost if the oil migrated to the Copper River Delta.

Despite the grim prospect of the story, however, it did not get mired in the moribund, but was thoughtful, thorough, and presented highly informative context that considered deeper ecological aspects of the spill, such as the longer-term biological ramifications not easily measured in a few months to widowed eagles or bears. “The real cost of this spill may be measured in generation of unborn eagles to come,” Walker wrote. The story also put the wildlife rescue effort in context, a facet which Beresford (1996, 73) has said may have been given disproportionate media attention outside the real ecological damage. Walker’s story ended with the philosophical comment that: “The rescue of these birds is an irrelevance in numerical terms, yet they represent a powerful symbol of the human need to do something to mark the solidarity of living creatures, and a gesture of defiance against the terrible black tide.” Thus, although framing the spill as a potentially pandemic ecological catastrophe, the story also succeeded in cutting through the hype, craze and drama of the spill presented by media images and accounts and penetrating one of the most difficult and intangible but underlying emotional aspects of the spill – one which was an almost universally shared experience and catalyst for action, no matter how insignificant in the long-term.

Other stories typically reminded readers that Prince William Sound was “considered one of the richest marine environments in North America” (Monday March 27, 1989, International, Pg. 6), as well as a beautiful and hitherto unspoilt scenic wild place which “teemed with sea lions, seals, killer whales, and sea birds” (pg. 6). Another story opened with a lead which combined an update of the spill’s movement with a reminder that the spill threatened “one of the world’s most fertile fishing areas” (Tuesday March 28, 1989, International pg. 10).
At the same time, however, the Guardian also looked beyond the narrow, episodic ecological events associated with the spill typically seized upon by the majority of media, such as dramatization of wildlife deaths, individual clean-up efforts by small groups of volunteers, or the immediacy of the debate over how to clean up the spill, to consider longer-term ecological ramifications often overlooked by other media. Smith (1992, 166) has said that “cleaning the beaches may have been essential for aesthetic, political, and public relations reasons, but in many cases was not a good environmental decision.” Yet, the majority of media accounts of the spill neglected the environmental downside associated with efforts to use chemicals on the spill or purge the beaches of oil.

With this comment in mind, it is interesting to note that by the Guardian’s third story on Tuesday March 28, four days after the spill, the paper made a point of mentioning this aspect specifically (see #22 in Appendix). Christopher Reed, one of the Guardian’s U.S. correspondents who had traveled to Valdez to report on the spill, wrote a story titled “Experts Divided on How to Treat Alaska Superslick” (pg. 10) which discussed the various methods already tried or being considered to treat the spill, along with the failures of those methods. In the telling, he made a point of mentioning that dispersants, favored by Exxon in the clean-up debate, could be even worse in the long-term: “arguments continue over whether the new chemicals [dispersant use] creates could cause longer-lasting and worse damage to the ecology.”

In a few instances, the Guardian used more subjective or emotionally assumptive adjectives to refer to sea otters in passing – but, as will be explained, never with the intent to exaggerate or sensationalize. In one story describing how thousands of animals would be killed by the “deadly tide” of oil which was migrating further than experts predicted, the reporter made a point of adding “including the enchanting sea otter” (Thursday March 30, 1989, pg. 24). A second story the next day said that the “playful” sea otters “may be the saddest victims” of the spill (Friday March 31, 1989, pg. 8). However, despite the somewhat more colorful rhetoric used to refer to the media’s favored tragic symbol of the oil spill, the
Guardian did not misrepresent the threat to otters and always embedded the subjective qualifiers in text that was informative or offered surprisingly helpful context.

For instance, in the story in which sea otters were described as the “saddest victims” – titled with the somewhat misleading headline “Valdez Captain’s Alcohol Level ‘Over Legal Limit’,” as the story was primarily about ecological aspects of the spill – reporter Christopher Reed contextualized his otter comment with highly informative historical context about otters and simply stated facts about the difficulties of animal rescue. The story also provided a deeper and more informative ecological perspective, devoting a full paragraph to explaining how the spill was a threat to the entire ecological system of Prince William Sound. After mentioning that larger marine mammals such as sea lions, seals, porpoises and whales were at risk from the spill, Reed offered the additional context needed to perceive the marine environment as a larger system in which threats to the smallest elements escalated up the chain: “Fish such as salmon, herring, and crabs, shrimp and other crustaceans provide food in a chain which in turn can harm bears and other large mammals. Contaminated plankton can also hurt whales that spend part of the year in the area” (pg. 8).

The ecological focus pivoted back to otters, and the earlier “saddest victims” comment is soon realized to have been a just a preface to a more thoughtful analysis of why the description was merited. Reed interviewed a University of Minnesota biologist specializing in sea otters and offered new facts about the biological explanations underpinning why the oil was such a devastating death knell to otters – specifically, because “sea otters . . . literally spend half their lives keeping afloat by constantly aerating their fur, a plucking technique they do with their paws” (pg. 8).

Systemic Frame and Roots of Spill

Beyond the ecological frame palpable in Guardian coverage, the more enduring frame was of a systemic nature. The Guardian framed the Exxon Valdez spill in terms of deeper systemic problems stemming from a system unprepared to deal with a spill of that size,
corporate greed and self-interest, and an American energy consumptiveness that demanded cheap oil at the expense of environmental safeguards and maritime safety. In the process of reporting these deeper meta-issues, occasionally sarcastic or sharp words used to describe Exxon contributed to the emergence of a negative sub-frame for Exxon (see #’s 24, 25, and 26 in Appendix). The corporation was framed as negligent and nonchalant regarding the oil spill, and insincere about its concern for local people or the environment.

By the Guardian’s fourth story on Wednesday March 29, the primary focus of the spill story had shifted from the immediate news angles following on the heels of the spill – updates of the spill’s spread, mentions of the potential role of Captain Hazelwood, and debates over how to contain the slick, among others – to a focus on the glaring discrepancies in the pipeline consortium’s contingency plan and the ineptness it had demonstrated at implementing the plan. The story’s headline – “Pipeline Group ‘Not Prepared’ for Alaska Oil spill Disaster” – introduced the critical news focus, and the lead sentence reinforced the theme of unpreparedness (see #23 in Appendix). Reporter Christopher Reed noted that bad weather – cited as an excuse by Exxon for difficulties in responding to the spill – “was to have been allowed for in a contingency clean-up plan devised by Alyeska” (pg. 20). With a powerful contrasting statement, his next sentence drove home the failure of the response system and revealed some of the underlying systemic cracks which had been laid bare by the spill: “Yet even booms, the most basic anti-spill equipment, were not deployed immediately because of a crippled carrier barge that had remained unseaworthy for months.”

The story also criticized the American media for its superficial focus on Captain Hazelwood – a small sub-current observed in Guardian coverage which reinforced the paper’s framing of the spill as a product of system failures and social irresponsibility and, as will be seen below, was related to an overall less condemnatory tone towards Captain Hazelwood seen in Guardian stories. A story by Reed the next day, titled “Alaskan Fishermen Angry at Oilmen’s Bombast” and appearing in the Guardian’s “Eyewitness” section on the back page, suggested all three of the major systemic issues: unpreparedness, corporate greed and
unconcern, and energy consumptiveness (see #24 in Appendix). Without using the first-person, Reed prefaced comment about the first systemic problem by illustrating the difficulty he had in gaining access to information from an Exxon press spokesperson. After being refused entry into a “Command Centre” located at a Valdez hotel, the Exxon press spokeswoman had to be summoned five times before coming out to speak with him, and then denied knowledge of a dispute between the Exxon Oil Corporation and the State of Alaska’s Department of Environmental Conservation. Reed drew on the experience to comment that:

“The incident encapsulates events here since the Exxon tanker hit a reef and ruined a town’s livelihood, perhaps for ever. The oil industry’s bombast, its strutting pretense of power, conceal an only too visible inefficiency. This combines with what many regard as a carelessness not only about oil leaks, but about the truth” (pg. 24).

Context provided later in the story about how so few reporters had seen the tanker or the slick, how reporters thus had to rely on Exxon-released bulletins, and how reporters who wanted to see the site of the tanker could spend $3,000 per day chartering a boat prefaced Reed’s suggestion of the second underlying problem: corporate self-interest and unconcern. Using mildly sarcastic language, Reed described how “Exxon officials drone through statistics,” and then quoted a fishermen accusing Exxon of caring only about money and profit, and not about “Alaska or its people.” The quote was followed by journalistic comment and context supporting the quote: “The men have a point. A contingency plan devised a decade ago has been flouted,” Reed wrote, but then contrasted the “flouted” plan with the reality of a clean-up effort that was “late, slow, poorly equipped, confused and inefficient.” Combined with comments from an earlier story on Monday March 27 where Exxon and the pipeline group were described as having “dragged their feet” (pg. 6), and additional context from this March 30th story where Exxon is described as “bombastic” and displaying a “strutting pretense of power” (pg. 24), the Guardian’s sub-frame of Exxon’s arrogance contributed to the larger systemic frame of industry greed and self-interest developed here and elsewhere.
The story concluded with anecdotal context which addressed the third systemic problem of American oil consumptiveness. Describing how Exxon had immediately defended its decision to renew tanker deliveries at Valdez immediately after the spill, Reed cited an Exxon executive reminding everyone that “a quarter of US oil comes from Alaska” and that “They need it for those Mercedes Benzes in California” (pg. 24).

A third story by Reed on Monday April 3 broadened the onus of responsibility to include the U.S. Coast Guard, which Reed implicated in the systemic failings for having replaced its formerly strong radar system in Prince William Sound with a “cheaper and weaker system” in 1984 (April 3, 1989 “Oil Pipeline Faces Threat of Closure,” pg. 9).

That same day – the day on which the Guardian ran two stories about the Alaska spill – Reed wrote the longest of all the stories published about the Alaska spill for the paper’s “Comment and Analysis” section. Titled “Crude Confrontations,” the story specifically targeted America’s “profligate energy consumption” as a major culprit of oil spills and also implicated the oil industry’s interest in short-term profit over safety and longer-term solution as an equally important underlying cause of spills (see #26 in Appendix). Employing an occasionally unmasked wry and mildly tongue-in-cheek tone, the story interwove context about the debate over drilling in ANWR, which had become a heated contemporary topic following the Exxon spill, with context about the Alaska spill to produce a commentary critical of both the social system in which Americans demanded cheap oil and the economic motives of the oil industry which compelled it to seek short-term gain in environmentally sensitive areas like ANWR.

One of the primary motivations fuelling the ANWR debate, Reed wrote – and all such “classic confrontations of environmentalists and the developers of Big Oil” (pg. 19) – was the “nation’s insatiable need [for oil],” which industry sources said could only be met by opening the Arctic refuge. After presenting the industry’s arguments, including worry over the “national security” implications of reliance on foreign oil, Reed offered one of the strongest systemic comments seen in Guardian stories about America’s prevailing cultural
consumptiveness – one of the most important but overlooked systemic issues underlying oil spill disasters, of which the Exxon spill was the most recent example – that hinged somewhere between factual statement and subtle editorial indictment:

“Questions of America’s profligate energy consumption, its recent abandonment of alternative energy development, its unrealistically low petrol prices (compared with the rest of industrial world), and the fact that Japanese and West German economies seem to thrive on foreign oil are dismissed” (pg. 19).

The statement directly criticized American society, but more implicitly, was critical of the U.S. government for failing to pursue more sustainable energy alternatives. In Reed’s story, this was suggested in his comment about oil companies “echo[ing] their erstwhile compadre in the business, President Bush, who said there was ‘no connection’ between Valdez and ANWR.” Combined with subtle negative framing of the Bush administration seen elsewhere in Guardian stories about the spill, the Guardian develops an ultimate frame for the Exxon Valdez spill in which the systemic problem undergirds the whole of American society, encompassing a wasteful population comfortable with cheap oil and a government entangled by the same self-interest motivating a short-sighted industry.

Though the Guardians’ intervening stories between early April and September meander through various other angles related to the spill, its last story on September 19, 1989 leaves no question about the paper’s ultimate frame of American energy consumptiveness as a root cause of the Exxon Valdez and other oil spills. The story, titled “Oil Firms Join Battle with Ecologists” with the subtext “Wildlife refuge at risk months after tanker disaster,” was partly a recap about the Alaska spill as Exxon prepared to cease its cleaning efforts for the season and part a context article about other U.S. areas targeted for oil exploration by the industry, including ANWR.

After leading the story with news about the oil industry’s proposals to open other sensitive areas to drilling, from ANWR to locations in Florida, California, and North Carolina, Guardian correspondent Simon Tisdall in Washington D.C. bluntly stated that “the controversy extends to the vexed issue of America’s use of cheap energy and the question of
conservation and economic need” (pg. 10). Through a quote from a source with the Center for Study of Responsive Law, Tisdall expanded the frame to encompass industry self-interest and problems with maritime safety, particularly in refusing to pay for double-hulled tankers: “legislating to defend wilderness areas is always a problem. The only incentive for the oil companies is their fear of being sued. They have ignored latest technology – for example, tankers going into Prince William Sound still are not double-hulled” (pg. 10).

Similar to the Seattle Times’ approach to ending the final spill piece, the story concluded with a statement which, as the last Guardian comment about the Exxon Valdez spill, left to linger a pointedly direct comment about the deeper systemic problem of desire for cheap energy. Quoting an oil industry lobbyist commenting that “the American public has come to take cheap and plentiful oil for granted” and prefacing the statement with the ironic and unlikely fact that in this, “oilmen and environmentalists are as one,” the statement reaffirmed the Guardian’s attention to the deeper systemic causes of the spill by projecting the American energy consumptiveness frame to the forefront.

**Local British Angle**

In some stories, the Guardian tried to add a British story peg where possible or include context relevant to British readers. Five of the Guardian’s total 27 stories – or about 19 percent – included a local peg or angle. Some cited local British sources knowledgeable about oil spills or involved somehow in the Alaska clean-up. In one case, a British spokesman for Heavy Lift Cargo Airlines, a British company shipping several thousand gallons of dispersant to Alaska, was cited (Tuesday March 28, 1989, pg. 10).

In another case, a full two paragraphs were devoted to presentation of the local angle that five members of the British Oil Spill Service Centre had arrived in Alaska “48 hours after the first appeal for help arrived in Britain” and the various equipment taken by the team to assist in clean-up efforts (Wednesday March 29, 1989). The reporters made a point of mentioning that “oil experts from Britain have taken a leading role in the vast [clean-up]
operation” (pg. 20). The two details are juxtaposed with a comment about how four days had gone by without “an all-out attempt to disperse the oil” by Exxon, thus creating the subtle micro-frame of British competence, willingness to help, and readiness which was in contrast to the ill-prepared Exxon Corporation (see # 23 in Appendix).

One story included a small story blurb at the end of the main story with a local angle by John Ardill, a Guardian reporter in England. The local context blurb had no headline of its own, but contained four short paragraphs introduced by the italicized text “John Ardill adds:” about how “20 British oil cleaning experts” were to arrive in Alaska within 24 hours in order to “help tackle the Valdez slick” and how British companies had offered equipment to coordinators in Valdez if needed (Friday April 7, 1989, pg. 10).

Finally, two stories provided context with which British readers would be familiar in order to make a comparison with some detail in the stories. One story, titled “Fish Harvest Hopes Rise as Exxon Inquiry Opens” (see #28 in Appendix), focused on the tenuous hopes for some Alaska fisheries after testing had proved the areas safe for fish harvesting. In the story, reporter Martin Walker included local British context in order to explain a ritual practice in Alaska of sending the fishing season’s first sockeye salmon catches to fancy restaurants around the U.S. and how the practice was jeopardized that year because of concern over oil-contaminated fish: “The season’s first catches of sockeye are usually flown to gourmet restaurants across the US, rather like August 12 grouse or Beaujolais Nouveau . . . .” (Wednesday May 17, 1989, pg. 8).

In the final example, appearing in the Guardian’s second-to-last story of September 8, Reed used the island of Great Britain as a figurative measuring stick of the spill’s size that provided local British readers a more familiar comparative visual metaphor: “six months later the oil patch has spread not only further than the full length of Britain’s east coast, but oozed onto more than 2,400 miles of convoluted Alaskan shoreline and islands” (Friday September 8, 1989, pg. 27).
Captain Hazelwood – Criticism of U.S. Media Focus

A few *Guardian* stories explicitly criticized the U.S. media or Exxon for excessive focus on the role that tanker captain Joseph Hazelwood played in causing the disaster. Although this study’s textual analysis found that *Guardian* stories framed the spill most prominently in terms of deeper systemic problems, and thus did not fall into the same media trap of focusing on the simplistic but superficial theme of targeting the captain, the paper’s outspoken – sometimes mildly sardonic – censure of Exxon’s and the U.S. media’s focus on this theme was surprising nonetheless.

At the same time, the *Guardian*’s criticism of Exxon and the U.S. media fits with the paper’s broader systemic frame. Smith (1992, 164) commented that “the way most stories about the spill were framed carried the implicit message that government regulation is unnecessary and that corporations should be expected to consider statistically improbably environmental risks more important than their own profits.” The *Guardian* framed the spill in almost exactly these terms – as related to corporate greed and self-interest. This fact lends further strength to the observations of this section’s textual analysis that the *Guardian* demonstrated higher quality reporting of the *Exxon Valdez* spill by avoiding the widespread pitfall of pack journalism and trying to probe the deeper context and issues smoldering beneath the surface.

The first story, already mentioned, appeared on Wednesday March 29, five days after the spill. As part of the story’s focus on the failings of the contingency plan by the Alyeska Pipeline Consortium, reporter Christopher Reed observed in the second paragraph that the “American news-media interest is focusing on Mr. Joe Hazelwood” (pg. 20), and then directly stated that the focus was “diverting attention” from the more important focus on why four days had gone by without any tangible efforts to disperse the spill.

The second story appeared on Saturday April 1 and criticized Exxon for using Captain Hazelwood as a scapegoat (see #25 in Appendix). Titled “FBI to Launch Oil Spill Inquiry,” Washington D.C. correspondent Mark Tran was mildly sarcastic in his comment that “the
oil company has already thrown to the wolves the tanker captain . . . after receiving a report from federal investigators that he had failed a blood-alcohol test” (pg. 6). Later in the story, Tran commented again that “while Exxon laid blame for the disaster squarely on the shoulders of Capt. Hazelwood, the oil giant continued to be battered by criticism.” In addition to demonstrating the Guardian’s awareness of how Hazelwood was functioning as an easy but obscurant scapegoat, these comments also contributed to the larger frame of Exxon as self-interested and unconcerned about its effects on people or the environment.

As a related facet of its criticism for overplaying the role of the captain, the Guardian also seemed to express a mild undertone of empathy for the captain. While the Guardian did not justify the captain’s higher-than-legal blood-alcohol limit or fail to report the facts about the captain’s whereabouts and actions the night of the accident, it did not vilify the captain as other news media did, and also seemed – through stylistic treatment via inclusion of certain details or quotes, and in one case a photograph – to express a subtle degree of respect for the captain.

The first mention of the tanker captain appeared in the Guardian’s second story, titled “Alaskan Oil Slick Spreads as Captain is Questioned” (Monday March 27, 1989, pg. 6). After mentioning that the Coast Guard had subpoenaed the captain for questioning, he is described as a “20-year Exxon ship veteran.” A story on Wednesday May 17, primarily focused on rising hopes among some fishermen about salvaging a few fisheries after a fortuitous near-miss of the slick, concluded with details about the NTSB hearing into the disaster and specifically ended with a quote which portrayed the captain as self-aware about the role of a captain in the wake of such a disaster and as graciously accepting responsibility for the spill in the first hours after the wreck (see #28 in Appendix). Walker quoted Coastguard chief Mark Delozier telling him how Captain Hazelwood had said “within hours of the accident” that “he was responsible,” and that “he had overestimated the third mate’s ship-handling capabilities” (pg. 8).
Additional context provided through the Guardian’s development of a side nuance not seen in Seattle Times stories – specifically, reportage about events pertaining to Captain Hazelwood outside of Alaska, such as his disappearance from Alaska, his retreat to his Long Island home, and the NY state police search for him – also contributed to the sense of the Guardian’s more respectful treatment of the captain. Small details, such as the fact that Hazelwood lived in Huntington Bay, “a seaside village . . . with his wife, daughter and parents” (Tuesday April 4, 1989, pg. 24) offered by the Guardian’s New York correspondent Mary Brasler, helped to humanize the captain and present a fuller picture of his life outside the tainted image of his role as captain of the tanker that caused the worst oil spill in U.S. history.

In addition, the fact that the captain left Alaska at all when access out of Valdez was so difficult is blamed, not on the captain, but on the ineptitude of those in charge of the clean-up organization and operation. A story from April 3, with the headline “Oil Pipeline Faces Threat of Closure,” devoted nine of its 16 paragraphs to the captain’s disappearance from Alaska and related context, including his firing by Exxon. Reporter Reed commented that “the captain’s disappearance adds yet another example to the incidents of inefficiency that have plagued those in charge of the oil spill crisis” (pg. 9). Reed also marginalized the alcohol culprit fanaticized by other media by portraying alcohol use as part of a wider phenomenon among tanker crew. Reed’s comment that this fact was “widely known” undermined Exxon’s credibility, along with the potency and potential shock value of the fact that Hazelwood’s blood-alcohol was higher than industry regulations permitted, and twisted the blame back towards Exxon. Reed also made a point of mentioning that Exxon “took away the lawyer it had assigned [to Hazelwood]” after he was dismissed. These elements all furthered the frame of corporate selfishness.

A photograph that appeared in a Guardian story on Thursday April 6 – during the same few days when the NY State side angle was being reported in the paper – also contributed to this humanization of the captain by depicting him handsomely with a
somewhat rugged but pensive countenance wearing clothing that invoked images of traditional sailors’ shore garb. The prominent photograph is almost the same size as the entire 9-paragraph story, titled “Valdez Captain in Jail on $1m Bail,” with which it appeared. A hazy background hints of rocks, sand and ocean. The image and story work together in this case to further subtle support for the captain. The caption, which states merely: “Charged skipper . . . Mr. Joseph Hazelwood, the former captain of the Exxon tanker, Valdez,” combined with the headline focused on the high bail and the pensive expression and slightly furrowed brows evident on the captain’s face suggests a seaman who perhaps lost his job prematurely.

Finally, the Guardian’s criticism of Exxon and U.S. media for levying unwarranted scrutiny on the captain also contributed to the mild sense of respect for the captain. Criticizing Exxon for “throwing [Hazelwood] to the wolves” contained the implicit message that he was being thrown as bait to the media, and that his side should given a chance to be heard. Once again, Exxon is framed as merely interested in saving its own skin to the extent possible by diverting attention and fingers of blame unfairly at the captain.

**Storytelling Elements and Narrative Context**

In several places, the Guardian used a storytelling style of writing and incorporated narrative elements, such as poetic descriptions, narrative and scene-setting leads, description of observational details, strong and vivid imagery, and occasional use of dialogue writing in stories. In many cases, the narrative style was used to present particularly informative or descriptive context or information that would have been less interesting or effective presented in a hard-news manner.

One example of this can be seen in a Guardian story from Saturday April 15. Guardian correspondent Martin Walker had traveled to Alaska and published a story titled “Alaskan Clean-Up Gets Tangled in Red Tape” that explored some of the organizational problems that had caused needless delay in clean-up efforts (see #27 in Appendix). He used a narrative lead to
segue to the main point of the story about how clean-up crew had been forced to idle three hours doing nothing because they had been sent to the beach they were supposed to clean without the beach expert or ecologist, whose pre-cleaning inspections were mandatory before any work could begin. He also used a literary style to present details inside the story, such as the “ironic cheer” that “suddenly broke the silence” of the deceptively peaceful natural scene, a description which supported his later comment that “this operation is throttling itself with bureaucracy” (pg. 24). Together, the information had more impetus with the weight of the narrative context built up behind it. The narrative style – including use of the second person – was also more conducive to the presentation of important contextual detail about the ecological cues that the ecologist and beach expert were looking for to make their assessment:

“Without their approval, no work may begin. They check for signs of ancient human habitat, and for ‘environmental sensitivity.’ This means that if you can see the milky green of spawning herring in the shallow waters, or if there are salmon eggs dug into the gravel of a stream bed, or if this is designated as a nesting point, then no matter how thick the oil, the beach may not be cleaned” (pg. 24).

In other words, the story used its narrative base to augment important details that would have seemed less important reported in a more hard-news style. After the above description, Walker was able to use the accumulated weight of the many problems, obstacles, and requirements of clean-up efforts described in more painstaking narrative detail to make a powerful factual statement: “We are now nearly three weeks into the disaster. There are more than 3,000 beaches, or affected shorelines, inside Prince William Sound. So far, only 44 have been approved for cleaning” (pg. 24).

A different story, titled “Harbour Hits Slump as Oil Slick Spreads,” used an anecdotal lead and story frame to report about the devastation to fishermen as a result of the spill. The story, published on Thursday April 13, described the disruption to local lifestyles through the new vantage of a harbormaster saddened by the unnatural quietude and stillness of the fishing harbor, and used several direct quotes to capture the flavor of the man’s perspective and experience.
In another story, Walker flew with a helicopter scout attempting to locate oil slick positions aerially and used the experience as the lead to his narrative story about some of the challenges confronting Alaskans in the town of Seward to locate and deal with the spreading oil before it hit land. Walker included small descriptive details, such as describing a sign on a window, and contemporary details such as a present-tense description of how a “phone call comes in” (Wednesday April 12, 1989, “Wind Grounds Flying Eyes in Oil Slick Operation, pg. 24), that provided a perspective not possible from strict hard news writing, and painted a vividly real picture of what it was like to be in the midst of the disaster. The small details in particular helped to portray the spill as more complex and multifaceted than disproportionate reporting on news themes such as wildlife deaths, the tanker captain, or anger at Exxon would suggest.

Photographs

The Guardian published a total of 6 photographs related to the oil spill during the six-month study scope. While this represents a relatively small percentage of the total stories written – about 22 percent – the selected images were a diverse lot that touched on most of the major news angles covered in Guardian stories. The images included a photo of the tanker visible through oil-covered icebergs, an image of the tanker captain, one small image of a bird’s head, a head shot of Vice President Dan Quayle, and an image of Exxon chairman Lawrence Rawls at a hearing.

The Guardian’s first photograph is particularly interesting, however, because its visual theme is unique to the image, the topic not appearing in any Guardian stories. Contrary to the expectations of this thesis, the Guardian did not publish any photographs about the spill until its third story on Tuesday March 28. The lead story did not have an accompanying picture, and the first photograph it did publish was not an image of the stricken tanker or the Alaskan wilderness befouled by oil, but a large and prominent photograph of Gary Kompkoff, leader of the Tatitlek town council – predominantly inhabited by native Alaskans – wearing a hat
and vest and standing near what appears to be the bow of a boat pointing towards something not seen off the left edge of the photo (see #22 in Appendix). In the background, a church and a few buildings – which are presumed to belong to the town of Tatitlek – are visible across a body of water with white-capped mountains behind them. The caption reads: “Oil peril . . . Gary Kompkoff, leader of Tatitlek town council, talks of the risks facing his home on Prince William Sound” (pg. 10).

What is interesting about this photograph is that it provides information presented nowhere else in any of the Guardian’s 27 stories, and also intimates that Native Alaskans will be affected by the oil spill. Altogether, the elements of the image, including the caption, frame the spill as a threat to Native Alaskans, whose home – shown in the background – is at risk from oil affecting areas important to Tatitlek residents, which Kompkoff was in the process of showing to those on the boat with him. His stance and posture pointing out things familiar to him, coupled with the caption, which describes him as informing others about threats to his home, collude to give him a subtle air of authority in the image.

Given the Guardian’s attention to other overlooked issues and angles related to the oil spill, it is curious that this photo was chosen to stand alone, with no story taking the image’s context further in words. At the same time, however, in lieu of writing a story focusing on the perspective and threats to Native Alaskans, the photograph – given a prominent placement on the page, and the largest visual element of any other feature – still serves to give a presence to Native Alaskans where most media, even the Seattle Times, gave scant or no attention at all. By offering an unavoidable image, instead of brief reference easily lost in a larger story, the Guardian gives voice – though a minor voice via visual framing – to the existence of the Native Alaskans and ensures that their presence is included in the community of locals affected by the spill typically portrayed as including just the fishermen, Anglo residents, tourist operators, and business owners of the Alaskan Sound.
Summary

The Guardian’s emphasis on development of systemic story frames which pointed to America’s desire for cheap oil and corporate greed as more important underlying causes of major spill disasters allowed the paper’s 27 stories to be highly informative despite the fewer number of stories published. Combining narrative storytelling techniques – in particular, eyewitness accounts – with thoughtful or novel information in places where reporting on the spill could have easily been overly dramatized resulted in the Guardian producing surprisingly informative stories that avoided the pitfalls of disaster news coverage – especially for an international newspaper. By having Guardian correspondents travel to Alaska to report on the spill, the paper was able to develop its own unique perspective on the spill that otherwise would have been impossible from afar. In addition, the fact that the paper even sent reporters to cover the spill in person indicates a dedication to covering important environmental issues to the best of its abilities.

Comparison of the Seattle Times and Guardian

Both the Seattle Times and the Guardian successfully dealt with the complicated and difficult story of the Exxon Valdez disaster. The complexities of the spill, and the journalistic practices which led other media astray, were negotiated with skill and delicacy by these two papers as a result of specific, conscientious reporting decisions. When analyzed together, it is evident the two papers shared some of the same reporting techniques. Both the Seattle Times and the Guardian specifically emphasized story contexts and developed deeper systemic frames. This fact alone allowed the papers to sidestep some of the more insidious traps of disaster reporting.

The papers also used more literary and narrative approaches that allowed them to better express important nuances of the spill that would otherwise have been lost in a traditional event-driven approach which tends to rely on easy symbols, standard accessible sources, and short-term causes and consequences. While the Seattle Times developed more
nuances, side stories, and angles of the spill, the fact that the *Guardian* produced so many of its own stories on the spill – despite the international nature of the disaster, which thus negated proximity as a news factor – indicates a dedication to coverage of important environmental issues and a more global perspective on the environment itself.
5. **Prestige – Spain’s “Environmental Nightmare”**

As a case study of the media’s ability to report on an exceptionally complex ecological disaster, the *Prestige* spill could not be a better model. Everything about the disaster was messy, from the tanker’s agonizingly protracted pollution of Galician and French coastlines, to the record devastation to the region’s environment and heavily fishing-dependent communities, to the Spanish’s government’s mishandling of the situation and the byzantine web of ownership which confounded attempts to determine who was responsible for the disaster – and for compensation.

In many respects, it was a disaster which should never have happened. On November 13, 2002, one of the ship’s tanks burst during a storm off the Galician coast in the northwest of Spain. Worried the ship might sink, the tanker’s captain called for help from Spanish authorities. However, instead of towing the *Prestige* into a safe harbor where it could be repaired or off-loaded, the Spanish government banished the 26-year old, single-hulled tanker from its coast. Refused safe ports of call by both Portugal and France, the damaged tanker, leaking a trail of heavy fuel oil, ended up being towed aimlessly around a particularly rough section of the Atlantic Ocean for almost six days, destined ultimately for Africa when no other European nations would accept it, before fierce weather gales finally caused the tanker to break in half on the morning of November 19, 2002. By day’s end, after a dramatic display of its death throes, the *Prestige* was completely gone, sunk over two miles beneath the Atlantic, where it would continue to seep hundreds of tons of oil a day into open water, eventually re-polluting beaches already coated and cleaned.

Neither the Spanish nor the Portuguese governments wanted to accept responsibility for the disaster. Spain tried to blame Great Britain, claiming the tanker was en route to Gibraltar, an overseas territory of Britain since the early 18th century. The Spanish government also tried to pin the wreck on the tanker’s Greek captain, accusing him of having obstinately refused to heed Spanish directives. Ultimately, the spill affected more than 1,800
miles of coastline along the Iberian Peninsula, from northern Portugal to southwestern France, with Spanish Galicia suffering the greatest damage. The pollution process languished across months as a result of bad decisions and premature assessments of the oil’s likelihood of solidifying in the cold depths of the sunken tanker. In addition, when Spain finally acknowledged that the tanker’s sunken oil was a serious problem, the depth of the shipwreck presented new logistical and technological difficulties. No one had ever tried to recover oil from a tanker so far beneath the ocean, and the heartiest robotic submersibles were only capable of dealing with pressure up to about 1.5 miles under the sea.

The media’s response to the disaster was likewise extraordinary. Raul Garcia of World Wildlife Foundation-Spain said in a November 2003 report on the disaster that “never in the history of Spain had an environmental disaster aroused such public outcry, exerted such a political impact, or elicited such media coverage as the Prestige spill” (pg. 4). Indeed, in journalistic terms, the Prestige was a disaster of the truest kind. The tanker’s heavy fuel oil wreaked havoc on an ecologically cornerstone area that, as Tito Drago of the regional paper Tierramérica reported eight months after the spill, is “the European region mostly highly dependent on its coastal and fishing resources.” Interwoven with the raw devastation were tangled threads of complexity and controversial angles ripe for the telling. The spill could easily have conformed to the classic disaster narrative. Images of dead birds and fishermen trying to hold back the oiled waves with their bare hands flooded television screens around the region. Death to birds reached record levels for Europe, estimated at between 250,000 and 300,000 – rivaling the high tally after the Exxon Valdez. The spill is expected to be the costliest in history, in part because a majority of the region’s people, many of them fishermen, suffered substantial economic loss. In Galicia alone 120,000 people were directly or indirectly affected by damage to the fishing and shellfishing industries there, according to Garcia (pg. 19).

As told by the Guardian and Seattle Times, however, the Prestige spill was more than just a prototypical oil spill disaster, but an even more egregious example of industry failings and inconsistencies within the system of maritime standards. As this study’s textual analysis
found, the Guardian focused primarily on the interrelated ecological aspects and threats to the region’s largely family-based fishing communities, dependent on the rich coastal and marine ecosystems responsible for supplying a significant percentage of the total European fish catch. Predictable themes observed in media coverage of earlier oil spills, such as a focus on the tanker captain – who police also arrested in this case and charged an exorbitant £1 million bail – scarcely appeared in the paper’s coverage of the Prestige spill. Instead, through a dual focus on the ecological and regional consequences, and a strong focus on deeper systemic issues aided by rich historical context, the Guardian framed the spill as a preventable disaster caused by serious bureaucratic inefficiencies and an industry more driven by capitalistic self-interest than responsible stewardship. The Guardian’s treatment of the Prestige spill is also particularly noteworthy for its outstanding convergence reporting. Making full use of print and web technologies, the paper developed extensive online material about aspects of the spill best reported through audio-visual means, and repeatedly alerted readers to its existence by prominent asides, teases, and advertisements within its suite of print spill stories.

Most of the Seattle Times’ spill stories were written by wire services or outside news media. However, the wire stories the paper selected to publish also emphasized the ecological and regional consequences and, like the Guardian, explored pressing questions of maritime standards and questionable industry ethics. Despite the international nature of the news, the paper ran a steady stream of wire stories throughout the study interval, though fewer than the Guardian. Additionally, in the two cases where the Seattle Times published its own material on the spill, the overwhelming emphases were on the deeper systemic problems of greed and sloth within the shipping and oil industries – epitomized by the reluctance to pay for safer vessels and their reliance on cheap, ageing, single-hulled tankers – and the public’s fickle, short-lived concern for environmental disasters like oil spills. As a result, the Seattle Times framed the spill as a preventable disaster caused primarily by glaring self-interest on the part of industry concerned more with its bottom line than with stewardship and responsible business.
The Guardian

The Guardian published a total of 33 stories about the Prestige spill between Thursday November 14, 2002 and Sunday March 16, 2003. The overwhelming majority – 20, or about 61 percent – appeared in the month of November. Perhaps significantly, 42 percent of the Guardian’s total spill coverage over the 6-month interval – 14 stories – is accounted for in just 4 days of reporting between Wednesday November 20 and Sunday November 24. The dates coincide with the immediate aftermath of the tanker’s break-up and sinking on November 19. On November 20 and 21 the Guardian published 4 stories per day, and 3 stories per day on November 22 and 24. If the first 3 stories prior to the actual sinking of the tanker are counted, the Guardian published a total of 17 stories in the first 11 days after the Prestige first signaled distress on November 13 – accounting for just over half of its total spill output over the study interval. In December 2002 and January 2003, the paper published 5 stories each per month (about 15 percent). Only 1 story was published in February, 2 stories in March, and no stories during April and May, the last two months of the study interval.

In many ways, the Guardian’s distribution of stories parallels the nature of the spill story. Initially, the Prestige was just a damaged, leaking tanker looking for a place to safely dock in order to stanch the leak and make repairs. While the five days during which the tanker was carted around the Atlantic permitted enough oil to leak so that environmental damage was substantial, the actual sinking of the ship took everyone by surprise and drove the realization that a tanker-full of oil would be perpetually enshrined under water close to Spanish, Portuguese, and French coasts. The threat of an even more serious disaster thus became more imminent, and the severity of the spill solidified into the realm of catastrophe.

As such, the Guardian’s concentrated story distribution reflects the surprising and stark developments during the critical first two weeks following the spill. Curiously, this is also the interval when the Guardian published the majority of its stories of a systemic nature. With the exception of one story published in early January, nine of the Guardian’s 10 stories
with a systemic focus or bent coincide with the most significant breaking developments in the spill during the first two weeks. The conjunction underscores the Guardian’s conscious attempt to penetrate the deeper issues surrounding the spill as well as its attempt to develop a more probing systemic frame for the disaster. After this period, however, the Prestige spill diverged from the normal phenotype of other spills in that it remained a long-drawn affair which stretched out over months – ultimately, through August 2003 when authorities and scientists realized that 60 percent more oil had escaped the tanker than had been believed.

Thus, the news accounts that fell within the scope of this thesis had to reckon with an unusually persistent and uncertain spill scenario. Developments in the spill tended to be of a more homogenous, chronic – but not breaking or overly novel – nature. The Guardian dealt with the situation by updating readers about developments related to new slicks from the leaking, submerged tanker – as well as the emerging threat to France’s Aquitaine oyster region, affected by some of those slicks – and tracking the efforts of the Spanish and French to deploy submersibles and robot scouts to assess the status of the tanker or patch holes, or examining aspects of the clean-up process. The Guardian’s story distribution reflects this comparative lull in news developments owing to the atypical prolonging of the pollution affair, and it may therefore be noteworthy that the paper decided to end its coverage in mid-March during this relative lull instead of carrying it through May.

Overall, most of the Guardian’s stories appeared in the International section of the paper, save for the instances when a strong British local angle appeared in a story. However, beginning on Wednesday November 20, the Guardian created a special “Tanker Disaster” section where most of the Prestige stories appeared (see #33 in Appendix). The special section floated between the Home and International sections of the paper, but was advertised from the front page and also contained a hard-to-miss dark bold heading. The special section only lasted for 8 stories, which also coincided with the Guardian’s concentrated reporting between Wednesday November 20 and Friday November 22.
**Themes and News Angles**

While many of the usual threads of an oil spill disaster story appeared in *Guardian* stories about the *Prestige*—such as updates about the movements of the various slicks, effects on wildlife, and the proceedings of the clean-up effort—the three angles most noticeable in the *Guardian*'s coverage focused on the environmental consequences, the effects on fishermen—and by extension, the livelihoods of a regionally distinct group—and the systemic underpinnings of the disaster. For this spill, the ecological threats were closely interwoven with threats to fishermen in the *Guardian*'s narrative.

One issue that *Guardian* stories focused on almost immediately was the status and history of the tanker itself. The fact that the *Prestige* was a 26-year old tanker with a contested safety history, built during an era when many tankers were mass produced at sub-standard quality, became a topic of immediate importance in the pages of the *Guardian*. The tanker’s age became a hook for stories of a systemic nature, many of which examined the issue of single versus double-hulled ships. Combined with the overwhelming focus on the other two angles, the story of the *Prestige* thus became the story of a regional environmental and economic disaster caused almost solely by the manipulations of a self-interested industry that actively dodged regulation while seeking to maximize profits by knowingly contracting aging vessels to transport a substance notorious for its ecological toxicity.

One angle that was noticeably absent in *Guardian* stories was any sort of focus on the real or alleged role of the tanker’s captain, Apostolos Mangouras. With the exception of a few references to some fact of his imprisonment or bail bond, the *Guardian* completely bypassed the Spanish government’s accusations about Mangouras’ role in the disaster and speculations at large in society, instead focusing on the history of the tanker and the role of the Spanish government in causing a much more severe pollution disaster.
Ecology and Fishing Intertwined

Throughout Guardian stories, a palpable current of concern for the ecological consequences of the spill was observed, often closely coupled with narrative about the threats to fishermen and coastal fishing communities. Almost immediately, the Prestige spill was billed as an environmental disaster. While the environmental damage had not yet spread widely, the Guardian’s first story on Thursday November 14 established the prominent ecological disaster frame by presaging the ominous possibility: “Spain was bracing itself for an environmental disaster last night as a tanker carrying 77,000 tonnes of fuel began spilling oil while struggling to save itself from sinking off the north-west Atlantic coast” (pg. 19). The portent for fishermen reverberated through the story as well. The Guardian concluded this lead story with an ominous historical reference to the 1992 Aegean Sea tanker disaster, which occurred in virtually the same area off Galicia, and was “a major disaster for a local economy that remains heavily dependent on the sea” (pg. 19).

The paper’s second story on Monday November 18 more closely concatenated the two key threads of ecology and fishing (see #29 in Appendix). The lead paragraph of the front-page story informed readers about the first major slick to hit the coasts and ended by stating that it was “devastating local fishing grounds, coastal ecosystems and birdlife” (pg. 1). The superscript heading to the story – “Wildlife suffers as slick swamps Spanish coast” – accompanied a prominent photograph of an oiled shearwater, a bird rare to Spain, on a beach. Later in the story, reporter Giles Tremlett – one of the Guardian’s main reporters on location in Spain – employed two tactics for conjoining the ecology and fishing angles that would become routine methods observed throughout the Guardian’s coverage, namely: 1) providing information about the status of wildlife followed immediately by information about fishermen; and 2) citing environmentalists and fishermen together, or using sources derived primarily from these two groups. Coupled with the Guardian’s simultaneous focus on the larger meta-causes of the spill, these methods emphasized the importance of ecological soundness to the regional stability of the area hit by the Prestige spill.
For example, in this November 18 story, Tremlett followed a paragraph about bird rescue centers with a paragraph about fishermen that compressed narrative detail with factual emphasis on the effects already felt: “Local fishermen and those who harvest the wealth of goose barnacles, mussels, crabs and octopus sat watch gloomily on rain-lashed cliffs and beaches as black waves washed over some of Europe’s richest seafood grounds” (pg. 1). Later in the story, Tremlett wrote that “fishermen and environmentalists” warned that despite the smaller quantity of oil spilt by the *Prestige* in comparison to the earlier *Aegean Sea* disaster, “the impact on local ecosystems would be worse” (pg. 2). This dual citing invested the knowledge of fishermen with a degree of authority equal to that of the environmentalists, presumably basing their opinions on scientific knowledge, while accentuating the emphasis on the predicted ecological impacts. The fact that fishermen were prognosticating such widespread ecological damage also emphasized their own dependence on the local ecosystem, thus binding the two themes closely together and framing the spill as both an ecological disaster and a threat to a regional way of life.

This pattern is seen several times in *Guardian* stories, in several instances by making use of narrative and storytelling techniques. The paper’s third story on Tuesday November 19 – written just before the tanker broke up and started sinking early on Tuesday morning – engaged the same tactics. The story, titled “Got a Sticky Problem? Don’t Worry, You Can Always Dump it on Africa,” is a perspicacious systemic examination of the much bigger, but little explored, global problem of the developed world’s perception and treatment of developing nations (*see #30 in Appendix*). Tremlett structured his mildly sarcastic story around the new context that the *Prestige* would be taken to Africa because no European nations wanted to deal with the “ticking time-bomb” (pg. 3). In the process of examining what this NIMBY attitude held by European nations meant globally, he again engaged the tactic of consecutive ecological / fishing references. A paragraph about how the “vessel was last night close to an especially rich part of the Atlantic seabed known as the Galician bank” (pg. 3) is followed immediately with a paragraph describing the “long faces” of fishermen.
who had gathered in a café as a result of a recently implemented shellfishing ban. A large section of the story goes on to interview local mayors, fishermen, and regional nature reserve wardens about memories of effects after earlier spills and recent effects to nature preserves. By the next day, November 20, the spill had morphed from being “Europe’s biggest environmental headache” (Tuesday November 19, 2002, pg. 3) to “threatening Europe’s biggest ecological disaster in a decade” (pg. 1) as the stricken tanker cracked and started sinking close to the Galician coast. The implications of this development to the ecological and economic vitality of the region were suddenly magnified many-fold, and subsequent Guardian stories reflected the starkly augmented gravity of the situation by focusing even more on the intertwined ecological and regional implications. The paper published stories focused on the effects to various regional villages that featured the voices of local fishermen. The paper also printed environmentally-oriented stories exploring the nature of the particular type of oil involved and continued to engage the tactics already explained of closely interweaving the ecological and fishing aspects into the story narrative.

A story on November 20, for example – the paper’s fourth story of the day – focused exclusively on the environmental aspects of the disaster by exploring in detail how type of oil and climate factored into the severity of a spill (see #32 in Appendix). Paul Brown, the Guardian’s environment editor, wrote the story, headed “Spill will Test Nature’s Ability to Recover,” which appeared in the newly created “Tanker Disaster” section. At the bottom of the story was a large convergence ad box titled “guardian.co.uk, on the site today” in bold, with detailed explanations of the online specials, interactives, and audio reports on the paper’s website – including an audio feature focused on the dual “environmental impacts on coastal wildlife and the people of Galicia” (pg. 5). A story from December 2 mainly about a new slick from the tanker that had moved “perilously close” to Galicia devoted time to explaining the “great concern for nearby areas which [were] breeding grounds for many species of shark, dolphin, porpoise, seal and turtle” (pg. 15), and followed the segment immediately with perspective of local fishermen.
Other stories maintained the awareness of the particularly interconnected place of ecology in the area hit by the Prestige by highlighting the dependency of locals on the sea and using quotes from fishermen explaining how oil affected important marine species like mussels and clams. Some stories not primarily about environmental or fishing aspects maintained an ecological focus in their headlines. For instance, a story from Monday November 22 updating readers about new slicks and other ships believed to be exploiting the spill to illegally clean their own tanks, contained very few internal references to wildlife, but had the main headline “Wildlife Suffers as Oil Spreads Along Spanish Coast” (pg. 18). The story’s primary focus was identified in a smaller sub-heading beneath this.

**Systemic Focus and Frame**

Systemic issues formed the other predominant focus of Guardian stories about the Prestige spill. The tanker’s old age and the fact that it was single-hulled served as fodder for many stories exploring the tanker’s checkered history and regulatory issues, use of flags of convenience and cheap older vessels, and industry ethics that prompted calculated action to avoid regulation, resist upgrading to double-hulled vessels, and seek the cheapest means available of shipping oil. Attention to systemic issues was often integrated with the paper’s other dual focus on ecology and fishing. In doing so, the Guardian is following its own precedent. While integration of these topics may have been, to some extent, a natural element of the Prestige story because of the facts of the spill – for instance, that the widespread devastation was primarily the result of an outdated tanker plying a particularly sensitive and dangerous section of ocean – the Guardian has demonstrated a propensity to pinpoint these deeper issues in the past. The degree to which it developed in-depth systemic angles here suggests a conscious attempt to highlight the specific regulatory and industry problems that allowed the Prestige to set sail in the first place.

While the first story of a primary systemic nature does not appear until the Guardian’s third story, the paper introduced the systemic frame early in its second spill story
on Monday November 18. After the story’s lead, which advanced the fishing / ecology focus, reporter Giles Tremlett referred to the tanker in the second paragraph as “the ageing, single-hulled Prestige” (pg. 1), introducing one of the key systemic elements of the Prestige disaster which would become an acute focus in subsequent Guardian stories. The same story suggested that the debate between Britain and Spain boiled down to arguing over “who was to blame for the decrepit state of the vessel.” Though the rest of the story focused on other topics, it concluded by mentioning that “the EU has agreed to phase out single-hull tankers by 2015” (pg. 2), thus ending the story on a systemic note. The story also included a map and mini-graphic illustrating the differences between single and double-hulled ships.

The Guardian’s third story, about how the Prestige was being towed to Africa, supplied important systemic context that “one-sixth of the world’s fleet of 6,000 tankers was as aged and decrepit as the Prestige” (pg. 3), and used the story of the Prestige to introduce a related pervasive systemic problem of how the developed world perceives the role of developing nations. Tremlett described the solution to tow the Prestige to Africa as a “ruse” and quoted an environmental source describing the practice as “a way of getting rid of [Europe’s] environmental problems by exporting them to the developing world” (pg. 3). Tremlett returned to this point at the end of his story, concluding with the powerful systemic and global context that “although spills in Europe and the US got most publicity, many of the worst tanker disasters had occurred off Africa” (pg. 3) – a statement which implicated media as much as governments in the peripheral concern for developing nations.

The next day – the same day that the Prestige had broken up and sunk – the Guardian published one of its more telling systemic stories exposing the fact that a slew of tankers had been mass-produced during a surge in tanker manufacturing in the 1970’s. Reporters Tremlett in Spain and Owen Bowcott in Britain gathered comments from an editor of the highly respected Lloyd’s List shipping newspaper in Britain revealing that the Prestige had been among “a large number of tankers built in Japan during the boom years of the 1970’s,” a fact which had started “triggering international disputes about maritime safety” (pg. 1). The story
also included highly critical commentary from France’s President Jacques Chirac, who had become the most vocal European leader condemning the Prestige spill and calling for accelerated implementation of stricter maritime rules (see #31 in Appendix).

Several other stories in the concentrated window of days between November 20 and 24 canvassed other systemic issues in depth, many of them concerned with maritime safety and profit-driven practices of the shipping and oil. The second story of Wednesday November 20, appearing in the newly created “Tanker Disaster section,” explored what it meant that the Prestige “may have split along old lines of repair,” as the story’s sub-heading suggested, and provided new context that the Prestige was among a cohort of tankers of its age and build to have sunk in recent years, as well as the startling fact that 60 percent of the world’s tanker fleet was still single-hulled (pg. 5).

A story the next day, headed “Oil Giants Still Hire Cheaper, Older Ships,” suggested that the oil industry had tried to mask its main interest in profit beneath a veneer of environmental concern (see #33 in Appendix – story “G008a”). Reporter Terry Macalister scoured shipping industry records and commented, somewhat wryly, that “while Shell and others are keen to trumpet their commitment to the environment . . . their records suggest they are mainly choosing vessels on the basis of price” (pg. 5). The story continued by providing more specific information about the age and history of ships chartered in recent weeks by some of the major oil companies.

On Sunday November 24, the Guardian published two feature-length stories specifically of a systemic nature in its Sunday-only sister paper the Observer. Both the Guardian and the Observer are owned by the Guardian Media Group. While the Guardian is published on weekdays and Saturdays, the Observer is essentially the Guardian’s Sunday edition. The Guardian also published an online special by one of its regular monthly contributors. While the first story, titled “How Oil Slick Will Bring Black Death to Coast’s Way of Life,” constructed a probing anecdotal narrative focused on fishermen in the Galician village of Caion, the story contained a strong systemic component that was an integral part of
the narrative on fishermen. After quoting a local town councilor speculating that he “supposed at some point [the disaster] would end,” the story immediately transitioned into a powerful systemic comment related to the *Prestige* that directly addressed the deeper problems of worldwide demand for cheap oil and wanton industry self-interest:

“It might. But that will not end the controversy about how a rapacious industry that feeds the insatiable demand for cheap oil across the world operates largely hidden from scrutiny and regulation, trading through a bewildering chain of companies that defy attempts by government and environmentalists to guard against such disaster” (pg. 18).

The story then devoted a substantial section to exploring the dubious and labyrinthine ownership history of the tanker, which traced back to a supremely wealthy Russian industry mogul who also happened to own the British company that chartered the *Prestige*. The story, written by three reporters gathering information in both Spain and London, included another strong systemic statement near the end that pinpointed a problem underlying many tanker accidents: “It is this ‘flag of convenience’ system that is blamed by environmentalists as one of the main factors that allows cheap-to-rent, sub-standard vessels, manned by untrained crews, to travel the world’s ocean with impunity” (pg. 18).

The other print story of the day was a commentary by *Guardian* columnist Will Hutton, titled “Capitalism Must Put Its House in Order,” which probed the wider issues of globalization and de-regulation of the shipping and oil industries in context of the *Prestige* disaster. In the process, Hutton made a few strongly condemnatory systemic comments that expressed the larger systemic frame of industry self-interest: “The Prestige was not just a garbage ship,” Hutton wrote. “It has exposed the international framework of maritime regulation and attitudes of many shipping companies as garbage as well” (pg. 30). The online special by Ian Willmore of the environmental group Friends of the Earth, and regular monthly *Guardian* columnist, explored in detail the “complex web of ownership and control behind the oil tanker disaster,” arguing that the disaster “showed the worst excesses of corporate globalization in action,” thus complementing Hutton’s print feature on
globalization and industry regulation. The piece relied on extensive reporting to unveil the facts behind the various companies and parties involved.

**British Local Angle**

In several instances, the *Guardian* developed story pegs of interest to home readers in Britain, whether by developing an angle on the home front related to the *Prestige* spill in more depth, referring to context widely known by most Britons, or by seeking a British source to quote. One news angle related to the *Prestige* spill by its intrinsic nature extended into the British domain – namely, Spain’s accusations that Britain was to blame for the disaster because the tanker was supposedly on its way to Gibraltar (*see #29 in Appendix*). The *Guardian’s* second story on November 18 clearly indicated this angle in its headline: “Spain Blames UK for Oil Disaster” (pg. 1). After informing readers the Britain and Spain had become “embroiled in a bitter row” over blame, reporter Giles Tremlett wrote in the story’s third paragraph that: “the Spanish government produced documents from shipping authorities in Latvia and France allegedly showing the *Prestige* was bound for Gibraltar, a revelation that could worsen the political row over the Rock” (pg. 1). Immediately after reporting this and allowing the Spanish a paragraph to comment, Tremlett provided contrary evidence from Crown Resources, owners of the oil on board the *Prestige*, who Tremlett wrote “had repeatedly said the vessel was going to Singapore” (pg. 1).

To understand the importance of this context to local British readers, it is important to understand that the issue of sovereignty over Gibraltar has been a major source of contention between Britain and Spain for centuries – since 1713 when Spain ceded control over to Britain after the War of Spanish Succession. Located on the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula, the British Overseas Territory shares a border with Spain, but throughout history has been an important naval base for the British Armed Forces. In the 1960’s, Spain entirely closed the border to Gibraltar and severed all communication links after a referendum asking voters’ preferences for Spanish versus British sovereignty overwhelmingly chose to remain
under the British. Later, in 1981, the Spanish king at the time refused to attend the wedding of Prince Charles and Princess Diana after they had announced plans to board their honeymoon ship in Gibraltar. Despite joint talks in recent years between the two nations over the future of Gibraltar – and a second referendum on joint sovereignty, which was soundly rejected by the people there – the issue has continued to figure into Anglo-Spanish relations. Thus, Spain’s accusation that Britain had caused the *Prestige* disaster because of Gibraltar added an important layer of meaning to the local angle, potentially aggravating a much older and deeper source of political tension.

Some stories added a British peg by examining the role of Crown Resources, the shipping subsidiary based in London that had chartered the *Prestige*. Other stories cited British ornithological or shipping experts where possible, or examined the *Prestige* in conjunction with related historical context of spills that had occurred near Britain, such as a January 3 story by Paul Brown centered on the WWF’s calls for better government action to prevent tanker disasters. The story opened by invoking the historical context of the *Braer* tanker disaster near the coast of Shetland in 1993, and after examining the ecological and political context of that spill, segued into how the *Prestige* spill was playing into the symphony of calls from around Europe to prevent tanker spills.

Hutton’s systemic commentary about globalization and regulation from Sunday November 24 also played off local political context to get into his case for regulation of the oil industry. The story opened with the comment that “even the committed deregulator Tony Blair might have borrowed President Chirac’s description of the *Prestige* as a garbage ship” (pg. 30), thus using a clever contrast based on context familiar to local readers to introduce the commentary’s wider focus on the *Prestige* spill.

One news brief from November 29 mentioned that some oil from the *Prestige* had “come ashore at Caw Sand Bay” near Devon (pg. 7), and the *Guardian’s* last story on Sunday March 16, titled “High Tides Add to French Oil Slick Woes,” made a point of including a local British angle into information about the threats to tourism in the French Aquitaine
region affected by the oil spill. Reporter Paul Webster specifically mentioned that Biarritz, one of the areas hit, was “a favourite British holiday zone,” and later emphasized the effect of the spill on British tourists by commenting that “as much as 20 percent of holidaymakers [in three French counties] are from Britain” (pg. 23). The statement had the dual effect of highlighting how the lost tourism might also affect the economic welfare of the affected French areas as well as British holiday plans.

**Regional Galician Identity – Families Bound to the Sea**

In addition to the *Guardian’s* emphasis on the threat to fishermen as a strong news theme, *Guardian* stories also suggested a unique regional identity based on the special connection between fishermen of the Galician region and the historical source of their livelihoods, the sea. In the case of Galicia – an autonomous region of Spain with its own regional president – fishing was often a tradition that involved entire families and was passed down through the generations. *Guardian* stories picked up on this and fostered a sense of regional identity uniquely and specifically structured around the family-oriented nature of fishing to the Galician communities that depended almost entirely on the sea for survival. *Guardian* stories also suggested a regional identity by specifically referring to the wide variety of marine species harvested by local people – identifying each by name – and in a few instances, including regional Galician dialect to illustrate the complex structure of the fishing community. The tactics emphasized even more the critical importance of fishing to daily life.

*Guardian* stories repeatedly included narratives about fishermen in terms of the variety of unique species they either harvested or were being prevented from harvesting because of the spill. Interviews with fishermen were often padded with literary details such as how a fisherman “should have been out harvesting valuable goose barnacles,” or “out fishing for octopus” (Tuesday November 19, 2002, pg. 3). One story included narrative context about how a woman was “carting sacks of clams into the market.” Other stories included substantial detail about the traditional methods used to harvest species like mussels,
clams, winkles and goose barnacles followed with explanations or quotes about how the shellfish would die from oil contamination. The detailed narratives underscored both the regional identities and the serious threats to the people’s traditional livelihoods.

While the Guardian’s conjunction of the threats to ecology and fishermen helped to construct the sense of a regional identity, several stories specifically highlighted the family-oriented nature of fishing in the affected regions and the potential loss to an entire regional way of life as a result of the spill. Several local fishermen and women were quoted emphasizing how “everyone here lives from the sea” (Wednesday November 20, 2002, pg. 2), or expressing grave concern that the devastation to fish, shellfish, octopus, clams, mussels, rays and other marine species so critical to the local economy would force entire villages to be abandoned.

A large feature story about fishermen from Thursday November 21 (see #33 in Appendix) picked up on this widespread current of concern and incorporated it into the story’s subhead: “Villagers fear having to abandon home were 6,000 depend on the sea” (pg. 5). The lead paragraph of the narrative piece by Tremlett quoted a local fisherman in the lead saying, “We know there’s oil floating out there. If this storm brings it in, we might as well all emigrate.” The very next paragraph, Tremlett made a point of mentioning that the fisherman was a “son and grandson of O Grove mussel gatherers,” and that “he was not the only one talking of packing his bags if the sunken oil tanker . . . spilled its deadly cargo” (pg. 5). Other fishermen worried that “the whole town will have to close down” if the oil came ashore, and Tremlett pointed out that even the women of fishing families were intimately involved with seafood-gathering. He quoted “two thick-armed sisters” who went out every day to “gather clams and winkles” also expressing worry that they would be forced to emigrate. The story also chose to emphasize the family nature of fishing in its singular bolded pull-quote from an O Grove village fisherman: “‘My father, my brother, and my cousin work with me on the boat. We all have families. If we can’t fish, nobody will have anything to eat.”
The Guardian’s Sunday feature on fishermen and their coastal way of life in the Observer on November 24 opened with the descriptive detail of a fishermen scrubbing “fuel oil off his mother-in-law’s doorstep,” and emphasized the integrated economic family structure of fishing in Galicia:

“It is the fishermen of Galicia who have been the first victims of the Prestige disaster. Those fishermen put out more boats than the rest of the EU fleet put together in an enterprise worth more than £190m a year, divided among family-owned boats whose efforts sustain entire communities along the coast” (pg. 18).

The story also featured the regional dialect of Galician fishermen, another method by which Guardian stories fostered a sense of regional identity. After quoting a local fisherman who “expected to lose two-thirds of his income harvesting spider crab, octopus, sole and rays” (pg. 18), the story emphasized the complex and deeply rooted structure of fishing to local people by using Galician regional terms to identify people who made their living from the sea in ways besides fishing:

“It is not just the fishermen [who would lose money]. It is also the marisqueros who have been hit, the men and women who make a living raking clams and cockles from estuary sands, hauling ropes of mussels in from platforms set in protected inlets, or grabbing goose barnacles off the rocks without getting swept into an angry sea.”

The level of detail provided about the nature of this task and methods used by these “marisqueros” to avoid the “angry sea” illustrates the skill required to carry out the job, further stressing the fact of fishing as a traditional way of life. Immediately after this passage, the story introduced Mari-Carmen Lista, “a percebeiro,” or “one of those who earns a living collecting goose barnacles off the rocks,” in anecdotal fashion and described how she would likely lose £80 per kilo as a result of the spill (pg. 18).

A story on Monday December 2 with the headline “New Oil Slick Threatens Galicia” also made a point of including a quote that expressed the family-oriented regional fishing identity. Though the bulk of the story focused mainly on providing details about the new slick, including the threats to wildlife and the French submarine Nautil that was about to go investigate the sunken tanker, the story’s single quote from a fisherman stressed this
identity: “‘They call this the Costa da Morte [coast of death],’ said Juan Antonio Toja, head of the fisherman’s cooperative in the village of Laxe. ‘It couldn’t be more appropriately named. Hundreds of families are without work and it is unclear when they will be able to go fish again’” (pg. 15). The Guardian also selected this quote to emphasize in the story’s pull-quote space. Thus, in addition to the ecological and systemic frames for the disaster, the Guardian framed the spill as a reckless – but preventable – disaster which was threatening the very survival of a region’s identity.

**Historical and Global Context**

References to historical and global contexts featured prominently in Guardian stories about the Prestige spill. These contexts were often integral means of providing a deeper perspective on everything from threats to the Galician coast, to the scope of the Prestige spill and its ecological and economic significance, to unique historical contexts about the expertise of a French submarine noted for its “important role in finding the wreck of the Titanic” (Monday December 2, 2002, pg. 15) that was leading a pioneering effort to investigate and patch the sunken wreck of the Prestige.

Many stories of a systemic nature drew on historical contexts pertaining to tanker manufacturing and spill statistics for single-hulled vessels built in the 1970’s. Stories also frequently referenced the Exxon Valdez spill in order to make comparisons with type of oil and its effects, ecological damage, and subsequent clean-up costs. One story from Friday November 29 referenced the Amoco Cadiz spill to help explain how the Brittany coast had “suffered from several oil spills from wrecked tankers” in the past 25 years (Friday November 29, 2002, pg. 17). The story was about a ship of the same questionable age, safety, and destination as its sister ship, the Prestige, which was heading past France towards the site of the Prestige spill. On Wednesday November 20, the Guardian also published a large information box full of historical contexts highlighting the largest oil spills in recent history. The box, titled “A Sea of Troubles,” featured a map and eight of the worst spills since 1967 –
including the *Amoco Cadiz* and *Exxon Valdez* – with brief explanations about each spill (see #32 in Appendix).

Several stories wove substantive historical contexts about previous spills – especially the 1992 *Aegean Sea* spill, but also the 1976 *Urquiola* spill – along the Galician coast in order to discuss the repeated oil damage the region, its ecosystems, and people had suffered in recent years. For instance, the *Guardian's* first story on November 14 ended by reminding readers that “in 1992 the Aegean Sea tanker grounded and burst into flames just outside the mouth of the Galician port of Coruna . . . in what was a major disaster for a local economy that remains heavily dependent on the sea” (pg. 19). Another story noted that the “[Baldaio] reserve's ecosystem still had not recovered from the spill caused by the Aegean Sea tanker when it grounded off Coruña 11 years ago” (Tuesday November 19, 2002, pg. 3). In that same story, Tremlett quoted the mayor of Arteixo saying that “the goose barnacles had just recovered from an oil spill 26 years ago when the Urquiola tanker went down” (pg. 3).

**Images and Graphics**

The *Guardian* published a total of 16 photographs related to the spill during the study period, including 5 maps and 2 graphics. In terms of total stories published, an image or visual appeared in about 48 percent of *Guardian* stories. Of these images, 75 percent were published within the first 10 days after the spill – and of these, most appeared in the same concentrated interval of *Guardian* reporting between November 19 and 24. The majority of images focused on people in the context of a wider landscape, such as volunteers working amid the larger background of a rocky beach; fishermen at work trying to gather mussels and clams in the surf before oil came ashore; or single individuals standing by an oiled beach with a much larger backdrop of ocean, coast and beach. Three images of the *Prestige* also appeared in *Guardian* stories on November 19 and 20 only.

The *Guardian* printed just one image of an oiled animal– a close-up of an oiled shearwater, which accompanied the paper’s second spill story on November 18 (see #29 in
As the inaugural Guardian photograph about the spill, the picture helped to establish the ecological disaster frame, which was carried solely by textual means after this point. The fact that Guardian stories emphasized people – and often people as small parts of a larger background – stressed the grave regional impact, and also complemented the Guardian’s emphasis on the interconnectedness of humans and environment in the areas affected by the spill. In addition, the fact that several of the people-oriented shots featured a solitary individual – either standing reflectively by a vast shoreline, or shoveling oil from a beach alone – stressed the impact to a more remote regional group of people. These images also subtly captured the anger at the Spanish government and the fact that locals, fed up with the government’s response, often struggled on their own to clean the coasts they depended on.

On Tuesday December 3, the Guardian published a giant graphic-story in its “Learning” pages about the Prestige spill, titled “A Slick Operation.” The graphic-story included a small text story summarizing the spill and highlighting some of the difficulties of clean-up nested inside a huge graphic illustrating various clean-up technologies, the differences between single and double-hulled ships, and featuring a huge map with a key that showed everything from affected coastlines, to various reported slicks, to the locations of important fisheries along the Galician coast. The superscript to the section itself read: “Five pages of resources for teachers and parents” (pg. 60). Thus, the inclusion of this large graphic-story suggests that the Guardian regarded the Prestige spill as newsworthy enough to educate young readers about its importance.

**Convergence Reporting**

Extensive development of highly informative convergence reporting using online media was another noteworthy feature of the Guardian’s coverage of the Prestige spill. The first tease to online content appeared at the bottom of the paper’s third story on Tuesday November 19, referring readers to a special “Waste” section on the newspaper’s website. By the next day, the Guardian had developed a full suite of online material, including: a special
“Prestige” section on the website featuring a photo gallery of spill images; a Q&A explaining how modern science could be used to deal with spills; an animated interactive graphic illustrating the route of the tanker, the events that led to its sinking, and theories of why it cracked; and an audio news story from Giles Tremlett about efforts to save the tanker from sinking and prevent damage to wildlife.

The Guardian continued to place teases to this material throughout its stories. The Guardian also used its website to publish Ian Willmore’s story of Sunday November 24 about the tanker’s complex ownership history. Later in the spill story, the Guardian developed another online graphic illustrating different methods traditionally used to clean oil spills and why those methods were problematic in the case of the Prestige’s spilt oil. All of this material is still available on the paper’s website today.

Summary

The Guardian’s coverage of the Prestige is a telling example of excellence in reporting. The paper avoided traps of oil spill reporting while producing highly informative stories that focused on the systemic problems behind the disaster and the complex interrelationship between ecology and the vitality of a region defined by its maritime traditions. Through the paper’s ability to weave together seeming disparate narratives of ecological and economic effects, the Guardian clearly revealed how closely the two realms can overlap – and how damage to one could threaten the survival of a people’s entire way of life. Though this is a story that is repeated around the world, especially in developing nations, industry and the developed world display little regard. The Guardian demonstrated a sophisticated approach to reporting by addressing this systemic problem, rarely discussed openly among nations, and by using the inherent advantages of the internet to produce a diverse suite of convergence materials. The paper’s approach to covering the spill helped to frame the Prestige disaster as yet another example of a disaster – in this case, a preventable disaster – caused by chronic systemic problems within industry and regulatory frameworks that have yet to be resolved.
Between Saturday November 12, 2002 and Monday May 5, 2003, the Seattle Times published 20 stories about the Prestige spill. Fully half of these stories were published in November. Of the remaining 10 stories, 4 were published in December, 2 in January, 3 in February, and 1 in May. No stories about the spill appeared in March or April. On November 20 and 22, the Seattle Times ran 2 stories about the spill in each day’s paper – the only times throughout the study interval when the paper ran more than one story per day about it. Of note, these dates coincide with the significant turning point in the spill affair of the tanker’s unexpected sinking and the subsequent amplification of concern for a major catastrophe. A few of the paper’s stories were longer features with narrative storytelling elements. After the first two weeks of reporting, stories tended to be news briefs published in the “World Digest” or “Around the World” compilation section, or smaller stories. Nonetheless, many of these smaller stories still packed a lot of informative context into their narratives. In December, all the spill stories were news briefs, while other spill briefs were scattered among slightly longer stories through May.

With the exception of two stories written by Seattle Times editors or staff, all the paper’s stories came from wire services or outside newspapers, including one New York Times story. A few stories were amalgams of different news sources, pooling information from both the news wires and newspapers such as the Los Angeles Times, Knight Ridder Newspapers, and the Washington Post. However, the two pieces written by Seattle Times staff distinctly emphasized systemic issues related to the spill. Combined with the informative nature of the outside sources selected by the Seattle Times to represent its voice in its news pages – several of which also explored the deeper systemic aspects of the spill – the explicitly systemic focus of these two pieces by the paper’s staff suggests a conscious attempt to foster understanding of the spill’s more complex systemic underpinnings.
Themes and News Angles

Though many of the Seattle Times’ headlines tended to emphasize the movements of oil – such as new or old oil slicks “spreading,” “coating,” or “closing in” on different coastlines – the stories themselves touched on all the major news angles and developments of the Prestige spill story, from the breaking news aspects, to the friction between the Spanish and British governments, to the ecological and regional effects and the subsequent attempts to pioneer a method of patching the tanker in the depths of the ocean, among others. Like the Guardian, the Seattle Times emphasized the ecological damage and its interrelationship with the livelihoods of fishermen, though the Seattle Times also tended to use adjectives and phrases that emphasized the sullied scenic beauty and rugged isolation of Galicia more than the Guardian. Coupled with the overall emphasis on the threat to fishermen’s livelihoods, this practice helped to foster a sense of regional identity based on maritime traditions maintained in an autonomous region of Spain more insulated from outside influence.

Stories with strong systemic components also formed part of the bulk of Seattle Times stories. Many stories drew on a rich diversity of historical contexts to discuss the deeper framework of problems related to the continued pervasiveness of single-hulled tankers, industry greed and self-interest, and the particularly deep-rooted problem of society’s fickle attitudes about persistent environmental problems. Combined with the other prominent emphasis on threats to the pelagic ecosystem and fishermen – and some harsh language proffered through quotes and editorials – the Seattle Times clearly framed the spill as a preventable disaster born of collective human stupidity and industry self-interest.

The Seattle Times also developed nuances of the spill story not seen – or as distinctly – in Guardian stories. A few stories devoted time to exploring in more depth the tricky technological aspects related to recovering oil from the sunken tanker and explaining the processes involved in refining different types of oil. The Seattle Times also wrote more about the effects to France’s Aquitaine oyster region and threats to the Basque coast – including the new contextual angle of the threat to surfing (see #37 in Appendix), a popular pastime in that
region (and also in coastal America). In addition, the paper devoted more space to discussing the captain of the *Prestige*, though with a subtle bent towards criticizing the Spanish government while exculpating the captain of any guilt.

**Threats to Ecology and Fishermen**

Throughout its stories, the *Seattle Times* framed the *Prestige* spill as an environmental disaster that threatened a particularly rich ecological region of Spain and the fishermen who depended on the bounty of the sea. The lead of the paper’s second story on November 19 established the ecological focus, stating that “a damaged tanker carrying more than 20 million gallons of fuel oil . . . [was] threatening an environmental disaster” (pg. A9). A few paragraphs later, A.P. reporter Mar Roman established the threat to fishermen using a punctuated style that emphasized the human aspect of the disaster: “Fishing was prohibited, putting hundreds out of work. The spill threatened some of the region’s richest fishing grounds” (pg. A9). When a *Seattle Times* editor commented in the paper’s first and only editorial on Friday November 22 that the sinking of the tanker had “produced an environmental catastrophe of epic proportions,” and then said a few sentences later that “Spain’s fishing industry has taken the first economic hit” (pg. A10), the weight of reading the paper’s own voice for the first time helped to frame the spill in ecological terms that linked “sea-dependent” fishermen and workers with the environment.

Like the *Guardian*, *Seattle Times* stories often featured environmental information in close proximity to comments or information about fishermen. Some stories wove the threads together in a single sentence, as in this example from a story on Wednesday November 20: “The *Prestige* has already inflicted severe environmental damage on Spain . . . threatening birds and the fish and shellfish on which the local economy depends” (pg. A3). Other stories placed passages about environmental aspects immediately next to passages about fishermen or their ocean-based economy. A narrative story focused on the threats to fishermen from Thursday November 21, titled “Spain’s Fishing Industry Endangered by Oil Spill” placed a
paragraph explaining why oil spills are so damaging to sea birds immediately after two paragraphs explaining the importance of Spain's mussel culture industry. The reporter, Daniel Rubin of Knight Ridder Newspapers, stressed the threat to fishermen's livelihoods by quoting a World Wildlife Foundation source: “About 30,000 southern Galician families rely on . . . one of the world's largest mussel beds for their livelihoods” (pg. A2). Immediately following the quote with the statement that “sea birds also suffer in oil spills,” and then later context about a dolphin that was found dead, linked fishermen and wildlife together as two elements of the same ecosystem equally threatened by one oil spill.

Feature stories using narrative and anecdotal stories from fishermen also helped to stress the threat to fishermen's livelihoods in Seattle Times stories. Rubin opened his November 21 story with the narrative detail of a fishermen who “wasn’t about to stop casting his fishing nets” because of a “little oil spill from a sunken tanker” (pg. A2). Framing the story from the fishermen’s initial perspective on the spill helped to emphasize the gravity of the information that came after – about how the fisherman's catch of “175 pounds of fish had to be thrown away” because it was contaminated by oil – and more effectively illustrated how the spill could be so devastating to people almost fully dependent on such catches.

Many Seattle Times wire stories also provided informative ecological context that conveyed the complexity of the ecosystem under threat, helping the paper to present an ecological frame that didn’t misrepresent or over-dramatize the spill. For instance, in Rubin’s November 21 story, his explanation of the scientific reasons behind why “only 10 percent of oil-soaked fowl make it to shore” (pg. A2) provided helpful context that enabled a deeper understanding beyond the statistics and speculations often found in oil spill stories that focus on keeping track of bird mortality. Similarly, after mentioning the dead dolphin found, Rubin added the useful context that “but experts say that those marine mammals, like fish, usually avoid oil spills and survive,” information which explained why it is that marine mammals are found much less frequently than birds.
A story the day before, on Wednesday November 20 titled “Tanker’s Troubled Voyage” (see #34, pg.2 in Appendix), provided additional ecological perspective for why the location of the Prestige spill may have merited its designation as a “catastrophe”: it had sunk near the underwater island known as the Galicia Bank, “home to a wide range of sponge species, crustaceans and fish, including 11 species of shark” (pg. A3), the reporter wrote. Similarly, New York Times reporter Emma Daly’s November 24 story provided important ecological context that cut through some of the potentially misleading conjectures of experts and authorities who were arguing that environmental effects would be minimized if the tanker’s oil congealed in the cold temperatures under the ocean. She quoted a marine biologist stating that “even if the fuel solidified on the seabed, toxins would still leach into the water and enter the food chain” (pg. A20), a statement that added longitudinal perspective on the longer-term environmental impact of the disaster (see #36 in Appendix).

**Emphasis on Galicia’s Scenic Beauty**

A few Seattle Times wire stories used language emphasizing the scenic beauty of the region affected by oil in the context of the threats to fishermen. One story referred to “the picturesque Galician coast” in the same sentence describing how “at least 1,000 Spanish fishermen were thrown out of work” and how the coast “boasts one of Europe’s richest fisheries” (Wednesday November 20, 2002, pg. A3). The same story later wrote that “at stake in Spain’s misty, green northwest corner is a fishing and seafood industry that feeds much of the country . . . . [and] employs tens of thousands of people” (pg. A3). Another story reported that contamination along “about 185 miles of shoreline” was “killing wildlife, spoiling sandy beaches and imperiling a fishing industry that is the most bountiful source of income for tens of thousands of people in rugged Galicia province” (Thursday November 21, 2002, pg. A2). This conflation of the region’s beauty – along with suggestions of its unspoilt ruggedness – with the effects on local fishing communities added emphasis to both the ecological and regional impacts by intimating that Galicia was a more pristine and remote region inhabited
by people isolated from the outside world, and thus more dependent on the sea and the health of its ecosystems.

**Systemic Frame and Roots of Spill**

Systemic issues were a clear focus of *Seattle Times* stories. Several stories addressed the technological and capitalistic underpinnings of spills, pertaining to the continued predominance of more dangerous single-hulled vessels and the flagrant self-interest of the responsible industries. However, a handful of stories also commented on the murkier aspect of society’s current mercurial attitudes towards the environment and the collective failure to proactively learn from past mistakes.

The almost unanimous belief that a disaster the size of the *Prestige* could have been averted had the tanker been outfitted with a double hull made the focus on shipping construction and the delayed implementation of a European Union mandatory phase-out of single-hulled tankers by 2015 a natural part of the ambient debate among governments and sources. However, beyond exploring the systemic problem of single-hulled vessels, the *Seattle Times* exposed the seriousness of industry self-interest in relation to single-hulled tankers. Its fourth story on Wednesday November 20, synthesized from various news outlets, devoted a sub-section of the feature-length piece to the profit motive operating insidiously behind the rationale to charter older vessels with single hulls. The story set up its presentation of the information by juxtaposing the context of the *Prestige* disaster with seemingly behind-the-scenes industry actions: “Even as Spain struggled to contain the Prestige spill, dealers were planning similar shipments that make money by chartering old tankers at cheap freight rates” (pg. A3). Later in the same section, the story reported that “higher prices for fuel oil in Asia than in Europe were the financial incentive,” and that European oil dealers stood to make “about $400,000 in profit from using the cheap Prestige.” A source commenting that “the fact is . . . the hundreds of older vessels in the world fleet . . . shouldn’t be allowed to carry toxic cargoes, never mind pass anywhere near pristine coastlines” (pg. A3) further highlighted the
selfish interests of the major oil and shipping industries, operating without regard for environmental welfare or the communities sustained by it.

The Seattle Times’ editorial of November 22, titled “The Pain in Spain,” focused on the same issues, but with a little more flair: “All the numbers are huge” (pg. A10), the editor wrote. After listing some of the large numbers associated with the spill, including the length of shoreline affected and the volume of oil involved, the editor expressed the systemic punchline: “Perhaps the scariest number of all is the figure 5,000. That is the number of ageing, single-hulled tankers still on the job.” In a statement two sentences later, the editor implied that the companies chartering the ageing ships were willfully avoiding countries with more rigorous inspections protocols: “This is not simply about replacing one maritime technology with another . . . . these aging rust buckets are avoiding European Union ports to avoid inspections” (pg. A10). Also of note is the fact that the paper’s last story on Monday May 5, titled “Oil Tankers Slow to Shift to Anti-Spill Hulls,” written by Seattle Times reporter Craig Welch, was a distinctly systemic piece about the dangers of single-hulled vessels that ended the paper’s spill coverage. The fact that the long systemic feature came from the paper’s own voice and concluded its spill coverage indicates that examining the systemic problems still plaguing the industry was a priority for the paper.

Two stories in a row touched on perhaps the most important systemic causes of environmental disasters like the Prestige: cultural attitudes and society’s collective level of mercurial attention to environmental problems. The first story, from Saturday November 23 titled “Sunken Tanker’s Oil Salvageable, Expert Say,” ended with three paragraphs that pinned the repetitiveness of oil spill disasters on society’s fickleness with regard to environmental issues (see #35 in Appendix). A.P. reporter Daniel Woolls quoted a conservationist saying that “as time passes, it is unlikely anyone would continue to monitor the leakage” (pg. A16) because “in cases of maritime environmental disasters . . . governments and citizens tend to make a big fuss at first, then it all eventually dies down.” With the
Prestige so far out and under the ocean, it would be “easy to ignore [and] people would say, what is the worry now?” (pg. A16).

The next day, New York Times reporter Emma Daley wrote a long narrative feature highlighting the new angle of the threats to an ocean-side aquarium in La Coruña that had been built on the site of where the tanker Aegean Sea had ten years earlier caused the region’s formerly worst environmental disaster. It had been built “in homage to the sea,” she quoted the aquarium’s director saying, “so people would fall in love with the sea and never dare to damage it again” (pg. A20). Her chosen ending to the story returned to this context with a strong statement of condemnation for the short-sightedness of human actions. Not only will an EU measure to bring a “swift end” to single-hulled tankers fail because of industry greed – because “it will cost more,” according to the aquarium director Daley quoted – disasters like the Prestige would happen again because of human folly.

The story’s ending echoes with this source’s harsh words of criticism: “We thought, naively, that having two tanker accidents here would inoculate us against this. But it seems that human stupidity is greater than we thought” (pg. A20). If the statement itself weren’t strong enough, the paper chose to give the sentiment prominence by highlighting it in the story’s singular pull-quote space, thus suggesting an even deeper meta-systemic frame for the spill as an inevitability borne of human stupidity. The story leaves the dark systemic overtone that future spills will be the result of human folly bracketed by our repeated failure to learn from past mistakes (see #36 in Appendix).

Technological Nuances of Spill

A few Seattle Times stories explored technological and scientific nuances of the oil spill in more depth, a focus which added unique perspective to the spill story and demonstrated that oil spills can generate opportunities for informative news reporting beyond the stereotypical disaster angles. The paper’s second story explained that fuel oil is a “heavy, viscous blend gathered from the bottom of tanks at the end of the refining process” (Tuesday
November 19, 2002, pg. A9) and could be far more difficult to clean up. The long feature published the next day fleshed out the scientific exploration of fuel oil in two paragraphs, making use of informative contexts and language that lent well to visualization. The story described fuel oil as “the viscous goo literally left at the bottom of the barrel after refineries take gasoline and lighter components off the top” (Wednesday November 20, 2002, pg. 1). The story used the information to explain the difficulties of traditional clean-up methodologies for this type of oil. The paper’s story on November 23 prefaced its primary focus on the technological aspects of submarines attempting to salvage the sunken tanker’s oil with a witty statement: “All you need are robotic submarines, pipes and cables that can withstand pressure 350 times Earth’s atmosphere, an electric heat rod . . . and lots of time and money” (pg. A16). The rest of story drew on informative historical and scientific contexts to explain how robots would do the job (see #35 in Appendix).

**Historical Contexts**

Quite a few Seattle Times stories incorporated historical contexts in meaningful ways, often to help provide a wider historical perspective for ecological, regulatory, maritime, and even technological aspects of the Prestige story. Many stories drew on historical contexts highlighting the history of tanker construction or the volume of tanker accidents that had occurred off the coast of northwestern Spain in recent years. Because of the severity of the Prestige spill, these contexts added a grim and sobering perspective to the nature of threats facing the people and environment of Galicia. Some of these stories, such as Daley’s November 24 aquarium feature which commented that “the ecosystem [near La Coruña] had yet to fully recover” (pg.A20), also drew on the ecological historical contexts of these past accidents to emphasize the long-term nature of ecological damage caused by tanker spills.

Other stories included historical contexts related to the Seattle Times’ technological angle. The paper’s November 23 story, for instance, used the historical context that “pumping oil out of a sunken ship is not new,” but that “no operation [had] been attempted at that
Historical Context of Exxon Valdez

However, *Seattle Times* stories demonstrated a particular tendency to draw on historical contexts related to the *Exxon Valdez* disaster as a way of framing and assessing the seriousness of the *Prestige* spill. The paper’s second story from November 19 commented that “if the [Prestige] lost its entire cargo of fuel oil, the spill would be nearly twice the size of the 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster” (pg. A9). Its third story, on Wednesday November 20, drew heavily on Exxon Valdez contexts for everything from ecological, circumstantial, and systemic aspects of the *Prestige*, including references in the lead and a large section of the story structured around a side-by-side comparison of the two spills (see #34 in Appendix). The story prefaced the comparative section with the comment that “it is difficult to say how the environmental impact of the spill would compare with the Exxon Valdez,” and then proceeded to point out the similarities and differences between the two spill scenarios: “the Valdez held crude oil; the Prestige held heavier fuel oil” (pg. A2), for instance, and the “Valdez ran aground in the enclosed Prince William Sound” while “the Prestige sank in open seas.” However, using the historical context of the *Exxon* spill, the story commented that, like the Alaska spill, had the *Prestige* been outfitted with a double-hull, “the problem could have been averted” (pg. A2).

Also noteworthy about this story is a separate information box titled “How it compares to Exxon Valdez spill,” located on the front page immediately under the side column front page section of the day’s spill story. Although the *Seattle Times*’ first piece written by one of its staff doesn’t appear until the paper’s seventh story two days later, this comparative information box was not a part of the spill story with which it appeared, culled from various news sources. It was placed in its own box with a bolded line overtop and a bold title heading, thus suggesting that the *Seattle Times* added the box in order to provide context.
about the *Prestige* based on an incident widely known among the paper’s readership area – and with which the *Seattle Times* itself had been intimately involved.

In addition, the paper’s last story on Monday May 9 – a long, probing feature on the many threats and “close calls” posed by the high number of single-hulled tankers still sailing the seas – opened with a comment that linked the systemic focus to the *Exxon Valdez*:

“fourteen years after the Exxon Valdez ruptured against a reef in Prince William Sound, fewer than a third of the tankers ferrying crude between Alaska and Puget Sound are equipped with a double hull (pg. A8). As the last *Seattle Times* comment on this problem in relation to the *Prestige* spill, the prominent reference to the *Exxon Valdez* linked the 1989 disaster with the *Prestige* in the context of a harsh systemic critique, thus ending coverage on a systemic note.

**Images and Graphics**

The *Seattle Times* published a total of 12 images related to the spill during the study interval, including 11 pictures and 1 map. No graphics appeared in coverage. With the exception of one photograph that appeared on February 6, 2003 with a story titled “Oil Spill Spreads to Basque Coast,” all the images appeared in stories written during the two-week interval between November 16, 2002 and November 30, 2002. This is not entirely surprising, because half of the paper’s 20 stories were written during this same interval. Of the stories written after November 30, several were just news briefs.

The bulk of *Seattle Times* images focused on human contexts of the spill. Of the total 12 images, 8 focused on people, usually in the context of cleaning oil from the beaches (see #’s 34, 35, 36, and 37 in Appendix). Fishermen were portrayed at work collecting cockles and clams in one image, while another picture captured the interesting context of a cluster of fishermen standing together while fashioning a floating oil barrier. The image presented an active angle focused on the fishermen’s hands at work and their faces intent on the task. Other people shots depicted solitary individuals at work cleaning up the spill, or pausing to rest amid the
wider scope of an oiled beach. One image also showed Greenpeace protestors at work making a sign reading “Oil Kills.” The image was the smaller of two that accompanied Daley’s aquarium feature of Sunday November 24, and in this case, helped to augment the systemic frame of human folly expressed in the story by its placement immediately next to the paragraph that quoted a Greenpeace marine biologist describing the effects to the food chain.

The paper published 2 images of the tanker, including its first image which accompanied the paper’s third story. The image, contained in a small box under a much more prominent story headline, showed the tanker with its bow sticking out of the water as it sank into the ocean. The story’s inside page, with two stories contained in a “Close-Up” section on the spill, displayed the other tanker image – a larger picture of the tanker from the previous day when it had split but not yet sunk. The paper’s one map also appeared with this third story on the front page, showing the location of the tanker’s sinking and the stretch of coastline hit by oil so far.

Only one image of an oiled animal appeared in Seattle Times stories, accompanying the paper’s sixth story on November 22 with the headline “Oily Muck Coats More of Coastline.” In relation to the size of the small six-paragraph story, the image of the oiled bird flapping in oil was noticeably larger. However, considering that two-thirds of the paper’s photographs depicted people in contexts of cleaning oil or fishermen at work to salvage bits of their livelihoods, the focus on people rather than the tanker reflects the paper’s emphasis on the ecological and regional impacts of the disaster.

**Summary**

Although the majority of stories about the Prestige spill originated in wire or outside news sources, the Seattle Times’ selection of stories to represent its voice indicates a strong attention to systemic causes of the spill over superficial dramatic aspects. It also reveals that since the era of the Amoco Cadiz, the criteria used to select wire stories had significantly advanced. Whereas the paper’s 1978 wire stories were simplistic, event-driven, and lacked in
crucial contexts, the wires chosen to tell the story of the Prestige were noticeably more sophisticated and sensitive to the complexities of the spill disaster. This observation provides strong evidence for a process of evolution with regard to the Seattle Times’ approach to oil spill coverage. Through its primary focus on people in the affected regions, and the role of ecological soundness to economic and regional stability, the paper helped to convey that the real toll from oil spills is more than just the tally of birds, but the collective people dependent on the health of an integrated ecosystem, which oil spills damage in numerous complex ways. As in the case of the Guardian, the fact that the overarching frame for the Prestige spill was of a systemic nature beyond the generic disaster frame reveals a process of growth in reporting, that as will be discussed in the conclusion chapter below, is the result of an evolution in the approach to coverage of oil spills.
6. Conclusion

The field of environmental journalism has significantly advanced since environmental issues emerged as topics of social and journalistic importance in the 1970’s. Environmental reporters have become essential investigators of the human-environment relationship at a time when global environmental problems are becoming increasingly acute and complex, and their solutions elusive yet indisputably more urgent. Despite the pressures of the consolidating news business and the threats of environmental stories being marginalized or underreported in the wake of newsroom downsizing and cuts in environmental writing positions, the beat’s reporters have overcome many challenges relating to the quality of their work since the field’s early days (Friedman, 2004; Frome 1998; Sachsman et al., 2002).

However, despite a noticeable process of maturation in covering environmental news, media scholars (Friedman, 1990; Smith, 1992; Sachsman, 1996; Daley and O’Neill, 1991) have found that environmental journalists continue to wrestle with some of the same reporting challenges specific to the beat since its beginnings – especially in the area of environmental disaster reporting. Some of these challenges include criticisms that: environmental stories are still sometimes crisis-oriented and episodic; official news sources continue to dominate over a diversity of alternative voices; stories do not always cope well with complexity and nuance; and reporters undertake too few investigative environmental stories, among others.

Society is approaching a critical juncture when the decisions and actions of people on the planet today will determine the quality of life for generations to come. Most of the environmental problems today are acutely complex, slow to mature, and require long-term perspective to discern their urgency and work towards solutions. Environmental problems are no longer just someone else’s problem, isolated to far-flung corners of the globe. The critical problems of today are of a global nature, uniting nations and people under the universal specter of irreversible environmental change and the serious problems that will follow: climactic shifts; loss of biodiversity; erratic and increasingly dramatic natural
phenomena; increasingly strained water resources; and widespread famine crises from the destruction of soils, to name a few. The collapse of any of the earth’s currently stressed vital systems will undoubtedly result in future environmental crises of serious proportions. Yet, conveying the importance of these issues to the public, and thus enabling informed citizens to pressure political leaders to action, requires excellence in reporting that specifically defies the nagging criticisms that continue to haunt environmental reporting.

In an effort to assess how well environmental reporters have adapted to the changing landscape and rigors of environmental issues – and to obtain a more holistic historical perspective on this change – this thesis sought to document how environmental news coverage has changed across three decades according to several qualitative criteria, as evident in two newspapers reputed for their excellence in reporting: the Seattle Times and the British paper the Guardian. Three highly complex oil spill disasters were selected as models of inherently difficult and nuanced environmental stories: the 1978 Amoco Cadiz disaster off the Breton coast; the 1989 Exxon Valdez wreck in Alaska; and the 2002 Prestige disaster off the Spanish Galician coast. These spills served as case studies of how well environmental journalists reported on a highly complex environmental disaster.

In all areas of inquiry, this thesis found that both newspapers displayed significant improvements in quality of coverage between 1978 and 1989, suggesting that conscientious newspapers attentive to their quality of environmental coverage can overcome even the most nettlesome of reporting challenges. Both newspapers gravitated noticeably towards a thematic, systemic outlook on the environmental disasters that exposed failures in underlying regulatory frameworks. Reliance on official sources was abandoned for a people-centered focus relying on local perspective and a diversity of voices, permitting formerly marginalized disaster narratives to assert new frames for the 1989 and 2002 disasters. Because the quality of reporting improved so profoundly between 1978 and 1989, the papers had few improvements to target between 1989 and 2002. However, equally significant, both papers maintained the standards of quality coverage demonstrated in 1989 as they reported on the Galician disaster.
of 2002. In addition, despite the quality of their 1989 coverage, both papers attempted to improve even further. The Guardian’s extensive use of convergence reporting and online media to report on the Prestige demonstrated an awareness of the potential of emerging technologies to facilitate reporting in new ways. The Seattle Times’ choice of wire stories to represent its voice on the Prestige marked a clear shift in the criteria it used to select wire stories over its 1978 Amoco Cadiz coverage. The following sections explain the findings based on this thesis’ primary questions and their significance in more detail.

**The Changing Role of Government**

After 1978, both papers were noticeably more skeptical of government’s role in oil spill disasters, an aspect which closely related to the overarching systemic frames advanced in 1989 and 2002. Although the Guardian’s reporting of the Amoco Cadiz broke from journalistic routine on a few counts, demonstrating the glimmerings of an independent and quality-oriented approach to disaster reporting, the official narrative of the Amoco Cadiz was the clearest narrative to speak through the paper’s coverage. When oil damage threatened local people, Guardian stories framed government as competent and proactive. The government failed to take action numerous times, always blaming bad weather; yet, the failures of government’s response were not emphasized at the local level so much as the government’s readiness.

Some stories did portray the British government as paternalistic and insincere in its treatment of the Channel Islanders, suggesting that some individual reporters were ahead of their time in possessing a critical mindset about disaster stories. Some stories also demonstrated the beginnings of an awareness that government action can relate to systemic problems. However, probing and critical coverage of this sort was inconsistent in 1978, suggesting that the Guardian as a news organization had not yet progressed to the point of promulgating environmental reporting news values based on critical, investigative reporting at the editorial level and reinforcing these practices consistently across the entire newsroom.
In some cases, quality reporting was related to story focus. When government clashed with regional identity in *Guardian* stories, the paper tended to operate outside journalistic convention. When the paper focused its attentions on the effects to a regionally distinct group, its watchdog role seemed more noticeable and defined. Governments were scrutinized more closely for their insincerity or ineffective responses. Similarly, stories about the Breton angles contained subtle currents of criticism towards the French government for failing to adequately respond to the disaster in Brittany. Thus, focus of story played a role in how governments were framed. The paper tended to frame government more favorably when writing about threats to British people, but more negatively when establishing a regional identity or writing about regional angles. This observation suggests that a correlation exists between more critical reporting and the focus on broader regional implications.

The scant number of *Seattle Times* stories about the Breton disaster suggests that the paper did not place a high news value on environmental disasters at the international level. Thus, its related watchdog role for those issues was in a nascent stage at this point.

However, both papers displayed a noticeable shift in their framing of governments in both 1989 and 2002. Governments – and media – were scrutinized closely and the papers demonstrated a clear watchdog role by: 1) soliciting facts, perspective, and information from local people and nongovernmental sources; 2) investigating the systemic frameworks and the failures of governments that contributed to the disasters; and 3) using a suite of images that also emphasized the grittier, truer contexts of the spill over the stereotypical symbols of disaster. The fearless attitude toward implicating governments as part of the causes of the 1989 and 2002 disasters in both papers accompanied the marked shift towards framing the spills in systemic terms. For the *Guardian*, the consistency with which governments were scrutinized suggests that in the 11 years between the two spills, the paper had developed an institutional approach to spill reporting based on deeper scrutiny of the official viewpoint.

While perhaps a well-known principle of reporting today, these findings suggest that to begin to probe a complex environmental story more deeply, reporters have to be able and
willing to dig beneath the official accounts of an environmental problem and investigate potential failings of governments. In addition, the results of this research suggest that frames which run counter to those established by official accounts of a complex environmental situation will likely provide a less simplistic and more accurate picture of a problem.

**Effectiveness of Writing Styles**

Based on the research of scholars such as Daley and O’Neill (1991) and McComas and Shanahan (1999), who have argued that narrative storytelling may be more effective at conveying complex information, this thesis operated under the similar premise that reporting effectively on the oil spill disasters would require a strong emphasis on use of storytelling techniques and narrative styles outside of hard-news reporting. This in fact proved true in the cases of the oil spill stories studied for this thesis. In both newspapers, stories that adopted a narrative style or made more frequent use of storytelling techniques seemed to be especially effective at conveying regional identity, expressing systemic angles, prying out latent nuances, and developing a more genuine sense of the disaster’s effects – especially when the stories focused on the effects to people. In 1989 and 2002, both papers engaged a narrative style for a significant percentage of their stories. And, even in 1978, the *Guardian* used a narrative style specifically when reporting on effects of the disaster at the local level – as felt by the Channel Islanders and the people of Brittany.

While the story focus sometimes dictated whether a more hard news versus narrative style was adopted, this study observed that in all three cases, using a narrative approach helped to express difficult or less obvious nuances, and also helped to avoid sensationalism of the drama-prone elements of the stories. In 1978, the *Seattle Times* used a strictly hard news style with spatterings of linguistic color. The *Guardian*, however, engaged narrative techniques more frequently than expected to write about the effects to local people. Here again, the *Guardian* seemed ahead of its time on this front, outpacing its otherwise typical treatment of other aspects of the spill stories. The sophistication of the narrative approach
increased in 1989 and 2002, however. After 1978, the paper’s stories explored more news angles from the narrative approach with more depth, and from novel vantages not seen previously.

In both papers, stories of a hard news nature after 1978 were more analytical and often probed regulatory contexts of the spills. In these cases, the analytical news tone was an effective style, not least because the papers provided informative context and sought information from a range of sources. Shorter stories also were more likely to be of a harder news nature. However, as expected, stories that adopted a narrative approach and applied other storytelling techniques, such as informative similes and metaphors, were effective at promulgating other frames for the disasters besides the meta environmental disaster frame, including systemic frames and frames that advanced the usually marginalized narratives of local people or communities.

**Themes and News Angles**

Thematic treatment of the oils spills was a strong point in both papers – especially after 1978, but also including the *Amoco Cadiz* to some extent in the *Guardian*. While the *Guardian’s* thematic treatment of the 1978 spill did emulate certain predictable patterns of oil spill reportage, by emphasizing the controversy over the tanker captain, for instance, while the systemic aspects – though hinted at – remained consigned to the periphery, the paper also displayed a surprising narrative dexterity at interweaving local British and Breton news angles during this first study year. The *Guardian* explored the political angles, some scientific angles, regional angles related to lost livelihoods and economic effects, and the role of the tanker’s captain. The discovery of the paper’s broader thematic attempt during the early years of environmental reporting contradicted the initial expectations of this thesis, and again suggested a degree of environmental disaster sophistication slightly beyond the norm of the time period.

However, a significant part of the paper’s thematic treatment also conformed to Button’s (1999) observations of how media reported on the 1993 *Braer* oil spill near the
Shetland Islands. His study found that “the impacts of the spill and cleanup on the human population were all but ignored” (119), even though that spill generated other more significant health effects to the human communities nearby. Additionally, he observed that “the focus of attention was turned toward oiled marine life and the fury of the North Atlantic, which provided more photogenic drama that the possible invisible effects of chemical contamination” (119). The focus on weather and the fury of the seas figured prominently in the Guardian’s coverage of the Amoco Cadiz, though the paper did not strictly conform to Button’s (1999) observations about the scrutiny of oiled marine life. Systemic causes were touched upon, but only in fragmented fashion.

In telling contrast to Button’s (1999) findings, however, both the Guardian and the Seattle Times demonstrated significant maturation in their thematic treatment of the 1989 and 2002 spills. The investigation of several themes related to the spills correlated strongly with the heightened emphasis on systemic causes. Also in contrast to Button’s (1999) observation that the relegation of disaster to natural forces outside human control thus detracted from investigation of the human impacts, both the Seattle Times and the Guardian actively pursued news themes in which the human effects were the central focus. Similarly, Button (1999, 130) observed that “in so-called environmental disasters such as oil spills,” the focus is generally on “the effects on the ecology and not on the effects to human communities” – a tendency which he described as “an attempt to naturalize the disaster.” According to Button, (1999), the effect of such reporting is to remove “oppositional discourse” about responsibility and blame “from both government and corporate entities.” The Seattle Times’ and the Guardian’s 1989 and 2002 spill coverage completely contradicted these observations by focusing primarily on people – and even more, by interweaving human and ecological contexts so that humans were seen as both affecting and affected by environmental conditions.

These results suggest that thematic emphasis is linked with more probing investigative reporting. In the case of oil spill disasters, the results suggest that investigating a diversity of news themes helps to guard against event-driven reporting that obscures
systemic explanations and suffers from lack of critical contexts. Smith (1992, 189), citing Entman’s identification of three “production biases,” argued that quality reporting on disasters is beleaguered by a tendency to oversimplify, to “personalize” stories so that “individuals rather than social institutions or historical contexts” are emphasized, and to favor symbols that “reduce complex concepts into easily grasped” symbolic portrayals.

Because the excellent reportage observed in the Seattle Times’ and the Guardian’s 1989 and 2002 stories directly contrasted with all three of these points, these results suggest more broadly that fleshing out the thematic angles of complex environmental issues breeds quality reporting by encouraging “intensive data searches” that reveal critical nuances and contexts while discouraging preconceived stories of a simplistic nature.

**Environmental Reporting and Regional Identity**

An interesting correlation between environmental reporting and regional identity emerged over the course of this study. Across all three dates, stories in both newspapers cultivated a sense of regional – and on occasion, national – identity. During the Guardian’s 1978 reporting, stories that tended to foster a regional identity tended to be higher-caliber stories that probed more deeply, invoked narrative styles, and broke from journalistic routines. Coverage of the Exxon Valdez also triggered intense focus on regional perspective. A sense of Alaskan regional identity did emerge in the Seattle Times’ coverage, though the paper’s reporting was so thorough that its outstanding investigative reporting on the systemic causes of the spills and its numerous human contexts most noticeably distinguished its coverage and regional identity aspects were usually interwoven with the systemic angles. In 2002, the regional perspective was the mainstay of reporting in both papers, and in the process of reporting on the plight of Galician fishermen and portraying them as regionally distinct, the papers developed stories acutely focused on the systemic and regulatory contexts of the spills while completely sidestepping the traps of “routine” spill reporting.
These unexpected results suggest that adopting a regional perspective, of which cultivation of regional or national identity is one form, is more conducive to the formation of richer conceptual frameworks for complex environmental stories. Perhaps Button’s (1999) observations can lend some insight into why this may be so. According to media scholars (Button, 1999; Daley and O’Neill, 1991; Wilkins, 1989; Smith, 1992), technological disaster frames tend to focus on individuals as victims. Button (1999, 115) argues that “individualism, the mainstay of capitalist ideology, obscures the extremely relevant categories of class, race, gender, and age which are essential to understanding and explicating the politics of disaster.” It can be argued, based on the results of this thesis, that “extremely relevant” regional characteristics could be included in this list as well. Correlates of regional identity could also easily include reporting that focuses on environmental justice and perspectives of unique racial groups; reporting that presents alternative views of environmentalism – such as the seldom heard from Native American views; or reporting that examines environmental problems in relation to the perspectives of smaller regional groups, such as states or counties.

Button (1999) further argues that dwelling on the individual in these stories “displaces any systemic account of a disaster and its causes, and . . . serves to decontextualize the larger sociopolitical conditions in which the tragedy occurred.” The end result of this kind of narrative discourse on spills is to make individuals appear helpless, victimized, and “not as active agents struggling politically to redefine events and reframe official accounts of the disaster” (pg. 115).

What this study found, however, is that systemic explanations and the expression of traditionally marginalized voices tended to accompany stories that cultivated a sense of regional identity. The Seattle Times’ attention to the multiplicity of angles about the struggles, conflicts, successes, and losses of different Alaskan fishing communities portrayed the fisherman as anything but passive. Stories expressed their angst, their concern, their frustration, their self-reliance, and their active efforts to take control of their situation. Their narrative accounts of the spill expressed a far different reality than the official accounts. The
Guardian’s conflation of regional identity with environmental wellbeing emphasized the long-term nature of the spill and its long-lasting effects while expressing the interdependence of environment and humankind. This critical lesson from the oil spill disaster may have been lost through a focus on single individuals as passive victims. On the contrary, both Guardian and Seattle Times stories portrayed Galician fishermen as actively engaged in efforts to prevent damage to their livelihoods and regional identity, and their narrative accounts of the spill framed the disaster in vastly different terms than official Spanish government accounts. In the Guardian’s earlier 1978 spill reporting, the stories that expressed a regional identity tended to be those where rich contexts emerged. They also gave voice to habitually suppressed disaster narratives showing the clash between official and regional viewpoints and illustrating the dissatisfaction with the official disaster frame.

Thus, the results of this study seem to indicate that reporting which aims to foster regional identity will be more likely to focus on the broader conceptual and systemic frameworks that do not easily fit within traditional journalistic templates of complex environmental problems. The discovery of this correlation between a regional outlook and higher caliber environmental reporting may be of particular importance given the nature of the environmental problems facing society today. If regional perspective fosters greater understanding of the complex relationship and interdependence between humans and the environment, journalists may have a better chance at informing the public and avoiding superficial reporting while unraveling the layers of complexity that often deter journalists away from investigating the more difficult, but meaningful, systemic frameworks.

Photographs and Framing

Across all three spill dates, the use of photographs in spill stories was surprisingly judicious. With the exception of the few images that accompanied Seattle Times stories in 1978, which lacked context and emphasized disaster by featuring large images of the wrecked tanker, both newspapers used photographs in ways that tended to emphasize complementary,
informative contexts. From the Guardian’s 1978 photograph selection onwards, use of images, maps and graphics in both newspapers differed distinctly from the observations of some media scholars (Smith, 1992; Daley and O’Neill, 1991) that oil spill images tend to reinforce drama, superficial contexts, and easily available symbols.

At times, images helped to advance story frames. For instance, the overwhelming focus on human contexts in photographs of the Prestige spill contributed subtly to a sense of regional identity. During coverage of the Exxon Valdez, the Guardian’s photographic portraiture of the tanker captain reflected the paper’s implicit sense of respect for him and his profession. In a similar way, the Seattle Times amplified many of its sub-themes during its Exxon Valdez coverage by publishing context-rich photographs that synergized with some element of the text. Active shots of fishermen engaged in efforts to protect their harbors, or images of volunteers at work hunting for wildlife or cleaning beaches, helped to convey the remoteness of the locale and the need for fraternal cooperation and dogged self-reliance. These photographic expressions complemented the paper’s emphasis on the independence and active struggles of the local people.

More often, however, the visual components of the stories served as complementary but stand-alone contexts, offering insight into angles of the spills that captured their complexity and contradicted official discourse about the scope of the spills or their impacts. Like the stories themselves, that often used descriptive narrative and storytelling features to dig deeply into difficult contexts, photographs often functioned as small visual stories that encapsulated moments in time during the lengthy disaster events. Drawn together, the visual components formed their own subtle spill narratives based on visual contexts.

Beyond this spotlighting of aspects and nuances of the spills that might otherwise have remained hidden, the study found that the Seattle Times’ and Guardian’s images helped to amplify the voices of those same marginalized groups that in other spill coverage have usually been trampled by official accounts of disaster. As the only visual representations of the spill disasters that most people experienced, the photographic forum played an important role by
either reinforcing or undermining textual frames or narratives. In the case of spill images from 1989 and 2002 – and in *Guardian* images from 1978 – photographs noticeably reinforced the alternative accounts of the disaster, which included depictions of the spills’ more problematic long-term effects, the true nature of impacts to local people, and some of the self-defeating systemic problems sabotaging the safety of the industry.

**Source Use**

The selection and treatment of sources in spill stories over time showed marked improvement in both newspapers. Again, the most noticeable evidence of evolution took place during the interval between 1978 and 1989. *Guardian* stories in 1978 attempted to include a diversity of voices. However, the paper’s philosophy in practice appeared fragmented and less effective at deviating from the official story line. Several stories sought local perspective, but always through a collective, anonymous attribution. Individual fishermen never appeared defined by their proper names, though regional mayors were cited by name. In effect, this tendency served to individualize the collective, so that instead of enforcing a sense of several village voices uniting with one narrative message, the effect was essentially to treat the collective as a single unit which thus appeared as victimized and passive. While collective citing did at times suggest a broader base for dissent from the official view, failure to quote individuals meant important contexts were lost.

It is still significant that the *Guardian* attempted to seek input from local people, wildlife biologists and conservationists, and tourist operators to the extent that it did. However, Coleman and Dysart (2005) have argued that sources can function as framing devices within stories. Despite the *Guardian’s* attempts to strive for narrative diversity, the paper still relied heavily on a handful of official sources – especially when writing about local British angles. Thus, the *Guardian’s* coverage of the *Amoco Cadiz* enforced the official narratives that extolled the government’s concern and readiness while attributing the disaster to natural forces outside human control.
By contrast, in both newspapers, source use had modified significantly by 1989. As Smith (1992) noted, many *Seattle Times* sources on the *Exxon* spill were unique to that paper. Quotes from science and environmental sources formed a substantial part of source commentary in both papers, along with in-depth, varied commentary from a huge diversity of fishermen and local people. This again contradicts Button’s (1999, 128) findings in his study of how media reported on the *Braer* and *Sea Empress* spills in Great Britain. Though the spills were presented as environmental disasters, he found that “few scientists or environmentalists – who could potentially have explained the spills in more objective context – were actually quoted.” He further argues that “when media do construct a catastrophic event as a disaster, they seldom construct the frame from the victim’s perspective” (129). While the victims – in the case of the spills studied by this thesis, the fishermen, families, and communities of sea-dependent coastal regions – are usually most harmed by the disaster, they must struggle to establish their interpretations of the disaster “against the ideological frames generated by the status quo and replicated by the media” (129). As explained and seen in previous chapters, the *Guardian* and *Seattle Times* specifically privileged these sources over official sources in stories about the *Exxon Valdez* and *Prestige*. The practice helped to foster a sense of regional identity while investing the spill frames with a greater sense of complexity through the diversity of voices and perspectives sought – especially in the *Seattle Times’ 1989* coverage.

In 2002, the *Seattle Times* and the *Guardian* again quoted primarily local people and environmentalists. The emphasis on local people experiencing disaster – in part via predominant source quotes from many named local people – as well as environmental perspective, enabled local people to assert their own frames for the disaster specifically because of the collective weight of their individual voices. Gathering perspective on regional effects from many different individual voices unmasked the subtle nuances and variations in experience. Added together, however, the many local voices captured by the papers revealed the breadth of disaster shared by many people across the regions. The unified strains of diverse local voices helped to stress the regional impacts while giving reporters a vantage
from which to probe the underlying causes of the spills. Whereas the government attempted to frame the spill as an isolated failure of faulty seamanship by the captain, or as the fault of other nations failing to do their jobs rather than a failure of Spanish government coupled with a failure of broader underlying systemic frameworks, the alternative frames established by giving voice to local people revealed the spill as a regional environmental and economic disaster firmly rooted in preventable systemic origins.

**The Guardian and Seattle Times as Case Studies**

One important question raised by this thesis is how representative are these two papers of the larger community of news media and the broader status of environmental reporting quality today. It has been acknowledged that the *Guardian* and the *Seattle Times* have a historical reputation as quality newspapers. As case studies of environmental reporting evolution, their selection as research subjects for this thesis has both a positive and a negative side – though more positive aspects than negative. On the plus side, the papers’ established reputations within the world of journalism as quality representatives of their trades meant that problems and deficiencies in environmental reporting could be isolated and attributed more specifically to the papers’ philosophy towards environmental news and their approach to reporting on these stories. Using a paper with a lower overall record of excellence in reporting would have complicated the textual analysis, as pinpointing whether observed problems were directly related to a paper’s grasp or perception of environmental news, or more generally to lower reporting standards, would have proved more difficult.

At the same time, this very point may also be one downside to the use of these two papers as case studies. As this study revealed, both the *Guardian* and the *Seattle Times* demonstrated a marked learning curve in their handling of the complex spill disasters. This ability to learn from past mistakes may be a function of a newspaper’s base level of quality, and could mean that in less-reputed papers, the specific nettlesome challenges of environmental news could be thornier and take longer to overcome. Additionally, the
conscientious attention to overcoming reporting problems observed in the *Guardian* and *Seattle Times* may also be a function of the specific set of newsroom values that caused the newspapers to obtain their quality reputations in the first place, and may thus be less developed in newspapers of more average quality. To some extent, these points represent a weakness in using the *Guardian* and *Seattle Times* as case studies, because their overall quality may mean that the papers are also ahead of the curve insofar as environmental reporting evolution. Thus, it is possible that in the larger scope of news media, environmental reporting has not evolved in quality to the extent demonstrated in these papers. A similar study of a different sub-set of newspapers would be a question for future study that would permit this question to be answered more definitively.

Nonetheless, despite these weaknesses, it is still possible to use these two papers as case studies of environmental reporting evolution. First, the *Guardian* and *Seattle Times* represent what is possible to obtain in environmental reporting. Specifically because of their quality reputations, the papers serve as models of the challenges likely facing all media in grappling with complex environmental news. As Smith (1992) observed, a newspaper’s receipt of a Pulitzer Prize indicates that it adhered to a set of news values which all media desire to emulate, but are perhaps prevented by the constraints of daily reporting. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the news values guiding the *Guardian* and the *Seattle Times* in their oil spill reporting represent standards which most news organizations desire to follow. Further, because environmental journalism itself is a newer reporting concept, studying how environmental news infiltrated and evolved in an above-average paper such as the *Guardian* or *Seattle Times*—including how the papers grappled with complexity or modified their approach to environmental reporting—offers a more genuine picture of the challenges of environmental news, as well as a purer basis of comparison for a paper’s learning curve and the degree of evolution possible for the beat.
Environmental Journalism in Perspective

Another peripheral question raised by this thesis is where environmental journalism stands in relation to other beats. This thesis has demonstrated that in the quality press, at least, environmental reporting has significantly advanced over 25 years. This indicates that in relation to itself, environmental reporting today is noticeably better than it was when the beat first came into existence. A more nebulous question is whether this evolution puts environmental reporting on a par with reporting of other news, such as politics, government, or even other types of science news. There are indications that environmental journalism, even in smaller newspapers, has gained more legitimacy and that more people are familiar with environmental concepts, as well as interested in reading more environmental stories. This may very well be a positive result of the news media’s greater attention to environmental issues. It is more common to see investigative environmental reporting today than in 1989 – and certainly than it was 30 years ago. It is also more common to see stories today with a local environmental angle in smaller papers.

However, as Friedman (2004) and others have noted, environmental reporting continues to struggle with aspects of quality. One striking contemporary example is the mainstream media’s treatment of global warming. While the overwhelming scientific consensus is that global warming is occurring and that humans are the primary culprit, many stories treat the issue as if it is still equally debated among scientific experts. Many papers have reverted to using the “dueling scientists” tactic seen in the earlier days of environmental reporting, giving equal weight to climate change dissenters even though they comprise a very small fraction of the global scientific community.

The issue of global warming is indeed politically charged, and whether fear of political reprisal is at work or merely shoddy journalism is difficult to say. Regardless, global climate change represents the ultimate challenge to environmental reporting. The problem is deeply complex, highly nuanced, hard to visualize – save through dramatic portrayals of drowning polar bears – and measured in increments rather than breaking events. As with the
oil spill disasters, the issue of global warming penetrates into many social, economic, and political realms, and requires a deep scrutiny of underlying systemic contributions. Some newspapers today have done commendable jobs at producing, thoughtful, narrative pieces addressing these complexities.

However, the news media overall bear a significant responsibility for failing – in aggregate – to devote the kind of media attention, with the same reporting standards, to the subject as to, for instance, the war in Iraq. Thus, global warming may be the ultimate litmus test of how environmental reporting has evolved in the media-at-large. Still – and this may be significant – there is substantial debate among journalists about the media’s treatment of global warming. The fact that the media are even arguing amongst themselves over the state of reporting on the issue, or critically assessing the reporting of their colleagues, is itself a powerful indicator that an evolution in environmental reporting has taken place. In 1978, there was no such debate.

Covering Complex Environmental Stories Better

Based on the results of this thesis, it would seem that reporters covering complex environmental problems, such as an oil spill disaster, would produce more thoughtful, informative stories by following certain reporting principles over others. First, as seen in the dramatic shift in approach to covering the Exxon Valdez spill in the Seattle Times, reporters should resist the temptation to focus on blame and responsibility and instead look at underlying causes. The results suggest that obtaining the perspective of diverse representatives of an affected group, area or people – instead of selecting a few individuals to symbolize abstract aspects of the situation – will contribute important context that lends itself to a deeper conceptual understanding the spill, as opposed to reporting that seeks to quantify the scope of disaster or provide “alarmist sound bites.” Smith (1992, 185) has commented that while focusing on individuals can help to produce a compelling narrative, “it seems to reflect the values that drama is more important than conceptual understanding and
that interesting things are more newsworthy than important ones.” Personification of a few dramatic aspects of an oil spill encourages journalists “to ask who was responsible instead of what was the cause” (185).

As explained, however, reporters who approach an oil spill disaster with a different template in mind – one that seeks to explore deeper underlying causes over the immediacy of blame – will be more likely to target broader conceptual frameworks over dramatic but superficial explanations. Seeking information from a wide variety of sources – a familiar journalistic refrain – is equally if not more important when writing about a complex environmental problem. Relying on official sources and accounts prevents important context and nuance from coming to light that could inform a systemic perspective. As seen in the *Guardian* and *Seattle Times* stories of 1989 and 2002, however, stories that minimized official sources in favor of scientific, regional, and environmental perspective gained from richer conceptual information. Smith (199, 187) also cautions against using sources to “verify a preconceived story.” This problem may be related to the unfamiliar territory of complicated environmental disasters that discomfits journalists used to operating by routine models of reporting. The defense mechanism is often to cast stories in predictable contrasts or to adhere to familiar reporting templates, such as the “5 W’s and an H” of traditional reporting – a formulaic practice which Smith (1992, 186) argues “reduces journalists to conscientious stenographers” of disaster – a phenomenon seen at time in the *Guardian’s* 1978 spill coverage – and leads to stereotypical, superficial stories.

Because many of the pressing environmental problems today are elusive and their implications are difficult to summarize or foresee, journalists need to jettison these familiar reporting templates and instead ask questions that aim to explain some of the elusive, difficult, and challenging contexts. Writing stories from many thematic angles may help in this task by providing many inroads into nuances and ill-defined concepts of a complex problem. Grounding information about the present in rich historical contexts also relates a complex problem to deeper systemic causes by showing that environmental disasters like oil
spill are not episodic, but rooted in systemic problems with a longer historical lineage. Given the important and historical role of the news media in serving as a watchdog of social wellbeing, fostering journalists equally competent at investigating the area of social environmental wellbeing will be essential for public understanding of the many complex environmental problems with which the world of today is just beginning to grapple, and the world of tomorrow will have no choice but to solve.

**Future Study**

As with any scholarly undertaking such as this thesis, there is never space enough to examine all the important questions that arise during the course of study. This comprehensive study of environmental reporting’s evolution over time is the start of a process of inquiry that deserves considerable future attention. The present study attempted to determine the extent to which environmental reporting has improved over the long-term in quality newspapers in order to pinpoint specific areas where even the quality press have had difficulty. The results of this study have raised several questions that would benefit from additional, focused scholarly attention. First, this study has demonstrated that environmental journalism has significantly improved in relation to itself. However, environmental reporting has always been characterized by unique difficulties. Answering the question of where the quality of the beat stands in relation to other traditional news beats would complement the results of the present study by orienting the hard-to-quantify question of “quality” in the context of more well-documented journalistic endeavors. Such study would also further refine journalists’ understanding of what they need to do to surmount the continuing obstacles to quality environmental reporting.

This thesis also happened upon the surprising discovery of a relationship between a regional outlook in environmental news and higher quality reporting of a systemic nature. Studies designed to target this question specifically could shed light on whether regional identity is a theme that relates to quality environmental reporting on a more general level, or
whether oil spills and similar disasters are unique in this regard. Based on the results of this study, cultivation of regional identity emerged as connected to a more holistic view of the human-environment relationship. If this discovery proves true in other studies of environmental reporting, the significance for journalists seeking to improve the effectiveness of their reporting, and to reach the broader audiences necessary to foster larger-scale social change, could be profound. Because the majority of environmental problems facing society today are not about isolated threats to endearing wildlife, but about our broader social relationship with the environment and our own behaviors as the dominant species on the planet, the possibility that reporting focused on the relationship between regional identity and the environment could produce more effective stories is a potentially important discovery that needs to be explored in much greater depth.
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APPENDIX — STORY SAMPLES

1978 — Guardian Stories

# 1 (pg. 1) — Prominent Front Page Tease

The Guardian

Monday March 20 1978

Left alliance disintegrates in face of
government election triumph

Giscard sails to victory

From Walter Schwarz

In Paris

The government of President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and its Right Wing coalition was returned triumphantly to office after the bitterest of the election yesterday with a smaller majority than expected.

During the day, it was clear that the Left would not disintegrate as Major Chevallier, socialist leader, pulled out of the alliance with the Socialists and Communist parties.

France estimates from early results showed a large swing of the Left by giving the government alliance an expected vote to the coalition between the Communists, Socialists, and the Greens. The Greens won an estimated 20% of the total vote, with the Socialists and the Greens winning 18% and the Communists the 19%.

Poll scorn

From Martin Weir

French forces, laying down arms for three months, before their artillery and fighter-bombers are advancing deeper and deeper into Lebanon. The so-called “green line” is falling apart as the fighting intensifies.

The Israeli press home

From Rabbi Solomon

The UN Security Council has decided to withdraw its peacekeeping forces from Lebanon by 2000. The Israeli government is expected to then withdraw its forces from the area.

The Israeli army is expected to withdraw its forces from the area by 2000. The Israeli government is expected to then withdraw its forces from the area.
#1 (cont’d) – Main Story w/ Interwoven Headline, Weather, Sub-Story, Historical Context

THE GUARDIAN
Monday March 20, 1978

Heavy seas pound Amoco Cadiz as oil slick moves towards the British coast

Row grows over delayed tanker alert

By Charles Cook

Energy Correspondent

Amoco Corporation's oil tanker, the Amoco Cadiz, suffered a catastrophic blowout in the English Channel on Monday, with the loss of several hundred thousand barrels of crude oil. The oil slick has been steadily spreading, with the British government announcing a delay in the activation of the oil spill response teams. The incident has raised questions about the preparedness of the British government and the shipping industry to deal with such emergencies.

The Amoco Cadiz hit the British coast on Monday morning, with the oil slick expanding rapidly. The incident has raised concerns about the impact on the environment and the potential economic losses. The British government has been criticized for the delay in responding to the incident, with some calling for a more robust disaster preparedness plan.

British anti-pollution officials remain on high alert, monitoring the slick and preparing to take action. However, the delay has left many questioning the effectiveness of the response efforts. The incident serves as a reminder of the need for improved preparedness and response plans in the event of such emergencies.

Shell said last night it might be pleased to see Strickland on the British disaster if he wished. The oil in the tanker was contained by a sheen which had settled on the surface of the oil slick. A small number of barrels of oil stranded on the Irish coast which could not be contained.

The blowout in the Exxon Valdez oilfield in the Norwegian sector of the North Sea. It predicted that only 1% per cent of the oil would reach the shore.

The final bill could run into the billions of pounds for the current oil industry estimate. The cost of cleaning up the oil spill was estimated at $100 million. The British government has been criticized for the delay in responding to the incident, with some calling for a more robust disaster preparedness plan.

The incident has raised concerns about the impact on the environment and the potential economic losses. The British government has been criticized for the delay in responding to the incident, with some calling for a more robust disaster preparedness plan.

The incident serves as a reminder of the need for improved preparedness and response plans in the event of such emergencies.

Shell's computer programme for pollution insurance shown.

British anti-pollution officials remain on high alert, monitoring the slick and preparing to take action. However, the delay has left many questioning the effectiveness of the response efforts. The incident serves as a reminder of the need for improved preparedness and response plans in the event of such emergencies.
**#2 – British Identity, Battle Imagery, Responsibility Theme**

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**THE GUARDIAN**

Tuesday, March 21, 1978

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**Tanker captain in oil disaster faces trial**

By David Fitchett, Shipping Correspondent

The captain of the wrecked British tanker Argo, Capt. Eddie Topham, faces trial in London for causing a spill of 100,000 tons of crude oil. The trial is expected to last two weeks.

**Gordon Trotter, the Italian**

The charge against Mr. Trotter, a former captain of the Argo, is that he failed to take immediate and necessary action to prevent the spill.

---

**Break-even car firm seeks new transformation of Government model Leyland ‘on the road to recovery’**

By Joe McLaughlin

British Leyland made a profit of £2.1 million in the year ending March 31, and was able to cut its debt by £25 million. The company is hoping to sell off its under-performing assets and to increase its production.

The Leyland chairman, Mr. Michael Edwards, described the result as a “breakthrough”. The company has been facing financial difficulties for some time, but is now on the road to recovery.

---

**Election result stuns Union of Left**

By-election result in a seat held by the Conservative Party was won by the Labour Party. The result is seen as a sign of growing support for the Labour Party.

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**The Weather**

- Sunny with high of 70°F.
- Low chance of rain.
- Winds light and variable.

---

**US charges are sneak peak of Soames’**

Soames is expected to announce new economic measures in the next few days.

---

**Sunny and clear**

---

**Never at a loss—animates Michael Edwards explains British**

A short film and future plans.

---

**Clyne**

More automated factories and systems are being implemented, with the emphasis on improving efficiency and reducing costs.

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**Our approach to Government**

Mr. Brown said that the Government was committed to a policy of economic reform and social justice. He also mentioned the important role of trade unions in this process.

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**Ministers’ salaries**

Mr. Brown announced that the salaries of ministers would be increased by 10% from April 1st.

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**Rural plan**

The government is planning to invest £500 million in rural development over the next five years.

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**Banking**

The Bank of England has raised interest rates by 0.5%, to 7.5%, in an effort to combat inflation.

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**Coming soon**

A new animated series about the history of British industry will be launched in April.

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**Cost of living**

The cost of living index has increased by 2.5% in the past year.

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**Baltic Tanker**

The Baltic Tanker, owned by a consortium of companies, is expected to be delivered in June.

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**Aerospace**

The government is investing £200 million in the aerospace industry to develop new technologies.

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**The Guardian**

The newspaper is currently undergoing a major revamp to improve its appeal to younger readers.

---

**Back page**

More articles and features are available on the back page of this issue. Read it now.
#3 – Narrative, Breton Identity, Historical Context, Unique Local Sources

Still keeping their sanity in the face of the holocaust.

Today CNIT explores through a renovated camp where the prisoners were subjected to various forms of torture and execution, the purpose of which was to keep the prisoners in a state of constant anxiety and fear. The camp was a symbol of the regime's brutality and its determination to maintain control over the population.

A deadly remedy for the beaches of Britain.

PHILIP JORDAN: Beach on the Wicket of Local concern over the use of chemical dispersants on the beaches of the UK.
Wreckers invade airport

From Robert Whynant

In Tokyo

The demonstrator, who was carrying a stick and a sign, was taken to the police station. The incident was reported to the police and the airport authority.

Kidnapped baron released unharmed in Paris crowd

From Walter Schwarz in Paris

The kidnapped millionaire, Baron Empain, was released unharmed after a 12-hour siege at the Palais de l’Opera. He was flown to London later in the day.

Jersey waits on the wind as speed spreads

From Philip Jordan

North-west winds were pushing the giant oil slick from the Amoco Cadiz on the Porquerolles groyne. The weather forecasters predicted the slick would reach the Jersey coast within the next few days.

Children slept in rubble as mothers worked on construction site.

Up to fifty percent of the construction site labourers in India’s cities are women. They work in the fields and in the factories, and in the construction site. Women are often the main breadwinners in their families.

Details of Oxford’s current activities are available from the University of Oxford, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7JF. For directions and contributions, large or small, contact us at: Oxford University. The project has always been gratefully received.

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MONDAY MARCH 23, 1979

FRONT PAGE

Turn to back page, etc.
The Weather

Budget gambles could	

Dispute this papers

PROOFS raise battle cry

Oil slick could affect holiday beaches in two days

Favourable winds are shunting the Channel Islands from the gale belt but lashing and wind overtop the west.

Hearto-p

In the baby beds

Jersey
French navy opens tanker hatches

From Philip Jordan

A French navy oil company, assassinated by the tanks on the Persian Gulf, has been deliberately sabotaged by the oil tanker "Jeanne d'Arc". The decision is made in the run-up to open the hatches, which was apparently carried out by the oil tanker's owner, who had agreed to open the hatches after a long negotiation. The operation, which was completed, was witnessed by the oil tanker's crew and the owner of the Jeanne d'Arc, who said that the hatches were opened by the French navy after a long negotiation.

From Hugo Smith

The French navy is still in negotiations with the owner of the tanker, but is waiting for better weather. The owner has agreed to open the hatches, which was apparently carried out by the oil tanker's owner, who had agreed to open the hatches after a long negotiation. The operation, which was completed, was witnessed by the oil tanker's crew and the owner of the Jeanne d'Arc, who said that the hatches were opened by the French navy after a long negotiation.

From Charlie Lloyd

The owner of the tanker, who is still in negotiations with the French navy, has agreed to open the hatches, which was apparently carried out by the oil tanker's owner, who had agreed to open the hatches after a long negotiation. The operation, which was completed, was witnessed by the oil tanker's crew and the owner of the Jeanne d'Arc, who said that the hatches were opened by the French navy after a long negotiation.

Israel may act to

From David Slater

The Israeli military has received new intelligence suggesting that the Palestinian Authority is planning to launch a major offensive against Israeli forces in the West Bank. The Israeli military has been put on high alert, and the defense minister has been working with the military to develop a response. The Israeli military has been put on high alert, and the defense minister has been working with the military to develop a response.

From Martha Mcnally

The French navy has been in talks with the owner of the tanker, but is waiting for better weather. The owner has agreed to open the hatches, which was apparently carried out by the oil tanker's owner, who had agreed to open the hatches after a long negotiation. The operation, which was completed, was witnessed by the oil tanker's crew and the owner of the Jeanne d'Arc, who said that the hatches were opened by the French navy after a long negotiation.
#7 - Narrative, Good Reporting, Ecological Angle, Science of Oil

FRANCE COUNTS THE COST OF BLACK EASTER

PHILIP JORDAN, IN BREST, ON THE REAL COST TO TOURISM AND INDUSTRY OF THE WORLD'S WORST OIL SICK

In the middle of what has become known as Black Easter, the world's worst oil sick began in the town of Brest. The incident occurred when a pipeline carrying oil from the town of Brest to the town of St. Malo, France, ruptured, releasing a massive oil spill into the sea. The oil spill caused significant damage to local fisheries and tourism industry. The incident highlighted the need for better oil spill response and environmental protection measures.

The Guardian Correspondent, KEITH HARPER, bids Jack Jones farewell

JAMES LINDLEY-JONES, JONES, usually quite reserved, today is happy. Many people think he has the most successful family in the world. In the past few years, Jones has been the leader of the leading oil company in the country. Several newspaper reports have said that he is due to retire in a few months.

The House that Jack built

JAMES LINDLEY-JONES, JONES, is a man who has built a house. He is a man who has built a business. He is a man who has built a family. He is a man who has built a career. He is a man who has built a reputation. He is a man who has built a life. He is a man who has built a name.

The chairwoman says: 'And now, I give you Doctor Boyson—if he'd only stop chattering for a minute.' DAVID LEIGHTON examines the second populism politician in our series, Rhodes Boyson (right)

The second populist politician in our series, Rhodes Boyson, is a man who has built a political career. He is a man who has built a political reputation. He is a man who has built a political name. He is a man who has built a political life. He is a man who has built a political family. He is a man who has built a political business. He is a man who has built a political house.
# Map Graphic, Narrative, Breton Identity, In-Depth Reporting

## Brittany Lightship

* Baltic power takes major share of the world's ships*

PHILP JORDAN at the wheel of the new British

* Updated chart for owners of the vessel's later size.*

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# Graphic

A map of Brittany with the location marked.

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# Narrative

A detailed report on the new lightship, its construction, and its role in maritime navigation.

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# Breton Identity

Exploring the cultural significance of Brittany in modern times.

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# In-Depth Reporting

An in-depth look at the technical aspects of operating a modern lightship.
Thatcher criticism mounts

From Anne Melford
in Belfast

The Conservative Party
Leader, Mrs Margaret Thacher, has
said public opinion is beginning
to support her policies. Mrs
Thacher also welcomed the
reduction in the Irish budget.

Mrs Thacher, who claimed
her visit last month was more
than just a diplomatic one,
visited Ireland yesterday to
meet with Irish politicians.

Mrs Thacher, who was in
Dublin to discuss the Irish
peace process, said that she
had been impressed by the
television coverage of the
scene.

Mrs Thacher has called
for an end to violence in
Northern Ireland and has
deprecated the violence
against civilians.

He said that the violence
was not justified and that
the peace process was the
only way to resolve the
problem.

Mrs Thacher has also
supported the government's
policy of direct talks with the
Irish Republican Army.

She said that direct talks
were the only way to solve
the problem and that the
peace process was the only
way to achieve peace.

The government has been
criticized for its handling of
the Troubles. Mrs Thacher
said that the government
needed to do more to
prevent violence.

She said that the
government needed to take
stronger action against the
violence and that the peace
process was the only way to
achieve peace.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Spain and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Basque separatists.

She said that the Basque
separatists were a
menace to Spanish security
and that the government
needed to do more to
prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Africa and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Mau Mau separatists.

She said that the Mau Mau
separatists were a
menace to Kenyan security
and that the government
needed to do more to
prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in the Middle East and has
supported the government's
policy of direct talks with
the Palestine Liberation
Organization.

She said that the Palestine
Liberation Organization was
a menace to Israeli security
and that the government
needed to do more to
prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Latin America and has
supported the government's
policy of direct talks with
the FARC guerrillas.

She said that the FARC
separatists were a menace
to Colombian security and
that the government needed
to do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in South Africa and has
supported the government's
policy of direct talks with
the African National
Congress.

She said that the African
National Congress was a
menace to South African
security and that the
government needed to do
more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in India and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Indian security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Pakistan and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Pakistani security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Indonesia and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Indonesian security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Vietnam and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Vietnamese security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Egypt and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Egyptian security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Nigeria and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Nigerian security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Lebanon and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Lebanese security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Jordan and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Jordanian security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Bahrain and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Bahraini security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Kuwait and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Kuwaiti security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Saudi Arabia and has
supported the government's
policy of direct talks with
the Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Saudi Arabian security and
that the government needed
to do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Iraq and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Iraqi security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Syria and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Syrian security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Libya and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Libyan security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Yemen and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Yemeni security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Saudi Arabia and has
supported the government's
policy of direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Saudi Arabian security and
that the government needed
to do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Iran and has supported
the government's policy of
direct talks with the
Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Iranian security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.

Mrs Thacher has also
called for an end to violence
in Afghanistan and has
supported the government's
policy of direct talks with
the Terrorist organizations.

She said that the Terrorist
organizations were a menace
to Afghani security and that
the government needed to
do more to prevent violence.
1978 – Seattle Times Stories

#10 – Disproportionately Large Breaking Story Photo, Headline

Associated Press and United Press International WASHINGTON, D.C. President Carter today issued a call for a strong defense program with a warning to the Soviet Union and Cuba that military expansion is a two-way street.

In his first major defense policy statement as President, Mr. Carter said the United States stands ready to expand if the Russians do so. Mr. Carter and the United States have, in the past, expanded if the Russians expanded, he added.

President Carter also praised the United States' foreign policy of "non-aggression" and "non-expansion," which has been successful in the past.

Carter warns Russ, Cubans to use restraint

St. Pat's 'spirits'

DuPhy's Irish rises to occasion

by STEPHEN H. DUNPHY

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The Navy pact to provide work for 300 at Todd

Seattle, March 21 — The bottom Navy contract to Todd Shipyards here is signed and work on the 300-employee job is under way, a Todd spokesman said today.

The contract was announced yesterday in Washington, D.C., by Sen. Warren G. Magnuson and Henry M. Jackson.

"We're gunning for it now," said Don Gillette, Todd's vice president and assistant general manager. Major overhaul on two destroyers, the Marvin Smith and the Gray, will mean work for about 300 employees for 18 months, beginning in May.

The Smith will go into the yard May 1 and is due out March 16 of next year. The Gray is due in September 18 and out the following July 27, Gillette said.

Both ships were built at Todd. The Gray was commissioned in 1943 and the Smith in 1944. The so-called "baseline overhaul" is intended to extend the warships lives for 10 to 20 years, Gillette said.

"Todd is delighted," not only because of the size of the job, but because work on the two destroyers could last into 1971, Gillette said. There are more than 10 Navy ships dry docked each month, he explained.

"We anticipate about a dozen more may be available for work in West Coast yards in the future," he said.

ONB is building your bank:

You can get more out of your bank you know your bank

When we asked you to help us build your bank, you asked us for an amazingly wide range of services. Some we already had. Others we got under way. But what's even more important is that you know about all the services we offer you. So you can get the most out of your bank.

Not just the big, important services that form the very foundation of the bank we're building.

But the little convenience services as well. We're working hard to provide as many of these as we can, too.

Little things, like carbon copies of the checks you write.

"Convenient things, like direct deposit of your Social Security checks, Visa cards and American Express Gold Cards. Safe deposit boxes. And travelers checks.

Speedy things, like faster-moving
teller lines. Simple things, like plain English bank forms. And simple interest on ONB loans.

These are just some of the things we're doing to build your bank. Of course, there's a whole lot more. For a more detailed account of it all.

When we're building your bank for our booklet "Concrete About You Bank.

Or better stop by the branch near you for your copy. We'd like to hear from you.

Because more we know about what want in your bank, the better we can build your bank.
Last of tanker's oil expected to spill; massive cleanup is begun

London Daily Telegraph

BREST, France — The last of the 75,000 tons of crude oil that was aboard the super tanker Amoco Cadiz when it ran aground of the French coast near last week is expected to be forced out by the waves and begin flowing.

The area is now a scene of panic as the oil continues to spread and the authorities struggle to contain it.

The oil is expected to cause significant damage to the surrounding areas and is currently making its way towards the port of Brest.

The authorities are working around the clock to prevent further damage and are requesting assistance from neighboring countries.

Tanker aground at mouth of Mississippi

NEW ORLEANS — (AP) — An 80,000-ton bulk carrier ship called the American Victory has run aground at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

The ship, which is carrying a cargo of crude oil, has hit a sandbar and is now stranded.

The Coast Guard has been called in to assess the situation and a cleanup operation is underway.

Copyright 2006 - Seattle Times Company. Used with permission.
wire crossed on Amoco Cadiz

by Glen Carter

A couple of our compatriots

I...
Anger, frustration in Valdez

Residents, environmentalists criticize delays in cleanup; human error blamed for spill

by Bill Dietrich
Timm staff reporter

Valdez, Alaska — Angry residents and environmentalists yesterday criticized delays in the cleanup of the 11.1 million-gallon oil spill that has been blamed on human navigational error and could get worse.

The tanker Exxon Valdez remained grounded yesterday about 3 miles off Prince William Sound at 240,000 barrels of crude oil spread through the southeast environment and waters where explorers and experts are searching for the remains of the tanker.

Residents of this community are upset at the oil company officials and the government agencies giving them the impression that the spill is clean up but not making progress.

Residents are angry about the lack of communication and lack of leadership by the government agencies.

"It's a major disaster and we're not being kept informed," said one resident. "We're being kept in the dark and that's not acceptable."
Anger, frustration in Valdez

Because of the need to fly in equipment from around the globe, the Coast Guard quickly began to consider options for dealing with the spill. After 14 hours of trying, the first attempt to fly in a helicopter to assist with the spill was unsuccessful. The helicopter was unable to land due to the high winds and rough seas.

The Coast Guard administration was unhappy with the response time but made the best of it. They recognized that the situation was critical and that immediate action was needed. They were able to coordinate with nearby vessels to transfer some of the equipment to the area, but they were still short on resources.

The Coast Guard quickly moved to establish a spill response command center, but they were still facing significant challenges. The spill was still spreading, and the weather conditions were making it difficult to control.

The spill continued to spread, and the Coast Guard brought in additional resources to help with the cleanup. This included helicopters, boats, and personnel.

The spill eventually stopped, and the Coast Guard was credited with doing a good job in managing the crisis. The cleanup process took several days, but it was successful in containing the spill.

The experience with the Valdez spill reinforced the need for better preparedness and response plans for future oil spills. It also highlighted the importance of having a well-coordinated response to such disasters.

Prices meant to move you.

These low fares not only get you where you're going, they get you there in style. With our celebrated More Care® service—an assigned seat means your seat is waiting for you when you arrive. And with our new flights, your journey is not only comfortable but also convenient. We're making travel easier than ever before. So book today and let us take care of the rest.
Valdez drowning in the oil that feeds it

by Bill Dierich
Times staff reporter

VALDEZ, Alaska — For John Devens, the community's biggest employer, fishing and tourism, since the Alaska Pipeline was completed.

Devens recalled that last Thursday evening, he was in a boat on the Sound and was watching a large tanker

"We're pretty unhappy this has happened, but it is also a reality we know could happen," said Devens, who is the community's lead

Valdez lawyer. In the past three years, the town has seen a steady increase in oil activity, with more than 6,000 tanker trips having passed by before this disastrous grounding.

Valdez itself takes its name from a site near the site where the tankers are docked. The town is home to a growing number of oil-related businesses, and tourism is increasing.

"This grounding has had a big impact on the community," Devens said. "We need to be prepared for the worst, but we're also hoping for the best."
Oil spill: one week of frenzy

Oil threatens fish, mammals, birds and plants

Spilled crude oil continues to spread south in Alaska’s Prince William Sound, one of the world’s richest environments for fish, sea mammals and birds. This map shows some of the areas most vulnerable to damage from oil.

BILL DREMMER

**Valdez spill spreads**

**Times news service**

The captain of the oil tanker Exxon Valdez is not out of a job longer because a federal investigation showed he was legally drunk after his ship ran aground, causing the nation’s biggest oil spill.

The spill now stretches beyond Prince William Sound and threatens additional fishing communities and marina of Alaska’s tourist industry.

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Tough lesson: ‘To prepare for the worst’

by Ross Anderson

CORDOVA, Alaska — Sea otters have been reduced to a shadow of their former selves over the past several years, and their numbers are in serious decline. They’re not alone. A number of other marine mammals, including seals, sea lions, and whales, are also facing similar declines.

The otters’ decline is a worrying trend, say scientists, who say the animals are crucial to the health of the local ecosystem. The otters act as a natural pest control, keeping populations of crabs and other invertebrates in check.

“Without sea otters, the crabs would multiply out of control,” said one scientist. “This would have a cascading effect on the entire marine food web.”

The otters’ decline is also an economic concern. Sea otters are valued for their fur, which is used in clothing, and for their meat.

“Sea otters are a valuable resource for us,” said another scientist. “We need to do more to protect them.”

Volunteer Kelly Weatherby

CALL FOR ACTION

Tells story through Weatherby's own words and phrases

Obesity is a national health crisis.

Use narrative/storytelling to engage readers

NATIONAL WEIGHT LOSS MONTH

A program that encourages all three elements (diet, exercise, and behavior changes) is more likely to lead to long-term weight control, the AMA concludes.

National Weight Loss Month

The 1,200 NutriSystem® Weight Loss Centers can take some of the burden off you and help you achieve your goals. They offer personalized programs that include diet and exercise plans.

NutriSystem offers the diet plan and exercise plan of your choice, as well as support from their experts.

Weight Maintenance helps keep you on track and ensure long-term weight control.

“War on Obesity”

If you’re concerned about your health— and the health of your family— join the national effort to recognize obesity as the number one public health threat it is.

What can you do?

1. Make sure you are not part of the problem. See your family physician and share your concern.

2. Take control of your own life, if you are overweight and/or obese.

3. Encourage others in the “War on Obesity.” Talk to your friends, families, and neighbors about this important national problem and join the thousands of Americans who will observe National Weight Loss Month during April.

4. Call for a national health policy on
Nature may help to mitigate spill

Oil is already breaking up, breaking down

What effects will the oil have on the environment?

Nature may help to mitigate spill. Oil is already breaking up, breaking down. The decomposition of the oil by bacteria will occur naturally, as will the breakdown by the actions of surfactants. Nature may help to mitigate spill.

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#18 (pg. 2) – Mention Plankton, Food Chain

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Exxon executives shouldn't resign, chairman says

Coalition will open special line on oil spill

Captain covered up 1985 DWI conviction

Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival in Seattle

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Ayatollah Khomeini dies at 86

Renee Gross and Associated Press

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini died last night in Tehran, after more than 30 years as supreme religious and political leader of Iran. He was 88 and left no recognized successor.

Khomeini’s death was announced this morning by Tehran Radio with a statement from his son and chief aide, Ahmad. The radio broadcast was transmitted in Farsi.

President Reagan said today that the United States has received reports from sources in Tehran that Khomeini has died. The President announced that the United States is suspending all flights to Tehran.

The news was first announced by the National Broadcasting Station, the newscast of the government-owned Voice of America in Arabic.

A Monday morning meeting was held in Iran, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) and Tehran Radio said.

A body of Khomeini’s body was seen in the early morning in the city of Tehran, and it was later carried to the capital, where the body was placed in a plane for transportation to the United States.

The plane carrying Khomeini’s body was seen departing from the military airport in Tehran.

Khomeini’s death comes at a time when the United States is facing severe economic sanctions and military pressure.

‘The citizens have gone crazy’

by Sherry Hu Duan

New York Times

BEIJING — As the struggle of communist felons spread across the country, the Chinese government faced increasing pressure from the international community. The government announced that it had completed a review of its policies and had concluded that the policies were effective.

The announcement came after a detailed review of the policies and the government’s response to the crisis. The government said that it had taken measures to stabilize the economy and had taken steps to increase productivity.

The government also announced that it had taken steps to increase social security and to improve the living conditions of the people.

The announcement came after months of protests and demonstrations in Beijing.

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Alaska fears spill has smeared its image

Tourism

continued from Page 1

seeing Topeka, "It's a perception Alaska has had a Nagasaki bomb dropped on it.

That perception, Alaska officials insist, is wrong.

In Anchorage, Gov. Steve Cowper will be in Seattle Tuesday to explain that most of his state's tourist season has been unaffected by the March 24 spill of 11.2 million gallons of crude through the super tanker Exxon Valdez.

And the state is using $4 million controlled by Exxon for advertising and public-relations campaigns to tell tourists that most of Alaska remains unaffected.

The campaign, which began last month on television and newspapers in the Lower 48, compares the contamination of approximately 700 miles of shoreline to losing the beauty mark on the cheek of Marilyn Monroe. With or without the mark, she remains lovely.

The Anchorage Daily News editorialized that comparing Monroe to Alaska seems bizarre. But Bob Miller of the Alaska Tourism Marketing Council says the analogy makes sense, because Alaska has 33,994 miles of coastal shoreline in all, more than the other 49 states combined.

The states in this effort are large. Alaska's biggest private-industry oil, in drilling the second- and third-biggest industries, fishing and tourism.

Tourism in Alaska employs 20,000 people in the summer and generates $1 billion in revenue -- about $450 million of that spent in the state and about $850 million spent on planes and cruise-ship lines. About 780,000 people visited the state last year, a percent of them from foreign countries. By comparison, Alaska's population is only 547,000.

Because of Alaska's reputation as a place unspoiled, pollution strikes at the core of the state's image of itself and its world.
Pipeline group ‘not prepared’ for Alaska oil spill disaster

Christopher Reed in Valdez, Alaska, and Gareth Penny

EVIDENCE is growing that a corporation involved in the Alaska pipeline was unprepared for oil spills. The pipeline is a joint project of the Exxon Shipping Company and the BP Alaska Pipeline Company. The two companies are responsible for the pipeline.

Exxon Shipping is responsible for the Spill Response Team. The company has been criticized for its response to the oil spill in Valdez in 1989. The response was not as effective as expected.

The Pipeline group ‘not prepared’ for Alaska oil spill disaster

High award... A three-story model of the Oscar receives its finishing touches outside the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles where the Academy Awards will be announced tonight. Dustin Hoffman and Rain Man are tipped as winners.

Trade after...
#24 – Narrative, “Eyewitness” Section, Systemic Aspects

When the brewery asked Gaston Berle- 
men to do the English translation of “merde” and pointed out that a somewhat earlier date would arise only a few years later.

On this occasion, St. Bénigne, the name of the French revolution, the tenant of the most famous pub in Britain, the French History, Soho, will go under the hammer of the wine-stained tears from all the ad-libbing philistines of Soho, living and dead; among the last Augustus John, 

Dyson Thomas and the artist 

Nina Hamnett.

Gaston was born in the little 

at 39 Dean Street shortly before his father, 

Vicar, a head waiter from the Pas-de-Calais, took it over in 1914. It had been a German 

pub. But, with the first world war breaking out, Victor 

smartly turned it into what it has been ever since, a strange jungle in Waltham’s crown, a refuge for spiritual 

philistines, emphasising fine wines and spirits, serving only half-pint glasses only.

Bermonton fils took over in 1914. A brewery rep once said in his upmarket effete 

“Excuse me, your background music seems to be turned down.” Gaston’s rear 

could be heard in the bar two 

stores down. There is no 

murk, no juke box. What does burst into the street is the undelivered clamour of human voices.

This creates what drew the 

boxer Georges Carpentier, 

Maurice Chevalier and 

Gerald de Gaulle, who made it one of his Five French social head 

quarters.

But its lure, above all, has been the variety of clientele. You can see an old man with 

a cane, a young cricketer, without collar and tie, ordering pints of champagne, a 

drinker whose breath or spititously causes white wine to foam in his 

glass; and the character whom staff have nicknamed, in 

ev, the Man Who Mixes 

Cameri and vodka.

Gaston would like to see 

the service gently enlarged, with 

croissants and café 

Gallico introduced but isn’t yet entirely confident that this will happen.

Another brewery rep once urged him to turn it into a 

French theme pub, with plas 

tic onions. The reply was, “You can’t create atmos 

phere or ambience. You can’t paint them into a place, but you could put me down in a corrugated tin in the middle of the Sahara and there would soon be atmosphere.”

--

Alaskan fishermen angry at oilmen’s bombast

Eyewitness

Christopher Reed in Valdez, Alaska

A man with a gun, dark blue uniform, helmet, and badge marked “Emergency” or “Command Centre” at the Westmark Hotel in Valdez. No shell for the press. No one in the bunch of the 

incident ever appears to show 

interest in what the other fellow is doing, not even Shaw, who does not read the press. You’ve been too busy working an 18-hour day,” she said.

The incident accumulates events here, since the Exxon tanker hit a reef and burned a 

tanker’s fuel oil. The fuel oil, black oil, and water from the Exxon burned for three 

days in the pristine waters of Prince William Sound. There have been no reports of 

pollutants in the oil, although there have been reports of 

birds and marine mammals, including the entangled 

sea otter, the animal whose blood 

brought Russian trappers to Alaska. Even if fishing 

villages, fishermen worry that the 

publicity about the spill will harm sales of 

salmon, crab, and black cod.

Meanwhile, the oil industry’s main focus is on production of 

bulletins on the oil spill, which grows ever wider. The impression of 

improvement in its clean-up efforts increases as the few events 

that actually happen are publicised.

The refinery will kill thou-

9. Go on a la U.S., or something, 

32. Since for example without 

5. Make poor child above his 

1. Play at hazardous road 

2. Used freight on the 

12. From front page at 

14. Turn over last (4) 

24. Withdraw pamphlet on 

7. Burden in abscence from 

8. Solved, as in some 

9. Reduced to measure to 

2. Smaller than a credit 

3. Solved, as in some 

10. Largest of US cities 

20. Part of a plane or ship 

21. Black cod is known as 

22. Hairless or bald (4) 

23. Photographic negative 

24. Part of a plane or ship 

25. Gordonian, a type of 

26. One of a group of 

27. Police for example 

28. A kind of herbal 

29. Greatly impressed by 

30. Underwater growth 

31. Not always a 

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33. Burden in abscence from 

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41. A kind of herbal 

42. Greatly impressed by 

43. Underwater growth 

44. Not always a

Across

9. Go on a la U.S., or something, 

10. Yell as soon as cow-catcher 

11. Fell someone for girl involved 

12. Out of front page at 

13. Turn over last (4)

14. Make poor child above his 

15. Sold some taken to 

16. Small and weak (4)

17. Opposed to orchestra having 

18. Part of a plane or ship 

19. Photographic negative 

20. Gordonian, a type of 

21. Black cod is known as 

22. Hairless or bald (4) 

23. Photographic negative 

24. Gordonian, a type of 

25. Black cod is known as 

26. Hairless or bald (4)
FBI to launch oil spill inquiry

Mark Tran in Washington

The FBI yesterday announced that it will launch an investigation into the Alaskan oil spill to determine whether Exxon or its employees committed criminal violations of federal law.

FBI officials said the bureau will focus on whether the spill of 11 million gallons of crude oil constituted a “negligent discharge of a pollutant into navigable waters of the United States” and whether the spill breached the Clean Water Act.

Exxon has said it will endure a barrage of criticism for the handling of the spill from the supertanker Valdez and the intervention of the FBI, with possible criminal charges, put further pressure on the oil giant.

The oil company has already thrown in the towel with the court...
Crude confrontations

The massive Exxon Valdez oil spill looks set to claim a further victim — the credibility of the oil industry itself.

Christopher Reed reports from Alaska as battle brews again between the oil companies and conservationists.

The OIL SPILL that spread its contamination across Prince William Sound in south central Alaska has also inflicted severe damage on the industry it claims to be a boon to in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, known as ANWR. Here, 1.5 million acres of coastal land believed to contain the oil is also home to a host of 160,000 caribou, polar bears, and tens of thousands of species of birds and sea mammals.

The federal government had promised the classic combination of government intervention and the developers of Big Oil.

The Reagan administration made a determined but failed attempt to turn over the coastal plan to the two main contractors, Chevron and British Petroleum USA, for exploratory drilling. President George Bush Jr. has indicated his sympathy for the conservationists’ viewpoint.

The Titanic is only a few feet away from the Deliverance, a 2,000-ton, 1,800-foot-long oil barge, which owns 5 percent of the Prudhoe Bay, and the pipeline to Valdez where the spill happened, owns 25 percent. The incident, its owners believe, will save the industry millions of dollars.

Estimates of how much oil may lie in the refuge range from a relatively modest 500 million recoverable barrels to an amazing 2.5 billion, with an Interior Department figure of 3.2 billion. Claims of finding the oil are only 0.1 percent of the industry’s “shut-in” estimate, but those are globs, and the Interior’s estimate is to avoid dependence on oil imports.

Conservationists insist that, in an improvement of just over two years per Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Prince William Sound, President Bush has said there was “no connection” between Valdez and ANWR, Exxon’s USA president’s comments.

The week also saw the “underestimated incident” and the refuge drilling issue being put on hold. The report to the industry that has involved Exxon in Valdez, he said, “is a false statement.”

If oil is ever pumped in the Arctic Refuge, it will be sent down the 80-mile pipeline to Valdez, Alaska, which has a pipeline that runs directly into the oil spill.

The industry continues to pump its considerable power and money into support of opening the refuge. But the impact of Valdez may already have run its course.
#27 – Storytelling, Excellent Context, Systemic through Narrative

Heavy going... Muscovites lining up to be weighed outside the Soviet capital’s Kletskii railway station.

Photograph: Sankagil Corly

Alaskan clean-up gets tangled in red tape

**Eyewitness**

Martin Walker, Prince William Sound, Alaska

The sky is a stern grey-blue. The sun beams down on the Arctic tundra, and you bend over the morning sun. You look down at the frozen beach, at the towering cliffs, at the rushing water. Your stomach is in knots. The cleanup crew is late, and there are salmon eggs caught in the grass. A beach clean-up is in progress, but the work is only just beginning. It is now after midnight, and the beach expert has finally turned up to make his inspection. This was all arranged by offshore workers in the SAME (Save the Arctic Marine Environment) project. The beach expert has travelled in the same charter, and they can make it through the inspection at the same time. Without their approval, no work may begin. They check for signs of ancient human habitation—"activating memory". This means that if you can see the recently green of peascocling herring in the sand, the oil, the beach may not be cleaned.

We are now nearly three weeks into the disaster. There are more than 1 million barrels of oil washed up on the beach. The local communities are becoming increasingly concerned, and the government is under pressure to act. The beach expert says that the cleanup work is progressing well. They have removed in excess of 100,000 pounds of debris, and the beach is starting to look better. The cleanup work is ongoing, and they hope to be finished by the end of the week. The beach expert says that the work is going well, and they hope to be finished by the end of the week. The beach expert says that the work is going well, and they hope to be finished by the end of the week.

Guardian Crossword 18,449

Longman Dictionaries

Prize Crossword

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Fish harvest hopes rise as Exxon inquiry opens

Mark Walter in Washington

The official inquiry opened in Anchorage yesterday began its first public session. The inquiry is expected to last six months, and it will be the first time that the public has heard directly from the officers and crew of the Exxon Valdez.

The inquiry is being held to determine what caused the spill and to prevent similar accidents in the future. The Exxon Valdez is one of the world's largest tankers, and the accident caused an environmental disaster that continues to affect the region today.

The inquiry will hear testimony from a variety of sources, including the Exxon Valdez crew, government officials, oil industry experts, and environmental activists. The inquiry is expected to be a long and complex process, and it will be watched closely by people around the world.

The Exxon Valdez spill was one of the worst environmental disasters in history, and it has had a lasting impact on the region. The inquiry is an important step in the process of understanding what happened and finding ways to prevent similar accidents in the future.

Stars flock to defend Patsy's pasta against the critics

Our Correspondent in Washington

The food critic of the New York Daily News, who is known for his no-holds-barred approach to restaurant reviewing, has once again come under attack. The critic has been accused of being biased and of unfairly slamming some of the city's top restaurants.

The latest controversy has centered around Patsy's, a popular Italian restaurant in Little Italy. The critic has given Patsy's a low rating, and some of the restaurant's patrons have spoken out in defense of the restaurant.

Patsy's has a long history in Little Italy, and it is one of the city's most beloved Italian restaurants. The controversy has sparked a debate about the role of restaurant critics and the standards they use to evaluate restaurants.

Teaching

Paul Webster in Paris

When 20 members of the extreme left organization, Directe, went on trial in Paris yesterday, the prosecution had warned that it would need at least six years to prove its charges against the group, which is accused of involvement in terrorist activity. The prosecutor's guide was a lawyer named Pierre Trogneux.

The trial has been highly charged, with both sides presenting their own version of events. The defense has argued that the group is being unfairly targeted, while the prosecution has presented a detailed case against the group. The trial is expected to last for several months, and it will be closely watched by people around the world.
Wildlife suffers as slick swamps Spanish coast

Spain blames UK for oil disaster

Spanish authorities claimed the tanker would not have been allowed entry into any other European port, because it did not meet EU security regulations.

"In Gibraltar we see yet another case of lax, smugness and inappropriate behaviour," the EU Commission spokesman said.

Experts speculated that a third crane was used to remove the debris from the Prestige. The tanker was carrying 1.5 million tonnes of fuel.

Meanwhile, another oil tanker, the Prestige, was seen entering a nearby port.

A pint of best and be generous with the B1, please landlord

James Meikle
Spain blames Britain for oil disaster

The body of controversial magazine editor Mino Pecorelli, shot dead in a Rome street.
#30 – Systemic Focus – e.g. "Third-World" Spills, Narrative, Online Tease, Photo Context
Oil-laden tanker sinks beneath swirling seas as accusations begin to fly

Timebomb under the ocean

The loss of the oil tanker Prestige, which broke in two early yesterday, in the Atlantic off Spain. Photograph: Paul Lane

**Support for royals plummets to record low**

The support for the monarchy has taken a hammering. The death of Princess Diana in 1997 brought the royal family's popularity to an all-time high. However, following her death, it has been on a downward spiral. The latest poll shows that only 32% of the public now support the monarchy, a significant drop from the 72% recorded in 1997. The majority of the decline is attributed to negative public opinion surrounding the royal family's handling of Princess Diana's death, which is seen as insensitive and callous. The royal family's involvement in several controversial issues, such as the handling of the issues related to the Duke of York and Prince William, has also contributed to the decrease in support. The royal family's traditional image of opulence and privilege has also been challenged in recent years, leading to a decline in public support.
Timebomb under the ocean

Page 1 of the Ria Arousa, a sea loch famed for its shellfish, which provides nearly two-thirds of Spain's mussels, was in a state of fear. Everybody here lives from the sea, he said. "If this gets into this area the mussels will be ruined and thousands of people will suffer. It will cause more than triple the damage already suffered on the Coast of Death."

Although fishermen differed on whether the oil was more likely to solidify in the cold ocean depths and sink to the bottom, or float up to form a massive slick, they all condemned the Spanish government's handling of the Spanish oil spill. They should have taken it into an estuary somewhere and allowed all the fuel to be taken off," said Jose Antonio Dominguez, who cultivates mussels. "If the boat had sunk, at least only one loch would have been affected. Now we will all suffer."

Madrid yesterday insisted it had done the right thing by expelling the Prestige from its waters. But Mr Chirac accused other leaders of failing to tackle the world's ageing tanker fleet, saying the EU had sworn to take urgent measures after the Prestige collision in the Atlantic coast in 1999. "I am horrified by the stupidity of those in charge, politically, nationally and particularly at European level, to take action," he said.
Spill will test nature's ability to recover

Analysis

Paul Brown

Oil-covered beaches64 appearing on the shore are the first image of a tanker disaster and often spark frantic rescue efforts.

But apart from the immediate impacts, the spill can have far-reaching consequences. The massive slicks of oil will have significant effects on the local ecosystem.

The brown tide, in which untold thousands of tonnes of oil are allowed to pour into the Gulf, is a threat to life itself. A variety of marine species, including fish and crustaceans, are at risk. The oil will also coat the feathers of birds, impairing their ability to fly, and will enter the food chain, affecting top predators.

The impact on the local wildlife is already evident. The Gulf of Mexico is home to a diverse range of marine life, including many species that are not found elsewhere in the world. The oil spill will have a devastating effect on these species, leading to a loss of biodiversity in the Gulf.

The effects of the oil spill on the local economy are equally severe. The seafood industry, which is a major source of income for many communities in the Gulf region, will suffer a significant loss.

The oil spill is a wake-up call for all of us. It is a reminder of the fragility of our environment and the importance of protecting it. We must act now to prevent such disasters from occurring in the future.
Port at mercy of oil slick prepares for worst

[Image of text from the page]
Catastrophic spill feared as oil tanker splits, sinks

Monorail: It's a nail-biter, 'yes' votes finish 868 ahead; opposition

Next: neighborhood meetings, organizing board and staff

Dept. of Homeland Security with Bush hails action as 'bold step'

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TANKER’S TROUBLED VOYAGE

No port in a storm for Prestige

The Prestige, a tanker that ran aground off the coast of Spain in 2002, was abandoned in a storm. The ship’s crew was rescued, but the tanker continued to leak oil. The accident highlighted the risks of oil spills and the importance of preparing for such events.

Ship has complicated lineage

The Prestige was owned by several companies, making it difficult to determine who was responsible for the spill.

Spill soils beaches, poses threat to fishing grounds

The oil spill contaminated beaches and threatened the fishing industry in the area.

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Sunken tanker’s oil salvageable, expert says

Real story is emerging in Monte Carlo ‘attack’
Spanish city awaits yet another black tide

Oil spill threatens aquarium at site of earlier disaster

LA CORUÑA, Spain — The city is on high alert as an oil spill threatens the aquarium at the site of an earlier disaster.

The spill, which occurred in 2000, is the latest in a series of environmental disasters that have hit the city over the past decade.

The spill occurred at the site of the former aquarium, which was closed in 2001 after the oil spill. The city has since taken steps to clean up the spill and prevent further damage.

The city's mayor, Antonio García, said the spill is a reminder of the importance of environmental protection.

"We are taking every precaution to prevent the spill from spreading," he said. "We are also working on a plan to clean up the spill and prevent future disasters."
#37 – Broader Coverage: Focus on Basque Region, Effects on Surfing, “Et Cetera” Column

Oil spill spreads to Basque coast

By the numbers

Savings. Simple savings.