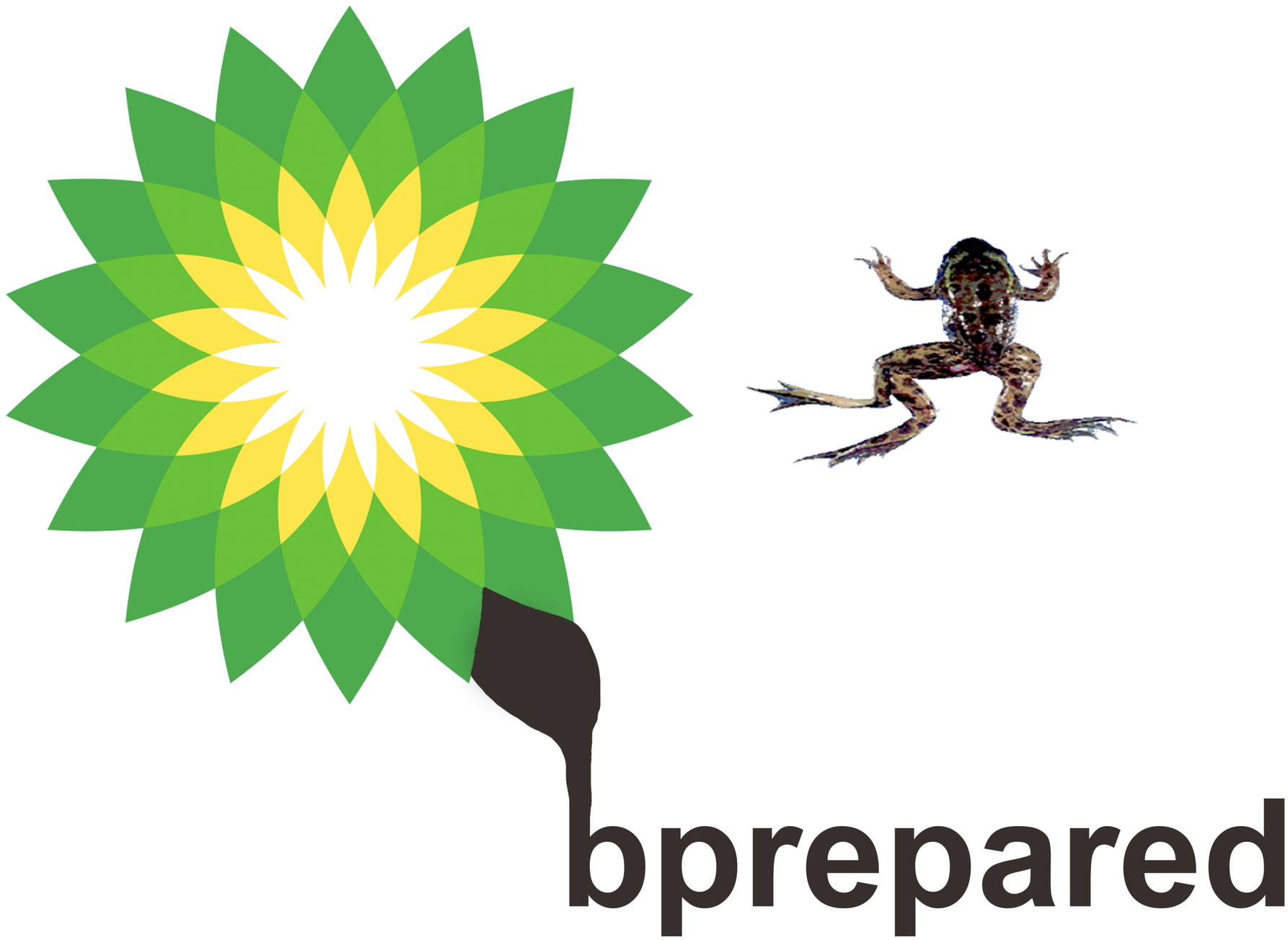
BPrepared



Caption

The two images mashed up in this visualization point to my interest in both acute disaster – such as BP's Deepwater Horizon disaster, or the Bhopal disaster – and chronic disaster, which almost always follows acute disaster, but also can emerge separately, and more quietly – the global asthma epidemic, for example, and the global decline and malformation of amphibians. The images also point to ways corporate interests are entangled in our preparations for and understandings of disaster, and to the role of new media in activist response to disaster. The "bprepared" spoof points to a technically enabled mode of activist critique that blossomed in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon disaster. The story of coming to see malformed amphibians in systemic terms is also noteworthy: many credit reports from school children on a science outing as the beginning, sparking what came to be a global investigation. The emergence of citizen science and increasing recognition of value in the interrelation of diverse modes of expertise to address complex environmental problem is also of key importance here. These simultaneities characterize what I have termed "late industrialism" – a historical formation riven with many overlapping and synergizing risks, accelerating the likelihood of disaster. Critical response, in my estimation, will depend on what I have come to think of as kaleidoscopic perspective: the capacity to see complex problems from many angles and standpoints.

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Fortun, Kim. 2019. "BPrepared."

In "Toxic Vitalism." In Visualizing Toxic Subjects, curated by James Adams and Kim Fortun. The Center for Ethnography. May.

https://tinyurl.com/y6j3ecns

Design Statement

This visualization is a mash-up that points to simultaneities and entanglements at the center of my ethnographic attention: natural and technical systems, commercial interests with ecological and public health, fast and slow disaster.

Project Statement

Vitalism has provided a way of thinking about how systems are discontinuous with themselves -- constituted through the operation of more than one set of laws. Historically (and controversially), vitalism points to ways living systems are more than the result of physicochemical forces and laws, for example. Vitalism also highlights the liveliness of systems -- the way systems can take on a life of their own, so to speak, often beyond what experts planned or expected. I also want to highlight ways vitalism is also, often, toxic, producing inurious outcomes, often unevenly distributed. "Vital systems" can thus be read in multiple ways -- referring to systems on which bodies and societies depend, which have both functional and frightening capacities. In the visualizations that I'll present in this essay, I hope to convey the nature, dynamics and cascading effects of such vital systems -- systems encoded with many sets of laws, almost inevitably producing unexpected, even run-away reactions -- especially when tightly coupled to other such systems (as when atmospheric systems tangle with ecological, technical and social systems, for example). My visualizations will be drawn from extended ethnographic study of industrial and environmental disasters, fast and slow -- reaching to convey "late industrialism" in motion.

toxic
vitalism