

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

International Conference *The Awakening of Enceladus. A Transdisciplinary Inquiry into Ecological Risk and Disaster*

University of Pisa, 17-19 December 2025

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Representations of Disaster in Western Fine Art

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Abstract

In western countries there is a long and varied tradition of depicting disaster impacts in fine art. One of the earliest surviving examples is a marble frieze from Pompeii that shows damage caused by the earthquake of AD 62. Since then, there has been a growing tendency to paint, etch or draw earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, storms and shipwreck as well as war, conflict and, latterly, terrorism. Representations vary from the fanciful to the accurate, from representational to allegorical, from chronicles of actual events to lessons in morality, and from the mystical to the historical. Over the history of painting, particular incentives to deal with disaster and its agents include the Grand Tour and the Romantic Period, with its emphasis on the picturesque spectacles of natural events. Nineteenth century attempts to revive the culture of the Classical period added a further dimension. Religious revivalism provided a moral impetus and mysticism one based on symbolism. Lastly, there has been an enduring desire to commemorate and interpret real events. In the 19th century, J.M.W. Turner's fascination with shipwrecks resulted in many paintings. A different perspective was provided by John Martin's stern and sensational depictions of the apocalypse. His day of judgement was so different from Stanley Spencer's view of that day a century later as a time of the joyful reunion of the dead. In both Italy and Mexico, painters were drawn to the spectacle of a volcano erupting. Indeed, in the former, the constant activity of Vesuvius led to a cottage industry of painting the eruptions in gouache and oils. Representations of natural hazards and other forms of disaster in western fine art reflect both the tastes and the mores of the period to which they pertain, especially in terms of how artists chose to interpret and represent the phenomena they depicted.

Keywords: Western Civilisation; Western Fine Art; Aesthetics of Disaster; Painting

Performance-Lecture “I am a Disaster”

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Abstract

The monologue focuses on a landslide that occurred in San Benedetto Val di Sambro (Bologna) on June 25, 1994. Although it tells a very “local” story – as reflected in the protagonist’s accent – the work addresses universal aspects. The piece is the result of a detailed work on the relationship between the story of the geological event and its stage representation, moving from documentary evidence to their dramaturgical, directorial, and interpretive transformation.

Keywords: Landslide; Local Memory; Documentary Theatre; Dramaturgy of the Real

When Risk Lies in the Future

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Abstract

For more than three decades, climatologists, geologists, atmospheric chemists, oceanographers, and other Earth scientists have been sending us warnings: if we continue like this, the Earth will soon be uninhabitable for the human species and for countless other living species. It is the greatest emergency that humanity has had to face in its entire long history. Yet there is a reluctance to take the necessary measures for reducing CO2 emissions and for a conversion of methods of production and energy consumption. Indeed, precisely when one would expect drastic action to remedy the situation while there is still time, new wars are breaking out, increasingly powerful weapons are being designed and manufactured, and there are even renewed threats to use nuclear weapons. Why does being aware of the enormous risk we are running fail to provoke proportional action? In my presentation, I intend to focus on this painful experience, especially as it affects younger generations: the culpable inertia in the face of a catastrophe that looms in the near future; and the possible remedies, also bringing some examples of writers and thinkers who confronted this tragic obstacle.

Keywords: Emergency; Culpable inertia; Catastrophe Writing; Younger Generations

When the Earth Speaks: Vital Dynamics and Ecological Awareness

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Abstract

The Gaia hypothesis, developed by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, conceives the planet as a self-regulating system in which atmosphere, biosphere, and geosphere cooperate to maintain conditions that are favourable to life. This perspective redefines the concept of geological risk: earthquakes and eruptions are not anomalies, but intrinsic processes to terrestrial metabolism. The presentation will focus on the implications of such vision, showing how it challenges the traditional separation between nature and culture and invites us to consider disaster not only as a threat, but as an integral part of planetary equilibrium. Within this framework, education about geological risk takes on a decisive role: teaching people to read seismic and volcanic phenomena as vital dynamics of the Earth means fostering an ecological awareness capable of uniting scientific competence with ethical sensitivity and orienting cultural and scientific action towards a mindful planetary resilience.

Keywords: Gaia Hypothesis; Geological Risk; Ecological Awareness; Planetary Resilience

The Kingdom of Naples and the Experience of Calamity in the Seventeenth Century: Knowledge Systems, Memories, Response Practices

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Abstract

This presentation intends to present some of the results and possible developments of a long-standing, interdisciplinary research on the social and cultural impact of calamities in the Early Modern period, starting from the study of representations. Beginning with the analysis of discourses and images, the project aimed at investigating the gradual, irregular emergence of institutions, forms of knowledge and social practices aimed at managing the crises and instability caused by natural phenomena. One of the recurring themes in different research lines concerned the transmission of memory of past disasters, understood as a potential basis for the development of adaptive and preventive behaviours in the face of new threats. In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the perpetuation of calamities in public memory was organized in an articulated manner, through the reiteration of commemorative gestures (such as processions), through the fixation of their memory in the urban fabric (obelisks, votive chapels and statues, wall inscriptions), and through their constant mentioning in texts such as sermons, saints' lives, city histories, or histories of religious orders: through these texts, the memory of the event could be perpetuated in "shared memory", as a warning to the following generations not to fall back into the mistakes that had unleashed divine wrath. The presentation will focus on some disasters that occurred in the Kingdom of Naples in the seventeenth century – some Vesuvian eruptions and the earthquakes in Calabria, Sannio, Irpinia and Basilicata – highlighting the different responses adopted by the affected societies, which pertained to the religious sphere as well as the judicial and financial spheres, and ultimately to architectural and urban planning aspects. Moving from the analysis of the documentation produced following these events, the analysis will allow to shed light on the way in which the evocation of past disasters was used by different institutional and social actors, both for the purpose of defining action and prevention strategies, and for the purpose of legitimizing their own action.

Keywords: Volcanic Eruptions; Earthquakes; Shared Memory; Kingdom of Naples

The Earth Trembles, The Mind Falters...The “Fear of Breakdown” from Ancestral Terrors to Contemporary Risks

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Abstract

The presentation will examine the psychic and anthropological configurations linked to the “volcanic” moods of a land in continuous subsidence, a “terrain” that in some way also influences the perception and construction of subjectivities and relationships. Geoseismic characteristics of the soil and subsoil and the psychic perception of the “safe base” are intertwined and refer to one another both from a historical and metahistorical point of view, and on both the individual and collective level: they intertwine powerfully, decisively determining the “destiny” of entire communities, with reference to the Campania region. The “fear of breakdown” described by English psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott as a possibility immanent to human beings, perpetually “exposed” to the risk of collapse because they have already experienced it in their individual infancy, as in their collective prehistory, powerfully conditions both apocalyptic anxieties directed towards the future and omnipotent perceptions of invulnerability or, conversely, states of fatalistic paralysis and resignation.

Keywords: Psychic and Anthropological Configurations; Fear of Breakdown; Donald Winnicott; Campania Region

Between Rubble and Rhetoric: The Messina and Reggio Calabria Earthquake of 1908 in Maud Howe Elliott's Narrative

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Abstract

From the perspective of geography, writes Claude Raffestin (1987), disasters are “interesting” (“if the use of such a strong expression is legitimate”), at three different moments: first, the moment of the disaster itself, because it reveals behaviours that are not usually easy to observe. But the subsequent moment is also interesting, when rescue teams are activated: it then becomes possible to examine how a given society reacts in a moment of crisis; from this perspective, observing the aid mechanism can shed light on the system of political and socio-economic relations of that society, as well as the private behaviours of its citizens. The rupture of the normalizing ordinariness of daily life can in fact reveal not only how society functions in organizational terms, but also how it is internally structured. Finally, the moment of reconstruction is relevant, since it is the time when it becomes possible to grasp the codes, and the more general discourse behind them, as they are employed to reestablish a (new) socio-political and socio-economic equilibrium. However, the moment of the geo-graphy of the disaster is also interesting, that is, when disaster is narrated. Starting from the Messina and Reggio Calabria earthquake of 1908, this proposal investigates the event as a “strategic research site” (Elliott and Pais, 2006), using historical sources, direct testimonies and visual materials. At the heart of the analysis is the text *Sicily in Shadow and in Sun* (1910) by the American writer Maud Howe, an extraordinary testimony of the era and a densely emotional, but also strongly ideological, narrative. The book highlights the contrast between Italian bureaucratic inefficiency and American operational efficiency, celebrating the latter as a moral and organisational force. The presentation intends to show how the narration of disaster becomes a space of symbolic and political construction, revealing not only the organisational structure of the affected society, but also the attitude towards victims and rescuers of those who offer its description.

Keywords: Disasters; Messina and Reggio Calabria Earthquake; Maud Howe; Disaster Narrative

Territories of Cinema: Between Metaphorical Landscapes, Apocalypses, and Disaster Movies

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Abstract

The representation of geological risk in cinema finds its most prominent expression in the so-called “disaster movies”, films centred on catastrophic events such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and floods, which – also within the subgenres of “survival movies” and dystopian narratives – have gained increasing popularity. These films often privilege a cathartic function over scientific accuracy. In apocalyptic movies, destruction can become so excessive as to overshadow the real magnitude of the threat, while in other cases it serves as a form of initiation or transformation. In this sense, the ancient oral tradition that narrated tales of immense destruction and divine punishment has been partially transferred to cinema. At the same time, disaster movies feature contexts and situations that function as a “training ground” for survival, confronting audiences with plausible everyday dangers. Since its beginnings, from Buster Keaton to Lang’s *Metropolis*, from Disney’s *Bambi* to Hitchcock’s *The Birds*, from Cameron’s *Avatar* to the films of the Marvel universe, cinema has consistently engaged with the theme of hydrogeological risk. At times, it highlights how scientists or ordinary citizens’ warnings go unheard, like in Soderbergh’s *Erin Brockovich*, framed as a legal thriller, or Martinelli’s *Vajont*, which adopts a more historical perspective. On other occasions, the landscape itself becomes the true protagonist of the narrative: the desert, for example, has a profound symbolic dimension, while the volcano is frequently employed as a metaphorical device. Since the late 1990s, disaster films have experienced a marked upswing, driven by advances in special effects and growing social awareness of environmental risks. Audiences have shown increasing fascination with the combination of visual spectacularity and stories of human resilience, often inspired by real events. Beyond fiction, from the early 2000s onwards, several noteworthy documentaries have explored geological risk, from *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* to the series *Years of Living Dangerously*.

Keywords: Geological Risk; Cinema; Disaster Movies; Disaster Representation

Disasters and Cross-Border Displacement: Towards a Duty for Host States to Establish a Complementary Protection Scheme

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Abstract

The presentation will open with a concise overview of natural disasters that have, more than others, caught the attention of the international community, prompting institutional responses that go beyond immediate assistance and reconstruction funding. A specific line of analysis will then focus on disaster-induced cross-border movements of people. Such calamitous events will be framed as situations that facilitate or accompany acts of persecution or serious violations of human rights, and which are relevant for the purposes of recognizing international protection (e.g., the status of refugees). Beyond the recurring requirements for such protection, the discussion will also address disasters as factors leading to the denial of access to essential rights for vulnerable individuals, and the possible application of complementary forms of protection regulated by the national law of the host state. The presentation will highlight how, in contrast with the European Union's generally restrictive stance, some national legal systems (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, Italy) and non-European regional systems (e.g., the Inter-American Court of Human Rights) are moving toward a more ambitious approach, one that is more attentive to the protection needs of displaced people.

Keywords: Natural Disasters; Institutional Responses; Human Rights; Migration

Geology, Ecology, and Memory in Esther Kinsky's *Rombo*

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Abstract

In *The Three Ecologies* (1989), Félix Guattari proposes an ecological view that is an integrated system of three interconnected spheres: environmental ecology, concerning the relationship between humans and nature; social ecology, which involves the relations among individuals, groups, and institutions; and mental ecology, pertaining to subjectivity, the psyche, and the imaginary. In her novel *Rombo* (2022), where Esther Kinsky reflects on the earthquake that devastated Friuli in 1976, the seismic event emerges as a force that deeply transforms all three of these domains. From an environmental perspective, it reveals a space that resists the orders of society and culture, a “wild” space where matter follows its own laws, overturning the “order of things” and setting everything “upside down, even the thoughts in your head”. Kinsky’s narrative construction places humans and animals, organic and inorganic matter, on the same ontological level. Literary writing itself seems to take shape as one of the many forms of geo-graphy – of one material inscribing itself upon another – revealed throughout the novel, which range from waterways carving paths through the soil to the seismic movements that gradually turn rocks into a “picture book of the shifts and interferences, a testimony to the dislocations of the various layers of rock”. On the level of social ecology, the earthquake marks the beginning of “new lives” characterized by the loss of intimate contact with nature and the fading of a centuries-old cultural memory. It accelerates the disintegration of the mountain community and its culture, causing the demographic and symbolic emptying of the places struck by the tremors. On the level of mental ecology, the earthquake represents a rupture that radically reconfigures individual memory and provokes a disorienting reflection on remembrance itself. The novel weaves together these three ecologies by alternating geological description with the characters’ recollections of the earthquake, thereby suggesting constant analogies and associations: between human memory and the memory of the landscape; between the unpredictability of the earthquake and that of remembrance; between the unconscious depths of human memory and the gorges of Mount Canin, where the remains of living beings that met their end lie invisible “even with the most powerful binoculars”. The earthquake thus appears as a fissure, one that allows a glimpse into an unrecordable depth, which nonetheless constitutes the very foundation upon which the social, the cultural, and the human are built.

Keywords: Three ecologies; Friuli Earthquake; Esther Kinsky; Mental, Social and Environmental Ecology

Earthquakes: Natural Disasters or Divine Punishments?

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Abstract

Why does God send an earthquake to punish some evildoers, if many innocent people also perish because of the earthquake? Gian Franco Parodi

Natural calamities do not have God as their immediate and direct origin, but rather the limited structure and dynamic character of the created cosmos. Regarding the former, just as we often experience our limits, for instance in illness, aging, fatigue, hunger, thirst and finally in death, so it happens for the universe and the planet we are called to inhabit. This cosmic limitation, by which we perceive the world as very different from absolute paradisiacal perfection, cannot help but involve us as creatures, as we often suffer its consequences and are called – with our intelligence and ability, which is also technological – to make the world increasingly habitable and nature less hostile. Dynamism has ensured that the Earth has configured itself as a place capable of welcoming life and human existence, not without struggle and “suffering”. Paul admirably exemplified all this when, in a text that we should take up and meditate upon in these circumstances, he wrote: “For the creation was subjected to *frustration* – not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it – in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been *groaning as in the pains of childbirth* right up to the present time” (Rm 8,20-22). Unfortunately, man, with his sin and his choices of death, also manages to make the limitation of the universe even more radical and devastating, and causes even more damage than that the one resulting from calamities such as earthquakes or floods. Indeed, on these occasions we must remember that the main causes of deaths are not natural events, but collapsing houses, or overflowing rivers, often the results of our own choices. Hence the necessity to be vigilant, as individuals and as a society, so that our carelessness, thirst for profit and violence against nature do not turn it into a hostile entity. If, as happens, the suffering and death of men, women and even innocent children (without any distinction between righteous and wicked) occur in nature, it is not because of divine punishment, of which the cosmos would be an instrument. Rather, these are occasions in which we are called to meditate on our creaturely limits and our moral deficiencies, and to gather around those who suffer, to ease their suffering with tangible and material solidarity and fraternity. This form of natural and human “compassion” can certainly contribute to our personal and collective growth while we wait for fulfilment. This growth should be oriented by the awareness, neither naive nor unprepared, that “God never disturbs the joy of his children, except to give them a more certain and greater one” (A. Manzoni).

Keywords: Natural Calamities; Creation; Theology; Suffering; Compassion

A Catastrophe Without Catastrophe: The French Eighteenth Century and the Restrained Catastrophe?

Matteo Marcheschi

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Abstract

How can a real, already occurred catastrophe make it possible to “contain” – to defer, slow down, or attenuate – the impending catastrophe of the future? This is the question that eighteenth-century philosophy begins to address in the wake of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. What triggers this interrogative is that, at the margins of the Portuguese disaster, the term “catastrophe” itself changes meaning, shifting from its predominantly dramaturgical use to the contemporary sense of the word. This semantic shift carries important consequences: in the transition from theatrical to contemporary usage, “catastrophe” inherits the temporal assumptions of drama. The theatrical catastrophe, namely the event that brings a dramatic narrative to its conclusion, introduces the irreversible temporality of human history into the perception of nature, thereby redefining how human beings relate to both the future and their environment. This redefinition of temporality through catastrophe provides the premise for understanding catastrophe itself as an optical device, a lens through which the future can be observed in the present, and through which action upon the future becomes possible by means of the present and its temporal concatenations. This paper will examine two emblematic eighteenth-century uses of the catastrophe, showing how they function as instruments for reducing the unpredictability of the unexpected and of the future by containing catastrophe. First, attention will be given to the temporal, philosophical, and literary device of the fictionally anticipated catastrophe, the future perfect-catastrophe developed by Louis-Sébastien Mercier. This technique makes visible and tangible those processes within the present that, silently yet inevitably, lead to future destruction: by rendering tomorrow necessary, the present deconstructs the catastrophic assumptions underlying it. Secondly, the analysis will turn to the use of the catastrophic in Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger, showing how it becomes a tool for political and philosophical analysis, capable of redefining priorities and conditions for action in the present. By conceiving human history as always originating in catastrophe – both natural and civil – politics becomes the art of acting upon time through the very observatory that catastrophe provides, an art that values what prevents a perceived catastrophe from becoming an actual one, thereby holding it back.

Keywords: Catastrophe; Lisbon Earthquake; Eighteenth-century Philosophy; Fictionally anticipated Catastrophe.

«The Day the Earth Trembled»: Narrating Trauma from the Lisbon Earthquake to Insular Memory

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Abstract

Starting from Gil Vicente's Letter to Dom João III (1531), in which the author defends the Jews blamed for having caused an earthquake in Lisbon, this study investigates the persistence of the connection between catastrophe, religious guilt, and theological justification. Beginning with this early formulation of an implicit and popular theodicy, it aims to examine the narratives produced in the aftermath of the 1755 earthquake: on the one hand, these narratives reflect the private and fragmented memory embodied by foreign observers (Paice); on the other, they mark the construction of a public and foundational memory of modern Portugal (Tavares). Engaging in dialogue with both these tendencies, is Voltaire's philosophical and poetic reflection, which in the *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* radically challenges the notion of a providential justification. Completing the framework is an insular reading of the catastrophe centred on the Azorean archipelago from the 1522 earthquake on São Miguel Island, preserved through oral tradition and recorded in Book IV of *Saudades da Terra* by Gaspar Frutuoso, to the symbolic reworking of the 1980 earthquake on Terceira Island at the heart of Joel Neto's novel *Arquipélago* (2015). Beyond the contingency of these events, it is through their narration that disaster turns into thought, a site where meaning, responsibility, and the possibility of reconstruction – both individual and collective – are interrogated.

Keywords: European Literature; Narration and Trauma; Lisbon Earthquake; Theodicy

The Study of Earthquakes in Different Regions of the Globe: Prevention, Preparedness, and Responses in Different Cultural Assets, with a Specific Focus on Central Asia

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Abstract

Risk mitigation requires the implementation of innovative techniques, methodologies and tools, as well as adequate means of communication to prepare populations and inform them about risk. However, the diversity of cultural and religious approaches to understanding and managing natural phenomena, as in the case of earthquakes, implies the necessity of developing risk communication strategies appropriate to each specific context. In addition, the perception of being exposed to risk diminishes over time, even after severe events, which, despite being rarer, can nevertheless generate cognitive distortions. Among these are phenomena of self-conviction regarding the impossibility of being exposed to such events again in one's lifetime and the incorrect evaluation of risks posed by natural hazards. In the presentation, these aspects will be examined from a global perspective, with specific focus on results obtained from research projects in Central Asia, where countries are characterised by different cultures, religions, and levels of development.

Keywords: Risk Management; Risk Communication; Earthquakes; Central Asia

Linguistic Analyses of Volcanic Activity

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Abstract

Italy is one of the few countries in the world to possess an extensive historical record of written texts documenting the eruptive activity of its volcanoes, both in Italian and in other languages. Relying on an unprecedented synergy between volcanology and computational linguistics, the CorVo project (Corpora for Volcanoes) is exploiting this rich body of documents by applying automatic text analysis techniques to provide volcanologists with access to organised information concerning the eruptive history of Italian volcanoes. Following a corpus linguistics approach, we built a pilot digital corpus of Modern Italian written texts documenting five centuries of activity of one of Italy's most iconic volcanoes: Vesuvius. The over 200 documents included in the corpus were cherry-picked from the BIBV database (Bibliography of Historic Activity on Italian Volcanoes) and digitised when not already available. To analyze this corpus, we adopted state-of-the-art large language models (LLMs) to automatically identify and extract information related to volcanology, including in particular entities and events. These tasks required a close interdisciplinary collaboration between volcanologists and computational linguists, who co-designed the guidelines for entity extraction and the set of interesting events tailored to the domain. The performance of the LLMs was systematically evaluated, and an in-depth error analysis was conducted to understand their strengths and limitations in domain-specific language understanding. A digital platform was also developed to disseminate the annotated corpus and project outcomes to a broad audience. This innovative collaboration has the goal to advance scientific methods in both linguistics and volcanology, as well as to provide valuable tools for institutions responsible for volcano monitoring and the development of response and resilience strategies to volcanic risk.

Keywords: Volcanology; Corpus Linguistics Approach; Vesuvius; Project CorVo

The Comet's Legacy: Literature and the Nördlingen Meteorite

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Abstract

With its 25 km diameter, Central Europe's largest meteorite impact crater is in Bavaria. The crater forms a depression in the ground produced by a celestial body one kilometre long, which hurtled into Earth at cosmic velocity, releasing upon impact a force equivalent to 250,000 Hiroshima bombs, vaporizing tons of rock. At the centre of this rounded crater, the medieval city of Nördlingen arose, still nestled today within its oval ring of walls. The Nördlinger Ries was believed to be a volcanic crater until the late 1960s, when NASA geologists found in the area the characteristic minerals they were studying at Chicxulub, the meteorite crater that probably caused dinosaurs' extinction. This recently discovered physical catastrophe has not directly given rise to great literature. However, against the backdrop of this disaster occurred some fifteen million years before the appearance of *Homo sapiens*, one can trace a subtle line between geological apocalypse and the literary evocation of a "beyond", even more interesting since it was unconscious as long as the meteorite remained unknown. Therefore, one is led to think that even in this case literature creates a compromise formation, an expiation, a tribute to dark forces. First, one can call to mind the mystic author Heinrich von Nördlingen (14th century). For what concerns calamities, Nördlingen is the place where: the "magician" Paracelsus wrote his (attributed) treatise *De pestilente*; the Enlightenment publicist Weckherlin campaigned against the last death sentence of a witch; and the publisher-printer of Enzensberger, a poet who studied and worked here, published a refined "Crater Library". In recent years, there has also been a flourishing of local detective fictions, which address the theme of crime in contrast with Nördlingen's idyllic setting. Among these new novels, one is titled *The Comet's Legacy* and fantasizes about the diamonds produced by the meteorite.

Keywords: German Literature; Geocriticism; The Nördlinger Ries; *The Comet's Legacy*

Between the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 and the Messina Earthquake of 1782: Pictures of the European Imagination's Crisis

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Abstract

The 1755 Lisbon earthquake marked a profound moment of crisis in European culture, although it received scarce attention in 18th-century narratives. The disaster is famously known for having opened an important philosophical debate, involving Voltaire and Rousseau among its main protagonists. As Andrea Tagliapietra has emphasized in his several writings on the topic, the 1755 earthquake marked the birth of the category of “catastrophe”. This new category dismissed the providential perspective and rather foregrounded the interpretation of such events as unpredictable natural phenomena, capable of exposing humanity's fragility in its fullness. From a philosophical and history of ideas standpoint, 1755 thus represents a moment of rupture. The earthquake and its devastating effects on a densely populated and prosperous city were also the protagonist of a widespread media phenomenon, perhaps the first of modernity. The catastrophe was depicted countless times in prints that enjoyed wide European circulation. This presentation will examine the various typologies of earthquake images from an art-historical and visual culture perspective. The images of the Lisbon earthquake will then be compared with those of the subsequent 1783 Calabria and Messina earthquake. This comparison will allow for reflection on three key aspects in tension with one another: first, the spectacularisation of catastrophe through images, a phenomenon extending to our present day; second, the cluster of fears, fragilities, and forms of exorcism, as well as repression, that the representation of disasters condenses iconically; and third, the scientific and rational study of earthquakes and their consequences on places and people.

Keywords: Visual Studies; Disaster Iconography; Lisbon Earthquake; Calabria and Messina Earthquake

The Paradigm of Depth: Literature and the Anthropocenic Imagination

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Abstract

Depth in relation to the environment is a category which offers a privileged insight into ecological dynamics and possible future scenarios. The thematization of deep environments has thus emerged as a prolific mode for both cultural narratives about physical and social landscapes and for ecological reflection. Geological depths constitute the theme and setting of recent works in which characters and their lives are deeply conditioned or emblematically defined by the subsoil. The presentation, connected to the monograph *Sotto l'inesauribile superficie delle cose* (2025), will discuss examples of narratives about events and conditions related to depth, such as earthquakes and petroleum, which feature respectively in Esther Kinsky's novel *Rombo* and in the literary subgenre of petrofiction.

Keywords: Eco-critique; Paradigm of Depth; Earthquake Narratives; Petrofiction

Institutional Responses and Public Reactions to Recent Volcanic Eruptions in Iceland, Hawaii, and the Canary Islands

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Abstract

Institutional responses and public reactions to volcanic eruptions are similarly influenced by several interconnected factors of political, economic, social, and cultural nature, especially when the event occurs in an inhabited area. This presentation will compare three recent volcanic eruptions in the United States, Spain, and Iceland, focusing on governmental measures to manage the impact and the reactions among affected residents. The 2018 eruption of Kīlauea (Hawaii, United States) destroyed over 600 homes, forcing 3,000 people to evacuate. The government offered to purchase the destroyed properties at pre-eruption market value, on condition that owners relocate permanently to a lower volcanic risk zone. This buy-out program is voluntary, but residents who decline permanently forfeit access to all public services. Yet many decided to retain their properties, seeking to minimize their interaction with the government. During the 2021 eruption of Tajogaite (Canary Islands, Spain), 3,000 buildings were destroyed by lava and ash. 7,500 people, approximately 9% of the island's population, were evacuated. The government, facing elections the following year, focused resources on rapidly reconstructing access roads to every remaining house, regardless of its condition. This strategy was met with approval from the local population, yet hundreds of people have remained displaced to this day. The seven eruptions of Sundhnúkur (Iceland) that have occurred from 2023 to the present have destroyed 3 private homes (reached by lava) in the town of Grindavík and ravaged many others due to the simultaneous seismic activity. 3,800 people were evacuated. The Icelandic government offered to purchase residential properties in the town at pre-eruption market value, providing owners with the option to repurchase them at the same price after three years, provided the necessary safety conditions are met. Most residents participated in the program.

Keywords: Comparative Politics; Disaster Management; Volcanic Eruptions; Risk Governance

On the Origin of Stories: Making Sense of the Senseless

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Abstract

In August 1986, 1746 people, thousands of livestock and countless wild animals were found dead in a remote valley in Cameroon. Houses and vegetation remained unscathed. In the absence of clear signs of a possible killer agent, a wide variety of explanations blossomed. French and Italian geologists who probed the site blamed active volcanism: their Icelandic-American colleagues proposed an alternative natural hazard – a suffocating cloud of carbon dioxide that was released during a “limnic explosion” in the nearby Lake Nyos. My research went beyond the question of “What happened?” to ask “What stories do people tell about the event?” In answering this question, I tried to piece together how dozens of actors, ranging from international scientists to religious leaders and survivors, made sense of the same event in distinctively different ways. In my (literary) account *Choke Valley/L’enigma del lago rosso*, I trace the origins of the most persistent stories to have emerged from the so-called Death Valley between 1986 and 2011, and show how political, cultural, religious and metaphysical explanations inside Cameroonian society completely eclipse the “foreign” scientific accounts. One of the causes of this eclipse was a newly-hatched conspiracy theory (the testing of a neutron bomb on people and animals by either France or Israel) which wove its way into the local cosmogonic belief systems to produce a popular and powerful modern-day myth. Decades after the disaster, Cameroon’s Death Valley has proven itself a fertile ground for homegrown legends that paint “Western” science as a cover-up rather than a truth-seeking exercise. This research lays bare how stories evolve in culture, much like species in nature. As they are retold, they reproduce and multiply, undergoing mutations in the form of twists and turns.

Keywords: Storytelling; Choke Valley; Lake Nyos Disaster; Science-Myth Dychotomy

Prophetic Noir. Søren Kierkegaard and the Climate Catastrophe

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Abstract

Søren Kierkegaard's work is teeming with images of earthquakes, floods, storms, volcanic eruptions, wildfires, burned-down cities, and apocalyptic events that "let the heavens fall and the stars change their places in the overturning of everything". These disaster images are not just rhetorical packaging of the philosophical and theological content of his works. Rather, disasters play an important but largely understudied role in Kierkegaard's analysis of human existence. Taking my point of departure in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, analyzed in *Fear and Trembling* (1843), I will focus on prophetic noir in Kierkegaard's work: the sombre mood that is evoked when the shadow of future disaster falls upon the present. The affective quality that arises, for instance, when Abraham lifts his head and sees Mount Moriah in the distance, where he is commanded to kill his son. My core contention is that the prophetic noir in Kierkegaard, modelled after the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, contributes to making his works urgently relevant today. From the vantage point of the contemporary world threatened by rapidly evolving climate catastrophes, we perceive Kierkegaard's analysis of human existence differently. We are all on our way to Mount Moriah. To exist, in the emphatic sense Kierkegaard gave to that word, is to live a meaningful human life even if things are darkened by the future disaster. Thus, a thorough analysis of the prophetic noir in Kierkegaard offers an existential perspective on living in a world threatened by environmental devastation. The presentation draws from my recent book, *Kierkegaard and Climate Catastrophe: Learning to Live on a Damaged Planet* (Oxford University Press 2023).

Keywords: Prophetic Noir; Søren Kierkegaard; Existentialism; Climate Catastrophe

Narrating Disasters: Discursive Representations of Geological Hazard in the Public Sphere

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Abstract

The study of the representations of geological risks and crisis responses finds a vantage point in linguistic and discourse analysis, as those representations reduplicate cognitive and social dynamics as well as ideological stances. The way in which earthquakes, landslides, floods and volcanic eruptions are narrated in newspaper articles, official communications and public debates deeply affects people’s perception of hazards, the construction of collective memory and the optimal success of risk-mitigation strategies and resilience policies. The presentation addresses the ecolinguistic dimension of the construction of geological risks in English discourse, focusing specifically on what might be labelled as “the language of terror”. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the presentation will demonstrate how the lexical choices, figurative tropes and narrative structures of discourse surrounding geological risk amplify fear, urgency and existential threat among the public. Based on a corpus composed of news articles, governmental risk-assessment reports and risk-mitigation public campaigns, the study examines how natural phenomena are linguistically framed not as ecological processes but as imminent hazards or “foes”, often anthropomorphised and dramatized through war metaphors and catastrophic images. Despite their intention to promote preparedness, these discourses can instead reinforce narratives of powerlessness and alienation from the natural world. From an ecolinguistic perspective, then, this presentation will seek to demonstrate the necessity of alternative frameworks grounded in relationality, resilience, and the integration of ecology, to foster a more sustainable and responsible environmental discourse. By interrogating the language of geological terror, this research contributes to a growing body of scholarship aimed at revealing and rethinking the stories we tell about our planetary precarity.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Ecolinguistics; Geological Risk; Risk Communication