Christoph Weber, North Texas University, Tableaux of Terror: The Instrumentalization of the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 as a Cathartic Spectacle

In this paper, I will discuss the representation of the Lisbon earthquake in German newspaper compilations published months after the disaster. With his contribution Das glücklich und unglückliche Portugall und erschreckte Europa (1756), J. H. Kühnlin strove to provide a truthful and cohesive narrative of the seismic event. Compiling information from supposedly reliable sources, he not only tells of the sudden onset of Lisbon’s destruction on November 1, 1755 – multiple tremors followed by tsunamis and fires – but also showcases the terrifying incidents (or what he calls “Trauer-Spiele”) that occurred over the course of the next 52 days until December 21, 1755. In order to heighten the emotional impact of the earthquake disaster, Kühnlin places an emphasis on sight and hearing. Scene after scene the distraught earthquake survivors are confronted with incredible horrors. Although the tableaux of terror are derived from actual eyewitness accounts and thus deemed authentic, they contain a high degree of stylization. In a paratactic manner, hyperbolic images such as dead children at their mother’s breasts and wailing victims crushed by falling debris are strung together. As they express the tragic fate of stereotypical figures, these generic scenes of terror are no longer tied to any one particular catastrophic event. Ultimately, Kühnlin’s intention of providing factual information conflicts with his interest to evoke strong feelings of sympathy in the reader.
Kühnlin and other commentators interpreted Lisbon’s downfall as an act of divine punishment. The portrayals of the terrors evoke associations of past cataclysms, which in turn foreshadow the Last Judgment. They signify both damnation and salvation. As the German philosopher Hermann Schweppenhäuser states in his essay “Mythisches und historisches Katastrophenbewußtsein” (1972), the catastrophe’s “Negativität” can lead to a cathartic purging of the unleashed “Negativität”: „[Die Katastrophe] wurde zum Mittel der Reinigung ausersehen und, als würden [...] Regeln Aristotelischer Dramaturgie praktiziert, in den Dienst der Entsühnung genommen.“ By reframing the catastrophe as a moralistic spectacle of sin and atonement, the sudden break in the daily routines becomes imbued with a purpose. However, without the mediating instance of mimesis, the scenes of tragedy fail to evoke any sense of catharsis. When travelers such as Giuseppe Baretti inspected Lisbon’s devastations, the sight of the omnipresent suffering was all too immediate. Instead of feeling cleansed, the spectators of the ruined cityscape were numbed by the dreadful impressions they encountered there.

Adam Woodis, Illinois Wesleyan University, The Catastrophic Status Quo: Narratives of Communal Violence in the 19th Century

Catastrophes – literary or otherwise – do not always “disrupt the existing order and result in a discontinuity of our sense of self.” With regards to catastrophes, perspective is incredibly important: what might be seen as a catastrophe for an individual, group, society, or even a nation, may be viewed by others as vindication or just retribution. In this paper, I argue that literary representations of violence toward dissenters in religious communities – on the one hand a catastrophe for the individuals targeted, while on the other hand appropriate punishment for transgressions against religious tradition – is legitimized, à la Walter Benjamin, through religion (from the perspective of the religious community) while
simultaneously starkly criticized as immoral and inhuman (from the humanistic perspective of the author). Drawing on examples of 19th-century texts by authors including Kleist, Gutzkow, Raabe, Meyer, and Franzos, I show how catastrophes of violence in religious communities result in an Aristotelian catharsis, but without the presence of either anagnorisis or peripeteia and thus represent a break with the Aristotelian model of the catastrophe as a turning point, since the violence in these societies is deemed appropriate and, contrary to disrupting the existing order, serves instead to maintain the status quo. In this literature, the moment of the catastrophe is not the focus of attention, nor does it represent a rupture of reality. It functions instead as the ultimate example the irrationality and grotesqueness of the (a)moral code under which these societies operate. That this narrative is present in literature from the first decade of the 19th century (Kleist) straight through to the last (Franzos) shows us that this issue — largely unaddressed in secondary literature — was at the forefront of the minds of German humanists over the course of the century.

Daniel G. Murphy, U of Cincinnati, Hazardous Hybrids: Vulnerability, Resilience, and the Ontology of Disaster of Mongolia

This paper fundamentally questions the western ontologies underlying notions of vulnerability, resilience, and disaster through a re-examination of Mongolian hazards called dzud, an event that leads to massive livestock death. Though over the last 20 years significant scholarship has attempted to demonstrate the co-production of disaster, this paper contends that this work is plagued by a continuing reliance on rigid conceptions of political economy, realist ontologies of ‘nature’, and systems thinking. The failure of these approaches is exemplified by contemporary endeavors to ‘locate’ dzud as an object of analysis. Economists attempt to track dzud primarily through its detritus, livestock losses, while natural scientists debate
the various assortment of climatological, meteorological, and ecological data in order to more effectively predict its occurrence. Dzud, established as a kind of shock or disturbance, are also increasingly analyzed through the lens of resilience theory and social-ecological systems frameworks. In contrast, this paper draws on Mongolian cosmologies and Latourian notions of hybridity to reformulate dzud as an historically contingent process of assembling that can only be understood by ‘facing dzud’ (zud and nuurlex). By reframing the ontology of dzud in such a way we arrive at new and more practical understandings of vulnerability and resilience, including a perspective that more closely attends to the deep spiritual implications of facing dzud. Moreover, I argue that the greatest loss from dzud is not a growing pile of livestock carcasses but the loss of one’s spirit (xiimori) and God’s favor (buyan khishig).

Naresh Chandra Sourabh, University of Turku, The Negligence of Responsibility and the 2008 Bihar Flood Catastrophe: A Reflection of Popular Newspapers/Agencies

This paper is an analytical study of how the Indian and international media constructed the North Bihar flood catastrophe (which resulted in fifteen districts under floodwater, causing millions affected and thousands missing) of 2008 August, public awareness, failure of Bihar state and central governments of India and their mischief practices, the loss of lives, relatives, animals and properties, inundating cropland and towns and villages with millions inhabitants, the lack of in-time and enough relief managements. This study also accounts of the media in projecting relation between human and nature. The neglected responsibility by Bihar state and Indian central governmental machineries was identified as both governments acted against the ancient political culture which provided a great doctrine on how civilians should be protected from any catastrophe.
This study is grounded in a sociological approach adopting ‘responsibility perspective’ to examine how and by whom the management responsibility was neglected before and after flood catastrophe in North Bihar in late 2008. The focus of the analysis is how flood catastrophe was man-made and the political motivations behind applied working practices were. This study notes that governmental / political set-ups and their practices have become immoral as they have lost their political cultural image which was once existed for thousands of years in India as an ideal.

In this study, the largest Indian newspapers /agencies (e.g. Hindustan Times, Times of India, PTI) as well international (e.g. Reuters, CNN) were conducted to make qualitative content analysis. This study provides fresh theoretical and empirical insights into the way in which flood catastrophe is mediated and framed within human value as well national. This study possess a great scientific value in the field of media and flood hazard and its socio-economic and environmental risks preventions and management specifically in Himalaya and other mountainous regions of the world.

Jan Hinrichsen, Universität Tübingen, Interfaces: Traditions of Disaster and the Cultural Construction of Avalanche Catastrophes

Concepts of interfaces or threshold values play a significant role in the social, medial, and academic discursive (re)construction of (natural) catastrophes: Disasters are interpreted as the interface of a safe past and an insecure future, of secure knowledge and uncertainty, of mankind’s hubris and purification, of continuity and rupture. Whereas the sciences tend to analyze catastrophes in the paradigm of threshold values, peaks, and borderlines, the humanities approach them as the tipping point between an established social order on the one hand and
chaos and disorder on the other, as the exception of or opposite to social order. Against the background of my PhD project in the field of historical and cultural anthropology, my paper analyzes “traditions of disaster” as part of the processes of construction of disaster and, simultaneously, as a means to overcome the aforementioned dichotomies.

As numerous alpine communities, my case example, Galtuer/Tyrol, faces avalanches not as a unique event but as an annual threat. The repeating experience of catastrophes brings about traditions of disaster: routines of disaster communication, structures of reactions, and patterns of interpretation, remembrance, and neglect. From a life-world perspective those traditions can be seen as a reaction to fill the void a catastrophe leaves and to overcome the immanent loss of reliability. They help to create stability and continuity, thereby still reflecting rupture, uncertainty, and disorder. From an academic perspective, traditions understood as a productive negotiation of the past in the present can serve as a concept to describe and explain those very constructions of continuity and rupture and with it, traditions enable a critical inquiry of the dichotomy of social order and chaos. This approach helps analyze disasters not as the opposition to social order but as a stabilizing effect – not as a tipping point, where social order is overthrown into chaos but as a process in which social order is persistently established, re-negotiated and manifested.

Nikolaus Perneczky, Freie Universität Berlin, Hangin’ in the Treme: A Novel Catastrophe

In my exploration of the HBO-series TREME I take recourse to Georg Lukács’ theorization of the novel as an aesthetic analogue to the catastrophic experience of modernity. Predating Lukács’ Marxist turn, his Theory of the Novel addresses this ostensible catastrophe as the fracturing and concomitant disintegration of the
premodern world, which consequently can no longer be grasped by means of an intuitive, immediate, and, most importantly, total apprehension, thus giving rise to the metaphysical condition Lukács terms “transcendental homelessness.” This condition, in turn, necessitates the elaboration of new cognitive and aesthetic templates for making sense, which is precisely what the novel provides, its fragmented and at the same time sprawling form approximating a misshapen world.

This conceptualization of the novel – understood as the aesthetic redemption of a catastrophic event – forcefully resonates with TREME. Situated in a Post-Katrina New Orleans in which great despair and even greater exuberance live right next door to each other, this is a series that renders all too real and immanent the Lukácsian notion of a merely “transcendental” homelessness, while at the same time imbuing the harsh realities it depicts with a distinct sense of hope. But whereas the Lukácsian novel retains at its, albeit unattainable, horizon a liminal notion of totality, TREME allows for its diegesis to be diffracted by the catastrophe into a series of lose aggregates – of people, narrative strands, or, in the case of Jazz, musical notes – that dissipate as quickly as they assemble. This radical remediation of the novel form resists the urge to quickly reintegrate the catastrophic disorder into a coherent and selfidentical whole, pointing not to a flaw in the series’ design, but to its greatest potential: to model and make palpable the wake of catastrophe as a state of becoming.

**Tanja Nusser,** University of Cincinnati, Beautiful Destructions: The Filmic Aesthetics of Catastrophes.

In 1987 REM produced the song “It’s the end of the world as we know it (and I feel fine).” Registering one catastrophic event after the other the song paints in each
verse a scenario of mayhem, destruction and inevitability. This breathless accumulation is countered in the refrain with an acknowledgement of the end of the world as it is known and the statement, that the lyrical subject feels fine in the face of this apocalyptic vision. In my paper I am interested in this positive subject position that seems to function both independently from (it is voiced in brackets) and as a comment to the disastrous events. This ambivalent position towards catastrophes can also be observed in feature films of the last 40 years. If filmic depictions of catastrophic events can be interpreted in the light of a cathartic moment (the viewer experiences the catastrophe in a position of subjective identification with the main protagonist surviving and learning alongside the filmic character the pitfalls of alternatively nature, civilization, culture, politics and so on) then it has to be questioned what functions the spectacle of destruction in feature films fulfill. From Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb to the German film Die Wolke (The Cloud), from Mars Attacks to Independent Day, from Twister to Volcano or from Die Todesbrücke (The Cassandra Crossing) to Godzilla the films indulge in exuberant depictions of various catastrophic scenarios that interrupt the narration (in the Aristotelian sense) and seem to follow another narrative economy.

The pleasure connected to these images of destruction becomes evident if one views the different compilations of disaster films on youtube.com. Concentrating on the catastrophic ‘highlights’ (the atomic bomb exploding, the destruction of the statue of liberty, the tsunami that destroys New York or aliens attacking earth, volcanos erupting in Los Angeles) these clips aestheticise the end of the world. I want to question what is at stake in these contradictory modes of narration. Whereas most Hollywood productions follow the classical or ideal (and definitely traditional) composition of (dramatic) texts to end on a note of hope – there is a survivor as witness of the destruction of a city, country or world who typifies or proclaims the moral of the story – the filmic spectacle negates this ethical
imperative (already evident in Immanuel Kant’s formulation of the dynamic sublime) and sets against this moralizing tenor of the linear order of narration the pure pleasure of seeing; it arrests the eye and focusses on the moment of disaster that disrupts, that doesn’t produce sense, that can’t be organized into a narrative logic. This ‘disorganization’ at the narrative center – the catastrophe is the narrative focal point through which the story is organized – can be interpreted as a counter movement that (in a deconstructive reading) affects the Aristotelian model of narration (the catastrophe as the turning point of the plot) and its implied purification of the spectator.

Torsten Pflugmacher, Universität Mainz, Observing the Observation of Nuclear Disasters in Alexander Kluge

The paper will focus on Kluge’s analytical narrative inventory in his literary and film narrative on nuclear disasters in comparison with disaster narratives in film and journalistic media.

Alexander Kluge is famous for his kaleidoscopic war narratives, with the battle of Stalingrad („The Battle“) or „The Air Raid on Halberstadt, 8 April 1945“, as one central theme. Less known is Kluge’s polymorphic focus on recent disasters such as the attack on the Twin Towers, the sinking of the submarine Kursk and the explosion of the nuclear power plants in Chernobyl and Fukushima. Mixing fictional and factual narrative, Kluge organizes his narration of the experience of non-experience in disaster management of nuclear catastrophes with almost 60 short stories in addition to a number of visual media productions.

Reconstructing the „Learning Processes with a Deadly Outcome“ in Chernobyl, Kluge offers management stories depicting the reaction of the Soviet Union government: Administration officers fly to the nuclear power plant to organize the
struggle against the disaster, but nobody claims the leadership position – no hero is born. Instead, Kluge describes how the “human robots” decontaminate the scene while the army makes use of the real catastrophe to set up a training center for special forces. He focuses on the efforts of secret agents from the West who attempt to infiltrate the scene in order to observe and learn from the Russian management of a disaster that has never occurred before. Deconstructing the omniscient narrator, Kluge uses two figures (experts, secret agents) who comment on the actions from a distance, or inserts hypothetical dialogues between figures competing with one another to solve the problem at the scene. The hubris of the nuclear power project is expressed in a semiotic commentary on the inability of humankind to construct and communicate warning signs in the contaminated area over thousands of years.

Shifting from Chernobyl to Fukushima, Kluge focuses on the medial making of heroes. He tests the ethics of disaster narrative with carnivalesque interviews and subtle humor when he tells of a group of mobile adaptive robots merrily approaching the dead zone in Fukushima to commence cleanup efforts: the beginning of a posthumanistic age. In confrontation with the impossibility of evacuating a megacity such as Tokyo in the case of a nuclear threat, Kluge even embarks on prophetic narrative a literary warning about an old East European power plant constructed in an earthquake zone, or the invention of ecological disasters in which archaebacteria eat highly active waste and nuclear power plants.

It is clear that Kluge avoids traditional patterns of fictional and factual disaster narrative. This paper will address questions concerning realistic representation and montage techniques, narratological aspects and the potential role of literature in the observation of discourses on disaster.
Cathrin Cronjäger/Ann Solveig Lena Hansen, Georg-August Universität Göttingen, “I thought my life would pass under the shelter of ordinary events.” Catastrophe, Technology, and Post-human Relationship in Jeannette Winterson’s The Stone Gods

In her novel The Stone Gods, Jeanette Winterson creates places where technologies effect an infinite circularity of catastrophe, recognition, and the reversal of intention, invariably leading to a repetitive failure of human existence. The story is about our earth in the 22nd century after World War III, in which humans live under a totalitarian capitalist and fully mechanized system installed by MORE Corporation. Another planet called Orbus, taking place in a prospective past, is displayed with an even higher degree of mechanization and destroyed to such an extent that a new planet, Planet Blue, must be conquered. The protagonist on both time levels, Billie, impassively accepts these facts until she falls in love with Spike, a female robo sapiens. The feelings are mutual and Spike becomes extraordinary among her kind: She transcends the state of being a machine and begins to develop an identity, materialized as the ability to perceive, feel, and remember. The novel is a narration of catastrophe in the pragmatic sense: as such it tells stories about war, environmental damage, totalitarian regimes, and human enhancement. More importantly, it also is a postmodern example for the classical Aristotelian catharsis, as Billie understands her feelings for Spike exactly when the catastrophes – the great Ice Age 65 million years ago precipitated through humans and the hostilities conducted by MORE against all social outcast – occur on both time levels. The plot’s tragic element, Billie’s death as a result of both catastrophes, marks the cathartic moment as the critical reader starts to contemplate her own options for future actions. The Stone Gods thus epitomizes the sci-fi notion of ‘delimination;’ not only does it stage a queer fusion between a human being and a robot but it boldly undermines the modern idea of a holistic, authentic being by maintaining a robot partly turned human. The postmodern amalgamation of “the natural” and “the alien” allows for a reflection of reality: to what extent are technologies the cause
for human isolation and a growing sense of insecurity? What are the effects? And to what extent do technologies generate a sense of strength and open up possibilities for autonomous future-oriented actions concerning catastrophes? Our aim is to use the novel for a Gedankenexperiment (though experiment) in order to explore negative as well as positive effects of 21st century technologies on our lives.

**Yasemin Dayioglu-Yücel, Universität Hamburg, Narrating the Untellable: Yoko Tawada, Haruki Murakami and their Poetics of Catastrophe**

While Japan happened to be the stage for an unavoidable natural catastrophe, the Tohoku Earthquake in March 2011, it was followed by a human made catastrophe which the internationally well-known Japanese writer Haruki Murakami called a “second massive nuclear disaster,” and which is and will be memorialized by the nuclear plant’s name: Fukushima. Murakami is distinguishing between active and passive roles in Japan’s confrontation with the nuclear threat as well: “This time no one dropped a bomb on us [...] we committed the crime with our own hands [...].”

Shortly after the Fukushima catastrophe, the praised Japanese-German writer Yoko Tawada, active in both literary fields, was invited as a guest professor for intercultural poetics at the University of Hamburg (Hamburger Gastprofessur für interkulturelle Poetik). The topic chosen for this series of lectures was “Foreign Waters” (Fremde Wasser), referring to Tawada’s ‘poetry of fluidity’ that can be traced throughout her work. In the wake of the catastrophe, this title gained an additional meaning. The aim of my presentation is to explore how Tawada incorporated the Fukushima catastrophe into her lectures.

It will be argued that Tawada finds a way to prove and counter-prove the assumption that catastrophes can’t be narrated in aesthetically ambitious ways at
the same time, because she is implementing an essayistic style very typical of her work. By reading Tawada’s lectures in comparison to Haruki Murakami’s short stories in the volume *After the Quake*, which he published in the context of the 1995 earthquake in Kobe, another literary genre and its occupation with the topic of catastrophe will be considered. Finally it will be addressed, whether there is a certain manner of narrating the catastrophe ‘Japanese-style’ as Japan is a country whose existence is interwoven with the constant threats of natural disasters.

**Alexandra Parks**, University of Cincinnati, Post-dating the Apocalypse: The Role of Writing in Arno Schmidt’s *Schwarze Spiegel*

Arno Schmidt’s post-apocalyptic text *Schwarze Spiegel* follows a narrator who on the surface seems to have been minimally affected by the civilization-ending catastrophe, of which he initially believes himself to be the sole survivor. This is no Robinson Crusoe-esque tale of a struggle for survival and a rebuilding of normalcy through wit and hard work, but rather a solitary wandering through the remains of human society. Throughout the text, the narrator seeks out the written word as companion, interlocutor, and instructor as he reads books, takes notes, and reads and writes letters. I argue that this relationship to the written word is both key to the narrator’s character, and key to understanding the nature of Schmidt’s vision of a post-apocalyptic reality.

The word play between post as a prefix meaning “after” and post as a noun relating to the postal service works equally well in German and in English. The relationship between sending a letter and waiting for its arrival demonstrates the interesting way these meanings can work together. As there is an inherent delay in all written communication – that is to say, time must pass between the words being written and the words being read – Schmidt’s narrator finds himself in an environment
where he can interact with words in more or less the same way as he did before the disaster, the main difference being that there is now an infinite delay between writing and reading. I argue that the narrator is obliquely trying to restore a sense of normalcy and continue the tradition of humans writing their histories through his interaction with the written word. This paper will seek to understand how delay manifests in the text, how it shapes the narrator’s behavior, and what this can demonstrate about human knowledge and communication habits.

Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, University of North Texas, Re-reading Christa Wolf’s Störfall following the Fukushima Catastrophe

The earthquake and tsunami that struck in Japan on 11 March 2011 was a natural disaster which destroyed natural spaces, habitats and human and animal life. The ensuing destruction resulted in a secondary disaster, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, the largest nuclear disaster since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. In the twenty-five years since Chernobyl, the world had become more complacent, indeed even comfortable with the production and use of nuclear energy. It became perceived as a “safe” energy source, an alternative to fossil fuel. Following Fukushima, a wave of anti-nuclear protests took place prior to state elections in Germany. Many Germans resisted the use of nuclear energy, and the protesters used the timing of the Fukushima disaster to make their wishes known politically. The German government deactivated eight aging nuclear reactors and parliament overwhelmingly passed comprehensive legislation to phase out the remaining nine reactors by 2022.

In an interview with Die Zeit (17 March 2011), Christa Wolf commented that her narrative Störfall “gewinnt […] nun eine Aktualität, die wir nicht zu fürchten glaubten.” In light of Wolf’s death, the renewed debate about nuclear power, and
Wolf’s own belief that literature “schafft eine Realität aus dem Nichts, die sich als tragfähig erweisen soll – als neue Realität,” it is an opportune time to re-read Störfall. Published in spring 1987, just one year following the Chernobyl disaster, Christa Wolf’s Störfall was received positively by the German and international press. At the same time, it was viewed skeptically by scientists and politicians, who accused Wolf of overstepping her role as writer and interfering in scientific and political discussions. By re-examining Störfall in the context of the Japanese disaster, I will re-evaluate the role that writers and literature play in their attempt to heal the rupture of reality that occurs in catastrophes. I will examine closely the use of language (especially the use/avoidance of terms such as “explodieren,” “Strahlen,” “kontaminieren,” and I will explore the extent to which Störfall represents a turning point in Wolf’s writing much as the late 1980s represented a turning point for the GDR.

Janine Hartman, University of Cincinnati, The Morning after Paris Burns: Romantics in the Ruins—1871

How does one handle catastrophe after a lifetime defined as post-apocalypse, amid a society surviving as eternal and external to historical disaster or hope? One is a senior French literary writer in 1871. French Romanticism was an aesthetic of sensory awareness and studied apoliticism. Its exemplars were orphaned by events from events, by their own estimation, since the fall of Napoleon I, and the repeated failures of French Republicanism that would mark the nineteenth century. Generations of change and attempted change, since the Great Revolution of 1789 had experienced France as an expanding economy and population, and industrialized society. Political life had devolved into a ritual dance between elites parsing the past in order to pre-empt the future, punctuated by revolutions (1830, 1848) and an empire rebooted by a coup in 1851. Observation, reflection, artistic
detachment, the refuge of art, and an adherence to a theory of historical
decadence provided a refuge for writers and artists who claimed a post-
catastrophic, almost Petronean resignation towards contemporary events which
were a mere coda to the great events and failed aspirations that had gone before.
As progress was not possible in a sclerotic series of republics and monarchies,
further decay in France was unlikely. Since the publication of Alfred de Musset's
Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle (1835), writers had indemnified themselves
against involvement in contemporary events. Charles Baudelaire, Victor Hugo,
Maxime du Camp, Gustave Flaubert, and Théophile Gautier had observed,
commented upon, deplored and occasionally transmogrified the progress or failure
of France since the July monarchy (1830-1848).

France's defeat and protracted self-destruction after the Franco-Prussian War and
Commune, in civil conflict and conflagration called for a narrative and response.
Despite a lifetime of historical cynicism, the literary witness of the surviving French
Romantics, notably Gautier, Flaubert and du Camp took a complex and surprising
turn. This paper will examine the direct response to the catastrophe of defeat, fire,
purgation and military occupation, by men pledged to avoid history who now were
amid history, and civil engagement. By occupation, and their presence in the ruins
of Paris, they were compelled to depict and to represent catastrophe, where no
catastrophe should still be possible by 1871.

Claudia Jerzak, Universität Dresden, Narratives of the Bombings of Dresden and Hamburg

The narratives of the bombing of Dresden on February the 13th 1945 and the air
raids of the British-American Operation Gomorrah in July and August 1943 have
been always embedded in commemorative practices in that a more or less wider
range of stakeholders sets forth to find symbolizations for different interpretations
of the air raids and organize memorial events on the anniversaries. The culture of remembrance in Dresden is very controversial and involves thousands of people every year. No other German cities have such a strong and very emotionalized memorial tradition although especially Hamburg is a main symbol in the national narration about city bombings. While glorifying or victimizing narrations in Hamburg about braveness, solidarity, justice, vengeance and liberation are affected by a distancing self-perception of a 'hanseatic-liberal oasis', the myth of the catastrophe in Dresden constitutes itself around a nucleus consisting of the image of the per se innocent city of art and culture, exaggerated numbers of deaths and legends of hedgehoppers. In spite of mythologizations in the early decades in Hamburg to a greater extent research in local history in the 1980s caused a decline of narrations and commemorative activities. In Dresden processes of symbolization and ritualization have been going on since the historic bombing. The difficulty to confront the narrations of the catastrophe with historic facts and context is the result of an ongoing political instrumentalization. The National-Socialists instrumentalized the memory of this event for their propaganda as it did the GDR government marking the day with anti-imperialistic slogans. Due to an increasing number of Neo-Nazis participating to the commemorations the issue of how this city should cope with its national-socialistic past while keeping the mourning for thousands of deaths alive provoked a discussion the nucleus of the narration of catastrophe. In this lecture I will investigate how and why particular narrations in Dresden and Hamburg are told and in consequence commemorative actions are performed by different stakeholders. So I'll come from the interests of stakeholders in referencing to the past as something important for the present because it should legitimize their systems of meanings and values to their self-symbolization through communicative acting by re-telling and re-enactment. In the case of Dresden one can state to that effect: After the German Reunification and the Re-opening of an all-German memorial discourse Dresden has been a welcome symbol which was able to relieve the discourse about the National-Socialist German perpetrators with
a narration about victims. Though I'll also request how after 1990 the term of reconciliation has replaced the one of peace - nevertheless this specific interpretation was made popular by local, national and international media - and if it could be understood as a kind of catharsis.

Richard Schade, University of Cincinnati, Apocalypse Real: Günter Grass and the Braunkohlerevier

Grass’s recent editorial poem “Was gesagt werden muss” has focused the attention of the readers worldwide on what has been termed his proclivity for the framing of “apocalyptic visions” (Monika Shafi). The poem’s pronouncements are hardly surprising: In 1985, he warned of nuclear destruction in connection with the placement of Pershing missiles in Mutlangen. He spoke out about the Tschernobyl meltdown (1986). The novel Die Rättin (1986) has been thoroughly parsed as being “im Spannungsfeld der literarischen Apokalypse” (Thomas Kniesche). -- Grass then shifted to a focus on Calcutta, the locus of human disaster as depicted in Zunge zeigen (1988). He then considered ecological destruction in Totes Holz (1990), drawings and text chronicling the division of Germany, even as the two Germanys shared Waldsterben.

The prevalence of Grass’s “apocalyptic vision” is, then, uncontested, yet no one has evaluated the writer-artist’s obsession with the landscapes of Germany’s Braunkohlerevier. A chapter in Die Blechtrommel (1959) is devoted to it and the fascination returns in force in Ein weites Feld (1995), and most recently in Unterwegs von Deutschland nach Deutschland (2009), Grass’s diary of the Wendejahr 1990. There, the moonscape of the coalfields is the objective correlative for the failed DDR as well as for Grass’s sense that the political process of unification was doomed from the outset. Grass’s instrumentalization of the
Braunkohlerevier in writings and drawings – spread over 50 years -- speaks of his notion of the apocalypse as real.

Anna E. Zimmer, Georgetown University, Narrating Catastrophe in the Wake of 9/11 in American and German Novels

“Is there a proper role for [...] the novelist, at this time in our nation’s history? Can we make art in a time of atrocity? Does the imagination have anything to say when it has to compete with the actual horror of collapsing skyscrapers?” With these questions, American novelist and law professor, Thane Rosenbaum, summarizes many of the concerns surrounding art in the wake of 9/11. In this paper, I perform a comparative analysis of two novels that answer these questions with a resounding yes: Jonathan Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2005) and Thomas Lehr’s September. Fata Morgana (2010). While they have received significant popular attention, both novels have also garnered reproach due to narrative styles deemed inappropriate for depicting the aftermath of 9/11. Against assessments that view Foer’s novel as cloying and naïve and those that claim Lehr’s text is overly complicated and avantgarde, I argue that these novels must be read as narrative wholes whose parallel storylines and innovative narrative techniques—ranging from multimodality to a lack of punctuation—call into question trauma as nation-specific and underscore what comparativist Michael Rothberg has termed the multidirectionality of memory. Against a competitive memory framework that assumes that histories of victimization compete for recognition and that a direct line runs between remembrance and identity formation, these novels allow numerous multidirectional memories to coexist, imagining a global community that allows for solidarity while also remaining attuned to historical and cultural difference. Foer, a Jewish American, not only depicts the trauma of New Yorkers following 9/11, but also brings this recent catastrophe into mnemonic proximity.
with World War II memories in which Americans are perpetrators: the aerial bombing of Dresden and the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima. Lehr, a German author, focuses on the loss of life on 9/11 and the following bombing of Bagdad in 2004. Central to the novel are references to German WWII guilt and a fear of national expressions of pride, including claims of victimization, which can be used as justification for war. A comparative analysis of these novels thus provides a unique opportunity to explore the distinct and common ways in which different countries manage, perceive, and remember catastrophes. Rather than following an Aristotelian model which focuses on the actions leading to a catastrophe, these novels narrate the aftermath of catastrophic pasts and imagine more just futures.

**Lars Koch**, Universität Siegen, “To Survive is an Uncanny Experience.” Joseph Haslinger and the Tsunami of 2004

In the context of the conference “Catastrophe and Catharsis” I would like to focus on Josef Haslinger’s report *Phi Phi Island. Ein Bericht* (2007) in which the Austrian writer Haslinger uses his personal experiences and observations as a survivor of the Tsunami 2004 as a starting point for a comprehensive reflection on the assumptions and ethic consequences of the “western” life style. In this perspective the horrible catastrophe gets translated into a dramatic turning point of individual and societal catharsis.

The goal of my talk would be to re-contextualize Haslinger’s report in the horizon of utopian literature (Kleist, Schiller, Goethe) as well as in the ambivalent tradition of cultural critique (Rousseau and others) and to show which rhetorical elements and figures of thought are brought into play to deal with traumatic emotions such as fear and desperation in order to produce new meaning.