

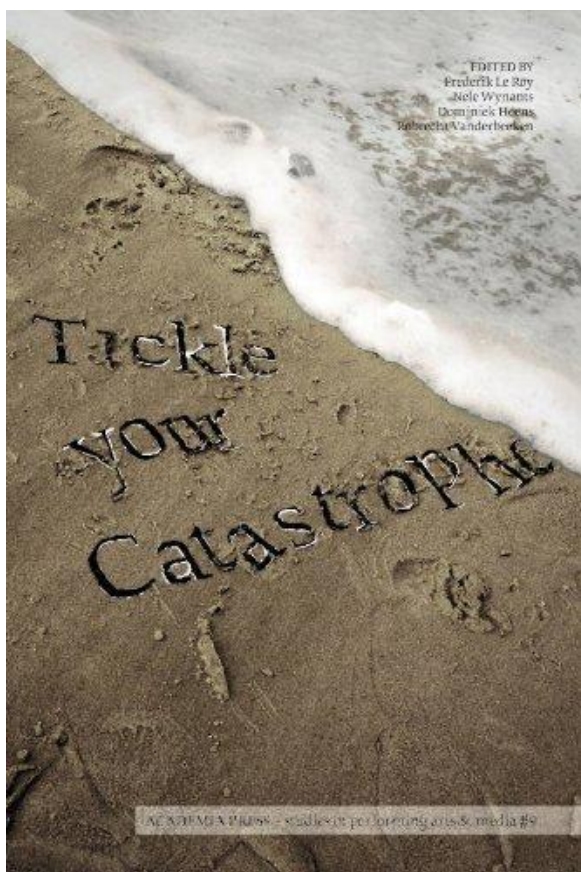
ON DISASTER RUINS: REVIEW OF LE ROY F., WYNANTS N., HOENS D., VANDERBEEKEN R. (EDS.) (2011), TICKLE YOUR CATASTROPHE!: IMAGINING CATASTROPHE IN ART, ARCHITECTURE AND PHILOSOPHY (STUDIES IN PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA), ACADEMIA

Maria BOSTENARU DAN

Researcher, PhD, "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism,
Department for Research, e-mail: Maria.Bostenaru-Dan@alumni.kit.edu

Abstract. This is a review of a book about the interpretation of disasters in art and architecture. The book was a result of one of the first conferences of this kind in Gent, Belgium.

Key words: disaster, image, photography, film, planning.



Vanderbeeken, R., Roy, F. L., Wynants, N., & Hoens, D. (Eds.) (2011), *Tickle Your Catastrophe! Imagining Catastrophe in Art, Architecture and Philosophy*, Academia Press, Ghent, Belgium, pp. 215, ISBN (Print) 978-90-382-1722-2

1. Introduction

The book provides a rare insight on how catastrophes can be interpreted in the field of architecture. Since it was published there were approaches mainly to interpreting war ruins but not so much natural hazard caused ruins. However, one of the authors in the book, Dirk de Meyer, professor in Ghent, where the conference on which the book is based was held in 2009, was employed at the Canadian Centre for Architecture which keeps in the collection numerous photographs of both types of ruins.

2. Overview of chapters

Entropy, deconstruction and utopia are key concepts for a ruin.

Johan Pas compares erosion to explosion, decay to destruction, historical ruins to new ruins, tourism – terrorism – indicators. A first document consulted at the Canadian Centre for Architecture collection by the author of this review are the romantic ruins as are called in this book of the Paris Commune. This is a site of conflict and loss. It is what is called in German *Trümmerfotografie* (photography of

collapsed buildings) as after the Berlin and Dresden bombing or Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Key concepts are the decay, the fragment, the cut. In postmodernism, ruins are a possibility of deconstruction. Some reference works are Woodward (2002), Makarius (2004), Roth et al (1997) – after an exhibition at Getty -, Macaulay (1953).

Oliveira and Oxley refer in their chapter first at Deleuze (1994) and the philosophic concept of fluidity. The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze can be well connected to architecture (ex. The flat and the striated space, analysed by the author, Bostenaru, 2010). Look at ruins means a look to the future according to Proust. In the ruin past and present blend together: the present is perpetual motion, while the memory reveals bits of past. We can reconstruct personal memories from the ruins of our own experiences (Op de Beeck). Then another philosopher relevant for analysing architecture comes in question as at Derrida. In the Derridean ruin, ruins are markers of temporality, of the passage of time. Ruins help to remember, when struck by tragedy, and are a mnemonic fragment. Remembrance guards against the repetition of the past. In this the approach is like what is written in the book of Wieczorek et al. (2014). Monuments are vigilance objects. The official memory is a beautification of horror and destruction. Memory is different of remembering. The decay reveals the temporal, but also covers traces, which is opposite from remembrance. The memory supposes an anterior event, in which the present intrudes, while remembrance involves new material provided at the moment of the recall. The most powerful memories are placed furthest chronologically, namely those from childhood. A circling occurs between event and remembrance. A ruin is not a blog, an object, a thing. The

remembrance is incessant, circling around present, an inability to forget. A ruin is remembrance and oblivion. The memory keeps alive. Forgetting releases mortality.

According to W. Benjamin, the most important Baroque emblems are the ruin, the corpse and the skull and they are already dead, their meaning has withered away, empty shells, markers of natural decay, so that they are available for the allegorist. Baudelaire treated the topic as well.

For Nietzsche, it is the idea of natural progress: "Catastrophe is progress, progress is catastrophe", as in Greek *katastrophein* = "to overturn". It is putting a stop to the continuum of history, the blind course of "natural" progression. Thinking of this we can compare the spiral of development: when reconstructing after a catastrophe, a better situation than before is achieved (Gociman, 2000). But there are stations of decline: shock and trauma.

"The Worst is Yet to Come" is a chapter dealing with the mentioned catastrophe films at Hollywood: Slavoj Žižek, catastrophe, 9/11. In Greek *apokalyptein* means un-covering and revelation, namely more than catastrophe.

"Mapping the Present through Catastrophe" starts again with a philosophical reference: Jean Baudrillard and the virtual catastrophe. Like Deleuze and Derrida, Baudrillard is relevant for philosophy in architecture, for example his discussions with the architect Jean Nouvell (Bostenaru, 2012). For Gilles Deleuze virtual does not mean unreal, ex. the slow catastrophe. In science fiction catastrophe means how the world will end, ex. animals die out, humans are invaded by technology. *Wesen* (being) is transformed into *Gewesen* (was – see here the "Rome, was!" project of Randolph

Langenbach, 2019). We can look into the cognitive mapping of Kevin Lynch (1960).

The chapter "Catastrophe in performance" starts also with a literary meaning from Greek: Katastrophe' means change of the strophe in poetry. Then at Aristotle it meant change to worse in tragedy. Scene is connected scenario, literary meaning representation of a possible chain of events. Susan Sontag wrote an essay on "The Imagination of Disaster", leading to the development of science fiction film. According to Andrea Bozic "Nothing can surprise us". Nothing means here catastrophic, atmosphere without catastrophe taking place, while Us is a catastrophe, day in former Yugoslavia, rehearse a situation. Several such films are mentioned: "Das Boot" by Wolfgang Petersen, "Blade runner" by Ridley Scott, "Solaris" by Andrei Tarkovsky, "The birds" by Alfred Hitchcock. According to the philosopher Derrida "It takes place when it doesn't". The best representation of catastrophe is fictitious, a composition. "It is as if ... a catastrophe overcame the canvas" is a citation from Deleuze "Logic of sensation" (*Empfindung* according Riegl) referring to a painting by Francis Bacon in a chapter by Vlad Ionescu. The "catastrophe" is seen as the "diagram's" effect: dynamic. It overturns the conception of the image. It maintains the instability of the visual, generating from chaos. An image is a snapshot of a dynamic process. Alois Riegl, doing the analysis of Baroque image saw the "will" (*Wille*) in geometry. Material and surface are something else. The haptic (different from optic, stable), as an iconic outline, can be compared to the Internet of things, the time machine. The Baroque had an accidental, thymic dimension. In the Baroquisation of the image, figurative elements resist to geometrisation (colour, line, plane). A catastrophe is a singular event.

In the next chapter on "The most dangerous film in the world", on radiation in Chernobyl, the "Chronicle of difficult weeks" by Shevchenko is presented. The parcours to film is a map. It could be captured only because of analogue film. A digital would not have survived. This led to a discussion on event versus accident. It is problematic, problematizes the accident. Singularity is a series from a history. The actual event is a historical incident. It was compared by Andrei Ujică in a course at the "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urban Planning to *Stalker – Mayak Cherlyabinsk 1957*. There is an interface between two virtualities. The Chernobyl "sarcophagus" is unlike Egyptian tombs, the accident invented when covered not uncovered.

The chapter "Worst case scenario" deals with the "The Mad Max Phase of Globalisation": "hyperkinetic frenzy of total mobilization" according to Karlsruhe (where also Andrei Ujică was teaching) philosopher Sloterdijk (1989). Disaster capitalism has 3 phases:

1. A disaster comes (coup d'état, natural disaster, terrorist attack)
2. This shock and its paralyzing effects are used to impose economic shock therapy
 - Privatization
 - Deregulation (elimination of public housing)
3. Then therapy: torture to those who oppose it.

After the 2004 tsunami we can look to how to get fisherman communities off beaches in order to ease tourism. War and disaster became big businesses. When the plans were ready, elites just waited for disaster to act. Turning security and disaster into a market opportunity is a way to "adapt": mitigation, not necessary and can be bad for business (the disaster

is the business). Also here some cyberpunk landscape films are cited: “Neuromancer” by William Gibson, “Diamond Age” by Neil Stephenson, again “Blade Runner” by Ridley Scott, and a short story: Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep. The landscape of the future is gated: communities, condos, skyscrapers and slums. The green zone means security walls, protection for example against migrants from Africa, see the report of the Club of Rome. Al Gore got the Nobel prize on Climate change in 2007. When the catastrophe will begin, it will be too late to act.

“Of the Relation of Scenarios and Paranoia” is a chapter showing the basis of strategic planning today.

Other chapters deal with “Emergence vs. Emergency”, or “How Knowledge Must Follow Fashion”. An explored item is the open (re)source, starting with free software and moving towards the domains of art and music. It is compared to popular epic art from the third world. Knowledge production and transmission in the field of urban planning must now follow the circuits of fashion and the copy.

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