

CALL FOR PAPERS

DEALING WITH DISASTERS

Cultural Representations of Catastrophes, c. 1500-1900

Thursday 14 – Friday 15 January 2021

Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands

Nowadays, we are constantly confronted with frantic reports on natural calamities. Major news outlets describe the potentially cataclysmic effects of the latest forest fires, floods, and storms – and due to the ongoing climate crisis, extreme weather events can be expected to have ever greater impacts on our lives. If we are left wondering how we should deal with these disasters, we should also acknowledge that natural calamities have always occurred and have affected human experience in myriad ways. For many centuries, news about catastrophic events has been disseminated via media such as pamphlets, chronicles, poems, and prints. This conference seeks to address the cultural representations that reflected and shaped the ways in which people learned and thought about disasters that occurred either nearby or far away, both in time and space.

This conference welcomes contributions that engage with the cultural dimensions of disasters and reflect on representations of catastrophes in different media. In doing so, we offer a platform to scholars from various backgrounds to adopt multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to reconceptualising the broader socio-cultural consequences of disasters. Without denying the very real and immediate impact that calamities have on people's lives, we consider disasters to be as much cultural phenomena as natural events. The power of cultural discourses to shape the perception of disasters is therefore key to understanding their wider societal impact. Such representations are not only profoundly influenced by specific cultural habits and beliefs, but also by the media that communicate these events.

To foreground understudied areas of research, we want to turn away from disasters that humans deliberately inflicted upon each other. In other words, we are excluding calamities that were a direct result of warfare, genocide or terrorism. Instead, we will focus on unplanned catastrophes: those fateful moments when nature and culture clashed. The period that we will be examining (c. 1500-1900) is roughly demarcated by two media transformations: the introduction of the printing press on the



one hand, and the invention of radio, television, and film on the other. This conference thus covers all the cultural manifestations of disasters in the intervening period, mediated, for example, by pamphlets, prints and newspapers, but also through letters and diaries.

THEMES

Themes that could be explored include, but are not limited to:

- representations of disasters in different media
- religious and ritual responses to disasters
- scientific understandings of disasters and technological innovation
- literary and artistic responses to catastrophes
- remembrance and memory culture surrounding disasters
- material culture of disasters, including disaster relics
- political and societal dimensions of representations of disasters
- human-nature relations in the context of disasters
- history of emotions in the context of disasters
- appropriation of disasters and (collective) identity formation
- solidarity and conflict in the wake of disasters

PROPOSAL

Paper proposals (max. 300 words) should reach the conference committee by **1 June 2020** via email: dealingwithdisasters@let.ru.nl. Please **enclose a 100-word biographical note**.

ORGANISING COMMITTEE

The conference is organised by the members of the *Dealing with Disasters in the Netherlands: The Shaping of Local and National Identities, 1421-1890* research project, which is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO). This project is part of the Radboud Institute for Culture & History (RICH) at Radboud University. Further information about the project can be found on our website: www.dealingwithdisasters.nl.

Committee:

- Prof. Lotte Jensen
- Dr Hanneke van Asperen
- Marieke van Egeraat MA
- Adriaan Duiveman MA
- Fons Meijer MA
- Lilian Nijhuis MA



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