

Preface

Collected in this volume are papers submitted for the conference “Das Unfassbare in Bilder fassen: Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf Deutungsmuster von Naturkatastrophen” (The use of imagery to describe the intangible: Interdisciplinary perspectives on the framing of natural disasters), which took place at the University of Bochum on 2 and 3 November 2018. Victims of natural disasters struggle needing to somehow find a way to understand these life-altering experiences. Building on cognitive linguistics and on Leikam’s 2015 study, these patterns of interpretation can be understood as frames that delimit the incomprehensible, thus in a way making it tangible. This interpretive framework allows disaster victims, who are suffering mentally or physically, to process the experience and gird themselves for possible similar catastrophes that might occur, or at least to feel that they are prepared. Framings are often tied to a causal attribution (earthquakes as God’s punishment, or storms because of climate change). This type of attribution can enable victims to become active, which in turn impacts preventive measures. As a result, studying the framing of natural disasters is a high-priority task for society.

Scientists can gain access to mental images by analysing linguistic imagery as well as actual pictures. Studying the contents of pictures as an avenue to analysing the extremely multi-layered concept of *imagery* offers potentially fertile ground, especially as part of interdisciplinary research. In an age defined by multi-modal communication, a scientific analysis of the photograph of a church tower rising above the ruins – an image that featured in many newspaper articles¹ – enhances cognitive linguists’ metaphorological exploration of reporting on the *Amatrice* earthquake. The church tower itself exemplifies how framings are deeply shaped by religion and culture, suggesting that it would be beneficial to include cultural-studies and theological research perspectives.

¹ E.g. <http://www.larampa.it/mondo/italia/video-terremoto-amatrice-la-giornata-dei-vigili-del-fuoco/>, http://roma.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/16_settembre_06/furti-case-sventratesciacalli-trasferta-roma-da1aba64-7462-11e6-b267-7b6340139127.shtml?refresh_ce-cp (07/04/2017).

Framings are not disconnected from the world. Instead, they take up existing frames that are perpetuated, modified or rejected in favour of new ones. As such, there is always a historical dimension to the analysis of how imagery depicts natural disasters.

Often events are processed in a narrative form: Renowned authors, but also amateurs, come to terms with their experiences in plays, novels, poems and the like.² Their works are now often made available to the interested public via social networks. Poetry is a form of expression often chosen in this context. As well-known historical examples show (cf. Voltaire, *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*), poetry provides a popular way to process physical and mental upheaval – one that is rich in metaphors. Analyses of other examples of literary or narrative linguistic expression have been conducted, for instance, by Vanborre et al. (2014). Various disciplines explore the significance of literature for processing trauma (cf. e.g. Döring 2007, Pennebaker 2000).

The goal of the interdisciplinary conference was, on the one hand, to provide a multitude of perspectives on the imagery used to grapple with natural disasters and, on the other hand, to explore conclusions about the underlying framings revealed by analyses of the imagery. Especially sought after were insights on two levels. First, to grasp in its entirety the interpretation of natural disasters as threatening, overwhelming and something that has always challenged humanity. Second, to foster methodological cross-fertilisation in the analysis of linguistic and non-linguistic imagery as well as verbal and non-verbal metaphors.

Various fields contributed to the conference and this collection of papers. Despite the conference's general openness for natural disasters of any type, responses from the speakers clustered around the following natural disasters: earthquakes, storm damage, floods and seaquakes.

The conference began with a focus on earthquakes. In the last decade, for instance, earthquakes have upended parts of the world where Romance languages are spoken. Stricken areas include Haiti in 2010, the 2009 and 2016 earthquakes in and around Amatrice in the Italian Abruzzo region as well as Mexico in 2017. The 2010

² Cf. e.g. Visser (2012) on the earthquake in Chile, Döring (2007) on foot and mouth disease in Great Britain or Vanborre (ed., 2014) on the earthquake in Haiti.

earthquake in Chile has also captured the interest of the humanities (e.g. *Iberoamericana* 55, 2014; Visser 2012). In the fall of 2016, the media's portrayal of the earthquakes in Amatrice shows that not everyone agrees with all framings that can potentially be attached to an image. A point in case is the emotionally charged reaction to a caricature printed in *Charlie Hebdo*: Only a few days after the earthquake (24 August), the satirical journal likened the victims of the Amatrice earthquake to pasta dishes in an article with the title "*Séisme à l'italienne*"³, presumably referring to the pasta sauce *L'Amatriciana*. This incident demonstrates how framings are not only passed on or modified; but are also dealt with in social discourse.

The German photographer Elisabeth Gumberger, who has been living in Chile since 1996, was an eyewitness to the 2010 earthquake there. She processed and documented her experience in a narrative form and in photography. Her exhibition *Heridas de un terremoto* has been shown in Talca, Chile, at the Chilean embassy in Berlin and in Bad Homburg. A selection of pictures from this exhibition as on display at the convention. In this volume, they form the starting point for the earthquake focus topic and are complemented by Gumberger's report of her experiences. This report is in the form of a journal and contains clues to the perspective victims take on earthquakes and how they try to conceptualise them. Certain sounds (thundering, rattling, clattering, groaning, rasping) are perceived as dominant. The earth seems an "angry, dancing fury". The experience feels like being trapped in hell. Darkness and silence follow the quake. There appears to be a heightened perception of colours and sounds. The experience is governed by speechlessness and a lack of comprehension. The devastation imperils memories of one's life.

Monika Wehrheim has also studied the earthquake in Chile. She analysed 8.8. *El miedo en el espejo*, the chronicle of the earthquake published by the Mexican author Juan de Villoro in 2011. Not only did the author experience the *seísmo* in Chile, he also witnessed the *terremoto* in Mexico in 1985. These events manifest in the fragmented style of his chronicle. As Wehrheim writes, "The chaos he experienced

³ Cf. <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/erdbebendorf-amatrice-verklagt-satirezeitschrift-charlie-hebdo-a-1112016.html> (07/04/2017).

was written into the structure of the text” that Villoro used to wrestle with the unspeakable.

Marius Rimmele’s paper on the theory of imagery and metaphor provides methodological support for the preceding portrayal of the contrasts between physical images and linguistic imagery in the aftermath of the earthquake in Chile. Rimmele looks at the usefulness of cognitive metaphor theories for art-historical studies. He convincingly explains that there are obviously also intricate examples of metaphor and metonymy in pictures. However, to a higher degree than is the case with texts, the identification and interpretation of the imagery is more strongly contingent on the eye of the beholder, more specifically their agency or will.

The 18th-century poem *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* by Voltaire is an example of iconic earthquake poetry. Lieselotte Steinbrügge, an expert on the Age of Reason, analyses the world views shattered by the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 (cf. also Weber 2015). She traces how the debate triggered by this upheaval culminated in a pragmatic view of research rather than a pessimistic one.

Judith Visser investigates whether there are parallels or divergencies among these world views and their deconstruction in the 18th and 21st century, both within and outside of Europe. To answer this question, she performed a cognitive-linguistic analysis of large corpora of poetry about the earthquakes in the Italian Abruzzo region and Haiti. The title of the Italian poetry collection *La parola che ricostruisce* is a linguistic expression of the hope that putting events into words, thus creating a framing, will help people physically and mentally grasp these experiences.

Felix Mauch’s paper brings the element of water in disasters into play. He examined pictures commemorating the North Sea flood of 1962 in Hamburg and identified various processes underlying the memorialisation of that “Great Flood”. Mauch illustrates how contemporary experiences are not only passed on but are also subject to partial reinterpretation as history unfolds. As a result, official memorial pictures and those initiated by “regular people” played off each other.

The conceptualisation of catastrophes is specific to languages and cultures and can evolve over the centuries. This was already demonstrated by the analyses of the earthquakes in Europe (18th v. 21st centuries) as well as in Haiti, a country with a substantially different society, religion and culture. Which causal attributions are

assigned depends in part on differing ideas of the relationship between humankind and nature. Lioba Rossbach de Olmos' analysis of disasters in the conceptual world of the Afro-Cuban Ifá oracle adds a further aspect to the question of cultural specificity. She rightfully asks whether it is always a given when we can begin to speak of metaphorical language. Might identifying (linguistic) imagery (such as the conceptualisation of the Earth as a mother) not instead depend on a culturally specific view of the world?

Roger Friedlein follows with another type of natural disaster: seaquakes. He delves into a mythical event, the platonic myth of Atlantis as retold by Jacint Verdaguer in the 19th century. Verdaguer creates a literary aesthetisation of the disaster, re-using it in the form of an epic tale. In his version, the land of Atlantis is not completely submerged, but instead its artistic tradition lives on as a new Hesperia. Accordingly, Verdaguer transforms the myth of Atlantis into an origin myth of Catalan poetry.

Michael Schulz' contribution concludes the collection of papers. He postulates that a theological perspective on the framing of natural disasters as well as the question of theodicy are essential for an interdisciplinary approach to the conceptualisation of disasters. His paper "Corinne oder Die praktische Theodizee des Unfassbaren" (Corinne or The practical theodicy of the incomprehensible) explores the possibility of an anthropocentric theodicy, drawing on experiences he gathered with emergency counselling during disasters.

The minute people come to view natural events as disasters, it becomes a struggle for them to comprehend what happened. They need to establish framings to cope emotionally with the events. These framings have not only influenced the history of humanity, its social structures and its religions, but also artistic forms of expression. Throughout the entire conference, there were lively debates and fruitful conversations among attendees. Clearly, a both multi-modal and multi-disciplinary approach to the phenomenon of metaphors can substantially contribute to the human search for answers to the incomprehensible and enhance analytical approaches. Our hope for publishing this collection is that these papers will help drive interdisciplinary dialogue in metaphor research.

Without the many helping hands, we would not have been able to organise the conference and the publication of this volume. We are grateful to the University of Bochum for its contribution to the conference. We would especially like to thank the team of organisers, including Anja Krysmanski, Greta Syha, Ilaria Capparelli, and Sarah Clemens, as well as Kerstin Sterkel (Saarbrücken) for the final layout.

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Judith Visser
Claudia Polzin-Haumann
Dietmar Osthus
Katrin Mutz
Olaf Jäkel
Martin Döring
Anke Beger

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