

## Call for Papers

20 May 2026

# Traces and Atmospheres of Disasters

*Edited by Mathieu Gaulène, Michela Deni, Yuho Hisayama*

It has been observed that Disaster Studies have recently shifted from the “era of the witness” to the “era of traces”, a change that has been called the “forensic turn” (Dziuban 2017; Mazzucchelli 2017). When there are no more witnesses able to speak about a disaster, or when words are not enough to describe it, then traces – but also atmospheres of disasters – allow us to feel, and at least partially comprehend, what happened. The ambition of this thematic issue is to bring these two notions, *traces* and *atmospheres*, into dialogue. Although they emerge from distinct philosophical traditions, their articulation can contribute to a deeper understanding of what is taking place under our ill-fated stars.

Feeling a disaster retrospectively through its traces is not something new. Such a methodology has its roots in the so-called *indiciary paradigm*. Carlo Ginzburg outlined its main principles based on the method first developed by art critic Giovanni Morelli (Ginzburg 1980). To distinguish the works of Renaissance masters from those of forgers, Morelli devised a groundbreaking approach that involved examining seemingly insignificant details in artworks, which would serve as the true signature of the great masters. Ginzburg also demonstrated that this method had a significant influence on Freud’s psychoanalytic approach, as well as on Arthur Conan Doyle’s famous detective, Sherlock Holmes. Around the same time, and in Bologna, semiotician Umberto Eco, drawing from the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, described a similar investigative approach – once again using Sherlock Holmes as a reference – based on abduction and the interpretation of different levels of codes within the environment (Eco 1976; 1981).

Building on this work, Patrizia Violi demonstrated the relevance of this method for analyzing sites of trauma and memory by beginning from environmental clues. She introduced the distinction between *imprints* and *traces* of disaster, where a trace is understood as a semiotic transformation, a *re-cognition* of the imprints left in a place affected by catastrophe (Violi 2014; Demaria & Violi 2023). Indeed, human perception of the environment is based on an abductive faculty that enables action, and which lies at the core of Peircean pragmatism. Abduction is a “reasoning process”, based on an insight close to what Peirce sometimes calls “instinct” or “sentiments” (Peirce 1931a, CP 1.628-630). This third mode of reasoning constructs hypotheses by linking, on the one hand, certain *imprints* perceived in the environment and,

on the other, what we can call a *codex* – a memory that is both collective and individual.

Peirce's phenomenology, which he called "phaneroscopy", distinguished three realms of relations to the world: firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Secondness and thirdness are familiar to us. The former corresponds to the realm of experience – of the facts that resist and force us to think – while the latter is the realm of laws, of established habits necessarily fragile in Peirce's fallibilist conception of things. Firstness, finally, is the realm of pure "qualities of feeling", the world as it is before any distinction, a "pre-logical" and "synesthetic" world. "It precedes all synthesis and all differentiation," writes Peirce; "it has no unity and no parts. It cannot be articulately thought: assert it, and it has already lost its characteristic innocence" (Peirce 1931a CP 1.357). This realm of firstness, where the "pure play" of abduction takes place, is particularly important in the case of disasters with a lack of traces or experience, and where the observer is plunged into a sort of "contemplative abduction" (Gaulène 2021).

In the same way that abduction occurring after a "surprising fact" has some similarities with the intuitive "evidence" occurring after "epoche" (Depraz et al. 2011), this description of firstness is not without resemblance to the way atmospheres are described in New Phenomenology, following the works of Hermann Schmitz (Schmitz 2023). Gernot Böhme, for example, describes it as an "in-between of environmental qualities and body states" (Böhme, 1993). Ogawa Tadashi, thinking about atmosphere through the concept of *ki*, describes it as a "pre-predicative" moment, a "proto-logical truth", or "something corresponding to synesthesia" (Ogawa 1998). Bruce Bégout, abandoning the somatology position of New Phenomenology, speaks of *ambiance* as a "pre-logical dimension," a *mersion* that not only merges subject and object, but which precedes them in an ineffable borderline state within *logos* (Bégout 2020). Rediscovering such a "mersive thought", he argues, through a "tonal understanding" of the atmospheres of places, could be a remedy to the anthropic disasters of our time (Bégout 2025). This is indeed particularly relevant in our time, when anthropic disasters seem to be on the rise, yet in most cases their perception and transmission remain limited by a lack of traces and by an underdeveloped atmospheric and tonal understanding.

Therefore, the phenomenology of atmosphere offers a particularly fruitful way of rethinking this concept, by placing the pre-logical dimension of experience at the heart of the phenomenon itself. At the same time, Peircean phaneroscopy, which can be described as another form of phenomenology, and the tradition of semiotics initiated by Eco, have extensively explored the role of imprints and traces in our atmospheric experiences of trauma and disasters sites. In doing so, this tradition has marked a shift from semiology and its limited view of the world through the domination of the word. One could notice that the shift from the era of testimonies to the era of traces is

again a return to the phenomenological and semiotic traditions, and is also, from a Peircean point of view, a shift from thirdness to a field where secondness (index) and firstness (feelings) overlap.

*From the dialogue between these two traditions and their concepts, the papers will focus on the following axes:*

- The possibility of grasping the atmosphere of a disaster and translating it into words.
- The interpretation of the *memoryscape* of a disaster where imprints are lacking (e.g., a radioactive disaster)
- The possibility of creating an atmosphere of disaster and the question of Disasters Memorials.
- The possibility of recreating the trauma of the event through its representation
- The risk of manipulating the atmospheres of post-disaster areas through memorialization

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## Timeline

**25 June 2026:** deadline for the submission of paper abstracts (1.000 characters including spaces plus a short bibliography).

**20 July 2026:** notification of acceptance or rejection.

**30 Octobre 2026:** deadline for paper submission (format doc, docx, or otd).

**10 December 2026:** deadline for peer review completion.

**20 January 2026:** deadline for revised manuscript submission.

**Autumn/Winter 2027:** publication.

*The maximum length for papers is 40,000 characters (including spaces, notes and bibliography); Papers should include an abstract in English, not exceeding 1.000 characters including spaces, together with 5 keywords.*

Paper abstracts must be sent to the following email addresses:

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Accepted languages: **Italian, English, French**

## Guidelines

- The acceptance of the articles and their publication is subject to double blind peer review.
- The Authors can find all the editing and format rules at the page “Come si collabora” (how to collaborate), on the Ocula home page (<<https://www.ocula.it/collaborazioni.php>>). Please read it carefully and follow the recommendations.
- There are no official limits of length to the articles, yet we recommend 40.000 characters as a reasonable maximum measure (including spaces, notes and references);
- Files format accepted are .doc, docx, .odt;
- The articles may include any kind of images;
- Images (photographs, graphs, tables) must be included in the main text file and submitted as a separate file, in .jpg, .png, .tif, .eps, .psd formats.
- Authors must send their contribution in two versions: one in anonymous form, to be sent to the reviewers, and the other containing name, position, email, website, biographic notes. Each version must be a separate file.
- In the anonymous file, in any reference to the Author’s publications the name must be cancelled and replaced by "Author" and the titles by "Title of the publication". The date must be let visible.
- An abstract of the paper, both in Italian and English, must be added.

*The Editors thank you for your kind attention.*