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Natural disasters between memory and oblivion

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Communication, Earthquakes, Memory/Oblivion

There is no single definition of memory because it is dynamic. Procedural memory, which remodels according to the present (context, temporality). There is no memory without oblivion.

Examples of oblivion in natural disasters communication



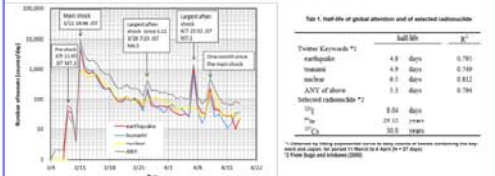
Interest over time News headlines Forecast



The graph obtained from Google statistics (<http://www.google.com/insights/search/>) shows how the search for the English terms earthquake (in red) and tsunami (in blue) and volcano (in orange) decays with surprising speed after a catastrophic event.

- A) December 26, 2004. Earthquake and tsunami in Southeast Asia, approximately 230,000 deaths.
- B) May 12, 2008. Sichuan Earthquake, Mw 7.9, 69,195 deaths.
- C) January 12, 2010. Haiti Earthquake, Mw 7.0, 230,000 deaths.
- D) March 20, 2010. Eyjafjall (Iceland) Volcanic Eruption
- E) March 11, 2011. Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan Mw 9.0, 15,703 deaths.
- F) August 23, 2011. Virginia Earthquake Mw 5.8

Yuzuru ISODA, William CLASTER, Oblivion Curve. Assessing how quickly people forget about the disaster by Twitter tweet counts. The 2011 East Japan Earthquake Bulletin of the Tohoku Geographical Association, June 2011.



In this work the authors searched Twitter tweets written in English using the boolean search (earthquake OR tsunami AND nuclear AND Japan) and counted the number of daily tweets with the expectation that these would reflect the degree of global attention to the disaster. The curve resembles that of radioactive decay (i.e. exponential decay), declining rapidly but with a decreasing rate of decline and tempered somewhat by subsequent media coverage of aftershocks and other related events. (Table). The authors fitted exponential curves to the period 11 March to 6 April (the day before the then largest aftershock) to obtain an estimate of the half-life of global attention. The result is shown in table 1 with the half-life of major radionuclides generated in nuclear fission also shown for comparison. The half-life, the period in which the frequency is reduced to a half, is about five days for the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and six-and-a-half days for the nuclear crisis. The speed of oblivion is much faster than the decay of life-threatening radioactive substances.

How Many Memories and How Many Oblivions

Individual
 Biological bases. Semantic and procedural memory. Trauma and removal mechanisms.

Collective
 According to the definition of the historian Pierre Nora, collective memory is "memory, or set of memories, more or less conscious, of an experience or a myth by a living community whose identity is an integral part of the feeling of the past". The term "collective memory" was coined in the twenties of the twentieth century by Maurice Halbwachs in opposition to the concept of individual memory. Collective memory is shared, transmitted and also built by the group or society. Compared to collective oblivion that which is not remembered by a group goes into oblivion even at the individual level (e.g. eyewitnesses, Holocaust).

Social (Halbwachs, Namer)
 The term social memory is anything that belongs to the "objective culture" and that manifests itself as "the total of what is offered to virtually all members of a society as possible content of their memory" and as "all the traces that remain of the past and offer interpretation".
 From: P. Jedowski, memory, experience and modernity, Milan, Angeli, 2002, 62.

Social Construction of oblivion
 The sociologist Alessandro Cavalli talks about the social construction of oblivion. For example, the earthquake in Friuli, has implemented a cancellation, removal of the adverse event and the memory has turned to rebuilding, and continuity with the pre-disaster past. As opposed to the earthquake of Belice, there has been a commemoration, celebration, exaltation of the adverse event, so not its cancellation, but rather its emphasis as time 0, which removes the memory prior to the event. These models are the author's polar references.

Mediated is the memory built through mass-media.
Transactive is the final memory type under study and refers to new technologies and changes in the mode of storing or forgetting in the Internet era, the digital era and the icloud era.

Towards a Transgenerational Memory

We are mere links in a chain of generations, and we often have no choice and we become victims of events and traumas already experienced by our ancestors. In her book, Anne Ancelet Schützenberger collected interesting case studies and examples of "genosociogrammes" that illustrate how patients have developed seemingly irrational fears, psychological or even physical difficulties by discovering and trying to understand the parallels between their own life and that of their ancestors.



A. Schützenberger *The Ancestor Syndrome*, Di Renzo Ed. Roma, 2004

At Collective level Memory disasters

In the Associated Press story "Tsunami-hit towns forgot warnings from ancestors" Jay A-labaster describes centuries-old stone tablets warning of coastal tsunami risk that dot the Japanese coast ravaged by the great earthquake and resulting waves on 2011 March 11th. This is an example of how "disaster memory," conveyed from generation to generation, can — at least for a time — limit losses from inevitable, but rare, calamities. The inscription inscribed on one stone (pictured at right) quoted:

High dwellings are the peace and harmony of our descendants.... Remember the calamity of the great tsunamis. Do not build any homes below this point.
 In Japan, there was evidence of great tsunamis on portions of the coast, but the most recent was in 1933. One Japanese expert in the wire story noted how such messages lose their influence over time. Earlier generations also left warnings in place names, calling one town "Octopus Grounds" for the sea life washed up by tsunamis and naming temples after the powerful waves, said Fumihiko Imamura, a professor in disaster planning at Tohoku University in Sendai, a tsunami-hit city. "It takes about three generations for people to forget. Those that experience the disaster themselves pass it to their children and their grandchildren, but then the memory fades," he said.

Rites and rituals institution

Recently in Italy, the Ministry of Education, University and Research has established the National Day for the memory of the victims of environmental and industrial disasters caused by the negligence of man.

[Law n.101, 14 June 2011]

Article 2 of the Law provides that, on this Day, which falls on October 9 of each year, schools of all levels can organize "events, ceremonies, meetings and moments of remembrance and reflection on historical facts to promote knowledge and greater awareness of the risks associated with interventions that alter the balance of the territory and the need to protect the environmental heritage of the country."

Example of Commemorative Days (Vajont, Val di Stava).

With respect to these commemorative days, the thoughts of the sociologist Alessandro Cavalli should be remembered. He believes that the establishment of commemorative events such as the celebration of the resistance, may have had the effect of removing the memory of fascism. In other words, the celebration of an event, somehow seemed to liberate social groups, political parties and intellectuals of the need to reflect on their responsibilities in the advent and consolidation of the Fascist regime. You then see how the processes of memory, of celebration in Cavalli's hypothesis can be functional to oblivion, that is, to processes of collective repression.

The Disputed Memory, by Anna Lisa Tota; memory as a sociological object: interview with Alessandro Cavalli p. 31 and following.

An ID card for buildings

For a few years many townships in EU have rendered obligatory the preparation and periodic testing of the state of efficiency of structures and buildings, all of which is recorded in a special booklet.

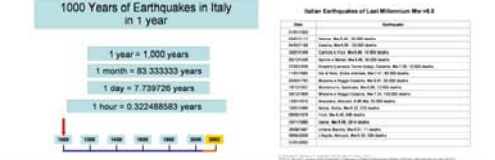
This booklet has been designed in relationship with the numerous disasters that have occurred as a result of acts of pure negligence on the part of officials and the like, who, without ascertaining the actual condition of the buildings, have authorized works for resizing structural elements or other types of works that have altered the stability of the buildings.

The idea to write and keep a written record of the history of a building will have a certain effect in terms of safety, and will eventually make the work of relevant bodies in issuing clearance more streamlined and faster.

The booklet will also be very useful for buyers of real estate units, who will now have a clear idea of the state of repair when purchasing a home.

Communication Strategies

From an idea of Carl Sagan, we tried to represent Italian earthquakes by a different time scale



January, 3	December, 8	December, 9	December, 10	December, 12
April 6, 2009, Abruzzi, L'Aquila, Mw 6.30	January 15, 1983, Sicily, Sicily, Mw 6.30	May 8, 1976, Friuli, Mw 6.40	November 23, 1980, Ispica, Mw 6.80	September 26, 1907, Umbria-Marche, Mw 6.70
	November 5, 1952, Basilicata, Mw 7.03	November 11, 1908, ME e PG, Mw 7.10	January 13, 1915, Avestano, Mw 7.00	
		October 6, 1783, Calabria, Mw 7.02		
		September 5, 1908, Sicilia Orientale, Mw 7.41		
		August 9, 1938, Calabria, Lamezia Terme, Mw 7.03		
		July -- no earthquakes		
		June, 7, 1946, Campania, Mw 7.22		
		May, 3, 1952, Calabria, Mw 7.02		
		April -- no earthquakes		
		March, 1, 1969, Sicilia Orientale, Mw 6.41		
		February, 6, 1975, Veneto, Mw 6.69		
		January -- no earthquakes		

150 years of earthquakes in Italy in 24 hours

