

Cross Disciplinary, International Conference

“Climate, Environment, Psyche and History”

Location

Oct 17-18, Grand Valley State University
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Organization

Jason Crouthamel (Grand Valley State University) and Peter Leese (University of Copenhagen)

Abstract

Goals

This conference aims to foster interdisciplinary conversations between the humanities (history, literature, philosophy), social sciences, geography, culture studies, health sciences and other fields dealing with a variety of themes related to human encounters with natural and human-made catastrophes. We want to explore the different ways in which scholars approach how individuals and societies experience environmental trauma, as well as the varieties of traumatic experiences with material environments. This can include the effects of climate-induced stress on human health, the impact of pathogens (pandemics and other medical disasters), the consequences of environmental degradation (pollution, destruction of resources) for humans and communities, the myriad effects of militarized and technological violence, and other related events. We look forward to sparking discussions between specialists in historical sites of natural and human-made disasters and scholars who are focused on contemporary case studies of environmental disasters, including the complex effects of the COVID pandemic, overpopulation, contamination of resources, and other current challenges.

While state, medical and institutional responses to climate/environmental-induced stress are a crucial part of investigations into how humans cope with dislocation and disaster, we are particularly interested in the more hidden social, cultural and psychological consequences of diverse forms of trauma and stress. The ways in which humans imagine their environment, their perceptions of material objects (both threatening and invigorating), and the potential for individuals to transform their environment and related objects, requires exploration from a variety of disciplinary and methodological standpoints. The politics of environment trauma, the ways in which culture wars shape perceptions of these events, and the larger environmental concerns that are a backdrop to tensions over colonial power, indigenous rights, and economic exploitation also require innovative new approaches.

This will be a workshop-style conference with a series of panels and plenty of time for focused discussion that will enhance interdisciplinary collaboration.

Questions to explore:

What forms of trauma are experienced as a result of climate/environment disasters?

How do humans cope with traumatic climactic and environmental events?

How does the environment/climate and objects function in the psyche of humans?

How do humans imagine their environment, especially in the wake of traumatic experiences, whether man-made or natural occurrences?

How do we reconstruct, categorize and investigate historical sites of climate-induced trauma?

Concepts/themes/topics

- Indigenous environments and colonial genocides
- Colonial ecologies
- Contemporary and historical urban environments
- War landscapes/psyches
- Natural disasters
- Pollution/environmental degradation
- Commodity and resource extraction
- Global environmental history
- Environment and mental health
- Trauma and digital media
- Transnational and global case studies of climate trauma
- Environment, trauma and memory

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Please send an abstract (up to 500 words) and CV to Jason Crouthamel (crouthaj@gvsu.edu) by June 15, 2025.

We will review abstracts shortly thereafter and let colleagues know by July 1st whether proposals have been accepted.