

## Culture and Catastrophe in Modern Europe (Chicago, 1-2 Mar 24)

University of Chicago, Neubauer Collegium, Mar 1–02, 2024

Deadline: Oct 27, 2023

Alice Goff

Conveners: Alice Goff (University of Chicago) and Jennifer Allen (Yale University)

Application Deadline: Friday, October 27, 2023

In the history of modern Europe, episodes of catastrophe have often produced arguments for the importance of the arts, literature, and other forms of cultural expression. In the face of royal tyranny, cultural work might offer revolutionary liberation. Amid imperial conquest, it might facilitate the subjugation of colonized populations. In the wake of total war, it might enable reconstruction. After genocide, it might make unspeakable atrocities imaginable. This history of the power of cultural work includes periods of enormous creativity in circumstances of great constraint. It also includes acts of cultural supremacy with devastating consequences on the continent and beyond. As scholars of culture, we participate in this history too. We experience its ambiguity when we reach for language to defend our creative labor in our own catastrophic times.

This workshop approaches these issues via two sets of inquiries. First, it takes our contemporary moment of multivalent crisis as an opportunity to articulate the historical relationship between culture and catastrophe. We ask how cultural practices have responded to catastrophic events in modern European history. We ask how the relevance of these practices to such events has been articulated. And we ask whether this work has accomplished its ambitions. These questions leave room to consider both generative and destructive aspects of cultural work. Are cultural practices primarily a salve after catastrophe, or have they been capable of prolonging, even provoking disasters? Have they generated danger rather than offering salvation? In short, we intend to consider the spectrum of historical arguments for and against cultural practices amid catastrophe in order to develop a richer sense of their historical stakes and a more nuanced vocabulary for analyzing them. Second, this workshop is attentive to the relevance of these questions to our present moment. The confluence of resurgent far right politics, climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, radical economic inequality and insecurity, to name just a few, might lead us to describe contemporary European life as disastrous. We would like to use these historical examples to analyze the relationship between calamity and cultural production in the twenty-first century.

We invite proposals from scholars across the arts, humanities, and social sciences whose work considers the relationship between culture and catastrophe. The workshop will be structured around a series of thematic roundtable discussions, each allowing ample time for participation from all attendees. Participants will be asked to share short think-pieces of approximately 2000 words by Friday, February 2, 2024. These reflections will serve as the basis of our roundtables.

Travel and accommodations will be fully funded with the generous support of the Neubauer Collegium.

Please send a CV and an abstract of no more than 300 words as one PDF document to [cultureanddisaster@gmail.com](mailto:cultureanddisaster@gmail.com) by Friday, October 27, 2023.

Reference:

CFP: Culture and Catastrophe in Modern Europe (Chicago, 1-2 Mar 24). In: Arthist.net, Sep 30, 2023 (accessed May 12, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/40237>>.