



Geoethics. The risk and the rite

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The present work combines anthropological-philosophical and geoethical research on man's perception of, and reaction to, natural catastrophes such as earthquakes. The study offers an articulate and cohesive picture of the defense mechanisms man has deployed, since ancient cultures, against this risk, these are identified with mythical-ritualistic repetition. At critical moments, man develops a series of practical strategies resting on ritual action. Since the dawn of civilisation, in every instant of everyday life from birth to death and in all cultures, man is exposed to the risk of not being-there, that is, to the risk of catastrophe hitting him or the world around him. This may occur in connection to economic and social mutations, for example in times of war, or to the unpredictability of natural catastrophes which are out of human control, for example seaquakes. Taking this as our starting point, we will analyse the crucial matter of the crisis or loss of presence, that is, the risk of not being-there in critical moments of historical existence, limiting ourselves to consideration of forms of defense from risk represented by natural catastrophe (for example, seaquakes and volcanic eruptions) amongst so-called primitive people, from an anthropological-physical point of view.

We will look at the historical-religious thought of Italian philosopher Ernesto de Martino (1908-1965) and in particular some of his critical lectures published posthumously in *La fine del mondo. Contributo alle analisi delle apocalissi culturali* (1977). We will treat philosophical concepts like anthropological evidence with the aim of identifying different mechanisms of defense from the risk of not being-there, even in cultures very distant from Western ones. We will specifically consider apocalyptic representations connected with experience of natural catastrophe in traditional cultures.

The Italian philosopher identifies in repetition the characteristic behaviour of so-called primitives faced with the risk of not being-there – i.e. the risk of the end of the world and of man. Repetition of what? Of certain critical episodes (the first catastrophe, the first hunt, the first fishing, the first giving birth) or of certain critical passages, such as that from chaos to cosmos. This series of acts or episodes have the value of archetypes, of models, exemplary acts – not necessarily linked with religion – that are repeated for survival in light of their perceived protective function. This enables a series of mechanisms of defense of presence at critical moments.