



A SHORT BOOK
ON THE GREAT
EARTHQUAKE

Rui Tavares

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LISBON, 1755

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For my parents, Armando and Lucília



.I.

“Days that change the world” and other
natural and human catastrophes – Rome,
Lisbon, New York – Disasters and
circumstances in the
global village

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 and the days that followed, in the aftermath of the Twin Tower attacks in New York, newspapers, radio stations, TV channels and the internet all announced almost in unison that the world had changed that day. Few people would have disagreed – and certainly not through passivity regarding what they were being told. Everyone knows that the professional media have a habit of declaring historical moments like this: with every year that passes, magazines uncover several “weddings of the decade”; there are various “trials of the century” per decade and “the best author of his/her generation” usually comes in packs of six names at the start of every literary season. However, on that day, even the most suspicious observer or the reader most immune to these exaggerations was able to attest to a sudden shift in reality, patent in many unexpected signs – the faces of neighbours, the reactions of colleagues or by talking to strangers, among many other details.

If to this day we all have a clear memory of where we were when we heard of the attack, of how we felt and other personal circumstances, it's because, deep down, we realised then that the world had changed, even before the media announced it. We knew it because we experienced what I will describe as a feeling of unreality: the ground we walked on felt different and, when we woke up the next day, many people wondered whether it had really happened.

The world might or might not have really changed that day; but if it didn't, at least it made a very convincing imitation of it.

Therefore, the tsunami caused by an earthquake which destroyed a large part of the Indian Ocean coastline on 26 December 2004 took place fully within the historical era that began with September 11. And if back in 2001, even thousands of kilometres away from where the attacks took place, we wondered how predictable the future would be from that moment on, the truth is that the reality initiated by the New York attacks remained true to its unsettling promise: the predictability of the 2004 tsunami was extremely low.

The New York attack was designed by the human mind; the Indian Ocean tsunami was the result of natural causes. Before we proceed, it's crucial that we make this clear distinction between the two events: the tsunami did not become unpredictable due to the new texture of reality; to us, earthquakes and tsunamis have always been unpredictable. Naturally, we can safely say that the causal link between the two events is non-existent; in other words, the tsunami would have happened even if the passenger aircrafts hadn't crashed against their targets at the final moment. We might say: it is only our worldview that makes us think of it as unpredictable; the truth is that it is as unpredictable as it always was. But this objection misses a fundamental aspect of the human point of view: the world we see is the world we have. Because while the two events are radically different, there is something that links them beyond those differences – they were experienced by the same generations, on a worldwide scale, in a very similar way all over the world. The response, the setting, the mindscape in which the Indian Ocean tsunami occurred already belongs to the post-September 11 era.

The world that watched the second event was, in short, one that had been altered by the first. How else to interpret

the references made in the months that followed the second catastrophe to the religious, ethnic or class diversity of the tsunami victims – in other words, to the kind of difference made relevant by the world of September 11? Reiterated remarks that the tsunami had killed “democratically”, with no regard for religion, nationality or social class created a cliché that was no more than a reaction to another cliché that gained traction with the New York attacks, and which assumes undisputable distinctions between those categories. It is no accident that we knew the emphasis would be placed on the word “religions”. Religions take centre stage in post-September 11 reading grids, and, consequently, in the reading grids in effect on 26 December 2004. In a different decade, the emphasis would have fallen more easily on “social classes”; in a different century, on “nationalities”.

These two events in recent years have forced mankind to reflect upon the texture of history, the identification of good and evil or the relationships between culture, religion and reality. This reflection, usually attributed to philosophers, historians or theologians, was made as a group, as a result of the process commonly called globalisation; few people will have escaped it. The reading grid is not created by specialists for consumption by the remaining world population; all the people exposed, directly or indirectly, to the event are the same ones who create their cultural framework.

The issues listed above occur under various guises and with different reverberations in the context of the Great Earthquake; we will revisit them repeatedly over the course of this book. Let us consider the matter of the texture of history. If the world changes this dramatically due to events such as these, even if, unfortunately, they are by no means isolated occurrences, one question arises with renewed pertinence. How does the timeline of history run? Should we

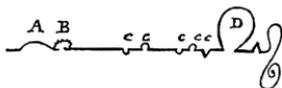
think of it as a straight – ascending or descending – line, curvilinear, spiral-shaped? If we think of it under each of these shapes, how do we then incorporate its sudden movements, such as the Great Earthquake, September 11 or the 2004 megatsunami? The insistence with which we identify these special events almost raises them to the status attributed by physics to “singularities” – a singularity is a specific occurrence which ruptures the texture of the universe (e.g. the Big Bang, a black hole). But can human history – obviously so different from the laws of physics – be understood by way of singularities? What form could mirror these unforeseen motions, the days when the normal course of events is broken, overflows or stands out in some bizarre way? Does history have corners or doglegs?

This is an old question. At one extreme, we can find the following answer: “Seen from a cold and cerebral distance, the leaps in history become of little significance; history has no doglegs nor does it contain any other kind of closed angle, it is our experience of it, on our scale, that makes us exaggerate the relevance of what we observe in our generation; excessive detail prevents any kind of rational or scientific perspective on history.”

At the opposite extreme, one might say something like: “History is arbitrary; an event may destabilise it in unexpected directions, and only an attempt at rationalisation, that is, at reducing it to the lowest amplitude of human understanding, can make us imagine it as a simple geometric shape.” The person defending this theory might illustrate his/her argument using the classic example of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 in Sarajevo. “If the bullet fired by Gavrilo Princip had missed its target”, the person might say, “we would not have had the First World War, millions of people would not have died, and late 19th-century prosperity would have

extended to a global scale.” That person’s opponent would accuse him/her of naivety: “How can you not see that the European powers were bound to fight each other? If they hadn’t done so because of the Archduke’s assassination, they would have found some other excuse.”

It should be mentioned that this dialogue is taking place between imaginary characters; but there is no shortage of more or less erudite real versions of these positions. Perhaps we should call the first character “determinist”, and the second one, naturally, “indeterminist”. In a famous debate between the British philosopher Arnold Joseph Toynbee and Dutch historian Pieter Geyl, on the subject “Is it possible to determine the pattern of the past?”, the former assumed the role of “pessimist” (which, just like optimism, is a determinist stance) and the latter preferred to be called a “sceptic”. For the purposes of this book, I have decided to use the qualifiers used in 18th-century debates: we shall call our determinist a “fatalist”, even if he is a scientist, and we will name our indeterminist “Pyrrhonist”, because the Pyrrhonist is the most extreme of sceptics (it is said that the founder of this current, Pyrrhus of Elis, responded to the Socratic “I know that I know nothing” with a terse “well, I do not even know that”). Therefore, to the Pyrrhonist, the question of finding out “whether it is possible to determine the pattern of history”, as Toynbee and Geyl debated, is not even an issue. To him, there is no guarantee that such a pattern even exists; history might very plausibly follow the type of timeline that Laurence Sterne attributed to his characters in *Tristram Shandy* and which, overall, contains more singularities than patterns:



Is it a coincidence that Sterne wrote that book in the same decade as the Great Earthquake?

Fortunately, there is no need to choose just one side. The truth is that most of us, if we exclude philosophers and some professional historians, alternate temperamentally between the two stances – fatalism, despite being scientific, and Pyrrhonism, for want of a better option. In order to follow this reflection, we do not need to safely establish whether or not there are specific days that change the course of history on their own. The easy answer would be to say that every single day changes history, especially those days when nothing relevant happens. The second easiest answer would be to escape this unsolvable problem by simply claiming that, under certain circumstances, mankind attaches more relevance to some days than others, and that what matters is to consider that collective perspective. It is precisely this second easier route that we shall take.

ON THE FIRST DAY of November 1755, Lisbon was destroyed by the combined forces of an extremely violent and unusually long earthquake, a tsunami which projected giant waves over the coast, and several fires, one of which consumed the entire centre of the Portuguese capital. At least as far as the perception that contemporary people have of their history is concerned, it is reasonable to establish a parallel between the 1755 Earthquake and the New York attacks or the Indian Ocean tsunami. The Earthquake, or Lisbon Disaster, as foreign contemporaries called it, was certainly an oddity, a violent disruption of the historical order. If there are serious contenders to the title of “day that changed the world”, the first of November 1755 is certainly one of them.

Traumatic occasions such as these are considered prone to more or less spectacular conversions. The 2004 tsunami, for instance, prompted the Archbishop of Canterbury to utter the peculiar statement – which he then amended – that events like that made people question

the existence of God. In the opposite direction, one of the greatest European political scientists, the Swede, Nils Elvander, wrote, around the same time, an article entitled “I, an atheist, returned to the church” (without, however, renouncing atheism).

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to generalise personal semi-inversions such as the ones I have just described, even with the caveats that I added to each one. It is by far more frequent for people to defend the idea that a catastrophe should, in fact, lead to a deeply profound examination of conscience – by others. And so, most testimonies and personal reflections from 1755 also regarded the Earthquake as confirmation of people’s prior beliefs. In the case of the devout, who had long lambasted their contemporaries for allowing themselves to be carried away by moral laxity and, above all, by “religious tolerance” and “indifferentism” regarding religious matters – well, for them, the Great Earthquake was nothing more than the perfect retribution that those dangerous philosophical games warranted. For deist and naturalist philosophers, who considered ridiculous the idea that God used the elements to send messages to humans and that he wasted his supreme intelligence by taking stock of the peccadillos committed by the inhabitants of a particular city, the Earthquake had been irrefutable proof that when nature needs to shake itself up, it does not care whether the people crushed under the rubble are devout or heretic, Christians or infidels. In Lisbon, the catastrophe even destroyed dozens of churches only to spare the street of the brothels – an image which remained engraved in the consciousness of the century.

In short: not only did the people, generally speaking, not give up their prior convictions, but they actually identified the catastrophe as a sign of rebuttal and failure of their opponents’ ideas. This seems to point to the idea that the role played by catastrophes in human communi-

ties is not so much that of a complete examination of conscience, although some dramatic shifts in philosophical stances may occur here and there, but rather the confirmation of old dichotomies within new contexts. It might well have been a “day that changed the world”. Very well: in that case, changing the world is easier than changing previously consolidated ideas and entrenched rivalries. A tragedy is always an unfortunate thing, but for those who fight ideological wars, any confirmation of their prejudices, one way or another, is welcome.

By adding new details to old quarrels, catastrophes play a significant role in the cultural dynamics of societies. The Great Lisbon Earthquake elicited an inordinate amount of discussions. There was controversy regarding what caused the earthquake, regarding the extent of the damage caused and regarding the future consequences of the event. Theological, political, philosophical and literary objections were introduced, which were prolonged in time and crossed borders. And there were still pamphlets to print, poems to complete and censorship to approve when people started saying that no other event had led to so much pondering and controversy since the great fire of Rome, in 64 AD.

This affinity between the Roman fires and the Lisbon Earthquake, thus remarked on seventeen hundred years later, is very revealing of the importance that contemporaries attached to the Great Earthquake and, in fact, with good reason. The Roman fires are held as a symbol of the beginning of the end of the Roman Empire, just as the Lisbon Earthquake is, in a way, a symbol of the beginning of the end of the Ancien Régime. Both catastrophes were the object of extremely exaggerated readings, both in their time and over the centuries that followed: Rome, which lost three of its 14 *regiones*, was announced to have been completely destroyed; in Lisbon’s case, someone made up

the spectacular number of 70,000 dead, and it was also said that the city had been obliterated from the map. Exaggerated or not, the representations of both events became common currency in the collective memory of the West over the following centuries.

Less visibly, we might add to these parallels a crucial question which we have not yet touched on: the relationship between a catastrophe and “great men”, a recurring topic, under very contradictory versions, in the history of catastrophes. For Lisbon and Rome, we have in common the representation of a tyrannical and cold political man, who is a patron of the arts and a believer in great works of reconstruction. But the differences between the two cases are more significant. Pombal and Nero adopt nearly opposing stances regarding the catastrophe. For one, it represented the beginning, for the other, the end of a career. Pombal is remembered as the “great rebuilders”; Nero – justly or unjustly – as the “great destroyer”. “Great men” are no less different from each other than great catastrophes are. Still, they are often regarded as the main link between catastrophes and politics, which helps to explain the painstaking attention that, on similar occasions, observers pay to providential or despotic, opportunistic or negligent leaders such as these.

I now wish to draw attention to a letter regarding the Roman fires which “Seneca” addressed to “St Paul”. However, before I proceed, I would like to add a caveat: this document’s status is undetermined, as there are serious reasons to doubt its authenticity. Seneca and Paul overlapped in Rome for a few years, and they were indeed both living in the city at the time of the fires in 64 AD; nevertheless, there is no evidence to prove that they ever met, let alone exchanged correspondence. The controversy regarding the authenticity of the letters has been going on for over one thousand years; among those who con-

tributed to it were Erasmus of Rotterdam (who was of the opinion that the letters were fake) and Joseph de Maistre (who thought they were authentic). For the Christians of the Middle Ages, who respected Seneca's philosophy, the existence of a collection of 13 letters exchanged between these two historical characters was proof that this profound philosopher and righteous man had been brought closer to the "true religion". Ultimately, the largely accepted opinion among scholars is that the letters are spurious and were probably written by Christians in the 2nd century AD, over two hundred years after the fire.

To us, however, the interest of this letter does not lie in its hypothetical authors (which is why I will leave the "Seneca" and "Paul" of the letters inside quotation marks, to distinguish them from the historical Seneca and Paul), nor in the fact that they might have been written right after the event. Their relevance to our discussion lies in the weight that the 64 AD fire of Rome continued to carry throughout the centuries, from two main perspectives: the role played by the political leader in the catastrophe and the creation of the Christian conscience. Let us consider "Seneca's" words:

Past eras have suffered at the hands of the Macedonian son of Philip [Alexander the Great], both Cyruses, Darius, Dionysus and, during our own time, at the hands of Gaius Caesar [Caligula], who did everything they wanted. The Roman fire had an evident cause. But if human humility permitted its causes to be discussed and allowed people to speak in these times of darkness without being punished for it, everyone would understand everything. There is nothing new in sacrificing Christians and Jews as the authors of the fires. The fate of the guilty person, whoever he may be, he who delights in carnage and seeks refuge in lies, is sealed; and just as the best of us "offered

the head of one for the sake of all”, so will the guilty person be cremated by fire on everyone’s behalf. One hundred and thirty-two palaces and four thousand insulae burned for six days; on the seventh, it rested.

The eminently political contextualisation by the author of the letter is, perhaps, the single most interesting element to retain from this extract. Note that his account of the catastrophe starts with a list of tyrants from the Antiquity. Under a political reading, we cannot fail to note that the letter touches on the subject of the generalised blaming of ethnic and religious groups and the subjection of people to the private agendas of their vengeful and lying rulers. In the original Latin, the accusations that he makes against Nero retain all the force of his indignation against the use of Christians and Jews as scapegoats for the fires (“*Christiani et Iudaei quasi machinatores incendii*”) and his despair at the intent of the political leader of using his subjects to pursue violence, even if this means using fabrications. To Seneca, great men feel pleasure in carnage and hide behind lies (“*cui uoluptas carnificina est et mendacium uelamentum*”). The final passage refers to the impotence of the subjects, particularly “intellectuals”, in this type of situation where political pressure prevents them from “speaking the truth to power” and opening the eyes of the population. If it were possible to speak freely in these times of darkness, everyone would see everything (“*omnes omnia uiderent*”).

Basically, this statement says it all.

It is worthy of note that when he writes about a person “guilty” of the fire (the term used is “*grassator*”), this almost-Christian “Seneca” virtually subscribes, albeit implicitly, to the theory that the Emperor Nero himself, his former pupil, had caused the fires. But it must be said that, unlike the New York attack, the Indian Ocean tsunami or the 1755 Earthquake, the causes of the 64 AD fires

in Rome remain unknown. Contemporary authors could not agree on whether they were natural or human, pre-meditated or accidental. Suetonius defended the theory that the emperor had been the true instigator of the fire. Tacitus denies that hypothesis but recognises that there were countless rumours circulating in Rome at the time according to which Nero intended to set fire to the city in order to create space for enormous architectural projects, having later accused Christians to draw attention away from himself.

The position held by the author or authors of the *Letters* (said to be) by *Seneca and Paul* is included, as we have seen, in the historical tradition of the first centuries of Christian semi-clandestineness and enables us to add an essential connection to our journey, punctuated by catastrophes from such different times and contexts: the religious connection and, in particular, the one derived from the history of Christendom. Note how the “Seneca” in the letter writes that “the best of us ‘offered the head of one for the sake of all’” – like Jesus Christ on Calvary – and that the fire burnt down “one hundred and thirty-two palaces and four thousand insulae [over] six days” and that “on the seventh, it rested” (like God when he created the world). These analogies clearly show that for Christians, the Roman fires hold a foundational meaning.

AND NOW WE COME TO a relevant point. If we line up the catastrophes of Rome, Lisbon and New York, we will identify essential turning points in the very history of Christianity in the West. In Rome, the fundamental moment in precarious circumstances, in a minority and dangerous position before the imperial “pagan” power; in New York, the confrontation with an aggression stemming from the outside, thrust upon them by an enemy at a time when re-

ligion is relatively impotent in the very heart of the West. As far as Lisbon is concerned, the coming chapters will show how the Great Earthquake became the fundamental axis for a debate at the heart of Christianity – dominant and “sovereign” – about what is a matter pertaining to God, Nature and the Republic (or religion, science and politics). Three crucial moments in the relationship between power and religion, culture and material reality.

The extremely brief summary that has just been given of the cultural contexts of each of the three catastrophes allows us to unveil a part of the answer to the question that we will be dealing with over the next few paragraphs: what sort of argument would allow one to highlight and connect these three events rather than other similar and potentially more destructive ones?

After all, both before and after Rome, Lisbon and New York, other crimes and misfortunes have killed more people, or had a wider reach, or were of a more unprecedented nature. Some of them even led to a greater amount of documentation, more numerous written analyses and the most profound philosophical reflections. Others still, if they did not originate as much thought, this was more due to the fault of mankind rather than the lack of relevance of the subject. Therefore, I concede without hesitation that this list of catastrophes, if not quite fortuitous, is certainly truncated. We could undoubtedly add to the list the holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis, an event which holds a separate horrific place in the history of mankind; and certainly also the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda, the criminal psychopathy of Stalinism – and I will stop this sad list, which runs the risk of being never-ending, right here, even before I have listed countless natural catastrophes, some of which caused a greater number of victims than the 2004 earthquake and tsunami.

At their core, what lends cultural relevance to each of these events? It is surely not just about the intrinsic traits of the catastrophe in question, as terrible as they might be. To use a famous phrase, it is about the catastrophe and its circumstances. Of these circumstances, I will select two main axes for reflection: firstly, the intrusion of the catastrophe in a pre-existing cultural framework, namely in internal debate in societies; secondly, the articulation of the catastrophe with the means of communication, the media of each time. We have already explored part of the first point: the Great Earthquake, just as the Roman fires and September 11, coincided with a thought panorama that came before and in which they were poignantly included. Regarding the Roman fires, the issues of Christianity and western religions within the empire. Regarding September 11, the debate about globalisation and the clash of civilisations. Regarding 1755, the challenge brought by the Enlightenment to the relationships between religion and nature.

I would like to add two brief clarifications on the notion of “thought panorama”.

Firstly, the word “thought” is not used here merely in its usual capacity as a figure of speech to mean the erudite work of philosophers or literary authorities, but to encompass an entire mental framework, from the most basic to the most metaphysical, of a particular phenomenon. This is why I mentioned earlier that these events lead to reflection carried out by all, almost without exception, on certain subjects (good and evil, chance and necessity, fear of God and the administration of the Republic). This reflection occurs even when we do not realise it or dismiss it as a trivial or everyday manifestation: the 1755 Earthquake was at the basis of works by Voltaire or the young Kant just as much as simple amulet-books which people wore around their necks to protect them from earthquakes – there was some thought behind each of these forms of expression.

The amulet-books were made to be worn near the body as protection – more than for reading – and they were often accompanied by objects, relics (a piece of wood allegedly from the cross of Jesus, a handful of soil collected from around a saint’s grave) and lists of letters with the names of God protected by crosses. The example in the image above bears the title of *Palavras Santíssimas, e Armas da Igreja* (*Most Holy Words, and the Arms of the Church*) and was found in a family archive in Goa, still inside the velvet pouch attached to a ribbon made of the same fabric, which would probably have been used to so the whole thing could be worn around the neck. However, it was printed in Lisbon, and the publication date is 1760, just five years after the Earthquake, which probably explains the fact that the publishers advertised it as having “special powers against earthquakes”. In short, even if the amulet-book was not penned by Kant, it is still a cultural response to the Great Earthquake, and with richer density and ramifications than we might initially expect.



The second remark is this: unlike what we normally assume, it is a fallacy to think that thought is purely a product of the spirit, ethereal or immaterial. Thought begins and ends solidly anchored to the physical world: both Voltaire’s *Poem on the Lisbon Disaster* and the *Devout Exercise Against Lightning, Storms and Earthquakes* are, at the end of the day, ink printed on paper. For the thought itself, it is extremely relevant that we are dealing with ink printed on paper, rather than ink handwritten on parchment paper, like the medieval copies of the letter from “Seneca” to

“Paul”, or bit sequences stored in an internet server somewhere in the world, or electrons fired down a cathode-ray tube on to a television screen, as was the case of much of the news about the New York attack.

And this takes us to the second axis which, globally and from a cultural point of view, makes some catastrophes more special than others, whether we like it or not: their interaction with the media. It is true that each of these events – Rome, Lisbon, New York – gains new meaning when seen from the perspective of a prior intellectual debate, and gains traction because it reaches us in a state of maturity of a certain panorama of thought. However, we should not forget that it spreads via a communication framework which is very specific to each of those times, with each of its media constellations, information devices and technologies, to the extent that we practically cannot imagine a September 11 without the internet, or a 1755 Earthquake without gazettes. Thanks to their proximity and repeated use, the media have become intrinsically linked to the subject that they disseminated.

The circumstances which facilitated, in various ways, the rapid and mass dissemination of communication regarding the September 11, 2001 attack and the tsunami that occurred on 26 December 2004 were not unrelated to the shock caused by these events. For example, let us remember that when the second plane hit the World Trade Center, the images were seen in real time; in the case of the 2004 tsunami, the very fact that the catastrophe involved more than one country and that its victims included people of several nationalities, including travellers, meant that the information spread more quickly – unlike the catastrophes that occurred in China in the early 1970s, which were more fatal in terms of numbers, but whose perimeter was sealed off to journalists and even to international aid by the authorities. Over the next few chapters,

we will see how printed letters, pamphlets and books were as essential to the Great Earthquake as television was to the New York attack, the internet to the 2004 tsunami, or the rumours about Nero to the Roman fire.

This leads us to a final remark about the role played by the Great Earthquake in the globalisation process. It was said that the world “felt as a whole” the New York attack or the Indian Ocean catastrophe because globalisation had physically (if not mentally) brought the entire population of the planet closer together. However, I should point out that the word “globalisation” is not used here to refer to the growing economic integration between goods, services and capital markets which would once have been geographically contained. In the context of this book, I use “globalisation” in its original sense, coined by Marshall McLuhan, according to whom globalisation is a consequence of the increase in speed of information, which results in a perception of physical proximity.

The events of 2001 or 2004 were experienced in real time because of this extremely fast information spread, and even more amplified due to the growing diversity of communication channels.

The 1755 Earthquake was also included in a specific media panorama, aided not least because Lisbon was an accessible port and a platform for the major navigation routes, famous for its real or imaginary abundance of goods and its fortunes in precious metals – aspects mentioned often after the earthquake, particularly by foreigners.

Without this panorama – which took shape under the form of handwritten and then printed correspondence in pamphlets, gazettes on a pan-European scale, and oral accounts by sailors and other travellers, and which were preceded by the seismic effects of the earthquake and tsunami themselves in a large part of Europe and North Africa – the 1755 Earthquake would not have been *this* earth-

quake. The pamphlets made the Earthquake – the medium was already the message, even 250 years ago. We shall see how Lisbon eyewitnesses were outraged at the exaggerated and unrealistic echoes of the catastrophe, which were generated from Coimbra to the rest of Europe and its colonies. But the printed earthquake was the one which largely left doctrine and thought. In other words, the inhabitants of Lisbon (and the Algarve, Andalucía and the Maghreb) might have experienced the real earthquake, but the rest of the world experienced the Great Earthquake, the one of the media available. How outraged those local witnesses would feel now, if they saw that the subject of the culture historian is sometimes more the Earthquake that was described and was left in print than the real earthquake which they survived?

We are now moving steadily closer to the subjects covered in the next chapter: imagined (*unimagined*, to be more precise) earthquakes, impossible cities and alternative futures.

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The book you are holding in your hands relied on the assistance of several people who – among other things – offered advice, listened, lent books, raided family libraries, read early versions of the text, provided support, offered their homes, translated extracts, cooked meals, provided quiet, helped with precious clues and, above all, were extremely patient. Each of the names I will mention next knows what their role was: to ensure that any errors that this book might contain would not be their fault, but entirely mine. It is then my duty to offer public recognition to André Belo, Ângela Barreto Xavier, Carla Araújo and Celso Martins, Daniel Calado (and Teresa Gil), Dora Capinha, Eduardo França Paiva, Olímpio Ferreira, Pedro Cardim, Pedro Puntoni, Rui Lopes, Salete Kern Machado, Vera Tavares; siblings João, José, David and Maria do Rosário and nieces Ana (and Pedro), Raquel and Mariana; and above all Armando Tavares Pereira, Lucília Tavares Pereira and Christiane Machado Coêlho – who did everything I mentioned above, and more.

The Author

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