

BAJS Conference 2018 – Crisis? What Crisis? Continuity, and Change in Japan 5–7 September 2018

Panel: “Japanese Literati, Public Intellectuals, and the 3.11 Crisis: Arguments for Change or Confirmations of Continuity”

Chair: Lisette Gebhardt (Goethe University, Frankfurt) lissettegebhardt@googlemail.com
Co-organizer: Livia Monnet (University of Montreal)

Speaker 1: **Masami Usui (Doshisha University):** Japanese Women Writers against Borders

Speaker 2: **Livia Monnet (University of Montreal):** Fascism, Nuclear Ontopower, and Subjectivity
Production in Tsushima Yūko’s Celebrating the Term of Cesium 137’s Half-Life (*Hangenki wo iwatte*, 2016)

Speaker 3: **Lisette Gebhardt (Goethe University):** Murakami Haruki’s “Anti-Nuclear Speech” – “Japanese Mentalities” and the Exclusion of the Protest Experience

Speaker 4: **Anne Bayard-Sakai (INALCO, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales / French National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations):** The staging of writers in the aftermath of March 11

Abstract for the panel:

With the Triple Catastrophe of 3.11, Japanese Society is facing one of its greatest challenges since World War II. Some representatives of Japanese cultural discourse understand the events in Tōhoku as a turning point that revealed the weaknesses of the “Japanese system” after 1945. It cannot yet be said to what extent “Fukushima” will constitute a break for Japan, whether the “system Japan” will undergo a decisive change, whether a nation that was said to be economically, politically and psychologically not at its best even before 3.11 will move toward increasing nationalism or instead take the road to the self-empowerment of her citizens, renew democratic structures and leave behind old hierarchies. Meanwhile visions of Japan’s future are discussed in several literary texts such as Tawada Yōko’s *Fushi no shima* (Island of Eternal Life, 2012), Gen’yū Sōkyū’s *Hikari no yama* (Mountain Glow, 2014), Tsushima Yūko’s *Hangenki wo iwatte* (Celebrating the Term of Cesium 137’s Half-Life, 2016), Furukawa Hideo’s *Aruwa shura no jūokunen* (Or A Billion Years of Asura, 2016) or Kirino Natsuo’s *Baraka* (2016). – This panel will examine the 3.11-debates among Japanese literati and intellectuals / public intellectuals (*bunkajin*), for example Umehara Takeshi, and their arguments for the society of the future and a renewed value system

1. Japanese Women Writers against Borders

Masami Usui (Doshisha University)

Both Tsushima Yuko and Tawada Yoko embody the emerging women’s voice against violence and crisis in modern and contemporary eras. Especially, the consequences of 3.11 and also the global crisis -- the nuclear power plant issue, hate speech, and ultimately a search for the meaning of life -- made those writers to transcend beyond borders. These borders are not simply national, racial, and social. Those physical borders represent the internal borders that need to be released. Due to the rapidly transforming global networking, the contemporary writers have been confronted with invisible conflicts. Yet, both Tsushima and Tawada have become more active in performing their unique voices against the coming danger of those invisible catastrophes in this globalized age.

2. Fascism, Nuclear Ontopower, and Subjectivity Production in Tsushima Yûko's Celebrating the Term of Cesium 137's Half-Life (Hangenki wo iwatte, 2016)

Livia Monnet (University of Montreal)

Tsushima's *Hangenki wo iwatte* (Celebrating the Term of Cesium 137's Half-Life) opens sometime in 2015 with the autobiographical narrator's speculations about the socio-cultural, political, and technological transformations Japan, and the world may experience in the next thirty years (the time lag corresponding to the half-life of Cesium 137). The narrative then shifts to a dystopian vision of Japan in 2045. Through the perspective of a former nuclear refugee identified as "the old woman" (rôjô), we catch glimpses of a militarized fascist state that nurtures Yamato nationalism, and "disappears" ethnic minorities, dissidents, and former evacuees from the 3.11 triple disaster.

This presentation argues that *Hangenki wo iwatte*'s radical thought experiment posits the entanglement of contemporary global capitalism, subjectivity, and animate (nuclear) matter as a planetary ecology of non-linear (dis)continuities. Thus Tsushima's story suggests, not only that present-day, post-Fukushima Japan, the alternate world of 2045, and historical fascisms exhibit disturbing similarities, but that they are driven by the same obsessive desire: absolute rule as ontopower (Massumi) – a power that can manipulate the very material and dynamics of life. *Hangenki* further suggests that the assemblage of forces at work in historical fascisms and totalitarianisms (such as imperial Japan and Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s) was partly reproduced in the planetary ecology of postwar nuclear capitalism. While reenvisioning Fukushima radiation as ubiquitous, brutal, unstoppable ontopower, *Hangenki wo iwatte* also shows that radioactive mutant ecologies (Masco) can generate positive relational transformations and survival skills such as transindividual, mixed human-nonhuman subjectivities and shared vulnerabilities, as well as compassionate, neo-animistic collectivities.

3. Murakami Haruki's "Anti-Nuclear Speech" – "Japanese Mentalities" and the Exclusion of the Protest Experience

Lisette Gebhardt (Goethe University Frankfurt)

3.11 built – as a possible caesura in Japanese mentalities – the basis for a new debate on identity. *Bundan* and *rondan* asked which way Japan should take in the future. A lot of commentators argued for a better Japan, a new Japan, a "new mindset" for Japan: "Who are we? Who should we become?" Nakazawa Shin'ichi says in his post-Fukushima book *Nihon no daitenkan* (2011) that there has to be fundamental rethinking of a future Japan.

In his famous speech in Barcelona, certainly part of a 3.11-literature canon as seen 7 years after the triple catastrophe, Murakami points to both corporate and governmental lapses and calls for more critical consciousness on the side of the Japanese public. At the same time he conjures up the premodern Japanese mentality of *mujô*. His return to a traditional world view means once again a mystification (as well as a reduction) of the Japanese mind. While he had attempted to restore credibility to those who had been dismissed by technocrats as 'unrealistic dreamers', advising the Japanese citizenry to resist the arguments of the nuclear power industry, Murakami obviously lost the connection to the Japanese *Zeitgeschichte* of anti-nuclear protest and citizen movements, as for example Kuroko Kazuo argues.

4. The Staging of Writers in the Aftermath of March 11

Anne Bayard-Sakai (INALCO / Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales / French National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations, Paris)

March 11 disasters have led many writers to react, and to commit themselves to taking actions as answers to the situation. The texts they have been publishing since then are there as testimonies of those actions. At the same time, and for some of those writers, the way they got involved in the reactions of the literary world to the disasters has been producing social effects, as it changed their position in the literary field ("champ littéraire"). One of the strategic places those changes were displayed are the numerous roundtables, dialogues and interviews published in the literary reviews. How do those metatextual operations work, and what part do they play in the redistribution of roles in the literary field? What do they reveal of the symbolic issues induced by March 11 disasters? In this presentation, we will focus on some of those texts analyzed as symptoms of the redistribution of symbolic capital in the Japanese literary world since 2011.

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