Lisette Gebhardt
Yuki Masami (Eds.)

# Literature and Art after "Fukushima"

## Four Approaches

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# Contents



# Preface
## Literature and Art After Fukushima

In September 2012, the contributors of this volume formed a panel entitled "Literature and Art After Fukushima" at the British Association for Japanese Studies (BAJS) Conference, which was held at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. Employing different approaches to discuss literary and artistic responses to the disaster at Tokyo Electric Power Company's (TEPCO) Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant, the papers given at the panel supported each other in a way that allows for a multifaceted view of what "Fukushima" represents. We felt that these voices are worthy of being printed and shared in a small book form.

While bringing "Fukushima" into focus, at the BAJS panel we attempted to discuss how Japanese literature and art responded to the challenge of the three-fold catastrophe of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown in the northeastern Japan, a disaster which is called 3/11 or the Great East Japan Earthquake (東日本大震災 Higashi Nihon Daishinsai). Our shared interest lied in how writers and theatre/performance artists act in response to an immense human disaster which also ravaged and wiped out human conceptual realms to the extent that many writers and artists demonstrated nothing but their inability to give expression to what the disaster did – and meant – to them. Clearly there was an emerging environment in which writers and artists were urged to work on the task of exploring ways in which to grasp and give shape to the post-Fukushima age. It is the second time that Japan has had to cope with radioactive contamination, but this time the catastrophe was not due to the ravages of war but rather due to the hubris of economy and science.

## Repoliticisation and healing

Literary and artistic responses to 3/11 cover a wide spectrum, ranging from the overtly political (eg. concerning issues such as the possibility of art to excite discussions on a more emancipated Japanese

democracy, as well as on citizens' empowerment and more transparency in the political decision process) to the apolitical (eg. Yoshimoto Banana's literary stance, as Ina Hein examines in her essay collected in this book). While asking whether artistic engagement with 3/11 aims at a (re)politicisation of art or at using art in a therapeutic way to heal a traumatised nation, the contributors to this book focus on a corpus of works, written or staged, which immediately responded to 3/11, thus providing a baseline study of Japanese post-Fukushima literature and art. Covering different aspects, the four essays included in this volume delineate how literature and art perceive *Zeitgeschichte*, to communicate the impressions of sensitive witnesses and the Heisei-type of the engaged intellectual. In this first overview, which foremost intends to delineate and describe the articulations of the Japanese artists, references to the usual theoretical body is being consciously avoided.

Lisette Gebhardt draws a detailed picture of a Japanese literary scene divided into two fractions: a critical camp of writers that attack the "Japanese system" and a conservative camp that calls for "old traditions" in order to reconstruct a Japanese identity and a "sound nation." Gebhardt also points out how Japanese thinkers try to mediate the catastrophe globally and to restore the loss of reputation Japan has suffered with the nuclear damage.

Ina Hein analyses Yoshimoto Banana's narrative *Sweet Hereafter* (2011), that does not directly address the events of 3/11, but links them together by dedicating the novel to all the people who have experienced the triple catastrophe. Hein shows how Yoshimoto redirects the device of "healing" (*iyashi*), which has been one of the main characteristics of her oeuvre so far, in order to connect her novel to the wider context of Japan's traumatic experience.

Yuki Masami discusses literary representations of post-3/11 foodscapes, contrasting it with the language used in a popular social and political campaign of eating food from stricken areas as a gesture of support. In particular, Yuki analyses Taguchi Randy's literary attempt to question, explore, and redefine human relationships with the environment, a topic which Yuki has been exploring and was first addressed in her paper given at the conference "Comparing Fukushima and Chernobyl: Social and Cultural Dimensions of the Two Nuclear Catastrophes" which was held in Frankfurt, Germany, in March 2012.



Lisa Mundt discusses the political potential of theatre today, represented for example by such artists as the members of the performing art collective Chim↑Pom and the director of the ensemble Port B, Takayama Akira, groups which clearly demonstrate their desire to contribute to a change in Japanese society.

## "Discover Tomorrow": Toward Japan's future

Over a year has passed since the BAJS Conference in Norwich, but the discussions developed in this book remain relevant. While the Japanese cultural scene continues dealing with the Great East Japan Earthquake and its consequences, the arguments do not seem to demonstrate substantial shifts in focus, approach, or direction. Many artists proclaim that, with the disaster of Fukushima Daiichi, an irreversible paradigm shift has begun. They are protesting against a "Japanese system" whose failures are not only limited to the damaged nuclear plant, insisting that a day of reckoning has come for the nation's technocratic system which has only accelerated since the 1960s. Others seek above all to show their solicitousness and to encourage the victims in Tôhoku, facilitating local reconstruction, and clearing a horizon of hope for the future of both Tôhoku and the nation as a whole.

Japan just recently gained a quite impressive yet controversial perspective for its future – the IOC decided on September 7, 2013 in Buenos Aires to award the Summer Olympics 2020 to the city of Tôkyô. The slogan of the bid was "Discover Tomorrow". Prime Minister Abe Shinzô promised that the metropolis would be a safe place for the games, and that the situation in northeastern Japan was "under control", adding that "It has never done or will do any damage to Tôkyô", 150 miles away from Fukushima Daiichi.

Summer Olympics 2020 in the capital may provide support for the Japanese economy and certainly will lift the sunken morale for the nation, too. As far as the first cheerful reactions of the committee suggest, the event may bring the desired motivation to move forward with courage. The risk of Fukushima can be trivialised and neglected by Tôkyô, if we follow Prime Minister Abe's comments. However, the successful bid is in the end likely to symbolise efforts to overcome

Fukushima-related problems. Now, Japan has to cope outright with the situation in Tôhoku and finally take responsibility not only for Tôkyô but for the world. Forthcoming discussions in literary and art scenes should demonstrate various perspectives from which to critically think about the games and if they really will mark a positive turning point for Japan.

Lisette Gebhardt
Yuki Masami
October 2013

# Post-3/11 Literature: The Localisation of Pain – Internal Negotiations and Global Consciousness

*Lisette Gebhardt*

## 1. Mapping a catastrophe: Fukushima, Japan and the world

The three-fold catastrophe of 11 March, 2011 has changed the global image of Japan as well as the country's image of itself. Doubts have arisen concerning Japan's status as an advanced technological nation. "Fukushima"[1] has come to signify, therefore, not only the human disaster but also the damage to Japan's reputation. Within Japan, politicians have been accused of a lack of professionalism and integrity; they have also been accused of lying to the public.[2]

Indeed the policy makers who relied on the electricity company TEPCO for information about the damaged nuclear power plant initially pursued a strategy of appeasement.[3] In the long term this led to the nuclear disaster being underplayed. There is still a tendency to speak of the catastrophe as merely a regional event, limited to the northeast of the country.[4] In the capital the cold shutdown was finally acknowledged and a "new normality" was proclaimed. In Tôhoku, northeastern Japan, however, this level of adaptation and acceptance has still

1 "Fukushima" has been put in inverted commas because the name of the place has become a multivalent key term which amalgamates several aspects of this triple catastrophe.

2 The government's information policy in particular was subject to criticism (see for instance the statement by Hama Noriko, Vice Dean of Dôshisha University, quoted in the article "Japan government on nuclear crisis: Not lying, not telling the truth", 2011). The full political background of the catastrophe has not yet been explored; tentative thoughts are offered in Kingston (2012).

3 The official report by the Japanese Government of June 2011 is a first attempt to investigate the events.

4 Regionalising "Fukushima" does not mean that the government in Tôkyô has continuously made help available to victims in the area. Clear-up operations and the building of emergency shelters have been relatively successful but the resolution of the problems posed by the damaged reactors, the disposal of radioactive material and the administration of the restricted area were less satisfactory. For awareness of the problems see the essay by Gen'yû Sôkyû (2011).

# Post-Fukushima Discourses on Food and Eating: Analysing Political Implications and Literary Imagination

*Yuki Masami*

## 1. Introduction

There is no such thing as safe food, says Koide Hiroaki (b. 1949), an anti-nuclear nuclear engineer at the Kyoto University Reactor Research Institute. Koide has emerged as a leading spokesperson for nuclear issues since 11 March 2011, when an earthquake and subsequent tsunami hit the northeastern part of Japan and, at least in part, caused a meltdown at Tokyo Electric Power Company's (TEPCO) Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Though only recently gaining a wider audience, Koide has continually warned against the wide-ranging global circulation of radioactive-contaminated food since the disaster in reactor number four at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the Ukraine on 26 April, 1986. According to Koide's mantra, a nuclear-age foodscape is illustrated, showing that there is no clean, safe food, and what is presented to us is a choice between foods that are the least contaminated, less contaminated, more contaminated, or the most contaminated. This immediately brings about a series of questions. For instance, what standard is applied to determine the degree of contamination? What makes such a standard legitimate? How does a standard of contamination influence individual and societal attitudes towards food? And what do such standards really mean?

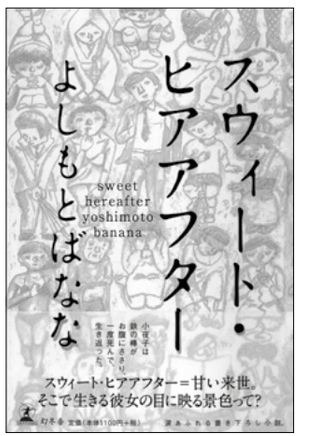
A major aim of this essay is to discuss discourses on food and eating in a nuclear age, especially those that took place after the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown in March 2011. The northeast of Japan, where the mega earthquake and the subsequent tsunami hit, was known for its productive agriculture and fisheries. This is clearly shown by the high percentage of the population working in primary industries in the region. Statistics show that, as of October 2005, the population involved in primary-industry in Fukushima, Miyagi, and

# Narratives of Trauma and Healing in the Aftermath of Japan's Three-fold Catastrophe: Yoshimoto Banana's *Sweet Hereafter*

*Ina Hein*

## 1. Introduction

This paper, rather than starting from the broader perspective of "Japanese literature after 3/11", focuses on a single author: Yoshimoto Banana, who is not regarded as a political writer but rather as a producer of popular, easy-to-read bestselling novels, short stories and essays. Yoshimoto has become exceptionally popular with her writing, which might well be placed within the context of *iyashi* literature,[1] not only in Japan itself but also outside of Japan in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, and, accordingly, her work has been (and continues to be) extensively covered by literary criticism and research.




Cover: Yoshimoto Banana *Suîto hiâfutâ*, NHK Shuppan, 2012.

In order to provide a backdrop against which Yoshimoto's most recent novel, *Suîto hiâfutâ* (*Sweet Hereafter*, Yoshimoto 2011a), will be analysed, a brief sketch of the general characteristics and developments of her writing over the past 25 years will first be presented. The central question for the subsequent analysis of *Suîto hiâfutâ* will be, by what means –

[1] The term *iyashi* could be translated as a kind of emotional and sometimes even spiritual 'healing'. For a closer look at the *iyashi* concept and its mode of operation in contemporary Japanese literature, Gebhardt 2004.

# Back to Politics: Artistic Disobedience in the Wake of "Fukushima"

*Lisa Mundt*

## 1. "People will be questioned for the way they lived": First thoughts on Fukushima

Artists, playwrights and directors were among the first and most radical voices to comment on Fukushima. Renowned personalities from theatre, performing arts, and fine arts such as playwrights Sakate Yôji (b. 1963, Rinkôgun), Okada Toshiki (b. 1973, Chelfitsch), and Tada Junnosuke (b. 1976, Tôkyô Deathlock), director and performance artist Takayama Akira (b. 1969), and the artist collective Chim↑Pom spoke out about Fukushima immediately after the disaster and expressed their desire to contribute to the much felt need for change in Japanese society. All of them found challenging and creative ways to answer to the catastrophe[1] – and, as Niino Morihiro (b. 1958), a professor at Rikkyô University, Tôkyô, notes, even playwrights who "had not been enthusiastic about depicting solidarity, have begun to take up the ethical question of solidarity with the victims" (Niino 2012).

In an essay published in the German theatre journal *Theater der Zeit* (Contemporary Theatre), Okada Toshiki, playwright, director and leader of the Chelfitsch theatre troupe, notes that he only became aware of the enormous potential of theatre once the earthquake struck Japan on 11 March: "It is understood that art is vital to society […]. Before the catastrophic earthquake I would not have believed this at all. Today,

[1] While a considerable amount of literature has been published on pre-modern and modern Japanese theatre and drama up to the 1960s, there has been little discussion about contemporary Japanese theatre and performing arts, especially on the interrelations between theatre and politics. Preliminary results on this topic and on the impact of "Fukushima" on theatre and performing arts in Japan have already been presented in German and English in several lectures (e.g. British Association for Japanese Studies in Norwich, UK, AAS-ICAS Joint Conference in Honolulu, German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in Tôkyô). This essay is based on a German paper published in the *Lesebuch "Fukushima"* ("Fukushima" Reader) in Summer 2013. The results presented here will be discussed further in my upcoming dissertation on theatre and politics in contemporary Japanese theatre.

# Contributors

**Lisette Gebhardt** is since 2003 professor of Japanese Literature and Culture at Goethe University, Frankfurt/Germany. She publishes on literature, literature and religion as well as on identity discourses and globalisation in modern Japan. In 2012, she edited a handbook on contemporary Japanese authors and literary trends in Japan. Since spring 2011 she commented on the Japanese „earthquake literature" (*shinsai bungaku*) as well as on the reactions of Japanese authors and intellectuals towards the three-fold catastrophe in northern Japan. Together with Steffi Richter (University of Leipzig) she edited two volumes on the Fukushima-case.

**Ina Hein** has studied at Trier University (Germany) and Ôbirin University (Tôkyô). In her doctoral thesis she analysed constructions of gender relationships in the works of contemporary Japanese women writers. She was member of the DFG-funded project „Turning (back) to Asia in Japanese literature, media and popular culture" (Trier University) in 2003 and researcher/lecturer at the Institute for Modern Japan, Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf (Germany) until May 2010. Since June 2010, she is professor for cultural studies at the Department for Japanese Studies, University of Vienna (Austria). Her research focuses on: contemporary Japanese literature, gender relations in Japan, constructions of Asia in Japanese literature and media, the discourse on cultural differences in contemporary Japan, Okinawa in Japanese literature, film and television.

**Lisa Mundt** majored in Japanese Studies and Theatre, Film & Media Studies at Goethe University, Frankfurt, from 2002 to 2009. Since 2009, she has been a doctoral candidate at the department of Japanese Studies at Goethe University. In 2010, she was granted a PhD fellowship at the German Institute of Japanese Studies (DIJ), Tôkyô. Her research focus is on contemporary Japanese theatre and performing arts, especially on artistic discourses on social and political issues. Lisa Mundt is currently a lecturer at the department of Japanese Studies in Frankfurt

and has worked as an organizer and interpreter for guest performances by Japanese theatre troupes at several venues in Germany.

**Yuki Masami** is professor at Kanazawa University where she teaches environmental literature and English as a Foreign Language. She received her doctoral degree in English with an emphasis of literature and environment from University of Nevada, Reno, in 2000. She has been publishing books and articles on American and Japanese environmental literature with special focuses on topics such as literary soundscapes, urban nature, and discourses on food and toxicity. Her most recent book, *Mizu no oto no kioku* (Remembering the Sound of Water: Essays in Ecocriticism, 2010), examines relationships between language, imagination, and the environment in works of contemporary writers including Ishimure Michiko, Morisaki Kazue, and Terry Tempest Williams. Recently she has been researching environmental imagination in discourses of food and eating, a topic which includes literary response to the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters which have continued to unsettle local and global attitudes on food.

# Name index

# Subject index

The four essays of the volume *Literature and Art after "Fukushima"* focus on the question as to what extent the three-fold catastrophy of Fukushima may be considered a turning point also for the Japanese literature and art scene, how those unprecedented events have been received so far, and what positions were taken up by Japanese authors, theater directors, and performance artists in their works and productions following 3/11.

**Lisette Gebhardt** is professor of Japanese Literature and Culture at Goethe University, Frankfurt/Germany. Recently she turned her interest to "Fukushima" and commented on the Japanese "earthquake literature" as well as on the reactions of Japanese intellectuals towards the catastrophe in north Japan.

**Yuki Masami** is professor at Kanazawa University/Japan where she teaches environmental literature and English as a Foreign Language. She has been publishing books and articles on American and Japanese environmental literature with special focuses on topics such as literary soundscapes, urban nature, and discourses on food and toxicity.

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