August is the month of semi (sic) in Japan. Unmistakable, electrical, unremit-ting. Like the beating of our own hearts, but externalized as if our hearts merged with our genitals to make a super-organ, charged and frequented beyond any knowable human sensitivity. These inside-out creatures make a sound that turns your head. Makes you search the tree for the source. Or the rice field. Or the urban

This past August (only five months after the disaster), the sound of the semi felt different. Their audibility came as a relief. Like the electrical wires that criss-cross this country, or the smokestacks that dot the quiet neighborhood, or the train tracks that gently strangle the ground, these technologies remind us that things (sound, power, people) come from somewhere and go somewhere else. They have a logic that we can follow, that runs a line. That ends. And dies. The beat, the wire, the rail—follow it and you'll end up at the power company or the station or at the stifled carcass of the semi. No wireless transmission or CADed curve, just the line—exposed, with a nothing-to-hide affect, leading from here to there like an immigrant.

People like to talk about the hidden. Japan: country of the perfectly executed silence, of the elegant self-erasing gesture, of the restraint of the space not filled. But this schoolboy aesthetics misses the point. There is nothing hidden. There is no deep hearted emotion ready to break through. Depth is not the opposite of surface, but its lining. And the same can be said about the invisible and the visible, the future and the present, as well as silence and the screams of the semi. The lining holds two terms together revealing that each term already contains the other, but also that each term has a certain autonomy from the other, and that the structural relation that ties the two terms together can only come undone...without a moment's notice. Each term, therefore, has a logic—runs a line—that is at once connected to and disconnected from the logic of other terms, other lines. This impossible doubleness of the line, the contradiction of the line, is figured by the lining, which (and now the circle into and out of and around) the semiotic image sense various pasts and futures (to integrate it into a larger system of meaning). Marker attempts to have it both ways: to criticize a structuralist logic that refuses to recog-nize positive identity in any single unit, and to submit to this structuralist logic, to the work of the black. "If we don't see happiness in the children, at least we'll see the blank."

This play of light and black is itself not an opposition; rather, one term lines the other. Or to put this in more dialectical language, this identity of identity and non-identity stands unrealized as opposition but contradiction. And, as Fredric Jameson argues, "Contradiction then passes over into its Ground," into what he calls the "situation itself, the aerial view or the map of the totality in which things happen and History takes place."

This mention of the ground returns us to the disaster in Japan, to the problem of materialism, and, fingers crossed, to the semi. Did the earthquake destroy this ground? Is this ground something that can be broken, flooded, or irredi-cate? How might we represent the ground of disaster, the unspecifiable materiality (if not the very logic) of disaster, the eerydaemonic that seems untouched by the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown...but that necessarily medi-ates and is mediated by these heartbeating events? How might we search not for ghosts or buried treasures, but for the beautaliy that grounds everything? In fact, this is one way to pursue the problem of materialism: Rather than repeat the constant variety of understanding its opposing to idealism and metaphysics or teasing it with nominalism, determin-ism, or horror of horrors—positivism, materialism is best mobilized today as the non-moralizing critique par excellence. By this I mean that materialism forces us not to fetishize the thing itself (the object, the event, the person, the line), but rather to focus on the relations of things, the lining of the line, which is nothing other than the ground itself. The ground is an absent materiality, which although lacking concrete form is the core of materialism.

To moralize is to impose a post-political value judg-ment on something (to judge something based on its imme-diately effect—this current policy, that admirable act), then to materialize is to mobilize a political critique that cares more about how something works, both in its singularity and in relation to a greater logic. To moralize the Japanese disaster, for example, is to focus on the bad leaders, or the failed technology, or the well-mannered victims waiting patiently in food lines, or even on the inevitability of the disaster itself. To materialize the disaster, in contrast, requires not only resist-ing such a moralizing critique, but also reaffirming the event in order to mobilize it toward a radically different future. Like resisting our temptation to anthropomorphize the cry of the semi, to materialize the recent disaster in Japan is to resist our temptation to integrate it into a world of meaning that we already know.

It was precisely this temptation that many critics submitted when making sense of the disaster. Less than three weeks after the earthquake, for example, Jacques Attali wrote a blistering attack on the incompetence and parochial-ism of the Japanese leaders; “The International Com-munity Must Intervene—In Japan.” Comparing the nuclear crisis to the global economic meltdown in 2008, Attali implied the international community to intervene as he criticized the Japanese authorities for letting their “pride” and “arrogance,” as well as their “penchant for secrecy and lack of transparency,” endanger the world. Just as the international community should intervene in Libya or in any human rights violation, Attali reasoned, “the world has the responsibility to intervene when a sovereign nation cannot or will not protect its own people and when the danger extends beyond borders.”

Attali’s criticism is the mirror image of the ubiquitous media celebrations of how polite and disciplined the Japanese people were following the earthquake. “Not a single act of looting,” many western reporters reported incredulously.

Offended by Attali’s reproach of the Japanese, Shogo Suzuki responded with his piece “Pakubasima and Cultural Superiority” in which he charged Attali for resorting to a culturalist argument about the uniqueness of the “Japanese” instead of recognizing that the nuclear accident could have happened anywhere. Suzuki writes, “No country is immune from human error, corruption, or complacency. With this in mind, and before we start painting with broad culturalist brushstrokes, other nations should examine their own nucle-ar safety...to try to ensure that the mistakes in not-so-unique Japan aren’t repeated.” Both Attali and Suzuki are right; but
both are as counter-productive as they are moralizing. It is hard to hold on to the positions of Atsushi and Sanuki anymore. Here is a debate that the Japanese studies has needed for a long time. The post-Japanese bubble is a historical and social phenomenon. By the 1990s, Japan was in a full-blown recession and that the sluggishness of the high-growth economy was more than just a momentary stall. To say that capitalism can produce magnificent qualities, for example, but on what each system delivers, such comparisons reflect a materially focused approach. The financial meltdown of 2008, when the derivative markets deflation of the Tokyo Electric Power Company spokesman, for example, its effects are almost always predictable and quite logical. In ecology, the disaster of global warming hits when the emission of carbon dioxide no longer produces a profit or the necessity of market expansion, but to the more immediate and pressing of practicality or impossibility. To make the impossible seem possible is a capacity of the historical fact that capitalism is a system that came into being at a moment in history and will go out of being in the future. Without this belief in the system of the future, we cannot talk about anything that has no moralizing the limits of the present. And one cannot help but represent the possibilities of a radically different future. The idea that somehow the future might be radically different than the present can only be entertained if we do not want to think about what we have inherited from the past. The problem with the revisionist/apologist debate is that the original, or perhaps now revised, content of the argument is in terms of a similar and unchanging view of the future. That idea that the future might be radically different than the present can only be entertained if we do not want to think about what we have inherited from the past.

In the early 1990s, however, the debate imploded, as did all practices, practices that were opportunistically rationalized by an appeal to Japanese cultural particularities that so many politically correct non-Japanese were too scared to question, and that so many self-orientalizing Japanese were too ready to exploit. The skeptics were called the revisionists (somewhat inappropriately) and the apologists (somewhat appropriately). By the beginning of the Japanese recession in the late 1980s, Japan was in a full-blown recession and that the sluggishness of the high-growth economy was more than just a momentary stall. The 1995 earthquake, therefore, was immediately turned into a symbol of Japan's economic downturn. In response, Japanese leaders vigorously implemented policies aimed at effectively destroying the Japanese welfare state (now no longer long-term financially sustainable or credible) that were healthy while producing an extremely vulnerable, flexible labor force of young and old alike. In addition to bringing Japan to its knees, these reforms implemented a critique of capitalism that directly affecting the debate over who should be entitled to the benefits of the new order. The 1995 earthquake, therefore, did not come as a surprise shock to the economy. Rather, the recent disaster will only strengthen the already existing hesitation of a critique to decline and confirm that such accelerated capitalist growth cannot last long—a lesson that China, India, and Brazil will soon learn as well. Karatani ends his piece the following way.

For this reason, global capitalist will not doubt become unsustainable in 20 or 30 years. In this sense, we could argue that the financial crisis is a terminal crisis of the system. That the deflection of the Tokyo Electric Power Company spokesman, for example, its effects are almost always predictable and quite logical. In ecology, the disaster of global warming hits when the emission of carbon dioxide no longer produces a profit or the necessity of market expansion, but to the more immediate and pressing of practicality or impossibility. To make the impossible seem possible is a capacity of the historical fact that capitalism is a system that came into being at a moment in history and will go out of being in the future. Without this belief in the system of the future, we cannot talk about anything that has no moralizing the limits of the present. And one cannot help but represent the possibilities of a radically different future. The idea that somehow the future might be radically different than the present can only be entertained if we do not want to think about what we have inherited from the past. The problem with the revisionist/apologist debate is that the original, or perhaps now revised, content of the argument is in terms of a similar and unchanging view of the future. That idea that the future might be radically different than the present can only be entertained if we do not want to think about what we have inherited from the past. The skeptics were called the revisionists (somewhat inappropriately) and the apologists (somewhat appropriately). By the beginning of the Japanese recession in the late 1980s, Japan was in a full-blown recession and that the sluggishness of the high-growth economy was more than just a momentary stall. The 1995 earthquake, therefore, was immediately turned into a symbol of Japan's economic downturn. In response, Japanese leaders vigorously implemented policies aimed at effectively destroying the Japanese welfare state (now no longer long-term financially sustainable or credible) that were healthy while producing an extremely vulnerable, flexible labor force of young and old alike. In addition to bringing Japan to its knees, these reforms implemented a critique of capitalism that directly affecting the debate over who should be entitled to the benefits of the new order. The 1995 earthquake, therefore, did not come as a surprise shock to the economy. Rather, the recent disaster will only strengthen the already existing hesitation of a critique to decline and confirm that such accelerated capitalist growth cannot last long—a lesson that China, India, and Brazil will soon learn as well. Karatani ends his piece the following way.

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examples of this logical necessity. Both contingent disasters and
necessary crises, however, are linked in the way that
their breakdowns in relations is built back up again by a dif-
ferent set of relations within the same system.

Revolution, in contrast, is that moment when a new set
of relations takes hold within a different system. This
distinctive but also palpable is the new ubiquity with which
disaster and crisis have been invoked over the past 20 years,
while resolution has been driven underground, rendered not
only unappealable, but, moreover, unfathomable. There
has been everything to do with the political-economic situation
of the post-Cold War era, a symptom of our own historical
formation, which currently, for good or ill, goes by the name
globalization.

Disaster and crisis have always been quick off the lips of
those wishing to justify misrule and misfortune. If it were not
for the crooked officials or crony capitalists,
leaves somewhere and the lining that doesn’t.

is both abstract and concrete, singular and general, the
in order to attend to the various historical, future, and meta-

is why I find Karatani’s argument so powerful. He is fi-

nally one who is keen to understand ourselves and think about the future? Indeed, this
may not be due to radiation, but possibly to the tsunami-

Reik was one of the founders of the Cultural Studies movement and a significant
contribution to the development of cultural studies in Japan. His work
was influential in shaping the field and his ideas continue to be
relevant today.

The earthquake and tsunami directly affected these
living in the towns and villages in the Tohoku region of Japan, compelling the survivors to deal with the tens of thousands
who died (in some cases, nearly entire communities) and the
economic and social consequences. It was a disaster of
such magnitude that it reshaped the way we think about the
capacity of the state and the limits of capitalism. The
survivors had to deal with the unexpected and the
catastrophic, and it was a reminder of the fragility of
human existence. The disaster raised questions about the
role of government and the responsibilities of those in
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The earthquake and tsunami were also significant
because they brought attention to the issue of radiation
and its effects. The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant,
which was damaged during the earthquake, released
radioactive materials into the environment, causing
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levels were monitored and the government, along with
international organizations, worked to ensure that
people were protected from exposure.

The disaster and crisis were as far
apart from revolution as heaven from earth. What needs to be
considered in the current post-post-Cold War moment
whether or not this is still the case. In something
changing so that crisis and disaster are becoming
dangerous again, no longer the trump cards of those in power. In something
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