Semi-ology of a Disaster or, Toward a Non-Moralizing Materialism

by Eric Cazdyn

August is the month of *semi* (cicadas) in Japan. Unmistakable, electrical, unremitting. Like the beating of our own hearts, but externalized as if our hearts merged with our genitals to make a super-organ, charged and frequenced 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 street where they scream from a crack in the wall. When you look for them you don't find them. They just show up. Next to your foot. On the hood of the car. Flying bat-like in the building. And once you see them they remain, motionless as you marvel at their form. How can such things make such a sound? It doesn't compute. They sometimes remain up to seventeen years underground before emerging for thirty starved days. We call it desperate. And hear Romeo in the full-blown drone. But this is our language speaking—our desire to sentimentalize, if not moralize, the unbelievable logic of this little machine.

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 (sounds, 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 buzz, the wire, the rail—follow it and you'll end up at the power company or the station or at the stilled carapace 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 always 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 seems to close) is not the opposite of the line, but its lining. In order to break out of this tightening circle, we must ask: What is the materiality of this lining?

Chris Marker gestures towards an answer in his 1982 film *Sans Soleil* when his protagonist writes, "I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember. We rewrite memory much as history is rewritten." Ricocheting back and forth between Japan and the rest of the world, Marker's film begins with a formal provocation: how does a single frame of light (in this case the white image of three children in Iceland) relate to another frame of light (U.S. fighter planes)? This is when Marker introduces a third frame, the black—the condition of cinema, not only in terms of narrative development (the black before the beginning (or as beginning) and the black after the ending (or as ending), but the black theatre (the historical space of consumption) and the materiality of the film stock (the black separating each frame). Black is the absent cause of all film and, more self-consciously, is the absent cause of *Sans Soleil*, even though this sunlessness is a direct reference to a Mussorgsky song-cycle that can be heard throughout Marker's film.

Black is also the absent cause of Marker's theory of history. Black is the relation, the abstract, that which connects one thing to another. There is a negativity, by which things do not mean in and of themselves, but only through their differential relations to other things. At the same time, Marker wants us to look at the children, to see their happiness. And he wants us to look at the U.S. fighter planes, to see their menace. "I've been around the world countless times, and the only thing that interests me now is banality," *Sans Soleil*'s protagonist writes. This is the impossible utopian dimension that Marker keeps alive in the film. He wants us to be flashed by the singular, discontinuous image (to cut it away from any totality, any otherness) *and* in this 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 recognize 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 black."

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 unveiled not 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." [1]

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 irradiated? How might we represent the ground of disaster, the unspectacular materiality (if not the very logic) of disaster, the everydayness that seems untouched by the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown…but that necessarily mediates and is mediated by these heartbreaking events? How might we search not for ghosts or buried treasures, but for the banality that grounds everything? In fact, this is one way to pursue the problem of materialism: Rather than repeat the garden-variety understanding of it (opposing it to idealism and metaphysics or teaming it with nominalism, determinism, 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.

If to moralize is to impose a post-political value judgment on something (to judge something based on its immediate effect—this corrupt 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 resisting such a moralizing critique, but also reframing 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 most recent disaster in Japan is to resist our temptation to integrate it into a world of meaning that we already know.

It was precisely to 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 incompetency and parochialism of the Japanese leaders, "The International Community Must Intervene—In Japan." [2] Comparing the nuclear crisis to the global economic meltdown in 2008, Attali implored 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 repeated incredulously.

Offended by Attali's reproof of the Japanese, Shogo Suzuki responded with his piece "Fukushima 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. [3] 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 nuclear 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's hard not to hear in the positions of Attali and Suzuki an older debate that defined Japanese studies during the heyday of the economic miracle. By the 1980s, Japanese economic growth was so spectacular that many analysts predicted that the next century would be named "Pax Japonica," a new era with "Japan as Number One" leading the way, as prophesized by the bestselling book by Ezra Vogel. But there were also the skeptics who refused to celebrate Japan's success and saw it resulting from unfair business 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 (sometimes, the Japan bashers) and the defenders were called the apologists. By the beginning of the Japanese recession in the early 1990s, however, the debate imploded, as did all of the enthusiasm and interest in the Japanese model. And then something on the order of a "Japan fatigue" set in, as so much scholarly and business interest expediently moved to China. The problem with the revisionist/apologist debate of the late 1980s was that both sides waged their opposing arguments in terms of a similar and unchanging view of the future. The idea that somehow the future might be radically different than the present (namely, that capitalism might not be the same, might not be dominant, or might actually end) was never considered. *Without leaving open the possibility of a radically different future, however, one cannot help but moralize the limits of the present. And one cannot help but forgo a materialist critique*.

Only five days after the earthquake, the well-known Japanese philosopher and literary critic Karatani Kojin wrote an essay about the disaster that rejects any moralizing and provides a glimpse into what a materialist critique might look like.[4] Entitled "Earthquake and Japan," Karatani begins by comparing the recent Tōhoku disaster to the Kobe earthquake that killed 6,000 people in 1995. Right up until the Kobe quake hit, people still did not fully accept that 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 downfall. In response, Japanese leaders vigorously implemented various neoliberal policies, effectively destroying the Japanese welfare state (now no longer promising life-time employment or cradle-to-grave health care, and producing an extremely vulnerable, flexible labour force of young and old alike). In addition to bringing Japan in line with the principles of the global capitalist economy, in 2003 the ruling Koizumi administration also betrayed the post-war pacifist constitution by sending the nation's Self-Defense Forces to Iraq. Despite the neoliberal hope of recovery through privatization and economic austerity measures, by 2010 Japan's growing poverty rate had almost met the extremely high rate of the United States, making Japan the fourth-highest impoverished country among OECD's 30 member nations. As for the recession, it is now moving into its third decade. The point Karatani stresses in his article is that unlike after the Kobe earthquake, the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake did not come as a surprise shock to the economy. Rather, the recent disaster will only strengthen the already existing tendencies of economic 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 capitalism will no doubt become unsustainable in 20 or 30 years. The end of capitalism, however, is not the end of human life. Even without capitalist economic development or competition, people are able to live. Or rather, it is only then that people will, for the first time, truly be able to live. Of course, the capitalist economy will not simply come to an end. Resisting such an outcome, the great powers will no doubt continue to fight over natural resources and markets. Yet I believe that the Japanese should never again choose such a path. Without the recent earthquake, Japan would no doubt have continued its hollow struggle for great power status, but such a dream is now unthinkable and should be abandoned. It is not Japan's demise that the earthquake has produced, but rather the possibility of its rebirth. It may be that only amid the ruins can people gain the courage to stride down a new path.

Regardless of how speculative and impractical Karatani's argument might appear, it represents a materialist critique of the Japanese disaster, one that holds within it the principles of what I want to call a non-moralizing critique of capitalism. Indeed, a proper materialist critique is at one and the same time non-moralizing. Before returning to the Japanese disaster, therefore, let's first try to establish what these non-moralizing principles are.

First, a non-moralizing critique of capitalism is not personally motivated.

> Of course, every action is personally motivated insofar as it comes from an individual person and is necessarily fashioned by conscious and unconscious desire. In this case, a non-personal critique of capitalism means that one first recognizes that one is necessarily part of capitalism, necessarily wrapped up in its ideologies, and that one shares this necessity with others, both friends and enemies. There is no escaping capitalism, since capitalism is not only the production and consumption of commodities, but a certain mode of production with special forms of exchange, meaning-making, social relations, desire, communication, and thought that necessarily insinuate themselves into our very beings, so much so that attempting to avoid them is like trying to avoid our deepest habits, from the way we hold our bodies to the way we think about how we hold our bodies. This inextricable relation to capitalism (which affects the very ways we understand and represent it) leads to the recognition that any critique of capitalism is necessarily social, necessarily part of something that exceeds the individual producing the critique.

Second, a non-moralizing critique is not personally directed.

> The critique, rather, is directed toward the structure, system, and logic of capitalism, which requires less a scathing rhetoric against individuals and more an analytic understanding of how capitalism works. The capitalist system works to produce greedy and corrupt capitalists (ones who certainly deserve condemnation), but to begin with a criticism of them is counterproductive—not only because the dominant system of representation (media, mass culture, pedagogy) is based on a sophisticated defense of these very individuals and their practices (so that to engage in a shouting match in the contemporary mediascape is to risk neutralizing all critique), but because to go after the successful capitalists undermines the analytical skills required to understand the larger system. Capitalism is a tremendously complex system, which was proven once again during the financial meltdown of 2008, when the derivative schemes were so intricate that the only people who were capable of dismantling them were the very individuals who invented them in the first place.
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> To direct a critique at the system and not at the individuals who manage and defend it is to reaffirm a belief in the reality of the system itself. This is also to argue that there is a certain cause-and-effect logic that can explain capitalist crisis, and such events as war, poverty, and illness (surely these effects are products of other systems as well, but the specific configuration of war, poverty, and illness within capitalism is qualitatively different than their configuration within different systems). Without the recognition of a greater logic special to each system, one effectively abandons politics as such. A non-moralizing critique of capitalism reaffirms a belief not in "the system" (and certainly not in the capitalist system), but in the "system as such." Keeping the problem of the system in the foreground (and thus deemphasizing a moralizing critique) enables a consciousness 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 capitalism and, more importantly, in the very reality of the system, revolutionary politics is impossible.

Third, a non-moralizing critique is weary of false cures while always keeping open the space for a radically different (however unknowable) future.

> Since there is always something within a system that escapes the systemic logic, something any critique cannot fully incorporate, one must be open to—and try to hold—the contradictions of capitalism, rather than immediately manage, resolve, or repress them. This is to say that capitalism can produce magnificent qualities while still causing heartbreaking destruction. To recognize this is also to recognize the history of capitalism, especially the unquestionable liberating effects that its founding revolution enabled. This simple fact sustains a non-moralizing critique, since it denaturalizes capitalism, opening up a comparative analysis with other social formations.
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> This comparative analysis (which also means comparing capitalism to other formations that do not yet exist) is based not on the ideological claims and desires of different systems (democracy and freedom, for example), but on what each system delivers, such as adequate health care, a healthy natural environment, opportunities to experience diverse pleasures, social equality, individual justice, nourishing food, and secure shelter. A non-moralizing critique, therefore, prioritizes outcomes and remains unconvinced by nonsocial and ahistorical justifications and arguments, such as the complacent recourse to the scarcity of natural resources, or the inherent greediness or goodness of human beings. This comparative impulse also inspires formal experiments with alterity, from social modeling to science-fiction narratives. Such exercises themselves should not be justified by any moralizing critique, but neither should they be discouraged by the constraints of practicality or impossibility. To make the impossible might very well be impossible, but the very act of imagining it can change the realm of possibility.

Fourth, a non-moralizing critique recognizes that crises occur in capitalism not because capitalism has gone wrong but because it has gone right, because it operates precisely as it is designed to operate.

> If one appeals to evil or righteousness then these qualities and acts should be understood as symptoms, rather than causes, of the very system under question. Evil acts do not cause capitalism's crises and then recuperate these crises by dispossessing individuals of their wealth and dignity. This process of crisis and dispossession is built right into the system itself and, as in any machine, can do certain things but not others. Instead of anthropomorphizing capitalism with histrionic claims of how evil or righteous it is, a non-moralizing critique sees it for what it is: a human-built machine that performs various functions based on specific rules and fundamental principles. Such a critique would generate a certain degree of respect for capitalism based on how capable it is at performing such tasks, even if they have such brutally cruel effects as allowing millions to die of treatable illnesses or of downplaying the dangers of a nuclear accident. Instead of incredulity and counterproductive anger, a non-moralizing critique generates a measured response (however poetic) in a clear voice (however angry) that does not retreat from the most painful and beautiful aspects of everyday capitalist life.

We are now in a position to test these non-moralizing principles in terms of the disaster in Japan and see what a materialist critique of the disaster would look like. At the outset, we must understand that our very ways of understanding and coming to terms with the disaster are mediated by the logic of capitalism. And here I'm not referring to the classic capitalist fundamentals such as the pursuit of profit or the necessity of market expansion, but to the more psychological aspects of capitalism—the dominant ideologies that shape how we fear, how we hope, and how we repress. These affective forms are not simply "natural," nor persist throughout human history. Rather, the way we hope for a safe resolution to the nuclear meltdown corresponds to the logic of late capitalism, just as socialist hope or feudal fear are organized in terms of those modes and are of radically different orders than capitalist hope or fear. A materialist critique of the disaster cannot separate the profound personal experiences of the event from the specific historical moment during which it occurs. Of course, the temptation to compare disasters is hard to resist—the way, for example, the 2011 disaster seems to echo the atomic bombs of 1945 or the great Kantō earthquake of 1923 or the Great Wave off Kanagawa in 1830 that Hokusai so iconically depicted in his famous woodblock print. But each of these disasters must be distinguished by the different subjective limits and possibilities of those living through them. The qualitative differences that Karatani distinguishes over the sixteen years separating the Kobe earthquake in 1995 from the Tōhoku disasters in 2011 are even more profound, if not incommensurable, when we contrast the subjective experiences of these disasters to ones that occurred centuries earlier.

We must also focus less on the deceptive, incompetent, or courageous leaders and more on the system in which these leaders act. In this sense we could argue that the practiced deflection of the Tokyo Electric Power Company spokesman or the earnest impotence of former Prime Minister Kan Naoto are not the opposite of the sincerity of the anti-nuclear activist or the indifferent disenfranchisement of the non-voter, but their lining. Likewise, alternative energy sources, such as thermal and solar, are not the opposite of nuclear energy, but its lining. When we only think about the minority emerging dominant within the same system (the dissident becoming prime minister or green capitalism replacing dirty capitalism), then we are still trapped. This is not to argue that we should not struggle for these reforms, but that this struggle must retain a revolutionary consciousness that is not afraid to "give it all away." From opposition to contradiction to ground: these individual and categorical relationships can only be disentangled by locating them on a different ground—on the ground of a different social formation, one that cannot yet be imagined save by the place-holder name, not-capitalism.

As for the logic of crisis that is internal to capitalism and how this relates to the disasters, we must attend to the key differences between what constitutes crisis and disaster, not to mention what constitutes the crucial third term, revolution. Disaster is that moment when the sustainable configuration of relations fail, when the relation between one thing and another breaks down. In finance (for a capitalist economy), disaster hits when goods cannot be related to markets, when idle capital and idle labour cannot be connected, or when currency bubbles burst, replacing so much cold cash with so much hot air. In ecology, the disaster of global warming hits when the emission of carbon dioxide no longer relates to the planet's natural capacity to absorb it. For those with HIV or cancer, disaster comes when cells overproduce so that they no longer relate to the logic of the living body, or when one is denied antiretroviral or chemotherapeutic drugs due to the inability to pay for them. In philosophy, disaster is that moment when thinking is cut off from history, while individuals experience psychological disaster when they are no longer able to relate to the world. As for political disaster, it comes when the relation is severed between those desiring representation and those authorized to grant it.

One thing we invariably learn when natural disasters strike (such as in Japan) is that such events are not natural, or at least the effects of such events are not natural. Their fallout, quite obviously, is social—products of human choices, political systems, even cultural assumptions. Extending this understanding to the limit, however, effectively evacuates the category of disaster itself. This is because although disaster is contingent (coming "from the stars," as its etymology suggests), its effects are almost always predictable and quite logical. Most people in power knew exactly what would happen if an 8.9 magnitude earthquake struck the Tōhoku region. Those in power simply crossed their fingers and hoped that such an event would not occur. When it did occur and its tragic consequences ensued, calling it a disaster is like calling a dying man a hypochondriac.

However much its effects may be completely predictable, the contingency of a disaster is what sets it apart from a crisis. Unlike a disaster, there is something necessary about a crisis, something true to the larger systemic form. In other words, systems are structured so that crises will occur that strengthen and reproduce the systems themselves. The boom-bust cycle of capitalism is only one of the more obvious

examples of this logical necessity. Both contingent disasters and necessary crises, therefore, are linked in the way that their breakdown in relations is built back up again by a different 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 crude distinction better explicates the new ubiquity with which disaster and crisis have been invoked over the past 20 years, while revolution has been driven underground, rendered not only unspeakable, but, moreover, unthinkable. This trend has 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 mishap and misfortune. If it were not for that earthquake, the town would not be in such disrepair. If it were not for the crooked officials or crony capitalists, there would be better public transportation, better health care, and more wealth to go around. If it were not for the new terrorists, we would be free from anxiety, sleeping comfortably on cushions bought by the peace dividend. Crisis and disaster are those props pulled out of the bottom of the bag when all other explanations lose operational force or cannot be spoken.

With the end of the Cold War, anomalous and non-systemic disaster and crisis (that is, events from the outside, like a meteor or a madman) have been even more likely to be employed to explain inequality and injustice. During the Cold War, for example, to speak the language of disaster and crisis was at once to speak the language of revolution: the discourse could easily slip into revolution. Disaster and crisis were truly dangerous. With "mutually assured destruction" the watchwords of the day, one crisis could accumulate into so many crises until the quantitative curved into the qualitative and the whole system was in tatters. We only need to think about the Cuban missile crisis or the oil crises of the 1970s to remember that crisis and disaster were a mere cat's step away from revolution. But with the transformed geopolitical situation following the Cold War, in which the United States remained the sole superpower and the "end of ideology" became the ruling ideology, it seemed riskless (not to mention utterly gratuitous) to call upon crisis and disaster.

Following the Cold War, crisis and disaster were as far apart from revolution as heaven from earth. What needs to be considered in the current post-post-Cold War moment is whether or not this is still the case. Is something changing so that crisis and disaster are becoming dangerous again, no longer the trump cards of those in power? Is something changing so that revolutionary discourse is creeping back into everyday consciousness, into the way we understand not only radical social change but the more banal ways we understand ourselves and think about the future? Indeed, this is why I find Karatani's argument so powerful. He is finally articulating the connection between disaster and revolution, or more specifically the connection between the Tōhoku disaster and the revolution of capitalism.

The earthquake and tsunami directly affected those living in the towns and villages in the Tōhoku region of Japan, compelling the survivors to deal with the tens of thousands who died (in some cases, nearly entire communities) and the extensive rebuilding process. Slightly differently, the nuclear meltdown has affected not only those in the immediate vicinity of the Fukushima nuclear reactors, but the whole country in terms of the potential contamination of the water and food supplies. Moreover, the temporality of the nuclear disaster is different from the temporality of the earthquake and tsunami—the danger and damage, for example, of the nuclear fallout will occur over the long-term with fewer immediate effects. These different but overlapping temporalities of disaster (short-term destruction and long-term threat) get at a fundamental logic that I have been calling "the ground": how, for example, one can directly engage the immediacy of an event (such as the practical destruction brought by the earthquake to both people and the physical landscape), while at the same time de-emphasizing the specific damage itself in order to attend to the various historical, future, and meta contexts of the immediate situation. The ground's materialism is both abstract and concrete, singular and general, the virtual future and the actually existing present, the line that leads somewhere and the lining that doesn't.

The ground is also the remarkable sound of the *semi* and its body—two things that seem to have nothing to do with each other, but are, in fact, one. When the *semi* were late to appear this year in the Tōhoku region, however, many feared that the physical ground had been so destroyed that the bodies of both the annual and periodical *semi* (billions of them) had been annihilated. But the delay had been due to an unseasonably cool spring. After the first warm spell, fortunately, the males were yelling again, leading one haiku poet to write: "The *semi* are finally here/ I'm sort of relieved/ As things aren't quite normal these days."[5] But then a report revealed that over 20 per cent of the *semi* around Fukushima had physical mutations. Scientists quickly confirmed that this may not be due to radiation, but possibly to the tsunami-flooded soil. Radiation damage will take much longer to manifest, the scientists explained in an "I-have-some-good-news-*and*-I-have-some-bad-news" sort of way. This bad news is saddening for all those who will suffer from radiation effects and those who will be terrorized by the threats of radiation, but the news also turns out to be bad in a more profoundly political way. The threatened future is now tied even more tightly to the disastrous present so that a radically different future, a revolutionized future, is harder to imagine. The real damage of the disaster is that a future free from the logic of the present becomes even *more impossible* to dream and act toward, at least when we remain within the discursive limits of the present and allow these limits to colonize the future. But it is precisely this colonized future that a non-moralizing, materialist critique of the disaster attempts to liberate. This de-colonized future, one that has no name and will not look anything like what we now know or can imagine, can be sensed in the intense, urgent, steady, and collective chorus of the *semi*. A chorus that can be tracked back years and underground (like a line), but that is always set to stop, to disappear, to die for a *less impossible* future that in some a-temporal and non-linear way is already here.

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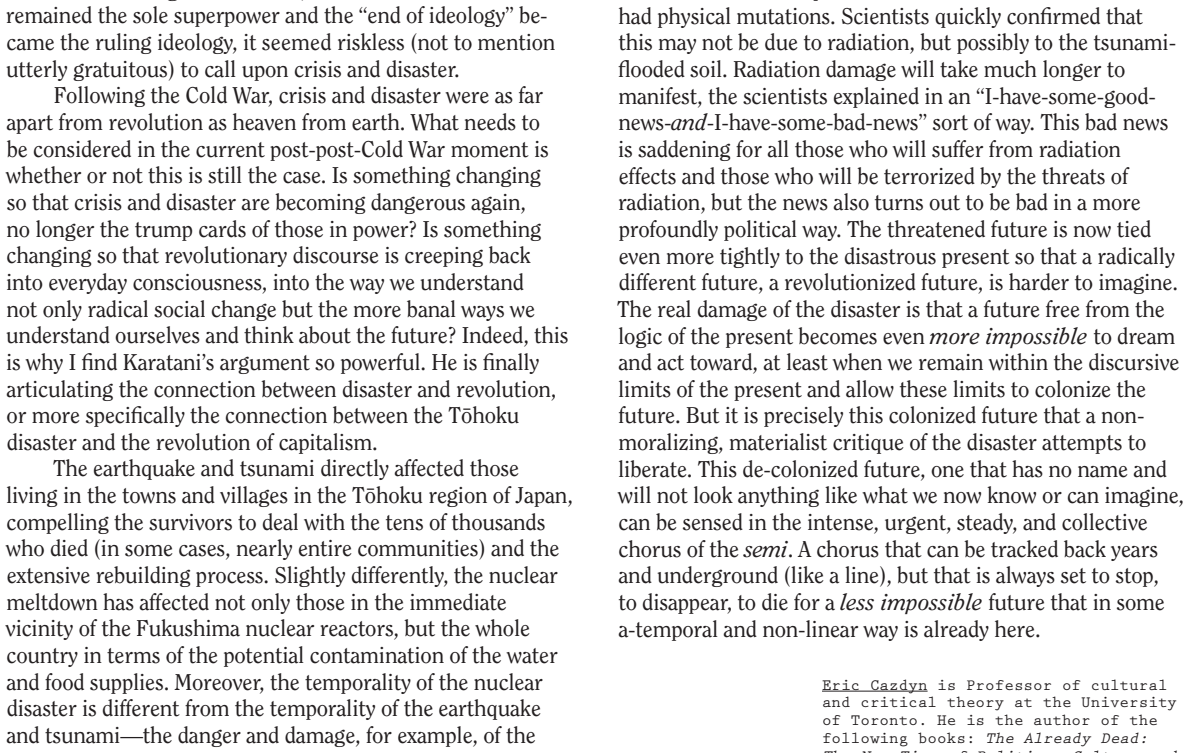

Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 76.

2. Jacques Attali, "The International Community Must Intervene—In Japan," *Christian Science Monitor*, www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Global-Viewpoint/2011/0330/The-international-community-must-intervene-in-Japan.

3. Shogo Suzuki, "Fukushima and Cultural Superiority," *The Diplomat*, the-diplomat.com/2011/07/15/fukushima-and-cultural-superiority.

4. Karatani Kojin, "Earthquake and Japan," trans. Seiji Lippit, www.kojin-karatani.com/en/article/earthquake-and-japan.html.

5. *The Asahi Shimbun*, "The Droning of Cicadas a Reassuring Sound of Summer," ajw.asahi.com/article/views/vox/AJ201108087833.