

“What could be spoken?” Lessons on disaster memories and narratives from the case of the Great East Japan Earthquake*

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Introduction: “What Could Be Spoken” between “What Was Spoken” and “What Will Not Be Spoken”

The Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011 (hereafter “3.11”) left 19,765 dead, 2,553 missing, more than 122,000 completely destroyed homes, approximately 284,000 partially destroyed homes, and countless other damages.^{1,2} As of March 7, 2023, in addition, 30,884 evacuees have been identified nationwide.³

Here, we must care about the effect of the expression of numbers such as “19,765 dead” mentioned in the first sentence of this section. It is not only a number. Such expressions indicating the scale of damage were widely circulated in the media after 3.11. The discourses were not limited to 3.11; they were necessary to understand the scale of the damage. Even a single death is a great tragedy, however, and when more people die and such expressions become unavoidable, it becomes more difficult to imagine the lives of the individuals behind these deaths. There are countless experiences surrounding such disasters that are not expressed in numbers and cannot be recorded.

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¹ This article is based on Ryuma Shineha ed, *Memories and Narratives on Disasters* 災禍をめぐる「記憶」と「語り」(Nakanishiya Press 2021). Rather than just translating it, it was edited and revised for this paper.

² The Fire and Disaster Management Agency, *The Great East Japan Earthquake (ver.163)* 東北地方太平洋沖地震(東日本大震災)の被害状況(令和5年3月1日現在) (2023), <https://www.fdma.go.jp/disaster/higashinihon/items/163.pdf> (Last accessed on the May 30th 2023).

³ The Reconstruction Agency, *The Number of Evacuee* 全国の避難者数 (2023), https://www.reconstruction.go.jp/topics/main-cat2/sub-cat2-1/20230307_kouhou.pdf (Last accessed on the May 30th 2023).

This article will examine the experiences surrounding disasters, which are often overlooked or cut off in the process of recording official numbers and records. I will therefore focus on the realities: experiences, feelings, thoughts, and changes that occur over time after disasters. How can these realities be preserved in our society, and what are the means of the inheritance of memories of disasters? To express the realities of a disaster in words often brought many difficulties. There are many reasons to generate “what could be spoken” (i.e., silent narratives) —between “what was spoken” (narratives) and “what will not be spoken” —and possibilities to make silent narratives visible. Difficulties to speak disaster experiences and lessons are sometimes generated by censorship which are made by formal pressure. Some victims showed their self-censorship by “structural inability to speak.” Therefore, there are many of the “what could be spoken” which are left and overlooked. Current trials and errors to archive narratives about disasters showed us the possibilities of “what could be spoken.” Those perspectives are useful to overcome issues of media bias on framings, power of authors, and continuous archives of disaster memories. It also means to consider a question of “how can scholars (and writers) face narratives of disaster?” I would like to discuss issues concerning concept of “what could be spoken,” particularly focusing on the case of 3.11.

2. Reality Changes During Disaster Recovery

Realities surrounding disasters have various aspects and changes over time. I would like to examine the case of changes in realities in the case of 3.11. Figure 1 presents photographs of a section of the Ukedo area, a coastal area in Namie-town in the Fukushima Prefecture, which was severely destroyed by the tsunami. Just after 3.11, Namie-town became mandatory evacuation areas due to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident (hereafter “the NPP accident”).



Figure 1 Pictures of the coast area of the Namie-town, called Ukedo area. Left picture was taken in the Mar 2014, three years after 3.11. Right picture was taken in the Mar 2018

Although the evacuation zone was subsequently divided into three categories according to the contamination of radioactive—areas where it was difficult to return home (i.e., the red zone); restricted residential areas (i.e., the yellow zone); and areas preparing for the lifting of evacuation orders (i.e., the green zone)—Namie-town had a mixture of all three zones, in which decontamination and reconstruction work was being carried out. Namie-town is one of the typical municipalities that was not only affected by the earthquake and tsunami, but also by the combined effects of the NPP accident and various reconstruction efforts.

The photograph on the left was taken on March 2, 2014, and the photograph on the right was taken on March 7, 2018. It should be noted that, as shown in the photograph on the left, reconstruction work in the area has not progressed well due to the evacuation caused by the NPP accident, despite significant reconstruction efforts and decontamination work that was still underway in the area during this period; three years after 3.11, vehicles, boats, and houses destroyed by the tsunami had not been removed.

Since 3.11, restoration work has progressed, and little by little, the town and its streets have been restored. Today, people can freely come and go in the center of Namie-town; stores are open for business, and local festivals are showing signs of revival. As shown in the photograph on the right, the destroyed objects were eventually removed, and roads and other facilities were reconstructed in the coastal area. This reconstruction progress is one of the local current realities.

It is not difficult to imagine that the prolonged loss of living infrastructure and various social ties, as well as the fact that life in the evacuation centers continued on a yearly basis, made it difficult for people to return. According to a survey conducted by a research group from Waseda University in collaboration with Namie-town, when asked whether they would return to their homes, the majority of local residents answered “Will not return” (34.8%) or “Don’t know” (45.6%), while the number of respondents who answered “Will return when decontamination is completed after the period indicated by the government” and “Will return when decontamination of the entire town is completed, no matter how long it will take” totaled 17.0%. When asked why they would not be returning, many respondents answered that they would not be able to recover their original lives even if they did return.⁴ There are a lot of difficulties of economic disadvantages, destruction of infrastructures and community, anxiety for uncertainty of radiation risk, and so on.

Difficulties related to returning were not limited to Namie-town. Realities have changed over time and vary greatly depending on individual contexts; for example, in a survey conducted by Fukushima University six months after The 3.11 in eight

⁴ Waseda University, *Report on Actual Condition Survey of Damages of Residents in the Namie-Town: from Results of Questionnaire* 浪江町被害実態報告書—質問紙調査の結果から (2015), <http://www.town.namie.fukushima.jp/uploaded/attachment/2040.pdf> (Last accessed on the May 30th 2023).

towns and villages in the Futaba-area along the coast of the Fukushima Prefecture (13,576 respondents, collection rate: 48.2%), 24.8% of respondents said they had no intention to return, and 46.0% of those under 34 years of age said they had no intention to return; the younger generations expressed stronger tendencies to not return.⁵

According to a survey conducted by Fukushima University in 2017 that targeted seven towns and villages in the Futaba area (10,081 respondents, collection rate: 37.1%), 58.8% of respondents answered that they “Have no intention to return/will not return.” The survey also found economic disadvantages associated with the evacuation; the percentage of respondents under 64 years of age who were employed full-time dropped from 61.7% before the earthquake to 41.2% afterward, while the percentage of unemployed respondents increased from 10.3% to 32.0%.⁶

Due to the prolonged evacuation process, some residents have given up on the idea of returning to their hometowns, while others have “taken root” in their evacuation sites.⁷ In the reconstruction process, some may have to accept—sometimes reluctantly—that their hometowns will be different from what they were before 3.11; this is another of the reality changes that occur over time after a disaster. Such realities will take various forms depending on the context of the region and each individual’s life. Not all these various realities will necessarily be “spoken,” however, and the reconstruction process will not proceed in a way that considers the subtleties of reality and residents’ narratives.

3. Issues of Reconstruction and the Difficulty in Describing Reality

After a disaster, a reconstruction process occurs. However, in the recovery process from disasters in Japan, such the Hanshin-Awaji Great Earthquake and 3.11, problems were pointed out, such as the use and misappropriation of reconstruction budgets, policies that were biased toward the creation of *hako-mono* (i.e., public-sector

⁵ Fukushima University, *Report of Disaster Recovery of the Eight Towns in the Futaba Area in 2011: Second Edition* 平成23年度 双葉8か町村災害復興実態調査—基礎集計報告書 (2012), https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/kaihatu/016/shiryo/_icsFiles/afiefile/2011/12/21/1314459_2_1.pdf (Last accessed on the May 30th 2023).

⁶ Fukushima University, *Second Report of Disaster Recovery of the Eight Towns in the Futaba Area in 2017* 第2回双葉郡住民実態調査報告書 (2018), https://fure.net.fukushima-u.ac.jp/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/d787750915_07d4436d30da9da35deb28.pdf (Last accessed on the May 30th 2023).

⁷ Sayaka Matsumoto, “Temporary Disaster Broadcasting Station, open to and from the Community—the Case of the Ringo (Apple)-Radio in Yamamoto Town 地域に開かれ、地域から開かれた臨時災害放送局—山元町「りんごラジオ」,” in Naoki Yoshihara, Kamon Nitagai, and Michimasa Matsumoto eds., *Records of ‘Reconstruction’ of the Victims’ Refugee Lives in the Great East Japan Earthquake* 東日本大震災と〈復興〉の生活記録 (Rikka Press 2017), 460–480.

buildings), and economic disadvantages to individuals and shopping districts related to the impact of reconstruction projects. Yoshimitsu Shiozaki highlighted the overlooked problems of people with disabilities and solitary deaths from the disaster and uses the term “reconstruction disaster” to describe a group of problems brought about by massive development and reconstruction projects that emerge in the wake of disasters; he asserted that the focus of reconstruction tends to be on the construction of *hako-mono*, and that the reconstruction of residents’ networks tends to be forgotten and may be damaged in the reconstruction process.⁸

A similar implication can be found in sociological studies. Naoki Yoshihara suggested two terms to describe reconstruction after disasters: capitalized reconstruction and uncanceled reconstruction. Without going into the details of Yoshihara’s argument here, capitalized reconstruction refers to disaster recovery primarily consisting of economic-policy-oriented reconstruction projects that sometimes overlook the local contexts. While Yoshihara does not deny the necessity of capitalized reconstruction, he sees it as problematic that capitalized reconstruction sometimes overlooks the context of individual people and regions and the diverse realities of the disaster, and that it therefore “must become a reconstruction in which only numbers walk alone” (p. 13). Alternatively, uncanceled reconstruction is an attempt to overcome capitalized reconstruction by focusing on individual contexts that cannot be reduced to numbers and is intended to overcome the diverse living world of disaster victims.⁹

These discussions considered that the community is inevitably transformed in the reconstruction process after disasters, and that capitalized reconstruction does not address individual contexts. However, uncanceled reconstruction, which attempts to overcome such challenges, also faces difficulties, largely because the ever-changing realities of the lives of disaster victims are not always spoken in detail.

When I interviewed Mr. Toru Suto (i.e., the principal of Ishinomaki High School in the Miyagi Prefecture at the time of 3.11) three years after the disaster, he took his time to respond and chose his words carefully. In his diary notes written at the time of 3.11, he wrote the following words.¹⁰

Already Three Years, Still Three Years, Just Three Years

⁸ Yoshimitsu Shiozaki, *Reconstruction Disaster: Hanshin-Awaji Great Earthquake and East Japan Great Earthquake* 復興 < 災害 > — 阪神・淡路大震災と東日本大震災 (Iwanami Press, 2014).

⁹ Naoki Yoshihara, “For the Uncanceled Reconstruction 「小文字の復興」のために,” in Yoshihara et al. eds., *Records of ‘Reconstruction’ of the Victims’ Refugee Lives in the Great East Japan Earthquake* [note 7], 9-27.

¹⁰ Ryuma Shineha, “Describing and Memorializing 3.11: Namie and Ishinomaki.” in Kyle Cleveland, Scott G. Knowles, and Ryuma Shineha eds., *Legacies of Fukushima: 3.11 in Context* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 211-222.

The death of people becomes just a number. [...] What an unpleasant sensation!

I despise myself, because I can only say my regret to victims with a traditional statement. [...] “Bonding” and “reconstruction.” [...] What instant words. [...] Now I feel the heaviness of words, and I’ve never felt this until now. [...] Light and dark sides of words mount us. This question comes back to me keenly. I have to face forward, but something that cannot be spoken agitates my insides like a grout simultaneously.

These words tell us how difficult it is for people to put their realities into the medium of words, even those who experienced the disaster. It also helps us realize there are countless things that are not even left as his words. “What was spoken” (narratives) and records that we can read are only a small part of the reality surrounding a disaster.

How have the realities of disasters been described and disseminated? And conversely, how many “what could be spoken” (i.e., silent narratives) have been overlooked? What kind of perspectives and practices are required to make the various realities surrounding disasters “spoken”? With these questions in mind, I will discuss what is difficult to record, especially the “what could be spoken,” which gradually emerges over time, examine the possibility of their preservation and mechanisms, and to consider the power issues of authors.

4. Media Discourses as Record: Lessons from 3.11

I would like to start by examining mass media coverage to consider issues related to realities and the limitations of the record of a disaster. Mass media coverage plays a major role in the agenda setting in society. Mass media coverages effected agenda settings and contributed to the public recognition of those agendas through spread stories repeatedly. In this process, stereotyping of stories were often observed.¹¹ Simultaneously, mass media also has a certain public-record role as a print medium. This is also true in the reporting and documentation of disasters. However, the record of mass media coverage cannot cover all of the complex realities surrounding the disasters. Actually, only a small number of realities framed from the viewpoint of the author describing it is distributed as news reports and preserved as records.

Nevertheless, biased media attention can have a significant impact on damaged areas. Looking at the example of 3.11, it is clear that media discourses on the disaster differed greatly between the national and social news and the local news. In the national newspapers, the topics of “tsunami” and “earthquake” quickly faded out and

¹¹ Maxwell McCombs, *Setting Agenda: 2nd edition* (Polity Press, 2014).

the NPP accident became dominant in the two weeks following 3.11. In other word, the NPP accident deprived the public attention. The situation was similar on the Internet, including on social networking services (SNS). Although interest in the national media and SNS reflected the interests of metropolitan areas such as Tokyo, and realities of damaged areas in Tohoku go behind.¹²

Behind these trends in media coverage, I have to pointed out several issues on media ecosystem. First is the correlation of media attention between national and social media. Those are influenced by the interests of metropolitan populations who are main user of those media. Generally speaking, stereotyped stories which attracted those media attentions were spread with large number of circulations under the media politics such as metropolitan-centered, resource imbalances, and media politics (e.g. relationships between mass-media and governments called “*kisya* (press)-club”).¹³ In addition, the issue of “under-reporting area”—in which severely damaged municipalities were not reported—is found. Several research groups found that the extent to which a municipality’s damage was reported in the media was affected by factors such as its name recognition prior to the disaster and the existence of a experiences which are easy to make a story on the disaster such as heroic activities, rescue, or straight forward tragedy.¹⁴ In particular, the relationship between the presence or absence of a story surrounding the disaster and the ease of reporting is related to the formation and selection of stereotypical stories surrounding the disaster in the media; the stereotyped stories are consumed and spread rapidly, and other realities of the disaster are discarded.¹⁵

However, when the media coverage of the damaged areas were examined, it is easy to understand the absurdity of lumping all media coverage of 3.11 together; for example, it is clear that even after interest related to the NPP accident became dominant in national newspapers and SNS, *Kahoku Shimpō*, one of the famous block

¹² Mikihiro Tanaka, Ryuma Shineha, and Kiichiro Maruyama, *The Disaster Vulnerable and the Information Vulnerable: What was overlooked after 3.11?* [災害弱者と情報弱者—3・11後、何が見過ごされたのか] (Chikuma Shobo, 2012). (in Japanese); Ryuma Shineha and Mikihiro Tanaka, “Deprivation of Media Attention by Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear accident: Comparison between National and Local Newspaper.” in Joonhong Ahn and Franck Guarnieri eds., *Resilience: A New Paradigm of Nuclear Safety* (Springer 2017), 111-125.

¹³ Mikihiro (2012).

¹⁴ Yoshiyuki Niwa and Masafumi Fujita eds., *The Media Quaked: Television and Radio after the Great East Japan Earthquake* メディアが震えた—テレビ・ラジオと東日本大震災 (University of Tokyo Press, 2013); Akihiko Takano, Shunya Yoshimi, and Shinya Miura, *Information Studies of the 3.11: What and How was Broadcasted by Media 311* 情報学—メディアは何をどう伝えたか (Iwanami Shoten 2012).

¹⁵ Ibid.

newspaper covering the Tohoku region, continued to focus significant attention on the tsunami disaster and document it through their reporting.¹⁶

Valaskivi et al. also conducted a content analysis and topic modeling on emotional framing in articles in national and local newspapers related to 3.11, and they found that while national newspapers mainly reported on “anxiety,” the *Kahoku Shimpō* framed their stories with “anger” and “grief.” In the *Fukushima Minpo*, the framing of *kizuna* (bond) were prominent. In addition, they also found that while other newspapers cited the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and past cases of Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, the *Fukushima Minpo* was distinct from such movements in the way it linked similar themes to the NPP accident.¹⁷

At this time, there is the structure of the “center and periphery” of media discourses and recordings between national, social, and local media. In the lesson-learning practices conducted by a research group of Journalism School of Waseda University, various opinions on media activities associated with 3.11 were collected from journalists in damaged areas. Some issues they unanimously voiced included their frustration that issues they wanted to write about and convey to the local media did not become the media’s central concern, and that the agenda was being set while the framing was off, and the local context of the disaster area was sometimes ignored. The reconstruction of everyday life issues related to compensation in the affected areas, and local changes that occur as time goes by in damaged areas were not covered by the national media, even though the local media tried to make such topics newsworthy.

How will the media focus their attention on the disaster? What will be portrayed? How the social interest in the disaster will be influenced? In this context, how will the reality of the disaster, which is often lost in the record as well as in the press, be captured and described?

5. Issues around “What Could Be Spoken”

In the aftermath of 3.11 and other disasters, research and practices that focus on structural issues (e.g., social vulnerability) that enable disasters and the recovery process have been conducted. At the same time, research groups that focus on the

¹⁶ Tanaka et al. (2012) [note 12]; Shineha and Tanaka (2017) [note 12]; Inamasu Kazunori and Shibauchi Yasufumi, “Research of information ecosystem by analyzing text data after the 3.11 テキストデータを用いた震災後の情報環境の分析,” in Kenichi Ikeda ed., *Studies on Information Media and Network of the 3.11 震災から見える情報メディアとネットワーク*, (Toyo Keizai Shinbunsha, 2015), 47-84; Shibauchi Yasufumi and Inamasu Kazunori, “Features of newspaper, TV, Yahoo! Topics, and Blog articles during the 3.11 disaster 震災期の新聞・TV、Yahoo!トピックス、ブログ記事と投稿の特徴,” in Kenichi Ikeda ed., *idem.*, 85-106.

¹⁷ Katja Valaskivi, Anna Rantasila, Mikihito Tanaka, and Risto Kunelius, *Traces of Fukushima Global Events, Networked Media and Circulating Emotions* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

daily lives and practices of people and their narratives have also accumulated. Relying on this accumulation, the following section will draw on the perspective that focus on “what could be spoken” (i.e., silent narratives)—between “what was spoken” (narratives) and “what will not be spoken”—and possibilities to make silent narratives visible.

Here, I would like to consider two perspectives to draw “what could be spoken”: power of author and structural inability to speak.

(1) Issues on Power of Authors

It is often difficult to express the reality of a disaster in words. However, the question of whether many of the “what could be spoken” are left out of the descriptions and narratives of disasters should still be emphasized. The question can be paraphrased to, “What kind of opportunities and practices describe ‘what could be spoken’ about disasters?”

While writing about disasters is not limited to experts, the descriptions with which authors record written mediums tend to become a kind of official record; in this context, the interests of authors affect their descriptions. At the same time, it is necessary to think about what kinds of “what could be spoken” tends to be neglected.

This simple question also prompts scholars as well as writers, journalists and others to look at the author’s power. What have scholars and writers been trying to see and describe? What have scholars and writers lost or made invisible in their writings on disasters? Here, I would like to refer to the debate on research disaster. In particular, after a disaster, numerous surveys are conducted; even in “normal” times, research surveys can be an annoying activity to informants and local communities.¹⁸ While these surveys are often necessary, it is essential to emphasize the violence of surveys conducted in affected areas, where researchers are rushed to affected areas in the midst of the emergency and reconstruction phases of a disaster.

Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak pointed out the impossibility of the oppressed to “speak,” and the structural oppression of the “speak” in her famous article¹⁹; she simultaneously criticized the power of authors, as it is impossible to be transparent and neutral. More recently in a interview, she criticized the political deceptiveness of authors, who act as if they are speaking for the oppressed:

¹⁸ Tsuneichi Miyamoto, Yuji Ankei, *The Nuisance of Being Surveyed—a Book to Read before Going out into the Field* 調査されるという迷惑—フィールドに出る前に読んでおく本 (Mizunowa Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg ed., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

Some of them are even calling themselves subaltern which is incredibly meretricious and really criminally wrong. They are calling themselves minoritarians and subalterns, the powerful ones, who quickly throw ‘help’ and they go away.²⁰ (p. 66)

At first glance, Spivak’s point may seem to be in a different context from the issue of the description of a disaster. Considering the power structure of the author, Spivak’s point presents an opportunity to reflect on writings about disasters. When scholars and writers write about disasters within a research framework, they discard “what could be spoken,” and our limited descriptions are then characterized as official records. From this perspective, it seems that some may agree that recording narratives of a disaster inevitably has a character of violence due to the power structure of authors; therefore, the possibilities of narratives should be expanded.

(2) The Structural Inability to Speak

The problem of an accumulation of narratives on disasters is not only dependent on authors, but also on structural difficulties of the victims of the disaster who cannot speak.

Ekou Yagi discussed these issues with the perspectives of “structural inability to speak”, based on a study of victims of the 2005 Japanese railway accident (i.e., the Japan Railway West Fukuchiyama Line accident), specifically injured people and their families. Even though they had the motivation to speak about their experiences related to the accident and the effects thereof, their will to speak were often stifled. They often faced to ideas such as, “There are others who have suffered more pain”; and “Is it right for me to speak out as if I represent this terrible damage?” In these cases, they were affected by such condolences as “You were lucky because the injuries were relatively light.” While such words were spoken with good intentions or to encourage others, this is one reason why the structural inability to speak about one’s own damage and hardship was formed²¹. “What was spoken” of the disaster finally emerges in the form of words through the struggle between worries of people about structural inability to speak. Here I emphasized that the structural inability to speak is not just psychological matters. From discussions of Ekou Yagi, it can be pointed out that hesitation to speak their experiences and difficulties on disasters were connected to value system in their society. In other words, their inability to speak about

²⁰ Swapan Chakravorty, Suzana Milevska, and Tani E. Barlow, *Conversation with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (Seagull Books, 2006).

²¹ Ekou Yagi, “Suffering the Effects of Scientific Evidence,” Cleveland et al. eds., *Legacies of Fukushima: 3.11 in Context* [note 10] 169-180.

their experiences on disasters which have their own individual stories is embedded to the society socially and culturally.²²

Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the way to overcome those structural inability to speak about their disaster experiences and memories. It is necessary to describe the diversity of “what was spoken.” Some people begin to speak their stories early on after a disaster, while others wait for a long time after a disaster before they begin to speak. In any case, as described in discussion above, narratives on disasters are spoken amidst a structural inability to speak. Nevertheless, stories that can be spoken are sometimes constructed by fitting them into a stereotype. Moreover, it is precisely because they are fit into a stereotype that they can finally be formed into words.

What means are available to overcome the structural inability to speak and to draw out “what could be spoken” that may come out over time and to make it “what was spoken”?

6. Drawing Out “What Could Be Spoken” and Making It “What Was Spoken”: Two Cases

There have been many attempts to go beyond the structural inability to speak and describe “what could be spoken,” which may come out over time, as in the case of 3.11.

In *Let's Create a Community Archives: The Struggle of the Center for Remembering 3.11*, readers can find an effort of community archiving activity conducted after 3.11 at Sendai Mediatheque, a lifelong learning facility in Sendai City in the Miyagi Prefecture.²³

The Center for Remembering 3.11 (hereafter “*Wasuren!*”)²⁴ attempts to function as a platform and a space that supports citizens who experienced 3.11 to record their experiences related to the disaster. Citizen participants transform their on-site sensations into words and images, and convey them to their contemporaries from the scene. It is a space designed to record dialogue and archive visitors’ “what could be

²² Ibid.

²³ Sato, T., Kai, K., Kitano, H. *Let's Create a Community Archives: The Struggle of the Center for Remembering 3.11 コミュニティ・アーカイブをつくろう！ せんだいメディアテーク「3がつ11にちをわすれないためにセンター」奮闘記* (Shobunsha, 2018). In addition, the author heard about trials and efforts in details from designers and coordinators of *Wasuren!* through organized sessions, seminars, and personal communications.

²⁴ Center for Remembering 3.11, <https://recorder311-e.smt.jp/>

spoken” and receive stories that emerge beyond the structural inability to speak through trial and error.²⁵

The participants are diverse; while some are professionals, most are ordinary citizens living in the Tohoku region, especially in the suburbs of Sendai City in the Miyagi Prefecture, which was devastated by 3.11. After 3.11, they experienced spatial differences and temporal changes associated with disaster. Because they accumulated their disaster memories and “what could be spoken” at the Wasuren!, the archived records at the Wasuren! have very personal characters; for example, a film recorded by a dashboard camera while the driver was traveling by car from the city to the coastal area for approximately an hour conveys to the audience a sense of time and geography of the continuity between the undamaged areas and the destroyed areas of the disaster. In another case, the person filming cannot decide whether or not to record in his familiar place, which was destroyed by the tsunami, so he continued to record everything he saw while he walked around.²⁶

In these cases, recording or speaking about something in a damaged area is in itself a kind of truncation. At the same time, these actions can be seen as a result of the participants’ refusal to accept such truncation.

Wasuren! opened a new trial of their recording house in 2019; this is an experiment in which pairs of people enter a small space to record their stories and emotions related to the disaster through dialogue. The attempt of Wasuren! recording house focused on voices which emerged currently and demonstrates that there are many things that can be spoken over time.²⁷ This also means that the structural inability to speak of the disaster experience is something that has continued. It seems that there are different characters between narratives that emerge right after the disasters - which often were stereotyped- and narratives that emerge after a long time. At least, it should not be overlooked that there are narratives on disasters which can be surfaced after a long time: “what could be spoken.”

I would like to look at another attempt to record “what could be spoken” that comes out beyond the structural inability to speak of the disaster. In the *Record of 3.11 Lamentations: 71 People’s Experiences of the Tsunami, Nuclear Power Plant, and Giant Earthquake*²⁸, individual experiences related to 3.11 are described in quiet discourses, offering a glimpse of the disaster and the loss of important things at that

²⁵ Op. cit. [note 23]; Kai K. “The trial of community archive for the remembering the 3.11 3がつ11にちをわすれないために—コミュニティ・アーカイブの取り組み,” in Ryuma Shineha ed., *Memories and Narratives on Disasters 災禍をめぐる「記憶」と「語り」* (Nakanishiya Press, 2021), 71-111.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Kiyoshi Kanabishi ed., *Record of 3.11 Lamentations: 71 People’s Experiences of the Tsunami, Nuclear Power Plant, and Giant Earthquake* [3.11慟哭の記録: 71人が体感した大津波・原発・巨大地震] (Shinyosya, 2012).

moment. Moreover, in the *Grief and Love: Letters to You on That Day*²⁹, victims expressed their respects and longings for people, hometowns, things, livelihoods, and places that they lost; readers can only imagine that even the words in those books are only a part of their grief and love. There are bereaved families who live with the unspeakable, families with the disaster experience, situations, and countless everyday lives. What readers can touch is only a small part of the individuals who wrote about their extraordinary experiences.

I would like to point out that the difficulty in the series of activities by Kiyoshi Kanabishi³⁰ coincides with Yagi’s discussions³¹ on the structural inability to speak. It is a process of changing “what will not be spoken” into “what could be spoken” over time, as well as a perspective and practice to increase the number of words that emerge beyond the structural inability to speak. It is also the difficulty of preserving “what could be spoken,” which only comes to the surface over a long period of time.

The two cases described here demonstrate that many “what could be spoken” about 3.11 has been gradually become surface according to the time passed.

7. “What Could Be Spoken” Becomes Public

Political scientist Junichi Saito summarized the meaning of publicness as official in the sense that it is an activity conducted by the state for the people through laws and policies; common in the sense that it relates to all people without being biased toward any particular interest as represented by public welfare, etc.; and open in the sense that it is accessible to all; he also discussed the importance of public spaces that are accessible to everyone, spaces that are generated between multiple values and opinions, and spaces where communication over interest in events occur between people.³²

Descriptions of disasters can manifest themselves differently, depending on the time, place, and attributes of a disaster (i.e., parties, recorders, victims, and perpetrators). It is also something that is not expressed in words, but rather in everyday practices, as is sometimes expressed in the phrase “living with disasters.” The reality and the description of such disasters are, however, unequal in their access.

²⁹ Kiyoshi Kanabishi ed., *Grief and Love: Letters to You on That Day* [悲愛—あの日のあなたへ手紙をつづる] (Shinyosya, 2017).

³⁰ Kiyoshi Kanabishi, “Declaration of Defeat in Oral History: A Letter to the Imagined Dead オーラル・ヒストリーの敗北宣言 - 想像の死者へ向けた手紙,” in Yutaka Suga, Katsutaka Hojo eds., *Handbook of Public History in Japan* パブリック・ヒストリー入門—開かれた歴史学への挑戦 (Ben-sei Press, 2019), 308-325.

³¹ Op. cit. [note 22].

³² Junichi Saito, *The Public* 公共性 (Iwanami Press, 2000).

Behind the imbalance in speaking of a disaster and its description in the public record lies the effect of the distribution of stereotyped stories based on biased media interest, the large amount of “what will not be spoken” due to the inability to speak the reality against the background of the structural inability to speak, and the framing of authors. In any case, these are the problems of various narratives and many instances of “what could be spoken” being discarded in the process of forming a description.

However, this also makes us look at the possibilities of “what could be spoken” on disasters and the meaning of seeking a way to hold on to these possibilities. The activities previously mentioned such as *Wasuren!* can be described as an attempt to correct the imbalance in access to discourses on disasters and to build richer discourses. Securing opportunities and venues for the representation and accumulation of “what could be spoken” on a disaster will provide a foundation that makes our discourse on the reality surrounding the disasters possible.

The many instances of “what will not be spoken” about a disaster will become “what could be spoken” through archive activities such as *Wasuren!*. Open, common, and continuous archive platforms for various disaster experiences increase the number of visible narratives and serve them as a public goods to deepen our understanding of the various realities of a disaster. The accumulation of such narratives about disasters is an important way to counter the “reconstructive disaster,” and the violence that emerges in the wake of disasters time that Naomi Klein discussed with such terms as disaster capitalism and shock doctrine.³³

8. Epilogue: My Personal Experience in Namie Town

Finally, I would like to write down of my personal experience. Figure 2 shows time-lined changes of my grandfather’s house in Namie Town, which was destroyed by a strong earthquake during 3.11. Our family were forced to leave it as it was for nearly seven years, due to the mandatory isolation and decontamination process, during which time the house gradually collapsed. Decontamination was eventually conducted at the house in 2017, and the backyard was occupied by flexible container bags with removed soils and other debris. The house was finally removed in 2018, and now there is only empty land. Nothing remains of our house.

³³ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Metropolitan Books, 2007). Klein examined governmental violent politics such as sudden passages of bills, changes of regulatory frameworks on migration and housing, and other political activities based on neoliberalism which occurred just after the big disaster. She called those changes as term “disaster capitalism” and “shock doctrine.”



Figure 2 The time-lined changes of a house in the Namie Town. Left: 24th July 2014. Center: 6th March 2017. Right: 13th November 2021.

Frankly speaking, it was an interesting experience. Even though I eventually accepted the situation in 2015, when I looked at the removed house, various thoughts and emotions rose up. I feel angry, an emotion that did not previously exist in my mind. Realities are changing, and ideas and emotional changes have finally surfaced in my case.

This is one of the experiences of “what could be spoken” has surfaced for me. Until this moment, I had written several academic publications concerning 3.11. I had taken issues on author’s power into my heart, inspired by Spivak’s discussions. I had to be aware of the moment when my activity of description changed.

This marked a new beginning in my relationship with the issues concerning author’s power. It raised questions about how to confront the process of writing about disasters’ memory and lessons, how to collect and archive many instances of “what could be spoken,” and how to overcome “structural inability to speak”. These questions continue to be asked. Trial and errors such as *Wasren!* showed us a lot of insights and experiences relevant to these questions. I believe that disaster experts will continue to consider these issues with archiving trials of “what could be spoken”.

Abstract

When we discuss the generation and sharing of narratives concerning disaster memories, it is essential to consider various issues such as the stereotyping of stories due to the media discourses and the focus thereof, the discarding of narratives for the authors' framings, and the issues on overlooking of "what will not be spoken." This paper examines the possibilities and perspectives of drawing out "what could be spoken" on disaster, which are often discarded in the formation of descriptions and discourses on disasters, considering discussions and practices related to the Great East Japan Earthquake, which occurred on the March 11, 2011 (3.11). This paper will discuss effects of changes of realities, media framings, power of authors, and structural inability to speak for the discourses on disaster. And then, I will consider the possibility of accumulating and describing of "what will not be spoken" on disaster and their public values for disaster memories and lessons through analysis of archive practices of discourses and experiences on 3.11.

Keywords: 3.11, Disaster memory, Narratives, Community Archive, What could be spoken, Subaltern