

UC Santa Cruz

UC Santa Cruz Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

The Long After: Disaster and Information Politics in Post-Quake Kobe, Japan

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/45t8844m>

Author

Takaki Richardson, Carla Ann

Publication Date

2014

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**THE LONG AFTER: DISASTER AND INFORMATION POLITICS
IN POST-QUAKE KOBE, JAPAN**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

ANTHROPOLOGY

by

Carla Takaki Richardson

June 2014

The Dissertation of
Carla Takaki Richardson is
approved:

Professor Melissa L. Caldwell, Chair

Professor Noriko Aso

Professor Donald L. Brenneis

Professor Anna L. Tsing

Tyrus Miller
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Copyright © by
Carla Takaki Richardson
2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	v
ABSTRACT	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
PREFACE	1
CHAPTER 1: A Catastrophe of Knowledge	4
“Disasters are not theoretical”	13
Interrogating Crisis	16
Commensurating Crisis	20
An Industry of Abstraction	23
Uncertainty and Affect	27
A Tectonic Story	31
<i>Saiaku no Toshi</i> (The Worst Year)	34
Situating the Field	39
“Deep Kobe”	42
Dissertation Overview	54
CHAPTER 2: An Ethics of Relationality	58
Trajectories	61
Crossroads	67
In the Aftermath of Violent Change	73
An Archive for the Future to Remake the Past	82
CHAPTER 3: The Politics of No Politics	94
Disaster and Community Participation	99
Activism from the Ashes	116
Civic Histories	124
Information as a Site for Political Critique	132
CHAPTER 4: Failure and the Limits of Experience	143
The Possibilities of Failure	148
Recuperating the Past	154
Reorienting Failures	161
Learning from Experience	165
The Impulse to Tell	173
Continuous Histories	178
CHAPTER 5: Aestheticizing Safety	181
Ubiquity and Attention	188
Distributed Anxiety	190
Saying Too Much	193
Airwave Aesthetics	196
Broadcasting Community, Broadcasting Care	201
Disasters in common	213
CHAPTER 6: Conclusions	219

EPILOGUE: Another Tectonic Story	233
A Triple Disaster	235
The View from Kobe	243
A view from anthropology	245
BIBLIOGRAPHY	247

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. A visitor at a Hanshin Earthquake memorial exhibit at the Nagata Labor Day fair, 2010.....	45
Figure 2. Members of the Hamaishi Disaster Prevention Club during a disaster role-playing exercise.	107
Figure 3. Safety evacuation sign at Okurayama Park, Kobe.	183
Figure 4. Advertisement for a disaster preparedness drill in Nagata Ward.	185
Figure 5. External view of the Disaster and Human Renovation Institution, Happy Active Town, Kobe.	220
Figure 6. Disaster Prevention Center visitors experiencing an earthquake reenactment, Rinkû Town, Osaka, 2009.	228
Figure 7. Mobile earthquake shake-table (<i>jishin-sha</i>) in front of the Disaster and Human Renovation Institution, 2010.	228

ABSTRACT

Carla Takaki Richardson

The Long After: Disaster and Information Politics in Post-Quake Kobe, Japan

This dissertation investigates the practices and politics of disaster information in Kobe, Japan in the years following the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Kobe was the site of Japan's worst urban disaster since World War II; the earthquake catalyzed nationwide changes to Japanese disaster preparedness and also became symbolic of the social, economic, and technological failures that plagued the "lost decade" of 1990s Japan. This study draws upon 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in multiple fieldsites: formal and informal associations including a community radio station, a citizen-led emergency preparedness club, disaster research collaborations among scholars and citizens, and finally, the city of Kobe itself. Through ethnographic data from participant observation, media analyses, and interviews, I show how earthquake survivors, researchers, and activists characterized the disaster as a catastrophe of knowledge. Such a portrayal describes a lack of information (*jôhô busoku*) – from residents' unawareness of Kobe as an active fault zone to victims' frustrations about locating loved ones, shelter, and food – as a primary reason for why the earthquake was not just a natural disaster, but also a human-made catastrophe. Problematizing the disaster as a failure of knowledge has resulted in the continual production of disaster preparedness information (*bôsai jôhô*) in Kobe. The abundance of

disaster information in Kobe illustrates the desire of disaster prevention researchers and activists to educate Kobe residents. At the same time, however, such information has become so ubiquitous that it risks becoming hidden in plain sight. This dissertation thus shows some of the strategies by which disaster prevention workers try to convince residents to become involved in securing their own safety. Further, these narratives of earthquake safety emphasize the importance of associational ties, as neighbors and community groups may prove to be lifesaving relationships during times of emergency. I argue that disaster prevention workers' focus on practices of neighborly intimacy and care are also keyed to broader social transformations of the 1990s, during which popular discourses anxiously affirmed the erosion of national values of connection and community. Finally, I suggest that disaster prevention workers use the Hanshin Earthquake as a way of creating a continuous history that recuperates both the failures of the earthquake and the perceived failures of contemporary Japanese society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Counting one's blessings is a lovely, humbling exercise. I am grateful beyond measure to the great many people who have brought me here. First, I extend my appreciation to the friends and acquaintances in Kobe, Osaka, and Tokyo who offered extraordinary hospitality during my sojourn there at various periods between 2007 – 2011. I hope the words here do some justice to the stories you all shared with me. I wish to especially thank Yoshitomi Shizuyo, Hibino Jun'ichi, Kim Chiaki, Kondo Seiji, Okawa Taeko, Sanda Kaoru, Iino Kenji, and Yoshimoto Kazuhiro. I am grateful for the kind mentorship of professors Yamauchi Naoto and Morita Atsuro at Osaka University and David Slater at Sophia University. Kimura Shuhei and Takano Sayaka provided a vision of an anthropological life lived sincerely. Other friends, including Fujii Eiko, Shigemoto Chiyoko, Yamamoto Atsuko, Tanahashi Toshio, and Kawaguchi Makiko provided hours of lively conversation and welcome breaks from fieldwork. My teachers, particularly Yazawa Michiko and Noborizato Tamiko, were endlessly supportive and patient.

A number of grants made my graduate and dissertation work possible. I thank the National Science Foundation's East Asia & Pacific Science Institute and the UC Santa Cruz Center for Tropical Research in Ecology, Agriculture, and Development (CENTREAD) for preliminary fieldwork

funding. My language study was made possible by the Japan Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education's Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) program. The NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program provided invaluable pre-dissertation and write-up support, and the Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Research Fellowship program and the Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Research Abroad fellowship program offered generous fieldwork funding.

I thank also the people who led me to anthropology when I was living in Colorado and taking classes just for fun: Carole McGranahan remains a model for taking joy in one's work and life, and Carla Jones exemplifies sophistication and warmth. It was my good fortune to move from one beautiful place to another: UC Santa Cruz. My colleagues in the department provided inspiration and fun in equal measure. In particular, I thank Miel Alegre, Sarah Bakker-Kellogg, Celina Callahan-Kapoor, Stephanie Chan, Sarah Chee, Nellie Chu, Rebecca Feinberg, Bill Girard, Peter Leykam, Aviva Sinervo, Heather Swanson, and Jess Watson for their friendship and feedback over the years. Susan Boonman-Berson has been a generous editing partner, and Irene Dutton has made sure to remind me that a world exists outside of school. Fred Deakin and Allyson Ramage, as well as the entire Anthropology department staff, are unsung heroes.

Among my many beloved teachers, in particular I thank Noriko Aso, Raoul Birnbaum, Don Brenneis, Alan Christy, Miyako Inoue, Dan Linger,

Carolyn Martin-Shaw, Andrew Mathews, and Anna Tsing. Words fail to express my gratitude to and admiration for Lissa Caldwell.

To my parents, thank you for your endless support and encouragement. To Jonathan, I'm so happy we're adventuring together. And to Jonah, I'm sorry this isn't an ethnography of choo-choo trains. Maybe that will be our next project.

PREFACE

This study charts disaster information politics in relation to the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (hereafter referred to as the Hanshin Earthquake), which occurred at 5:46 am on January 17, 1995.¹ The following chapters go into detail about the social, political, and economic afterlives of the earthquake, but here I provide summary details of the catastrophe.

The same seismic forces that created the basins and plains that have attracted urban development in Japan are also the ones that have caused massively destructive urban earthquakes in Tokyo and Kobe. While Kobe residents were unaware of the stress building below their feet, for several hundred thousand years geological tension had been building under the sea off of Osaka Bay. On January 17, 1995, the Nojima and Suwayama faults running directly under Awaji Island, a small populated island in the Seto Inland Sea near Kobe, suddenly ruptured and released geological stress along faults that had until then been considered of minor significance. The energy produced forced one plate up and the other under it, leaving a jagged, gaping scar across part of the island. It also displaced the Nojima fault by 1.5 meters.

The resulting earthquake, which the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) calls the Hyogo-ken Nanbu (Southern Hyogo Prefecture) Earthquake,

¹ In Japanese the earthquake is most commonly called the *Hanshin-Awaji Daishinsai* (Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake); this refers to the geographic locations in which the earthquake occurred (Hanshin refers to the Osaka-Kobe area, and Awaji refers to Awaji Island). It is often abbreviated in conversation as *Hanshin Daishinsai*. In English the quake is often referred to as the "Kobe Earthquake."

lasted approximately 20 seconds and registered 7.3 on the Richter scale. Its location and geological characteristics exacerbated damages: the quake is classified as an inland shallow earthquake caused by a slip-strike fault. Tremors from shallow-focus earthquakes (those that occur at depths less than 70 meters below ground) are experienced as more violent and cause greater damage than deep-focus earthquakes. The JMA also uses the *shindo* (seismic intensity) scale to measure the felt degree of shaking on the surface of the earth, and gave the Hanshin Earthquake the strongest rating (on a scale of 0 to 7) of *shindo* 7. It was the first earthquake to receive the strongest rating since the *shindo* system was implemented.²

Approximately 82 hectares of land, mostly within three wards within the city, were destroyed by fire on January 17 and 18 (Edgington 2010: 50). The final tally of destruction provides some indication of the breadth of the quake and ensuing conflagration: 6,434 dead, more than 40,000 injured, nearly 100,000 homes destroyed, and 320,000 people evacuated to overcrowded shelters at public schools and parks. The city of Kobe's population at the time of the earthquake was 1.5 million, an estimated 100,000 of whom permanently left the city after the disaster (Horwich 2000).

The following chapters are based on ethnographic data obtained from Kobe 15 years after the Hanshin Earthquake. While by the time of my fieldwork most material traces of the earthquake had been cleaned from the

² After the Hanshin Earthquake, the JMA revised the *shindo* scale to allow for increased granularity by splitting levels 5 and 6 into two (5 lower, 5 upper, 6 lower, and 6 upper).

urban landscape, a central premise of this dissertation is that the social, political, and economic consequences of disaster abides far beyond the point at which official recovery and reconstruction periods end.

CHAPTER 1: A Catastrophe of Knowledge

Nearly two decades after the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake of January 17, 1995, people living in Japan at the time still remember the nonstop media coverage in the days following the catastrophe. One of the most famous of these moments consists of an extraordinary two-minute encounter between a NHK reporter and a survivor filmed during the initial chaos on the afternoon of the quake. The camera follows a male reporter as he approaches a man standing in front of a house in Higashi Nada ward that had collapsed, along with its neighboring homes, into a towering pile of rubble and splintered wood.³

The man, wearing a dark ski cap, padded nylon navy blue jacket, black slacks, and wire-rimmed bifocal eyeglasses that were partially flipped up, stood in front of the house in a daze. Speaking in the regional Kansai dialect, the reporter asks if there is anyone remaining inside the house. Hands in his pockets, the man gapes at the reporter and stands, as if surprised to see a journalist before him. It seems that his distraction and politeness make him willing to answer the reporter's questions. He answers yes, forcing out the words, "My family is, my family...my wife and elder son." He continues, pointing to the collapsed house next door, "And my cousin and his wife over

³ Higashi Nada ward is located on the easternmost edge of the city and stretches north-south from Mount Rokko down to the coast of the Seto Inland Sea. The area suffered particularly heavy destruction in the form of partial and total building collapses.

there.” The camera zooms onto the man’s face as he turns away to survey the ruins of the house again. He looks helpless, bewildered. He paces a little, turning his body to and from the interviewer, occasionally looking again at the reporter’s face as if he had not heard what was being asked of him.

The reporter inquires about whether the Self Defense Force or other rescue workers had come to help.⁴ The man does not answer, instead saying that he had been in Osaka working, and had had to walk home from Amagasaki, a distance of about nine miles. As he tells this story he stops often, squinting his face in bemused concentration. His sentences trail off, and he is slightly out of breath, bobbing his head, exhausted polite bows enacting themselves through bodily memory. As he looks back upon what had been his home, it seems as if he has forgotten the NHK crew standing before him.

Suddenly, in an entrance so cinematically timed that it feels surreal, a young man on a motorbike speeds toward the man and the camera, yelling, “Father!” The man turns, forgetting the camera entirely, and runs toward the oncoming bike yelling, “Masaki! You’re alive!” He grabs and shakes his son by the lapels of his jacket, while Masaki, wearing a helmet and with a cigarette loosely dangling from his mouth, pauses. Slowly, he says to his father, “Listen carefully (*yoku kîteyo*).” He stops again, takes a breath, and tells the father that he has rescued his older brother Yoshiki, who is now in the

⁴ There is no comprehensive entity responsible for responding to natural disasters in Japan, such as FEMA in the United States. Rather, disaster response has traditionally been coordinated (to varying degrees of effectiveness, according to critics) between multiple agencies at various levels of government; the Self Defense Force can be called by the central government to provide immediate disaster relief.

hospital. “*Okâsan* (mother)...,” he begins, and then trails off. The camera shakily whirls around to capture the face of the father, who impatiently nods at his son to continue. He turns toward the collapsed house and stares as if studying it, as the son continues: “She’s stuck between the table and the wall. You can see her face. You can see, but... You can’t get her out until rescue gets here.”

The father interrupts, interrogating Masaki with a staccattoed, “Is she dead? Is she dead? She’s dead?” Outside of the camera’s gaze, the son must have nodded to the father, because his face suddenly collapses. He begins to look angry. With his lips pursed, he raises his arm and strikes futilely at the air while taking a great step forward to kick at the rubble before him. When the force of his kick makes him overshoot and spin a little, his foot gets stuck in some of the debris, and he wheels his body around in order to free it. As he shakes himself loose he gives a short grunting yell. The camera quickly pans out, and then the son calls for the father to get on the bike; they must go to the hospital to see Yoshiki. The father stops for a moment, collecting himself. Nodding, he pushes up his glasses with his right index finger and shuffles to the bike. Suddenly calm, he mounts and turns, in a final polite gesture to the cameraman and reporter, to quickly bow his head to them as he leaves with a final, “*hai*.” The son follows suit, and the camera watches them speed away.

The grace with which the man took leave of the journalist even after receiving such devastating news, coupled with the background scene of raw, total disaster, provoked an enormously empathetic response among viewers

nationwide. The footage was aired repeatedly, along with later follow-up segments on the family. The brief encounter has also been archived in several different videos on YouTube where fellow users in Japan, some of whom remember watching the story on television in 1995, have left comments sharing their recollections.⁵ One viewer with the screen name of koropomekuta wrote, “I also saw this on the news. I remember him clearly, the man who lost his mother, that man on the scooter. Disasters are tragedies.” Another YouTube user going by the name of Yuino555 added, “I saw this and remembered watching it as if it were yesterday. My tears won’t stop.” YouTube users who claimed to be earthquake survivors also left numerous comments, including the user named heisinn who wrote, “I’m one of the people who experienced the Hanshin earthquake. I understand the impatience of those victims so well that it makes me cry.”

Indeed, the brief clip plays out other unbearably similar experiences that were not caught on film. Many of the stories I have seen and heard in my research share common features regarding the challenges faced by quake survivors, particularly those who were displaced from their homes. I outline a few of these experiences and frustrations here in terms illustrated by the NHK footage.

First, the man’s journey from Amagasaki to Kobe by foot was one of many logistical hurdles faced by residents and emergency workers in the wake of the earthquake. So-called “lifelines” (*raifurain*) — transportation

⁵ Multiple YouTube users have posted copies of the clip. This is one site: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ffi0RAULNI&feature=youtube_gdata

arteries, water pipes, electricity and such — were often simply not available in the immediate days after the quake, and even for weeks after. In some cases lifelines even inhibited rescue efforts. For example, the city's loss of water pressure consigned firefighters in some areas to struggle futilely with hoses that could not connect water with fire. A recently-built state-of-the-art elevated expressway that had been proclaimed by engineers to be earthquake-resistant simply cracked into pieces. Swaths of the expressway tumbled to the ground, where asphalt shards and other debris formed barriers that stymied rescue workers and those who sought to leave Kobe or traverse the city to check on relatives and friends.

Second, the references to the Self Defense Force (*jieitai*), police, and rescue workers — and the deserted look of the street in the background — hint at the dearth of help available to victims scattered across Kobe and the greater Hanshin region.⁶ The delay with which Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama and the central government reacted to the disaster meant that far too few rescue workers were dispatched to the disaster zone too late for many. This led to a national discussion of blame for the dead who might still be living if only the crucial rescue window in the hours immediately after the quake had not been allowed to pass in confusion, bureaucratic indecision, and botched communication between the municipal governments and central

⁶ *Hanshin* denotes the greater metropolitan areas of Kobe, Osaka, and the smaller cities between them.

governments.⁷ It would also lead to widespread political changes and expressions of dissatisfaction with a government perceived as too rule-bound and Tokyo-centric.

And third, the clip highlights a central claim of this dissertation: that survivors and observers see the Hanshin Earthquake as a catastrophe of knowledge. In the immediate hours and days following the quake, the city existed in what Sato Kenji (2007) has termed an "information vacuum" (*jôhôte kûhaku*): a situation in which those within the vacuum experience a desperate, unmet need for practical information (83). Real, usable information such as evacuation instructions or *anpi jôhôte* (messages left in search of the whereabouts or condition of friends and family) is distinct from what was seen by many Kobe residents as the disrespectful, untoward lengths to which Tokyo-based media were willing to go in pursuit of a good story. The NHK interviews and footage taken after the quake was broadcast nationwide around the clock, with the tacit assumption that its primary audience was viewing the coverage safely from their homes in Tokyo, far from the devastation.⁸ Locally, survivors of the quake felt a growing resentment toward NHK and other national news outlets, who were sending journalists to report on the damage even as families, like the one in the video described

⁷ Japan consists of 47 prefectures. Kobe is located in Hyogo Prefecture (*Hyogo ken*), while Osaka and Tokyo are considered special cases and form their own bureaucratic unit called *fu* and *to*, respectively. While Kobe City is part of a prefecture, like Osaka and Tokyo it also enjoys special status and is administered somewhat autonomously from the Hyogo prefectural government.

⁸ For example, the linking premise for novelist Haruki Murakami's 2002 collection of short stories, *After the Quake* (*Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru*), is the image of strangers in Tokyo all watching the Kobe disaster unfold from their living room televisions.

above, still had relatives and friends trapped in rubble. In some cases the media was blamed for inadvertently hindering rescue efforts; the percussive whomping of news helicopters hampered communication among aid workers on the ground. One of my interlocutors, a quake survivor named Nishida who at the time was a young mother of two, told me the constant circling of helicopters made her so angry that one morning she stood outside on her front steps, still clad in her bathrobe, and screamed futilely at a helicopter overhead.

Indeed, the outside mass media was often derided by survivors as an irrelevant nuisance. Televised news broadcasts were not viewable by survivors without electricity; information about the scope and scale of the disaster flowed outward, but did not circulate in the very areas where they could have made a crucial difference in the lives of victims and their families. Instead, local survivors relied on *kuchikomi* (word of mouth) and hand-printed *chirashi* (flyers), quickly drawn and mimeographed newsletters, and other ad hoc forms of communication.⁹ These synchronous and asynchronous modes of information were used to request and exchange intelligence about missing loved ones, food, shelter, and bathing facilities.

After the initial rescue and response period, information continued to sound a theme in discussions about why the Hanshin quake had been such a disaster in a country that was supposed to have been better prepared.

Information (*jôhô*) became a locus for national conversations about why Kobe

⁹ See Sasaki-Uemura (2002) for a discussion of the political history of such forms of communication.

residents had not known that they were living in an active earthquake zone, and how residents should have known that they had been in danger. Analyses that ascribed Kobe's unpreparedness to information shortages (*jôhôte busoku*) subsequently led to the earthquake's rich afterlife in the form of disaster information (*saigai jôhôte*) and disaster preparedness information (*bôsai jôhôte*).¹⁰ In general, *saigai jôhôte* focuses on urgent disaster information such as broadcast emergency evacuation warnings, while *bôsai jôhôte* captures a diverse array of materials including radio dramas, technical reports, poetry, and dances for children. The lively production and circulation of such forms of information continues in Kobe nearly twenty years after the quake, and is aimed at correcting the perceived social, political, and technoscientific failures made manifest by the Kobe disaster.

Finally, I draw attention to the double nature of the footage. The clip contains the individual story of a man and his family that remains vivid in the memories of viewers. But it is also a material artifact in itself, which continues to exist in the NHK archives and as YouTube videos that have traveled far from their initial context as post-disaster footage. In addition to its archival value as a real-time view of disaster, the clip has become a node for public memory through its afterlives on NHK television and subsequent revival on YouTube. Its doubled forms — as both historical data and as a

¹⁰ As I imply earlier, there is a temporal difference in these terms. *Saigai jôhôte* is typically information aired in times of actual emergency or potential disaster (*saigaiji*). As such this information tends to focus on official warning information. *Bôsai jôhôte*, or disaster prevention/preparedness information, is a more general term. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the English term “disaster information” to encompass both *saigai jôhôte* and *bôsai jôhôte*.

mediated experience, both content and form — makes it an example of the central concern of this study.

Indeed, the clip points to the organizing question of this dissertation: how the 1995 Hanshin Earthquake became characterized as a tremendous social, political, and technoscientific catastrophe of knowledge. I examine how the disaster catalyzed public debates about residents' safety and triggered knowledge-making projects that put into practice an ethos of democratic participation and neighborly intimacy. Specifically, I argue that the continued production and circulation of disaster information are not just attempts to remedy the disaster information vacuum experienced after the Hanshin quake, but are also efforts to reestablish a sense of relationality, community, and shared values perceived as receding in contemporary Japanese life. Moreover, I suggest that disaster prevention workers attempt to provoke others into such a relationship by carefully attending to the formal and sensual aesthetic qualities of the information they create. These aesthetic qualities might take material form in cute, friendly-looking disaster prevention mascots, such as those I discuss in Chapter 5. But such aesthetics are just as likely to be aural or otherwise sensed: radio producers, for example, try to inspire listeners to prepare for disasters by inflecting their voices with neighborly intimacy.

Disaster planners' efforts, however, may be stymied by the population they are trying to reach: safety information in the Japanese urban environment is so ubiquitous that many residents simply disregard it as mere

“noise.” I discuss these issues in greater detail in the following chapters. First, however, I address an initial challenge posed by some of my interlocutors about the ethics of studying disaster, and even its relevance to anthropological study.

“Disasters are not theoretical”

A friend, a gentleman in his 60s who lives in the nearby city of Ashiya, was one of many quake survivors I met in Kobe. While he escaped without injury, Toshio had discovered and stayed with the crushed body of his neighbor until emergency workers arrived. During one of our get-togethers, he grew visibly agitated when I explained to him, in a way that I came to regret, that I was interested in the social theoretical aspect of disasters.

“Disasters are NOT theoretical,” he immediately replied. He added bluntly, “I have no idea how one could even think of them as theoretical. I don’t understand it.” I agree with him; to insensitively suggest, as I had, that disaster might have value in an abstract way did not properly acknowledge that the earthquake had profound effects on humans and non-humans in visceral ways that are beyond my experience.

Yet, the fact that he felt so strongly about my remark – even 15 years after the quake – also suggests that disasters are worth thinking about as an experience that reverberates through lives and places. I maintain that disasters can provide useful information in terms of social theory, especially on matters of memory, trauma, and expertise. Toshio’s response

demonstrates that there is no endpoint to disaster; the emotions and memories attached to the experience have been sustained long after the rebuilding of Kobe. Moreover, what has become clear in the decade and a half following the quake is that the disaster is not a single, solitary, extraordinary happening. It has taken on a social, historical life that must be considered as part of a more sustained upheaval in Japan that breaches any sort of temporal or categorical boundaries we might try to place around the disaster itself.

Indeed, disasters everywhere lend themselves to scrutiny because they often become unwelcome catalysts of sociopolitical change. The degree to which catastrophe compels the imagination is underscored by its very definition. The Oxford English Dictionary defines catastrophe as "an event producing a subversion of the order or system of things." The famous Lisbon earthquake and tsunami of 1755, for example, became a political, religious, and scientific flashpoint in Enlightenment Europe. The devastation it wrought and the scientific-philosophical problems it generated became a subject in writings from Voltaire to Immanuel Kant and Walter Benjamin. Similarly, writer Rebecca Solnit (2009) focuses on the productivity of disaster; her narrative of the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 describes the catastrophe as a kind of "utopia" that fostered conviviality among survivors.

While the apparent upending of social order caused by sudden disaster may compel social change, scholars such as Charles Perrow (1994) also insist that the great trick accomplished by catastrophe is its upending of our sense of reality, rather than reality itself. Perrow convincingly argues that

accidents — not safety — are “normal” and inevitable. In a time when so many of our socioeconomic and technological processes rely on the complex coordination of people, places, and things, it is actually a wonder that accidents do not happen with greater frequency. Further, the fact that disaster is inevitable illustrates the magical thinking involved in our belief that catastrophes subvert the natural order of things when, in fact, disasters are reliable both in their destruction and in their reoccurrence. Nevertheless, their spectacular nature allows us to see failures within sociopolitical life, such as insufficient infrastructure or social vulnerability, that are best visible when thrown into relief. Accordingly, disasters are a point of many attachments — of history, social structure, science, affect, and of politics in general. Writing on the social and political afterlives of the Chernobyl disaster, Adriana Petryna (2002) calls catastrophe a “prism” in the way it allows us to see already-existing social problems differently, and to potentially analytically productive ends (215).

This view is supported by a growing number of multidisciplinary-minded scholars of natural disasters (see Erickson 1994; Hewitt 1995, 1997; Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002; Lakoff 2007; 2010; Mileti 1999). These scholars attend to both the technoscientific and sociopolitical bases of catastrophes and stress that disasters are not instantaneous experiences from which people and places steadily recover.¹¹ They advocate instead for a much

¹¹ The field of disaster studies still leans heavily toward the natural sciences and sociologists. With few exceptions such as Oliver-Smith (1999), anthropologists tend not to identify as “disaster scholars,” even if — like Fortun (2001) and Petryna (2002)

more holistic understanding of catastrophe, and have pushed policymakers and the public to understand that disasters are not simply one-off events; people deal with the aftereffects of loss after a hurricane in as prolonged a way as someone who lost a family member or a job. As anthropologist Shuhei Kimura (2005) notes, in many cases, these losses are compounded: not only are people living with the experience of an acute trauma, but they must also live with the oftentimes messily bureaucratic necessities of insurance claims, the difficult financial decisions forced upon them by lost wages or the devastating deaths or injuries of loved ones. All of these truths lived by survivors demand recognition of catastrophes as long-term events.

Interrogating Crisis

And yet, this dissertation seeks to temper the temptation to label disasters including the Hanshin earthquake as an extraordinary, chronic crisis. This is not to deny its devastating impact on thousands of people, the entire national economy of Japan, or the political trajectory of Japanese civil society. Instead I call attention to the many ways in which the earthquake has become enfolded into contemporary Japanese life such that it has become not simply a single event from which people and society might recover, but an historical presence that has affected the daily lives of Japanese.

— their subject of inquiry deals directly with disaster. One reason for this is the disaster studies field's traditional emphasis on so-called natural calamities (such as earthquakes) rather than (again, so-called) "human-made" disasters caused by chemical pollution or nuclear accidents.

But what are the implications of considering the Hanshin earthquake, and natural and technoscientific disasters in general, as a crisis? Lauren Berlant (2011) argues that for nearly a century, trauma has been the conventional genre scholars have used "for describing the historical present as the scene of an exception that has just shattered some ongoing, uneventful ordinary life that was supposed just to keep going on and with respect to which people felt solid and confident" (17). Crisis, she adds, "is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming" (ibid.). To Berlant, crisis has become the constant background hum to which people live out their everyday lives. She describes this condition as "crisis ordinariness," offering the term as one way of understanding the "incoherence of lives" of those who are seen to exist in the convergence of histories – one supposedly seamless, one violently interrupted (ibid.).

Similar to Berlant, Janet Roitman (2014) critiques social scientists' use of crisis as a post hoc analytic because it necessarily leads to the teleological question of "what went wrong?" Such a question prefigures a rupture between a history that "is," and the one that "ought" to have been (94). I return to her point in Chapter 4. For now, however, Berlant and Roitman's arguments that crisis and trauma as overdetermining analytics suggests that natural disasters may also benefit from being thought of as "ordinary crises" or, in Perrow's terms, "normal accidents." This path allows us to consider how, in many ways, the earthquake was an expression of social, economic,

and political crises that had already existed and would continue to exist, but which had been laid bare in a single catastrophic moment. In this view, the Hanshin earthquake is both the product of upheaval and a symptom of it.

While both Roitman and Berlant critique the use of crisis as an analytic, they do not necessarily disagree that there is a sustained sense of anxiety that suffuses contemporary life. In this way both treat the symptoms of crisis as a modern development of the last century or, particularly in Roitman's case study of the U.S. 2008 subprime mortgage crisis, even more recent. Anne Allison's (2013) ethnographic description of "precarious Japan" offers a corollary, in which twenty- and thirty-something year old members of Japan's "lost generation" are unable to establish "adult" lives because they are caught in a constant struggle for socioeconomic footing as they drift between temporary and part-time jobs. Crucially for all three thinkers, ordinary crisis is endemic to the capitalist present.

Yet certainly analytics of trauma and crisis could also apply elsewhere and to other times, such as the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake and disaster-prone places such as Japan. Indeed, natural disasters and geological threats offer a sense of proportion to the idea of modern crisis structured by neoliberal capitalism. The very earth beneath the Japanese archipelago is geologically unstable and, as scholars such as Kitahara Itoko (2006) and Boumsong Kim (2007) have shown, the threat of seismic upheavals in the region has been constant. Such a threat has served as a continual source of philosophical and religious conjecture, political pressures, and infrastructural challenges. I

suggest that seismically active places such as Japan thereby offer an alternative way of thinking about “crisis ordinariness” beyond the terms set by a capitalism-ordered present, to a many-layered present also structured in part by what we often do not even think about: the ancient, literal ground beneath our feet. Those who live and have lived in places such as Japan, Turkey, and California expect to live life on a stable earth, but are also aware — perhaps by some more than others — of the ever-present possibility that the same ground could disappear without notice. Yet for many reasons, we persist in these places anyway. Arthur Kleinman (2006) writes that danger and the uncertainty of when danger might turn into an emergency is an “inescapable dimension of life” that makes lives matter (2). Solnit agrees: when she experienced the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, her petty bad mood evaporated instantaneously because, she writes, she was “thrown into an intensely absorbing present” (2009: 4).

Further, as Roitman implies, the contingencies at which crisis hints is a more useful heuristic than labeling a place or time as “in crisis.” Postsocialist Russia anthropologist Olga Shevchenko (2009) makes the key point that “crisis has to do with security and control as much as with instability and powerlessness” (11). As an alternative to crisis, Hirokazu Miyazaki and Annelise Riles (2005) offer the idea of hope: their discussion of Japanese corporate traders’ self-improvement practices illustrate the possibilities enabled by uncertainty. In a later work, Miyazaki (2013) similarly describes Japanese corporate arbitrageurs’ dreams and business schemes despite the

ever-present potential of economic and personal failure. Hanshin earthquake survivors, too, describe their experiences and plans for the future more in Miyazaki's terms of hope, however modest, than one of constant crisis or "chronic disaster" (Erikson 1994).

Commensurating Crisis

If disaster challenges categorical and temporal boundaries of crisis, trauma, and the ordinary, then we require tools that can help make sense of disaster. One method disaster managers themselves have employed is to think laterally across disasters. Those involved in disaster prevention projects frequently discuss disasters in the aggregate and in comparison with one another. I discuss these narratives of "lessons learned" in Chapters 2 and 4, but here I focus on its underlying logic of commensuration.

The practice of distilling highly-specific disasters into a grid of events that can be compared across time and place depends upon the practice of commensuration, which Espeland and Stevens (1998) define as "the expression or measurement of characteristics normally represented by different units according to a common metric" (315).¹² Drawing out similar characteristics among a particular category of experience allows for comparison within that category. At its most effective, this work allows inherently unlike things — car accidents and airplane crashes, for example — to be treated under the broad category of "transportation accidents." Such a

¹² See also Hacking (2003, 2006) for a discussion of the historical (European) underpinnings of this practice. See also Ewald (1991) and O'Malley (2002, 2003), among others, on how these logics are practiced through fields such as insurance.

process renders them into comparable events. Espeland and Stevens point out that this is a form of magical thinking: the comparability that classification enables makes us think that the number of people who die annually in car accidents is somehow logically related to the number of those who die in plane crashes.¹³ The relative risk for both can then be calculated and treated as if they were obvious facts. This logic also has emotional purchase. It has become a cliché, for example, for nervous passengers on a plane to reassure themselves by thinking that they are more likely to die in a car accident than a plane crash. Espeland and Stevens argue that it is crucial to see such comparisons as purposeful inventions and magical beliefs, rather than self-evident encapsulations of reality.

The logic of commensuration also requires constant labor to keep its categories stable (Bowker and Starr 1999). Disasters offer a good case in point. One metric by which disasters are compared is death tolls: the higher the toll, the worse the disaster. The 2011 Great East Japan Disaster left more than 20,000 dead; the Hanshin quake, 6,434. Observers might say that the East Japan Earthquake was obviously worse, because of the higher death toll, among other statistics. But the act of comparing these two disasters does the ancillary work of making it difficult, or at least impolitic, to consider the Hanshin quake as an equally harrowing calamity. In my post-fieldwork discussions with Japanese disaster researchers, some spoke about the Great

¹³ Espeland and Stevens also note, however, that not everything can be made commensurable. Incommensurable ideas and practices, such as the idea of placing monetary value on children, are so ideologically transgressive that they cannot be tamed into being thought of as available for being made into rational equivalences.

East Japan Earthquake as terrible, much more terrible than Kobe. But they would rapidly follow that statement with a disclaimer that of course the Hanshin quake was awful; it simply was not on the same scale.

This is true, but it also elides some crucial facts. The Hanshin quake and the Tohoku disaster were not equal events. They are separated by time, distance, regional culture, and geography. They are unique events. But that the disaster could be abstracted into categories and statistics of deaths and casualties, houses collapsed, money lost, and all the other forms of numerification we read in newspapers, means that these disasters come to be seen as inherently, if reluctantly and distastefully, commensurate.¹⁴

There are two key consequences of making disasters comparable: first, reducing a disaster to like metrics — lives lost, structures damaged — also often reduces its political force by making losses seem like technical problems, rather than political or social structural ones.¹⁵ Metrics are thus a knowledge-making enterprise that attempt to speak laterally, but which in the process foreclose other forms of knowledge (see Brenneis N.d. for an analogous point).

Second, once rendered comparable, categories and metrics of loss become the basis for safety-making projects aimed at the future (Lakoff 2010). In this way, the definition of disaster becomes increasingly promiscuous, allowing disparate events such as hurricanes, nuclear meltdowns, and

¹⁴ See also Bowker (2005) on the institutional ordering and preservation of categories, and Power (1999, 2007) on commensuration and risk.

¹⁵ See Espeland and Stevens (1998) for a discussion of commensuration as a general depoliticizing practice.

terrorist attacks to count in a broad category of risks because all share common bases for comparison (see also Lakoff 2007, 2010). Accordingly, all events within the “disaster” category are taken up under the same political project of “disaster preparedness,” which Andrew Lakoff (2010) argues works as a politics of appeasement. Lakoff quotes television journalist Anderson Cooper, who famously stated on air, “We are not prepared,” while standing amidst the chaotic conditions of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Lakoff writes, “Insofar as the hurricane and its aftermath could be said to have had a shared lesson, it was this: WE ARE NOT PREPARED — whether for another major natural disaster, a chemical or biological attack, an epidemic, or some other type of emergency” (2007:248). Such a realization makes for universal consent on the obvious necessity for disaster preparedness. Yet Lakoff emphasizes that this consensus also functions as a way of making disaster apolitical; everyone agrees on the importance of being prepared, so technical preparedness strategies come to the fore while stickier issues such as structural racism and poverty are pushed aside (Lakoff 2007: 248-249).

An Industry of Abstraction

As Power (1999, 2007) has argued, the only distinction between risk and uncertainty is that risk is produced through categories such as standards and audits. Such categories make uncertainties feel circumscribed and thus actionable and tamable (Hacking 1990). Unsurprisingly, such commensurative, abstractive logics have led to the commodification of

disaster through the development of entire industries that purport to manage catastrophe. Such industries broadly conceive of themselves as dealing with mitigating risk and uncertainty. In this way the Hanshin quake and Kobe itself are intimately bound up within a broader structure of risk management.

I turn now to an ethnographic example from a risk industry expo called RisCon, which is held every fall in Tokyo. The event draws more than 60,000 visitors from manufacturing, finance, government, and other industries. The expo site is a cavernous conference center called Tokyo Big Sight, located in Odaiba, a reclaimed island in Tokyo Bay. I attended the expo for two consecutive years in 2009 and 2010; both years followed a similar pattern with similar exhibits. Participants enter the convention through the East Hall of the Big Sight complex, a vast concrete space that eventually narrows to a long escalator. The escalator leads to the first floor and registration lobby. Riding the escalator and watching the expo unfold below is an exercise in overstimulation: beyond a long registration desk lies a central stage and smaller presentation areas that seat about 50 people each. Interspersed throughout are booths promoting risk management services and products. These led to additional halls that were cheek-by-jowl full of exhibitors' booths. The stage and presentation areas are nearly constantly in use, so the overlapping sounds of different presentations reverberate throughout the space.

On both of my visits I registered only for the general RisCon expo, and even these take me multiple days to navigate. As an international risk

industry exposition, RisCon exhibitors come from Japan, elsewhere in Asia, North America, and Europe. Exhibitors promote all manner of technological equipment, from portable emergency toilets to earthquake shake tables to metal detectors and bomb-detecting robots. Tokyo municipal authorities also sponsor booths; a large exhibit just behind the main reception desk was for the two years of my attendance sponsored by the Tokyo Metropolitan Disaster Center. Visitors to the booth could talk to staff members about emergency preparedness and even try on rescue worker uniforms. Public workshops and seminars are also open to the public; these meet in various meeting rooms on both wings of the expo. I attended several of these seminars, including one based on a case study of the Hanshin earthquake. Here, however, I describe another of the workshops that illustrate the ways in which security, disaster, and uncertainty are configured as commensurable categories within a broader structure of risk.

I had registered for the talk earlier in the day, which was lucky for me; as I entered the meeting room, I saw that there was already a waiting list for those wishing to attend. The room held about 75 people, most of them suit-clad men flipping through the expo program or rifling through the various plastic bags of marketing collateral that exhibitors press on attendees. The room was arranged like a seminar space; I sat along with others at rectangular desks facing a podium at the front of the room. Soon enough, the speaker, a security planner named Nishida, opened the presentation with a PowerPoint presentation emblazoned with three phrases: 1) Look past your

origins; 2) think concretely; and 3) leverage your business. He asked us to think about these three phrases as our words for the day. He added that they were key to thinking about how we might deal with risk. “Everywhere you look, there is risk,” he said. He illustrated his point with PowerPoint slides showing photos of high-profile mistakes (such as information security leaks, defective merchandise) and politicians and businessmen bowing low before press cameras.

Nishida then urged us to think about the causes of accidents. “Why do they occur?” he asked. “And why can’t we avoid them?” He suggested his own answer. “We must understand risk and use leadership skills to mitigate it,” he said, and began outlining this process in several steps. The first is honing our sense of *kikikan* (sense of danger or risk), which would then lead to step two: generating hypotheses or assumptions (*sôtei*) about these potential risks. The hypotheses would then allow us to develop step three, which is to develop prevention programs. At this point, Nishida turned to a PowerPoint slide of nested circles, each in pastel colors. The outermost ring of the circle was labeled “BUSINESS.” The next smaller circle read “RISK,” followed by an even smaller circle labeled “CRISIS.” And the center was tagged “DISASTER.” In Nishida’s visual rendering, disaster — whether it is caused by an earthquake or by a corporate mistake — lies at the core of threats to any institution.

Nishida’s business as a security planner was to use this understanding of disaster as the core threat to a business in order to advocate for Business

Continuity Plans (BCP). Briefly, BCPs are a product of technical and business risk management principles. By creating a BCP, businesses identify potential threats and put in place plans that are meant to safeguard the integrity of the business (such as its personnel, inventory, technology, and such) while preserving its competitive advantage. BCPs are relatively new to Japan, but its logic of preparing for “disaster” in general, rather than any one threat in particular, resonates with the kind of commensurative thinking I witnessed among those working in Kobe’s disaster industry.

Products such as security cameras and BCPs are thus meant to serve as a common tool for any crisis. Lakoff’s (2007; 2010) description of FEMA in the United States offers a similar logic of emergency preparedness. He suggests that state and private institutions’ focus on preparedness collapses a variety of potential human-made and natural disasters under the broad rubric of “security threats” (Lakoff 2007: 247). In this way, potential epidemics like SARS, hurricanes like Katrina, and terrorist events like 9/11 are all treated as inherently like dangers.¹⁶

Uncertainty and Affect

Crucially, however, a remark by another presenter at RisCon unsettled the certainty Nishida performed about the efficacy of measures like Business

¹⁶ As I wrote earlier, Lakoff notes that such work also effectively depoliticizes danger by focusing on creating flexible and responsive infrastructures, rather than dealing with stickier problems such as poverty and social inequality. He offers Hurricane Katrina as a primary example: the US’s focus on creating infrastructural improvements to prevent future disasters effectively left deeper problems about poverty and unequal access to safety out of sight.

Continuity Plans. The speaker, a Japanese financial analyst at Standard & Poor's, put it this way: "Risk as a concept is fine in itself. But the problem with determining risk is the problem of rationality (*gôrisei no mondai*). There are some crises that are outside the scope of rational assumption (*sôteigai*). We cannot plan for them, so we feel uneasy (*fuan*). This is the difficulty with trying to implement risk countermeasures (*risuku taisaku*)."

The financial analyst here voices a key characteristic of risk discourses, and of commensuration in general. As I wrote earlier, commensuration requires constant labor to keep its categories stable. The financial analyst's admission of the limits of rationality is an admission that the category of risk and technoscientific efforts to contain it are always paired with anxiety about what is missing from these assumptions and scenarios. These unknown unknowns result in a distinctly bodily and affective condition — *fuan*, or uneasiness — that cannot be remedied because there IS no solution for uncertainty. These unknown unknowns — the uncertain eventualities that exceed reasonable expectation — form the ambivalent heart of the disaster management industry, both here among the sleek exhibits at RisCon and among those involved in disaster research and preparedness ventures in Kobe.

Such ambivalence also characterizes the ways in which the Hanshin quake has been rendered an historical event in Japan. Many of the disaster activists, researchers, and hobbyists I met in Kobe did indeed engage in making the Hanshin quake comparable to other experiences. As I discuss in

the next chapter, researchers and non-experts alike created archives of earthquake materials and sought to extract from them “lessons” (*kyôkun*) from the experience that could be applied to their own lives or to future disasters. Yet they also expressed a similar kind of *fuan*, or unease, admitted by the Standard & Poor’s analyst. To many I spoke with, it was unclear to what extent these archives and lessons would actually prove useful. They acknowledged that the future, and certainly future disasters, were to some extent “unknown unknowns.” It is impossible to prepare useful lessons for the future when the future is unknowable.

I return also to the sense of distaste and discomfort my interlocutors expressed when they felt compelled to qualify their statements that the Tohoku disaster was “worse” than the Kobe catastrophe. Their inadvertent creation of a continuum of misery seemed to strike a dissonant note within themselves during these conversations. Rather than compare the disasters, other interlocutors from Kobe would discuss instead how they felt a certain kinship with folks from Tohoku. Despite regional differences in dialect and culture, they said, they felt that they could understand what these people were going through, and wanted to offer their experiences as a way of providing some solace.

In this way my interlocutors turn Espeland and Stevens’ critique of commensuration on its head. They show that while industries of abstraction of the kind evidenced by RisCon do exist, in many ways disaster preparedness advocates themselves are to some degree self-aware about the

instability of their work. Espeland and Stevens' view of commensuration sees it as a technology of governance. But disaster advocates in Kobe had a much more ambivalent relationship with commensuration. They do attempt to see disasters as comparable events in the interest of creating mitigation strategies that can be applied to future calamities. But I argue that they also used commensurative practices as a means of searching for connection with other people and events. In this sense, comparability is less about techniques of managing risk than putting singular experiences into meaningful relationship with other such singular experiences.

Indeed, based on my fieldwork among activists, scholars, and survivors who formed the disaster information industry in Kobe, I argue that framing disaster in terms of commensurate logics practiced in the interest of governance and profit is just that: one framing. I offer an alternative view: that while disaster information workers in Kobe do indeed make use of similar commensurative logics and discourses of risk that I saw at RisCon, many used them as a means for a very different goal. The goal, I suggest, is not to manage better or more profitably, but to use such technologies of risk management to foster relationships. This involves cultivating a relationship with the past, such as past disasters, in order to create a continuous history with the present and future. It also means creating associational ties between people, various disaster management projects, and places that have experienced catastrophe. These associations are meant to use disaster to create a new social order out of loss that takes the Hanshin earthquake

experience as a way to create a new relationship with others, with themselves, and with the literal earth on which they live.

A Tectonic Story

I tell this story through two nested lenses: through disasters as a sudden event that throws many of these relationships (including their inequalities) into relief, and how the Kobe disaster became the impetus for new practices of relationship-building. The ethnographic means by which I make this argument is through disaster information (*saigai jôhô* or *bôsai jôhô*). By “information,” I refer to both the aesthetic form and the content of films, poetry, dances, technocratic reports, etc. Even superficial practices like disaster prevention dance routines for children emphasize a certain relationship with the world around them. And I tell the story also of how this information is not equally shared, nor do people hold an equal interest in it. For example, young people who were born after 1995, or those for whom disaster and other safety information are simply forms of “noise,” become sources of anxiety for those involved in disaster work. As I detail in the next section, I suggest that the anxiety is partially about the danger of forgetting the past. But it is also about what amounts to a denial of a particular kind of relationship with Kobe, to the experience of the earthquake, and to those who survived the experience. Through stories, dances, music, radio shows, and other miscellaneous forms of “disaster information,” disaster workers aim to recruit the general public into their interest. Or at the very least, they seek to

compel them through subtle aesthetic practices and politics, which I discuss in Chapter 5.

Thinking of disaster information in terms of the relationships it creates also allows for thinking laterally among the diverse population of individuals and groups involved in disaster prevention and memorialization. My field research involved speaking with “experts” in the traditional sense: academically-trained researchers, firefighters, professional archivists, and those working in the public sector in disaster prevention training and management. But they also included self-taught experts and those who came to disaster management by way of their personal experience with catastrophe. These individuals include disaster storytellers, radio producers, amateur photographers and sound recorders, housewives, and pensioners. While much of Science and Technology Studies and anthropological studies of expertise have focused on knowledge “from above” in terms of how experts exclude non-experts, or valorize knowledge “from below” in the form of citizen science, I highlight how this distinction is blurred in the lateral intersection of expertise and experience among the disaster information industry participants in Kobe. The encounters among such individuals and groups take varied forms there, and during fieldwork I had the good fortune to participate in many iterations of expert-lay collaborations. For example, there was the Catfish Group,¹⁷ a network of television, news, and radio

¹⁷ The catfish (*namazu*) is an historic symbol of earthquakes in Japan. See Smits (2006) and Weisenfeld (2012) for fascinating discussions of its history as a political symbol of disorder and change.

journalists, engineers, seismologists, and social scientists, that met regularly to discuss and study disaster prevention progress. There were also frequent public seminars on disaster sponsored by the Disaster Reduction Institute and similar institutions. After to going to many of these seminars, I was able to predict with reliable accuracy that a large percentage of the audience would be retirees and housewives who actively took notes and asked probing, well-informed questions of their academic presenters. And then there were disaster festivals organized by collaborations of non-profit organizations and the ward or city governments. At these events, which I describe in Chapter 4, cartoonish plush “disaster prevention” mascots would perform choreographed dances to music on stage to capture kids’ attention, and where attendees could take part in disaster prevention seminars and learning exercises.¹⁸

In all these ways, disaster information played both a formal and mediating role in joining disparate groups of people together to discuss a common concern. These efforts also speak to the production of the Hanshin earthquake as an historical event in personal and national terms. Sumathi Ramaswamy (2004), in her sensitive study of the Tamil mythical originary land of Lemuria, focuses on catastrophe as the “enabling action that energizes the production of history, a collective practice through which we cope in modernity with being in exile from our pasts, and with the consequent displacement and estrangement such a rupture produces. Historians, be they

¹⁸ I expand on the notion of cuteness in Chapter 5.

professional or amateur, always already write in the shadow of loss” (2004: 30). For Ramaswamy, the “labors of loss” that Sri Lankans conduct in their memorializations of a land that has been lost to time but which validates a glorious past, also saturate modernity. The constant act of having to make sense of the past and come to terms with the present is also very much visible in the labors of loss conducted by Hanshin quake survivors, researchers, and activists. Much of this labor is motivated, implicitly or explicitly, by the sense of something having gone terribly wrong in contemporary society.

Saiaku no Toshi (The Worst Year)

Indeed, as Clancey (2006), Kim (2007), Kitahara (2006), Weisenfeld (2012), and others have argued, natural disasters like the one that rocked Kobe have long served as catalysts for social agitation and political change in premodern and modern Japan. The year 1995, which marked the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, opened promisingly enough. But little more than two weeks into the year the Hanshin quake wrought devastation on western Japan. Infuriating for residents of the affected areas was what felt like indifference to which the central government in Tokyo paid them, especially in the immediate hours after the quake when need for help was at its most pressing. Then-Prime Minister Murayama became infamous for carrying on with his scheduled morning activities even when informed that a major earthquake had devastated the Hanshin region. Not two months after the disaster, attention was drawn away from Kobe and focused firmly on Tokyo when on March 20 members of the Aum Shinrikyo religious cult

released sarin gas in the Tokyo underground. Insults to the predictability of daily life kept coming in 1995, with frequent news about another bank collapse, continuing revelations of bureaucratic cronyism, and attendant realizations about the shortcomings of public welfare services. Historian of Japan Gavan McCormack's *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence* (1996), published just the year after the quake, notes that 1995 became referred in Japan as *saiyaku no toshi*, ("the worst year"). The Japanese Kanji Proficiency Society, which selects a Chinese character at the end of every year deemed to characterize the events of the previous 12 months, chose "震" (*shin*; it forms the second character in the kanji compound for "earthquake" in Japanese: *jishin*), to shake or quiver, to reflect the ways in which Japanese society was rocked literally by the quake, and then by its political and cultural aftershocks. Indeed, the quake became a symbol of reflection for not just 1995, but the nation's entire post-war trajectory. McCormack describes the nation as at a moment when postwar goals for recovery and growth "had been clear and accomplished in full measure, but there was no consensus on how to formulate the agenda for the fifty that were to come, and there was a growing suspicion that the priorities of the past fifty might have been fundamentally ill chosen" (3).

That the nation's postwar success would come to seem hollow held enormous consequences. First, it suggested that national priorities for growth had placed faith in economic success at the cost of personal satisfaction. More devastatingly, as McCormack also notes, the notion that "economic

achievement has brought little joy and much anxiety” unsettles one’s relationship with a history that had seemed, at the time, to be on a promising trajectory (6). These histories were lived not just on national scales, but in the labor, family lives, and individual goals of millions of Japanese over three generations. The possibility that the sacrifices of men who worked 100-hour workweeks, wives and mothers who ascribed their identities to their children’s educational success, and children who grew up with absentee fathers were for a fundamentally misguided and empty promise of affluence led, as novelist Haruki Murakami has noted (2012), to a national sense of malaise, apathy, anxiety, and resignation.

There is a well-known proverb in Japanese: *tensai wa wasureta koro ni yatte kuru*: natural disasters strike just when they are forgotten. Many acquaintances in Japan would quote the phrase to me when I told them about my research. This cautionary saying points to the cyclical nature of disaster: they recur, and more often than we hope — especially in the case of earthquakes, typhoons, and tsunami, to varying degrees — in the same places. It is naive to believe that lightning does not strike twice in the same place, and those who fail to respect this truth potentially doom themselves to repeated victimhood.

The temporal tension implicit within the proverb — the need to remain vigilant because catastrophes do not necessarily come with warnings — also tells us something about the tension between disaster as an everyday occurrence and a one-off, extraordinary event. They are, in fact, both, and this

is particularly true in Japan. There are two ways in which disaster is a site for understandings of time that are held in constant tension: the uncertainty of future disasters, and the fact that disasters are never single events, but rather lived experiences that can and do stretch years beyond the acute, time-delimited frame of violent tremors or crashing tidal waves.

The teleological desire for a continuous past leading to a seamless present and promising future is certainly present in Kobe and, I would argue, in recessionary Japan as a whole. Natural disasters, domestic terrorism, and financial crises all provided ruptures that, on their own, would have posed challenges to a tidy narrative of Japan on an ever-more prosperous postwar trajectory. Together, however – and in quick succession, no less – the earthquake in January, the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway in March, and the domino-like failure of domestic banks throughout 1995 created a sort of national reckoning. The result was an existential questioning in the media, among families, among coworkers, about national values and what had been lost during the heady prosperity of the postwar era. Mass media began criticizing the vacuousness of Japanese youth consumer culture, and the shallow pursuit of luxury brands that had earned the Japanese a worldwide reputation as high-end travelers and shoppers. The bottoming out of the real estate market in the early 1990s led to a slow unraveling of the social and governmental infrastructure that had heretofore seemed so solid.

Walter Benjamin's (1986) angel of history – facing the past and with her back turned to the future, she sees a long line of rubble before her – reverberates strongly with a Japanese sense of history, particularly after World War II. Victims of the Hanshin quake who were old enough to remember the damage wrought by US air strikes in Kobe were jarred by the city's likeness to its 1945 self after the quake knocked down buildings and left debris strewn across streets and sidewalks. The quake's occurrence on the 50th anniversary year of the end of the war underscored this association.

The quake was significant on other, deeper historical levels, as well. Natural disasters are part of the central mythos of Japanese identity and nationhood. The story of how Mongol invaders were turned away – not once, but twice! – by seemingly providentially-timed typhoons has often been cited as evidence that the tempestuous seas and dangerous weather in the Japanese archipelago have been a natural symbol of protection, isolation, and even blessedness. Since the 1868 Meiji Restoration, too, natural disasters have served as catalysts for social change. Clancey (2006) has shown that the 1912 Nobi Earthquake ushered in a period of nativism in Japanese science; the collapse of Western buildings in the quake was used as evidence for the superiority of Japanese architecture and engineering. The 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake left more than 200,000 dead and prompted a massacre of ethnic Koreans; the very layout of Tokyo changed during the post-quake reconstruction period, and the catastrophe led to major changes in disaster prevention efforts nationwide (Weisenfeld 2012).

This dissertation, then, aims to tell a “tectonic” story: one that recognizes that the seemingly stable ground — both literal and figurative — moves beneath those who would keep it still. The ethnographic data included here attends to the work of citizens, scientists, activists, and others as they attempt to rehabilitate Benjamin’s angel of history. Rather than a continuous line of wreckage, my interlocutors sought instead to find value and redemption in that debris. I suggest that the timing and circumstance of the Hanshin earthquake made it into a key cultural signifier in Japan of failure and a wayward postwar society. A tectonic story offers the opportunity to illuminate contemporary Japan — sometimes called recessionary Japan, precariat Japan (Allison 2012) — through an exploration of a traumatic event and its afterlife, rendered ordinary (Berlant 2011).

Situating the Field

This study is based on 18 months of fieldwork carried out from June 2009 – January 2011. I had originally gone to Japan planning to complete six months of language training in academic Japanese, followed by 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork among members of a non-profit group dedicated to studying failure. In this dissertation I refer to the group as the Failure Studies Group (FSG). Based in Tokyo, the group’s membership includes engineers, business professionals, lawyers, and others with an interest in failure, mistakes, and methods of addressing them. The organization is chaired by a retired professor of mechanical engineering at the prestigious University of Tokyo who has written a number of popular books on analyzing and

overcoming failure. The group was formed around his guiding belief that all humans, but especially Japanese people, keep themselves from success and happiness because they remain unskilled with dealing with failure. This is not because they do not fail; on the contrary, they, like every other person, fail quite often. His diagnosis for Japan was that its economic and social decline was in part due to a cultural inability to learn from mistakes of the past. He advocated widening the application of common engineering fault analysis methods to other kinds of faults such as business failures, scientific failures, and even personal problems like divorce.

Soon after I completed my language program in December 2010, however, the group's office closed due to declining membership and I needed a new field site. Coincidentally, I had become increasingly interested in Kobe as a fascinating and deserving site for study. Originally conceived as a case study of failure within my dissertation work, I had initially planned to spend my first six months in Japan understanding the Hanshin earthquake as a spectacular instance of social, scientific, and political failure. I had arrived expecting the earthquake to be spoken of in retrospect, but instead I was surprised by the degree to which the quake had continued to be a major organizing presence in the city, not just in the static post-quake urban infrastructure, but through social networks that had been formed, sustained, and continued to be animated by some sort of connection to the Hanshin quake. This sense, combined with a deepening place among Kobe's quake-

related social networks, convinced me to stay in the city for fieldwork and, as my advisers had told me, to “follow the data.”

Following the data is a messy affair when one’s field site is an entire city. In the past two decades, ethnographic field projects have moved increasingly toward multi-sited research attentive to the constructed boundaries that we place on our analytical objects and sites of research (Faubion and Marcus 2009; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 2005). There are distinct advantages to multi-sited projects; in its ideal form, such projects allow anthropologists to stretch beyond the walled boundaries of specific institutional fieldsites in search of more aggregated, so to speak, data about daily life in any given place. Yet as critics of multi-sited projects have pointed out, work that is not anchored in a particular location can feel frustratingly without center — even when by design (Hannerz 2003, Marcus 1995). I experienced both of these during my fieldwork. While I conceived of Kobe as both a geographic place and a cultural imaginary, I was often faced with the much more prosaic challenge of doing research outside of an organization when living in an urban environment. The anxiety of deciding where to physically go every day when I left my small apartment in the blue-collar district of Nagata every morning, when I did not always have a place to regularly report or work, was a struggle for the first weeks of my field research.

Despite my initial worries, my days were inevitably busy with interviews, archival research, attending seminars and memorials, and

informal conversations with people I gradually came to know well. This approach allowed me to map out the contours of disaster management and planning in Kobe. During this time I also continued my engagements with the Osaka chapter of the Failure Studies Group; I was surprised, in fact, by the number of intersections between the FSG and the people I encountered through my fieldwork in Kobe. By April 2010 I also became actively involved with the Minatogawa Community Center (MCC), a non-profit incubator in Nagata that was created in response to the earthquake. I worked there twice a week as an unpaid intern until January 2011; I discuss my activities there in greater detail in chapters 3 and 5. My engagement at MCC allowed me to deepen my understanding of how the non-profit sector overlapped with state-sponsored disaster management programs, and how researchers, activists, and lay volunteers formed what I eventually came to think of as the city's disaster knowledge industry.

“Deep Kobe”

Kobe itself is a mid-sized city nestled between Osaka Bay to the south and the green Rokko mountains to the north. The city of Kobe was not formally founded until 1889.¹⁹ Look more closely, however, and it becomes obvious that Kobe is also an ancient place. The first mention of the geographic region that Kobe now occupies is in one of Japan's earliest written histories,

¹⁹ The name Kobe is derived from the more ancient reading of its Chinese characters (神戸), *Kanbe*. The literal meaning of the characters is “door of the gods” or “door to the gods,” and refers to Ikuta Shrine, founded in 201 AD.

the *Nihon Shoki*, which mentions the founding of Ikuta Shrine by Empress Jingu in 201 AD. Eight hundred years before the Meiji Restoration, it was the site of the fabled Genpei Wars (1180-1185) between the noble Taira and warrior Minamoto clans. Minamoto's victory ushered in Japan's feudal period. The region's natural port and clear mountain water have made it a haven for international trade, and its famous hot springs in Arima are among Japan's oldest, having attracted *onsen*-goers since the 8th century. In contemporary times, the city has held an image of cosmopolitan modernity, fashion, and romantic tourist destination — it was one of the first ports to open to western trade in 1868, and the city's architecture is a reflection of a mix of Chinese and western European influences.

Because the city is bounded on north and south by the constraints of water and mountains, the most populated parts of the city flow laterally, east to west: on the east end, the city center called Sannomiya connects Kobe to the commercial hub of Osaka. Slightly to the west of Sannomiya is Happy Active Town Kobe (HAT Kobe), a post-quake mixed commercial and housing development for earthquake refugees I discuss briefly in Chapter 6. The development was designed to function as a second city center that could contain Sannomiya's sprawl. Continuing west through central Kobe leads to residential areas, often mixed with the landmarks of urban life: train tracks and stations, subway stops, supermarkets, schools, and small family-run restaurants. What starts off as affluent housing, especially in the area that abuts the historic distilleries that produce Kobe's famous sake, gradually

transitions to working class and blue collar mixed residential-industrial areas further to the west until the land tapers to a point and the city becomes a narrow slice following the contours of the sea.

The degree to which the different wards of Kobe are marked by particular socioeconomic associations was most fully impressed upon me when explaining to Japanese acquaintances and informants where I lived. Whenever I answered that I lived in Nagata, the traditionally blue-collar area in west Kobe, my interlocutors would inevitably be surprised and, possibly, a little embarrassed for my living situation. Fukumoto-san, a new acquaintance I had made at a disaster prevention conference, however, responded with an apt phrase: “Ah! *Deep (dīpu)* Kobe!” he said with a wry smile. Our other partners in the conversation laughed and nodded in understanding: “Yes, that’s right! Nagata IS deep!”



Figure 1. A visitor at a Hanshin Earthquake memorial exhibit at the Nagata Labor Day fair, 2010.

These researchers picked up on Nagata as a signifier of loss. Science and technology scholar Togo Tsukahara (2011) has suggested that Kobe is the site of two disasters: the earthquake itself, and the neglect of its residents and their living conditions. As one of the three wards that suffered devastating fire damage in the disaster, it remained at the time of my fieldwork a literal,

widely-recognized symbol of loss embedded in place. But the area also stood for a lost way of life; the area retained a cinematic memory-image of a more intimate, personable, and rough-around-the-edges working-class ethos that had disappeared when the built environment that enabled such intimacy with neighbors disappeared in flames.

Indeed, the social and architectural history of Nagata offers several key reasons for why the area was so vulnerable to fire. First, as a traditional housing area for *buraku* (untouchable) caste Japanese and foreign workers mostly from Korea, Vietnam, South and Central America, the ward featured cheap rents in old two-story wooden houses built close together, hugging narrow alleyways strung across with clothing and power lines. Later, these twisting passageways and low overhead clearances would guarantee disaster, as fire crews could not gain access to buildings. For many of Nagata's residents, another draw to the area was its proximity to work: the ward was home to a variety of manufacturing concerns. Biggest among them were "chemical shoes" (*kemikaru shūzu*)²⁰ factories. The factories employed many of the foreign workers in Kobe; some were owned by ethnic Koreans. These factories became the major incendiary agent in the fires that eventually consumed Nagata; the stores of chemicals for manufacturing artificial leather shoes were highly flammable. Most of the factories in the area burned. And, because of the cost and time involved in rebuilding, the quake effectively meant the end for the chemical shoes business in Kobe, and in Japan more

²⁰ "Chemical shoes" are made out of synthetic leather and rubber, making them a cheap footwear alternative to genuine leather shoes.

generally; like many of Kobe's primary industries at the time of the earthquake, business moved elsewhere in the lag time between destruction and reconstruction.²¹

According to an elderly resident of Nagata quoted in a newspaper story in the January 19, 1995 edition of *Kobe Shimbun*, after the building collapses caused by the quake's tremors and the charred ruins left by the fires, Kobe looked like it had just after the American firebombings of World War II. Indeed, the extent of destruction in Kobe city had not been seen in the 50 years since the end of the war. It is ironic, too, that the destruction of Nagata, as well as the two other wards that sustained heavy fire damage, were the three areas of Kobe that had been left standing after the war. While the rest of Kobe had been severely damaged by U.S. assaults, the narrow alleys and cramped wooden homes in Nagata had been left standing. Government planners drafted a comprehensive reconstruction (*fukkô*) plan shortly after the war that aimed to build green space, widen roads, and rationalize property lines (*toshikeikaku*) that had until then been shaped by the outlines of rice paddy fields, but by 1951 the plans were placed on hold by the U.S. Occupation Authority as part of economic austerity measures (Edgington

²¹ Despite community and city efforts to bolster the chemical shoes industry, shoe manufacturing was moved to China, where labor and materials were cheaper. In a similar story, the port of Kobe was rendered unusable for several months following the quake; the holdups in deliveries — especially for car manufacturers and others utilizing just in time inventory systems — caused global shortages of Japanese goods such as computer batteries and cars. Because shipping waits for no one, the Port of Kobe's business went from second busiest port in Japan to sixth within a year of the quake, and has not recovered since.

2010: 40; Hein 2003).²²

Modernization improvements were again attempted in the 1960s, but this time the municipal leaders of Nagata and its adjoining ward could not agree with the city on allotment changes, and the city eventually omitted both wards from land readjustments entirely (Edgington 2010: 40). The result was that in 1995, prewar wooden residences and other structures, by then badly outdated (many did not have bathrooms), were left standing. This ecology of wooden houses and narrow, irregular alleyways were widely recognized as a fire hazard, yet by 1995 the city had focused its efforts instead on growth areas: expanding the city's port facilities, airport, and large reclaimed land projects in Osaka Bay. Nagata was consigned to a place of time travel, of remaining "deep Kobe"; long-time Kobe residents speak affectionately of the pre-quake Nagata as *shitashî* (friendly, intimate), a *shominteki na tokoro* (working class area), and *natsukashî* (nostalgic).

By 2009, when I began fieldwork, Nagata had almost wholly changed. While many of its streets are still narrow — enough so that a fire truck would be unable to pass through — the built environment of Nagata strives toward orderliness and angularity. Residential homes rebuilt after the quake are modern and indistinguishable from homes in many other parts of the city. Roads are uniformly well-paved and maintained; even in 2011, the sidewalks and buildings, most built around the same time and aging with the same

²² For a vivid, animated example of immediate postwar Kobe, see *Grave of the Fireflies* (*Hotaru no Haka*) (1988), an animated classic directed by Isao Takahata about war-orphaned siblings struggling to survive in Kobe.

patina, gave the impression of homogeneity, sterility, and newness. The enormous increase in green space has also been a major change in the ward; particularly around Nagata's primary train station, small parks sprinkle the area every several blocks. Each park, including larger recreational areas built on former factory land, bears a sign that it is a *hinanjo* (evacuation place). These parks were often empty, save for occasional joggers and teenagers who would gather there with their bicycles in the evenings, chatting loudly and stealing illicit puffs of cigarettes.

The main market thoroughfare (*shōtengai*), considered the bustling heart of Nagata, has also changed drastically; whereas before the quake the *shōtengai* were home to a lively variety of mom and pop shops including takeout stalls, pickled cabbage vendors, butchers, and pharmacies, it is now completely rebuilt but also significantly empty. My neighbors and the activists I met who worked in Nagata often invoked the image of metal rolling shutters (*shattâ*) that marked vacant storefronts in the central shopping arcade (*shōtengai*) as a direct indicator of Nagata's decline. The number of shuttered storefronts attest to the degree to which the population of Nagata has not returned to its pre-quake levels, and even before the disaster the area had seen increasing out-migration as elderly residents passed away or migrant laborers moved elsewhere in search of better jobs.

Despite these setbacks, Nagata boasted a lively constellation of social groups and non-profit organizations that had been formed through the quake experience. Some of these groups aimed to bring economic prosperity to

Nagata through the construction of an 18 meter tall replica of Tetsujin 28 (known as Iron Man in the U.S. in the 1960s), through frequent festivals that attempted to highlight the area's multicultural flavor, and through dozens of small non-profit groups that targeted the populations that had been shown to be most vulnerable in times of catastrophe: the elderly, the disabled, the young, and the foreign. The area was well-known in Kobe and among those involved in *shimin shakai* on a national level. I discuss these groups further in Chapter 3.

All of these places still beg the question of where, exactly, my fieldsite was. My default answer to these questions had always been *Nagata*, but in truth it is much more akin to Matei Candea's (2010) discussion of conducting an anti-village study of sorts. While his research was situated in one particular village in Corsica, the village itself was not the object of study, but rather a frame that could illuminate the whole of Corsica as a physical place and a cultural imaginary. Like Candea, I seek to study through Nagata, through Kobe, and even through the earthquake itself, to arrive at an ethnography of a city at a particular, perilous moment, and how this moment was both a reflection of a wider Japan with a national mood of pessimism and despair, and a driver of social change.

I include here a brief note about my own subjectivity as a researcher in Kobe. As both male and female anthropologists of Japan have noted (e.g., Allison 1994; Hamabata 1994; Kurotani 2005; Yano 2003), gender plays a significant role in circumscribing field access. At FSG gatherings, I was often

one of the few women in the room; at Osaka chapter meetings, I was often the only woman in the room. My presence was accepted with cordiality and, once I participated in several group trips, what felt like a sense of approving good humor. But it was also obvious that I was set apart. On one FSG retreat held at a traditional inn, for example, members retreated to a post-dinner party in one of their rooms while I and the two other women there (one of whom was the group's administrative secretary) were left to read quietly in our room in a separate wing. Similarly, my relative youth and border position as a not-yet-proven graduate student made me someone who would have been low-ranking had it not been for my status as a foreign researcher. The result was the occasional fumbling moment when I was asked to display some sort of expertise in disaster management while also performing humility that I was not yet a true expert.

Kobe's disaster management circles, however, presented a much different social landscape. As a female researcher, I was quite common; while I have no statistics detailing the gender breakdown among disaster researchers, quite a few researchers and graduate students working on disaster-related issues were women, and disaster management community projects featured both female and male leadership.

More consequential in my interactions among this group was my status as an American. I had arrived there when the effects of the U.S. financial crisis were still rippling around the globe; "Lehman shock" (*Lehman shokku*) – referring to the Wall Street banking crisis – was the term on people's

mouths. Particularly among activist groups concerned with migrant rights and socioeconomic parity, my American identity opened up interesting and critical conversations about a prevailing sense of American economic hubris and political inequality. Observations about America and my American-ness popped up at unexpected moments; once at a restaurant, for example, I opened my wallet to pay. My dining companion, a well-traveled businessman named Yoshino, glanced at the multiple credit cards in my wallet and said with a wry smile, “You’re really American, aren’t you!” His remark implied a difference between stereotypes of American profligacy (as evidenced by credit cards) and Japanese frugality.

As I wrote earlier, however, while my American identity seemed to punctuate moments in fieldwork interactions, this identity could also be subsumed by what was recognized by interlocutors as a shared Japanese ethnic heritage. A typical example is what an exuberant engineer named Tanaka said to me during a tour of an engine manufacturing plant with the FSG. The tour was part of a group weekend excursion to Shikoku, and while we had attended the same events before, we had not been formally introduced until the welcome dinner at the start of the trip. We had gone around the table giving our self-introductions (*jiko shôkai*), and Tanaka had loudly expressed astonishment that I was American. On this tour a couple of days later, our group was viewing a particularly impressive piece of machinery when Tanaka turned to me. With a broad smile, he said, “Ah, Japan (*Nippon*)! Aren’t Japanese great (*sugoi*)?”

In this way my subject position as a third-generation Japanese-American woman was a mediating factor in my interactions with everyone I encountered. It is an experience I have struggled to reconcile with, both personally and as an anthropologist. Japanese-American Dorinne Kondo (1990) has written movingly about the double subjectivity of “looking” Japanese during her own ethnographic fieldwork at a confectionary factory in Tokyo. Her description bears quoting at length here because it is so resonant with my own experience:

As a Japanese American, I created a conceptual dilemma for the Japanese I encountered. For them, I was a living oxymoron, someone who was both Japanese and not Japanese. Their puzzlement was all the greater since most Japanese people I knew seemed to adhere to an eminently biological definition of Japaneseness. ... In the face of dissonance and distress, I found that the desire for comprehensible order in the form of 'fitting in,' even if it meant suppression of and violence against a self I had known in another context, was preferable to meaninglessness. Anthropological imperatives to immerse oneself in another culture intensified this desire, so that acquiring the accoutrements of Japanese selfhood meant simultaneously constructing a more thoroughly professional anthropological persona. This required language learning in the broadest sense: mastery of culturally appropriate modes of moving, acting, and speaking. For my informants, it was clear that coping with this anomalous creature was difficult, for here was someone who looked like a real human being, but who simply failed to perform according to expectation (Kondo 1990: 11-12).

My experience was not as stark as what Kondo writes, but as Yano (2003) has discussed, a Japanese face possessed by a non-culturally Japanese person does have an impact on fieldwork access and interactions. One interlocutor once abruptly pulled away from the subject of our conversation to remark out of the blue, “But you seem so Japanese!” People also admitted to me things that I am sure they would not say to a person who was not

ethnically Japanese. But it was also a double-edged sword. My body sometimes made for a perplexing liminal presence at events in which I was not clearly affiliated with a Japanese company or institution, whereas someone who “looked” foreign would have been immediately recognized. This led to situations in which obviously non-Japanese visitors were given immediate access to people and social events that were not quite so automatically open to me (see also Yano 2003).

Accordingly, gender, race, and national identity were constant presences in my fieldwork interactions. My status as a Japanese-American became an interesting icebreaker with new acquaintances, a safe topic for people to discuss their observations of both American and Japanese stereotypes and perceptions. But I see this as no different from any other ethnographic encounter by any other anthropologist. All fieldwork – and indeed, all interactions – is inflected by perceptions of difference and similarity.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is organized around two broad frames: varied practices of disaster information production and consumption, and the social, historical, and ethical contexts that not just structure, but are actually co-constitutive with, disaster information. Each of the chapters focuses on one element of how information politics suffuses disaster prevention research and policy, and how also information is used by various people and organizations

as a vehicle for promoting a vision of a society more connected to each other and to its place in history.

This chapter has focused on providing an emic account of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, in which a catastrophe has become a cultural symbol of failure and decline, but also of connection to others and to a larger sense of history. Chapter 2, “An Ethics of Relationality,” discusses this sense of connection in greater depth and underscores this dissertation’s central argument that disaster researchers, planners, and activists craft disaster information as a way of cultivating in others “associational lives” that foster human connection and neighborly concern. Specifically, this chapter follows the post-quake histories of two interlocutors, both firemen who experienced the earthquake. Their experiences speak to a broader sense of trying to discern how such a calamitous experience fits into their lives, careers, and social relationships. I suggest that they, like many others who lived through the Hanshin earthquake, see the earthquake as a turning point and the source of a new — or newly important — ethics of relating to themselves, others, and history through the lens of disaster.

Chapter 3, “The Politics of No Politics,” shifts attention toward how such an ethics of relationality is practiced by those involved in disaster prevention projects. The ethnographic heart of this chapter focuses on two organizations: a non-profit group formed in response to the Kobe quake, and a disaster preparedness club. While members of both groups characterize their efforts as autonomous citizen efforts, they also characterize their work

as shaped by human relationships rather than practices of overt politics. As one of my interlocutors phrased it, their work is an attempt to enact cultural change while also maintaining a sense of “harmony.” I argue that such work enacts a subtle “politics of no politics,” in which disaster management efforts are often intentionally depoliticized even as they try to shape the behavior and environments of others.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, information became a source of controversy and a means for action following the Hanshin Earthquake. Chapter 4, “Failure and the Limits of Experience,” examines the close relationship between disaster information and the overarching narrative of the Hanshin Earthquake as a catastrophic social, political, and technological failure. I pay close attention to the cultural valences of failure, and pry apart the logics of failure as the result of a lack of information. The chapter then offers ethnographic data to show how earthquake survivors and disaster prevention specialists attempt to glean information from the earthquake as a way of recuperating the failures of the Hanshin catastrophe.

Chapter 5, “An Informational Aesthetics of Safety,” explores how the affective content of disaster information is a source of anxiety and strategy among disaster management specialists. I discuss the tension disaster information producers feel between trying to create information that speaks to residents’ “hearts” while acknowledging the abundance – and possible over-abundance – of disaster information in public spaces. Such a tension is manifested in particular among radio producers and announcers, who try to

modulate their voice in a way that avoids sounding alarmist yet also inspires action among listeners. I argue that these attempts rely on crafting a sense of a cultural and personal relationship between announcers and listeners.

Finally, Chapter 6 and the Epilogue underscore how the plans and projects carried out by disaster prevention practitioners in Kobe occur in a continual race to circumvent future disasters. Less than two months after leaving Japan, the Great East Japan Earthquake struck the northeast coast of the country. The 9.0 magnitude earthquake generated a devastating tsunami and nuclear crisis, the consequences of which are still unfolding.

A final note on naming conventions: while I keep most place names intact, I have employed pseudonyms for all individuals and organizations throughout this text, except in instances where I quote an author's published work. I also follow Japanese conventions in terms of name order (family name followed by first name) and refer to Japanese interlocutors by their last names. Although in keeping with speech etiquette I always used honorific suffixes (such as *san* and *sensei*) when speaking and corresponding with interlocutors, in this dissertation I use honorifics in the first instance of an individual's name but omit them in subsequent mentions.

CHAPTER 2: An Ethics of Relationality

What can be studied is always a relationship or an infinite regress of relationships. Never a "thing." (Bateson 1978: 249).

Hiroyuki Mitsui, a married father of two in his early forties and a career fireman in Ibaraki City, a working-class suburb of northern Osaka, awoke, with most other residents of the greater Hanshin area, with a jolt in the winter darkness of January 1995. It was just the 17th day of the new year, and life had resumed its customary pace after the flurry of end-of-year work, parties, feasting, and busy delivery of *nengajyô*, the ubiquitous New Year's greeting postcards people send to everyone in their address books. Sleeping on a futon in his *tatami*-mat room, he felt the entire house shaking — booming, actually, with an accompanying rattle and crash of dishes as they fell from the kitchen cupboard in the next room. Years of experience, not just as a fireman, but as simply a JAPANESE person, he would later explain, told him that this was an earthquake. A big one. His firefighter's dress uniform, which he had carefully hung on the lip of faux wood molding running along the top perimeter of the room, swung wildly before flopping to the floor. As if alive and caught by surprise, the TV set sprung off of Mitsui's low wooden dresser, narrowly missing him in his bed. Wiry and trim from years of playing and coaching in the regional fire department rugby league, Mitsui scrambled under a low coffee table until the tremors subsided, less than 30

seconds after they had begun. He then leaped out, calling the names of his wife and two children, all of whom had been sleeping in the narrow upstairs rooms of their modest home. Seeing that they were shaken but unharmed, he immediately turned on his battery-powered radio for confirmation of what he knew had been a powerful earthquake.

While both expert and amateur disaster researchers such as Mitsui and a great number of scientists and engineers would study in minute detail the mechanisms of the quake in the ensuing two decades, in the moment of catastrophe, Mitsui's own thoughts turned immediately to work. He had become a fireman while still in his late teens; self-admittedly "lost" (*mayotta*) as a high school student, Mitsui had not had the test scores necessary to pursue university studies. He identified himself proudly — often to anyone who would listen — as a fireman, and most importantly, as someone who had worked up the ranks to colonel. And so it was that after ensuring the safety of his family, Colonel Mitsui reported to his fire station to offer help. By mid-morning it had become clear that Osaka had suffered costly infrastructural damage but had mostly escaped unscathed. The nearby city of Kobe, however, was in deep trouble. Situated much closer to the fault, Kobe and its surrounding suburbs, with a population of about 2 million, suffered large-scale building collapses and fires across entire wards,²³ especially

²³ Called *ku* (区), wards are a geographic and demographic category within Japanese cities. Cities are divided into increasingly smaller geographic units, from *shi* (city), to *ku* (ward), to *machi* or *cho* (towns).

Nagata, the traditionally blue-collar, mixed industrial/residential area of west Kobe.

Mitsui, realizing to himself that he was witnessing an historic event, decided to bicycle to Kobe and document what he saw and offer help where he could. He left early the next morning, cycling about 45 kilometers from his home in north Osaka, past Osaka's Itami airport, and past sections of collapsed highway along the east-west running Hanshin Expressway. Taking pictures along the way, he took local streets, navigating around road debris, and then through the increasingly heavily damaged satellite cities to the east of Kobe: industrial Amagasaki, bucolic Ashiya, commercial Nishinomiya.

Mitsui showed me these carefully archived photos more than 15 years later, sitting together at the same table under which he had sought refuge, animatedly describing his route and the horrible things he saw. The worst of the scenes came at the end of his journey. They showed the expected gloomy grey skies and barren trees of winter, but had other features that were shocking in their incongruity. There were photos of Sannomiya Station, the central rail station in downtown Kobe, with significant portions of the roof pancaked onto the floor beneath it. Further west toward Nagata, the photos shift from damaged buildings and road debris to scenes of conflagration.

Like many others I would meet over the course of my fieldwork, more than 15 years after the catastrophe Mitsui described the Great Hanshin Earthquake as a turning point in his life. The experience of the quake motivated him to go to college in his 40s, a highly unusual move for an adult

male Japanese worker who is married with children, in order to study disasters. He joined academic associations, began writing for fire management professional journals, and incorporated disaster prevention (*bôσαι*) into his self-identity. During my 18 months of fieldwork in Kobe, I became acquainted with dozens of people who, like Mitsui, had spent years following the disaster weaving the experience into their personal and professional lives.

This chapter thus focuses on how the earthquake prompted people to forge new relationships with their personal histories and with one another. The next section discusses Mitsui in greater detail, suggesting that his own continuous efforts to chronicle and archive his life is premised on the new relationships and opportunities that the disaster engendered. I then contrast his story with that of another firefighter who has used the quake as an opportunity for self-awareness, and tries to help survivors put their experience into relationship with others. Their efforts connect, I argue, with broad archival efforts to preserve the experience.

Trajectories

I return now to Mitsui, this time circling through his story with slightly different details. I first met him through the Failure Studies Group (FSG). Mitsui was a well-known and liked member of the group's Osaka chapter of the FSG. His kinetic energy, his loud, enthusiastic cackle of a laugh, and his frequent jokes served as comic relief for many of the group's get-togethers.

Another member remarked to me that he was the reason the Osaka chapter was the liveliest and most fun of any other FSG subcommittees.

While I had known of Mitsui since my first Osaka chapter visit, it was not until several months later when I formally met him at the FSG's annual December "forget the year" (*bônenkai*) party in Tokyo. Like most of the attendees, he was wearing a dark suit and tie. He could be heard across the room laughing. The party was already under way after a long day of seminar presentations, and people were beginning to feel loose as the beer and sushi took effect. I had been talking with Kuroda, a somewhat tipsy member of the Tokyo chapter about my research on disaster, and he grabbed Mitsui as he walked past, saying, "This is who you should talk to! He experienced the earthquake, you know. He'll show you around!" I had attended several Osaka chapter events along with Mitsui, but had never had the opportunity to speak with him before; indeed, I had the distinct sense that he had no desire to interact with me — partially, I guessed, because I was such a liminal presence in the group. His and others' initial bemused reaction to my presence had made me acutely and uncomfortably aware that I was the sole active female member of the chapter, the youngest member, a foreigner who looked Japanese, and a lowly graduate student among PhDs and others educated at Japan's most elite institutions, to boot. The question of how I was to be able to get to know the fellow members better had been a source of some concern.

It turned out, however, that this half-drunken introduction made all the difference. Mitsui himself did not drink — he always ordered oolong tea, and joked that he didn't need alcohol to make him happy or talkative — but he immediately played along with Kuroda and began the obligatory *meishi* (business card) exchange with me.²⁴ Mitsui was exceptional in that he enthusiastically and proudly offered two versions of his business card. The first was his “official” card, signifying him as a colonel in Fire Department in a small city in north Osaka. Looking at my own card, he rapidly fired off questions: “Ah, you're American! You speak English, then? You speak English? Really? You seem Japanese! Are you sure you're American?” When I laughed and replied in the affirmative, he smiled and promptly drew my attention to the back of his card, which had his name and position typed in English. Pointing to his title, he said, “I speak English, though just a little bit.” He continued in English, “I am a *ko lo nel!* A *ko lo nel!* You know?” He then pulled out a second *meishi*, which was emblazoned with his avocation: referee and manager of his city's firefighter rugby team. I learned that Mitsui was an avid rugby player; he still sported the tan, trim physique and buzz-cut hairstyle of an athlete, but now that he was in his mid-fifties he mostly refereed games. “Do you know rugby?” he asked. He continued without waiting for my response, and pointed at the color photo on his *meishi* of him

²⁴ *Meishi* exchange (see Bestor 2003) is an important ritual exercise in formal introductions. It helps people place one another, and involves enacting a proscribed set of bodily gestures (presenting the card with two hands, bowing, studiously examining the card) and also ritual statements (reciting rote self-introduction phrases).

kneeling on the grass in a rugby uniform and holding a ball, and said “I’ve played 30 years!” Unsure of what to do with so much enthusiasm, I made an exclamation about how rugby seemed like a tough sport. We chatted in this way for a while, Kuroda having wandered to chat with other partygoers, and we began talking about the earthquake. “It changed my life,” he said. “I’ll show you.” He invited me to visit his home after the holidays, where he would show me his photos and the other earthquake-related work he had done in the years since the quake.

A few weeks later, I sat on the *tatami* mat floor of Mitsui’s two-story house. He had met me at the rail station wearing an Australian rules football windbreaker, and quickly ushered me to his car in the pouring rain. He lived with his wife, Mitsuko, in a modest wood and concrete home, along with his adult son. His daughter was married and lived nearby with her husband and young child. Mitsuko immediately met us at the door, taking my umbrella and guiding me to a room that served as both living room and, after the futon was unrolled later that night, Mitsui’s bedroom. His olive green colonel’s jacket was carefully hanging on a wire hanger from one of the rafters; the room was decorated otherwise mostly with the everyday armature of a densely-lived space: a wooden chest, a glass-doored bookcase filled to the brim, and a low wooden table around which we three sat. Later Mitsui’s son briefly looked down from the staircase; all I saw of him was a pale, slim young man with thinning hair; he quickly returned upstairs, and Mitsui briefly mentioned that his son had suffered from a chronic disease for a

number of years. He was relatively healthy now, but he no longer liked to go outside. At that, unbidden, Mitsui began a long narrative about the earthquake and how his life had changed with it. His story formed the narrative at the beginning of this chapter. Like quite a few other people I would meet during fieldwork, Mitsui framed the story as a turning point in his life.

During our conversation about his quake experience, Mitsui rummaged through the overflowing bookcase in the hallway separating the front room in which we sat, from the kitchen. He carefully extracted a few notebooks and a neatly bundled stack of cards. He removed the rubber band around the cards first, flipping through them as he held them out for me to see. "These are referee cards from rugby games," he explained, "Every date and score is recorded. I've saved all of them since, let's see...1992!" he exclaimed as he showed the first card in the stack to me. Next, he reached for the notebooks and thrust them toward me, opening the pages to display carefully written notes that he had taken in his college classes at a local technical university. He was particularly keen to show me a notebook from a class he had taken from a Kyoto University professor famous in the disaster management field. He felt that he had become the professor's mentee of sorts, and took out a photo of him at the professor's retirement party: "Me, invited to this professor's party at Kyoto University! So many distinguished (*erai*) people there. And me, a fireman!" Shaking his head, he continued, "I couldn't believe I was there. I couldn't believe it."

He then pulled out additional notebooks that had been divided into sections. Each section held neatly handwritten data from major earthquakes that had occurred in Japan over the last few centuries. Holding the notebook in front of us, he guided me through its contents, pointing out the magnitude of each quake, their depth, geological fault type, and statistics on their material and human casualties. He called this part of his “self study” (*jishu gakushû*); he was assembling these records, he said, because he was trying to look for patterns among these disasters. The notebooks, he said, formed part of his “life’s work” (*jinsei no shigoto*).

I came to think of Mitsui’s old rugby referee cards and shelves crammed full with books and notes on disaster as a personal archives of his life’s work. The earthquake provided a steadfast landmark in his life narrative; while Mitsui certainly recognized the event as an unqualified tragedy, ironically in other ways the disaster had led to a personally and professionally satisfying life trajectory. His trajectory was satisfying because, I suggest, it had expanded considerably following the quake and his subsequent interest in earthquakes and disaster management. Mitsui’s sense of humility and flattery from his inclusion in the company of “*erai*” (distinguished) scholars and officials signaled an opportunity that he had not seen available to him before the quake. In this way the earthquake was as productive of new relationships as it was destructive to other lives.

Crossroads

I turn now to another firefighter, Yoshimoto-san. Like Mitsui, Yoshimoto is also a career firefighter, and has worked his way up in the department to head of disaster education in his district. Yoshimoto, who is in his 50s, is a compact, sturdy man and lives with his wife and teenaged daughter in the hilly northern section of Kobe. His quiet and serious demeanor serves as a counter to Mitsui's gregariousness, yet they both exhibit an earnest sincerity when discussing their work. Yoshimoto was on duty on January 17, 1995; while sleeping in the back room of the fire station, his sleep was penetrated by what he had groggily perceived to be the sound of a landslide in the distance. An instant later he was jolted fully awake by the sensation of tremors and the sight of office furniture flying around the room. He vividly remembers an instant of strange and perfect silence just after the shaking stopped. That moment is one of the last he can recall as a chronologically-ordered point in time; minutes later his station was called to fight a number of fires around the city, and he worked without rest until most of the fires had been extinguished the following day. He had made sure that his family and home were safe, but was not able to return home for another eight days. Because of his exhaustion and the overwhelming destruction that he saw that day, Yoshimoto reported that his memories of those first 24 hours exist in his mind only as scenes.

Since the earthquake, Yoshimoto has remained active in emergency preparedness projects and has been frequently called upon to give lectures on his experiences and on the role of firefighters in disaster management. He is

also an avid ceramics artist and spends some weekends maintaining his ancestral home in the countryside outside of Kobe. Since the earthquake Yoshimoto has also committed himself to collaborations with disaster researchers in Kobe and Kyoto to develop disaster prevention materials for the public.

Also like Mitsui, Yoshimoto considers the disaster one of the major events in his life. In 2002 he self-financed the publication of a disaster memoir entitled *The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake As Seen by a Firefighter*. Printed side-by-side in both Japanese and English text, the book is a fascinating collection of statistics, personal essays from Yoshimoto and others, and ruminations about how people recover from disaster. The memoir is striking in its openness to readers' criticisms of his and other rescue teams' actions, and he counters feel-good narratives about people in the disaster zone always helping others through his observations of stressed evacuees bickering, and careless drivers getting into accidents with one another. Nevertheless, he asserts that the book is a chronicle of collaboration and writes, "The reality is that we got through this trial called a disaster through the solidarity of all" (94). Yoshimoto also writes that his aim in publishing the book is to convey a firefighter's perspective — one that is often overlooked — and pass on the lessons they learned from the experience.

Most interesting about Yoshimoto's memoir, however, is that it serves as a chronicle to his self-admitted struggle to understand his own emotions in relation to the disaster and its aftereffects. In a section on PTSD, he offers data

on the condition from studies on Japanese and American soldiers. He then wonders if he himself suffers from condition. "It is my opinion," he writes, "that most firefighters would answer, 'I don't know.' Other rescue staff and I came across many casualties. I had a difficult time physically, yet I am not sure how I was mentally affected" (67). He dispassionately mentions that he has always considered himself suited to a career in rescue because he wakes easily from deep sleep and is not frightened by bleeding. But he also relays harrowing stories about dilemmas he encountered and the struggles he continues to face reconciling them. In one case, he talks about leaving the fire station equipped with only a saw, the sole tool remaining in the station. He soon encountered a man whose legs had been pinned under the pillars of a collapsed building. Yoshimoto writes, "He painfully and desperately begged me to cut off his legs. The fire was quickly and violently approaching, and I understood immediately what he wanted. I could not cut off his legs with the saw. When I returned later, he had burned to death" (70).

Yoshimoto asks colleagues whether he made the right decision, and is told that he could not have expected himself to be able to cut the man's legs even if it would have meant saving the man's life. Nevertheless, Yoshimoto writes about the "deep sorrow" that he had "concealed and contained" as a result of his earthquake experience (70). He reports that he overreacted to subsequent accidents and incidents such as the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attacks, and for a time felt less comfortable in the intimate silence of his home than among his colleagues at the fire department.

Despite his “deep sorrow,” Yoshimoto notes that he thought he felt no emotions when people asked him to write down his personal experiences from the disaster. He only realized the effect the earthquake had on him when he recognized the visceral bodily reactions he experienced at the thought of sitting down and committing his thoughts and memories to paper. But once he did sit down to write, he was unable to stop. The book, he told me later, helped him make sense of the earthquake as a personal experience. The process of chronicling his own impressions and reactions paved the way to understanding who he was in relation to the disaster, and to the trauma that the disaster represented.

He also said that he wrote the book because he sensed a gradual degradation of human relations (*ningen kankei*) in general after the quake. This was evident, he said, in a certain lack of warmth and friendliness in Kobe’s neighborhoods that had previously been *shitashî*, or intimate. In Higashi Nada ward, for example, he writes that people “used to be very warm-hearted and friendly before the earthquake. They seemed to be losing their warmth and losing sight of their objectives in life. Soon we realized that it was due to the disappearance of the community they had been in” (4).

Yoshimoto’s sense that social relations in the city had changed for the worse after the quake was echoed in post-quake narratives from other interlocutors as well. Narratives about the reconstruction period were often peppered with references to the population of residents who were displaced from their homes and forced to move outside of the city. Temporary housing,

which in some cases were occupied for more than a year after the quake, were sometimes located in areas as far as Rinkû Town in neighboring Osaka, which in the mid-1990s was a thinly populated new development across the bay by Kansai International Airport. Their isolation meant that public transportation options were slim and even grocery shopping was an effort. Others who were for various reasons not living in temporary housing either chose or were forced to move out of Kobe in search of work, or to take shelter with relatives.

The dissolution of communities due to these factors, people told me, took its most vicious toll on the elderly. Deprived of their routines and the proximity of intimate friends and neighbors, the elderly were vulnerable to simply being forgotten. *Kodokushi*, or “lonely death,” has garnered a great deal of media attention in relation to the Kobe disaster, as elderly persons — often men, and often those already on social margins without support from relatives — were found dead in their homes.²⁵ According to the Hyogo prefectural police, it is estimated that approximately 1,057 solitary deaths have occurred in Kobe city and its surrounding prefecture.

On a drive one day through Nagata ward with a friend, Murakami-san, he gestured broadly with his right hand to the familiar orange and black storefront of Yoshinoya, a fast food chain known for cheap *donburi* rice bowls. His left hand gripping the wheel, he then pointed to the apartment housing

²⁵ The *kodokushi* phenomenon has been a consistent discussion in Japanese national discourse about troubling social trends. In 2012 the discussion came to a head when the central government admitted to losing track of nearly a quarter-million residents over 100 years of age (see McDonald 2012 for one example of coverage).

units above the storefront, saying, “These are where the old men (*rôjin*) live. They go down to Yoshinoya to eat, then go back up to their apartment. Everyday, without talking to anyone, without ever going outside.” The lonely elderly man was framed by Murakami, and in public discourse in general, as an increasingly-pervasive social ill made visible by the quake. The gradual dissolution of close multigenerational family ties, increasing geographic mobility, and the lack of an effective public welfare system for financially-strapped vulnerable populations has been the subject of pervasive public discussion following the Kobe disaster.

Linked to these concerns is also a more general anxiety voiced by interlocutors who were earthquake survivors and activists. They expressed worry that the Hanshin quake in general, and not just the elderly, was in danger of being lost from memory. Indeed, Kobe’s population demographics had changed so much since 1995 due to outmigration after the earthquake that new residents and births after 1995 now accounted for more people than those who had actually lived in the city in 1995. In Nagata ward, where I lived, the population has still not returned to pre-quake levels. To disaster information activists, this meant that the earthquake was in very real danger of becoming forgotten. Implicit in this anxiety was not just the old saying of *tensai wa wasuretakara koro ni yatte kuru* (disasters occur the moment they are forgotten), but a more visceral anxiety about a dismissal of the importance of the quake to Kobe, to Japan, and to individual lives.

In the Aftermath of Violent Change

I suggest that the anxiety about forgetting the Kobe catastrophe is intertwined with a wider anxiety about what Yoshimoto mentioned: the loss of social relationships and community ties in both Kobe and in Japanese society in general.

As I wrote in Chapter 1, Kobe, and the Hanshin earthquake in particular, sat at the confluence of a number of events that mark the “lost decade” of 1990s Japan. In addition to the city’s national reputation as aggressively profit-driven, it was the site of multiple bank failures that characterized the Japanese banking crisis and was well-known as the headquarters of the Yamaguchi-gumi, Japan’s largest *yakuza* organization that operates as an open secret in the city.²⁶ Kobe was also the site of a murder case that became, as Andrea Arai (2006) writes, part of a sense of continuing national crisis in the aftermath of the Hanshin earthquake, the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attacks, and the collapse of the Japanese economic bubble. The murderer in this case was known as *Shonen A*, or “Youth A,” who was identified with a pseudonym because he was only 14 at the time he murdered and mutilated a 11-year old boy, Jun Hase, leaving his body to be found by classmates in front of Hase’s school gates at Tomogaoka Junior High School in coastal Suma Ward on the western edge of Kobe city. He later confessed to an earlier murder of a 10-year old girl, as well as the assaults of several other girls. *Shonen A*, who referred to himself as Sakakibara Seito, had taunted the

²⁶ As I note in the preface, the Yamaguchi-gumi became the recipient of neighborly goodwill when members distributed hot meals to evacuees before official rescue workers were able to distribute food.

public with threatening notes sent to the city's newspaper, *Kobe Shinbun*. Officials initially formed the image of a suspect who was in his 30s or 40s, but the eventual arrest of the 14-year old quickly turned the story into one about dystopian modern life, a loss of national cultural values, and the monstrosities such a loss could produce. Arai writes that discussions of *Shonen A* eventually tapped into national discourses that had been gaining steam since the 1990s and was captured in phrases such as *kodomo ga hen da* (the children are turning strange) and *atarashî kodomo* (the new child) (2000: 847-848). Such discourses were based upon an implicit horror that the murderer, in this case, was otherwise a "*futsû no kodomo*" (ordinary child).

The *Shonen A* case also articulated with an undercurrent of violence that has run through Kobe. Infighting among the Yamaguchi-gumi yakuza organization led to a public shootout in 1997 at the Kobe Oriental Hotel, a place associated more for its nearby *shinkansen* bullet train stop and proximity to the picturesque tourist spot, Mount Rokko. A bystander was killed, and the incident stood out in a country where guns are illegal and shootouts extremely rare.

Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami hints at this undercurrent of violence and the loss of a more innocent past. Murakami grew up in bedroom communities encircling Kobe and spent many a teenaged jaunt in the city. In an essay written in the early 2000s he writes about a return visit to the city, and walks from Nishinomiya to Kobe, retracing the locations of his childhood

haunts. Throughout he notices a feeling of strangeness, as if he is walking in an entirely new place:

Places that used to be empty lots weren't empty any more, and places that hadn't been empty now were – like photo negatives and positives replacing each other. In most cases the former were empty lots that were now residences, the latter where old houses had been destroyed in the earthquake. These before-and-after images had a synergistic effect, adding a fictitious wash to my memories of how the town used to be (Murakami 2013).

Murakami's surreal sense of "photo negatives and positives replacing each other" is supplemented by a nagging desire to understand the earthquake in relation to other signal national events of the late 1990s, particularly the sarin gas attack that occurred two months after the quake in March 1995. Murakami eventually wrote a meticulously-researched oral history of survivors of the sarin gas attacks in his 1998 book, *Underground*.²⁷ He writes that the earthquake and gas attacks were to him, "a very suggestive change of events.... What I was seeking in that book, what I wanted to write about — what I, myself, really wanted to know more about — was the violence in our society that lies hidden right beneath us. About the violence that's there as a latent possibility, and the possibility that actually reveals itself in the form of violence, all of which we tend to forget exists." He adds, "To me, the two events weren't separate and discrete; unraveling one might help unravel the other. This was simultaneously a physical and a

²⁷ *Underground* was published in Japanese in 1998, and the English translation followed several years later in 2000. Murakami also published a collection of short stories inspired by the quake in *Kami no Kodomo-tachi wa Mina Odoru* (All of God's Children Dance) in 2000 (released in English as *After the Quake* in 2002).

psychological issue. In other words, the psychological is itself the physical” (Murakami 2013).

Murakami here connects the violence that occurred beneath the earth’s crust with the violence that occurred in the subway beneath Tokyo’s sidewalks. In Murakami’s rendering, the rapid succession of one disaster, geologically determined, and another, human-made, seems not so much odd timing as portentous and vaguely sinister. Both were physical manifestations of violence with aftereffects that cascaded across an already-existing landscape of financial crisis and national-cultural anxiety. And, as Murakami hints, they are also psychological in the sense that the two incidents seemed both a symptom and a catalyst for the 1990s, a period that Harry Harootunian and Tomiko Yoda have called one of “wide-reaching transformation” in Japanese society due to escalating unemployment, the demise of the lifetime employment system, and the concomitant rise of neoliberal governmental policies (2006:1).

Amidst this violent physical and metaphorical sundering of relationships between people, places, and social structures, my interlocutors in Kobe in 2011 were concerned with stitching personal and social-structural associations back together. They did so through the use of disaster information activities that sought to accomplish two things. First, they attempted to connect people to others and also to themselves — to their experiences and memories, as we saw with Yoshimoto’s writings. Second, they attempted to make people aware of and oriented toward a changing

social, economic, and physical landscape in Kobe. These practices and programs thus extended far beyond simple disaster awareness; rather, they utilized a language of universal humanism that harkened to a past — idealized or not — in which more personal and institutional effort was placed on building and maintaining relationships, and a shared concern for human relations (*ningen kankei*) had ordered daily life. In this way disaster information practices that might seem to be superficial, such as disaster prevention radio shows, dances, and games, always enfold its participants and publics into a much larger social project.

I turn now to one of these projects, a disaster role-playing card game called “CROSSROAD Kobe.” The game was designed by a group of scholars and disaster management professionals at Kyoto University, and is based on interviews of survivors and the real-life moral and practical quandaries they experienced after the quake. The game’s design is based in part on Lave and Wenger’s work (1991) on situated learning and communities of practice, in which learning occurs not through direct transmission from teacher to student, but by actively co-creating knowledge together. In addition to learning about disaster through role-playing in small groups, another purpose of CROSSROAD KOBE is to discourage consensus as a goal and instead encourage group members to make potentially controversial decisions. This is in part because of the designers’ argument that decision-making in a disaster situation is full of pressures that might require bold decisions. Yoshimoto, the firefighter friend whom I discussed earlier in this

chapter, invited me to participate in an iteration of the CROSSROAD Kobe game at a neighborhood event he facilitated with elderly residents in Nada Ward, one of the areas that sustained the heaviest damage in 1995. I quote here from my fieldnotes:

It's another hot September day, and the neighborhood association hall in Nada Ward is stifling. I arrived early to help Yoshimoto-san set up the room in preparation for the seminar; we opened all the windows, turned on the fans, and rearranged the tables and chairs to create teams for the 50 or so people who are taking part. He had me distribute game cards and pieces to each of the tables, and then urged me to participate in the game so that I'd have a chance to chat with people and experience the role-playing dilemmas that he would be posing during game play. People begin filtering in; most are older pensioners who look to be in their 60s and 70s. Most seem to know one another; they greet each other as they enter the room and choose seats near their friends. Yoshimoto-san has the air of a teacher, knowledgeable and confident in a friendly way, as he nods at people in welcome and invites them to have a seat.

By 1 pm everyone has shown up, and Yoshimoto-san closes the doors and begins his jiko shōkai (personal introduction). He talks about how, as part of a team of public officials and researchers at Kyoto University, he worked to create the CROSSROAD Kobe game as a way for people to really think through the kinds of difficult decisions one is faced with in disaster situations. He adds that he knows that many people here understand this very well, through their own experiences during the Hanshin Awaji disaster. He then

explains the rules of the game. We are handed sheets of paper on which various scenarios are written. These scenarios are dilemmas that were actually faced by survivors, public officials, and others just after the Hanshin quake. We will be considering these scenarios through the eyes of an assigned role, and will then have to say whether we agree or not with the decision that was made. Our duty is to come up with our opinion without conferring with anyone else. He emphasized that we will be simultaneously unveiling our decision to each other in the form of an “agree” or “disagree” card; while there is no right or wrong answer, those who answer in the minority will get extra points. Yoshimoto later told me that the reason for this is to actively reward those who are willing who make unpopular decisions and to think independently, because consensus thinking is a danger in perilous, time-sensitive situations.

Hearing no questions, Yoshimoto-san goes through the first scenario: “You are a municipal employee charged with the responsibility of managing an evacuation shelter at an elementary school. The shelter is full, but people are asking to gain entry. You deny their request, sending them to look for assistance at another center.” He pauses to give us time to consider the decision. I feel torn, but end up choosing the “agree” card at the last minute. I look around at the faces of my table-mates, two housewives in their 60s, and three older retired gentlemen who look to be in their 60s or 70s. I feel unexpectedly nervous that I’ve made the less-popular decision. We’re all quiet for a moment, until Yoshimoto-san instructs us all to flip over our cards at

the same time. We do, and quickly discover that we're split: half of us agree with the manager's decision, and the other half disagree. Yoshimoto-san gives us some background on the scenario, saying that this circumstance is one that happened often as people sought shelter just after the quake. "It's a difficult decision," he said, "But the reasoning is that people have to be treated equally. If you let one person in, you have to let everyone else in." He asked the participants for their thoughts, calling on a few people to discuss their reasons for their choice. A neatly dressed woman in her 50s with short permed hair stood up. "This happened to my family," she said. "It was difficult (taihen). We didn't know where to go," she added, her face crumpling a bit and her voice cracking. "There was no information about where we could get help. No one seemed to know what was going on." She tentatively bobbed a bit as if to bow, and sat down. I noticed others around the room nodding.

We go on to the next round of cards, and the subjects range from whether or not we would serve food to evacuees that had passed its "best by" date, to whether or not we would report to work as usual after sustaining material damages, but not injuries, in a disaster. Each decision we made spurred quite a bit of discussion, and attendees often verbally linked the scenario to their specific experiences after the quake.

Yoshimoto utilized the CROSSROAD Kobe game's specific examples from the Hanshin earthquake in order to generate a conversation about the practical and moral dilemmas posed by an enormously stressed situation.

After participating with these people in Nada ward, most of whom had experienced the disaster firsthand, it also struck me that the game offered a way for participants to make sense of their experiences in a lateral way. By this I mean two things: first, the game implicitly recognized each participant as an expert, a feeling that was probably underscored by participants' own sense of truly knowing disaster by virtue of having lived through it. By projecting themselves into the role of an evacuation center manager, a firefighter, or an evacuee, they were encouraged to extend this expertise and apply it to situations that they may not have personally experienced. The CROSSROAD Kobe game thus created a space for alternative modes of expertise.²⁸ Observing so many of my fellow participants feeling comfortable or compelled enough to share their experiences during game play suggested that they were happy for the opportunity to have their memories acknowledged and made sense of as part of a larger social experience.

Second, by prompting participants to try on different roles, the CROSSROAD game did the ancillary work of having participants put themselves in relationship with one another and with themselves. In other words, participants at this event at the Nada Senior Center encouraged quake survivors to imagine themselves as other people. In doing so they asked these people to reflect on how their own subjective experiences related to a larger whole and to other people caught in moral and practical dilemmas. In this way, the game is a complex exercise in reasoned empathy and deliberate

²⁸ The creators of the game indeed collaborative knowledge-making as one aim of the exercise (Yamori 2009).

action; for example, in game play the woman I quoted in my field notes who had been turned away from an evacuation center in 1995 had to take on the difficult role of a center manager who must balance the needs and safety of many people. Allowing her and other participants to go through the deliberative process of whether they should admit additional people to an at-capacity shelter placed the woman in the position of possibly deciding against her 1995 self. In my subsequent opportunities to see the CROSSROAD game enacted in groups, participants also discussed how the game had helped them realize that acts such as those committed by the evacuation center manager were not done out of cruelty nor even disregard, but out of logistical constraints in desperate circumstances.

An Archive for the Future to Remake the Past

The CROSSROAD game offers one way for participants to reimagine the relationships between themselves, others, and the disaster. The scenarios it asks participants to ponder stresses reasoned and principled decision-making, even while acknowledging that the process of coming to reasoned conclusions does not mean that everyone will draw the same connections between evidence and action. The game makers' deliberate decision to incorporate this flexibility of relationship and response is echoed also in other informational practices relating to the Hanshin quake (Yamori 2005). In this next section I turn to another of these practices: the archives.

Just as Mitsui, the firefighter I profiled at the beginning of this chapter, had curated a collection of photographs, newspaper clippings, and notebooks filled with earthquake statistics, I hazard that similar archives exist in homes and institutions all over the Hanshin region. In visits to people's homes and offices, I grew to count on interlocutors excusing themselves from our conversation in order to rummage through bookshelves and drawers so that they could show me the miscellaneous memorabilia they had collected about the earthquake.

These personal collections are intriguing in the sense that they seem to cement, in tangible ways, the collector's experience of and relationship with the quake. Even — and especially — those who did not personally sustain losses because of the disaster were able to produce yellowed copies of *Kobe Shinbun* newspaper articles about the quake, or commemorative photo anthologies of the disaster compiled by one of the national newspaper companies. Unlike Mitsui's collection, many of these personal archives seemed stable in the manner of a special collection dedicated to preserving the past: once compiled, they took no new entries.

By contrast, the various institutional archives I encountered in Kobe were constantly growing and were actively maintained and utilized. Institutional archives exist at organizations and public libraries throughout Kobe, but the two primary archives for the quake exist at the University of Kobe and at the Disaster Reduction Institute in the post-quake Happy Active Town Kobe (HAT Kobe) development. Both can be freely accessed by the

public, which is not standard for many libraries (for example, the Kobe University library is open to students only; visitors are given special access only to the *shinsai bunko* [disaster collection] housed in one section of the building). Both archives contain an overwhelmingly diverse array of documents, photos, and audiovisual recordings.

In my many hours spent in both facilities, I was struck by the array of materials that Kobe residents had contributed to the archives. They included newsletters from community town hall and other meetings held during the reconstruction period, scientific reports, government white papers and other documents, amateur poetry by senior citizen's clubs, photographs, drawings, memoirs, letters, and much more. The sheer variety of information generated by and after the quake is reminiscent of the broad genre called *tensai zassan*, or disaster miscellany, described by Weisenfeld (2012) in relation to the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923.

Despite its miscellaneous forms, the content of the archives are held together by virtue of their being placed in a collection in relation to one another. They function in much the same way as Gregory Bowker and Leigh Star (1999) write of telephone books. As an information system, the phone book places people in relation to each other (through alphabetization, for example) and to place (in the form of a regional phone book or a specific area code). Like the phone book, the infrastructure upon which the archive relies is also one of relationality.

Also key here is the information that the archive contains and the relationships they foster and reinforce. Kim Fortun's (2004) study of environmental information systems, for example, argues that such infrastructures are "...technologies designed to produce new truths, new social relationships, new forms of political decision-making and, ultimately, a renewed environment" (54). Andrew Barry's (2013) recent study of the public informational created by British Petroleum (BP) while constructing a new pipeline in Georgia similarly contends that information "...renders certain objects, materials, problems and spaces visible, while others are not" (18).

Accordingly, Fortun and Barry focus on information as a technology of control. In the case of the BP oil pipeline project, for example, Barry argues that the pipeline information archive was an effort by BP to increase public transparency yet simultaneously functioned as a "projective and managerial device" (24). In this way Barry and Fortun's analyses resonate with Foucaultian insights connecting control over knowledge to power, as well as Derrida's (1996) notion of the archive as a domicile of power. Derrida argues that the archive's power hinges on its ability to consign – to "assign residence" and "put in reserve" – documents that tell a particular history from a particular point of view. Just as the archive symbolizes power through the collection in its holdings and through its domicile in the home of authority, the contents of the archive model and recreate that authority through the appearance of unity.²⁹

²⁹ See also Bowker (2005) for a parallel discussion about databases.

While these analyses certainly pertain to archives in many places, the characterizations of the archive as necessarily a place striving for unity and governed by a magistrate do not fit neatly with the sense of democratic openness that characterizes the two primary archives in Kobe. Researchers I spoke with used the disaster archive to find patterns in information, to identify case studies, and to try to discern how disaster managers might do things differently in future catastrophes. Residents were also active users and visitors; throughout my fieldwork I often spoke with and observed people at the Kobe University and Disaster Reduction Institute's archives who were not trained scholars, but who were simply committed to self-study or had an interest in the disaster. On one occasion while conducting my own archival research at the Disaster Reduction Institute I sat for hours across from an elderly gentleman who sat with a stack of books and photo anthologies. He sat there slowly going through the books and taking notes. At one point I looked up from my work and saw him reading, his face twisted in silent grief, tears streaming down his face.

I suggest, then, that discussions of the archive as the material accretion of power does not quite capture the way in which public archives can be living sites where people come together, often asynchronously, out of mutual interest. In this way the archive performs a decidedly democratic ethics of information and of relationality that Derrida's conception does not allow. While the quake archives may strive toward some kind of whole in terms of collecting as much information and artifacts as possible, the heterogeneity of

its materials and of the people who contribute to the repository suggests that this holism is less about a “unified” image than a collective effort at salvaging an experience (Derrida 1996: 34).

Moreover, the archivists I encountered in my research were self-reflexive of their own roles as collectors and curators, and admitted to a degree of ambivalence about their work. One of my most productive conversations about the archives was with Suzuki Akiko, the head archivist of the Kobe University *Shinsai bunko* (disaster collection). I first saw her at a lecture she gave at the Disaster Reduction Institute in HAT Kobe. As head archivist, she is tasked with collecting and archiving earthquake-related artifacts, from newspaper articles to personal accounts and government reports. She was speaking on a topic she had titled, “Disaster: The Present and the Now” (*Saigai: genzai to ima*). In her presentation she explained that the gap between the *genzai* (the present), and *ima* (the now), indicates the degree to which she and her colleagues are constantly challenged with the question of why they continue to save fragments of a disaster. She hopes, she said, that somehow the archive could become the raw material for future improvements in disaster management, or helpful in some other way. It is a quandary, she said, that we somehow know these materials are important, but are nevertheless unsure about what they are important for.

This statement became the basis of our personal conversation a few months later in her small office at Kobe University. Like many universities in Japan, this institution for higher learning is literally perched high up on a hill,

making the commute to campus a multi-bus journey. Petite and casually dressed in a lime green t-shirt and black pants, Suzuki sensei's short hair and round wire-rimmed glasses gave her an air of maternal seriousness. She had taken an unusual path to her position: in 1995, she had been conducting research on Japanese wartime history while also teaching as a high school teacher on contract. This previous project bears a striking resemblance to her current work with earthquake records. She explained to me that Japanese archives do not exist as they do in the U.S.; she had spent time at the National Archives in Maryland doing research, and thought it queer (*fushigi*) that she would have to go to the United States in order to access Japanese wartime records. She found it interesting that she was able to access the NARA archives freely, "with only a passport," and thought that the open access to materials enabled people to learn from their past. With such information, she said, they could understand why bombings were done, and what kinds of strategies related to them, and thereby use them to prevent future calamities from happening.

At the time of the earthquake she had been living with her husband and three children in Ashiya, just north of the Hankyu railroad line. Their position closer to the mountains meant they escaped the quake without injuries and only minor damage to their home. During this time she also became involved with a document preservation group, one of a network sprinkled through the nation dedicating to preserving historical materials. She also took a part-time job, along with two sociology students, to collect

earthquake materials. As part of this work she began visiting evacuation centers in August 1995 and solicited evacuees to donate documents and other items that were pertinent to the quake.

Part of this effort was related to an earlier project organized by Hyogo prefecture (of which Kobe city is a part), which sought to assemble materials from the disaster. Telling me this, Suzuki sensei paused to reach into one of the bookshelves near her desk. She pulled out a sample of one of the prefecture's advertisements that were distributed to evacuation centers. The flyer requested evacuees to please turn in items they think might be historically significant. The project failed because, Suzuki said, people are unfamiliar with the prefectural government; they deal more closely with their *shichôson* (literally, "cities, towns, and villages"; these represent local units of bureaucratic organization). Usually the prefecture requests the *shichôson* to collect things on its behalf. In this case, however, the prefecture attempted to go directly to citizens and, as could be predicted, there was hardly any response.

Suzuki and her co-workers were thus hired to personally visit with evacuees and look for materials. While they planned on going to evacuation centers first because many of them were closing that summer, they had difficulties getting some documents because people were constantly moving and some did not know where they would be going next. They were able to salvage some materials, mostly flyers and other papers that people had thought of simply as information to be consumed and then thrown away.

Documents like paper postings about where to find drinking water for that day, for instance, was useful to evacuees for the information that they contained, not as historical artifacts. “They weren’t in the phase of ‘remembering’ anything yet, or even thinking that these things might be wanted for the future,” Suzuki told me.

These activities continued even after the Kobe University *shinsai bunko* (disaster collection) was founded in 1995. In 2000, for instance, Hyogo prefecture incorporated the archive into a welfare and stimulus program targeting middle-aged unemployed people in the area. The prefecture hired approximately 100 people — most or all of whom had no related experience — to conduct a large-scale survey to discover what documents and other artifacts from the quake that people had in their homes. The workers were given training on how to conduct interviews, and while they did not set out to request artifacts from people, in the end enough material was collected to form the basis of the information archived in the Disaster Reduction Institute in HAT Kobe.

Aside from prefecture-sponsored activities, there were also purely citizen-led projects that attempted to create an archival memory of the disaster. Suzuki was active in the largest of these, a group called “*Shinsai-Machi no Âkaibu*” (disaster town archive), none of whose members had professional experience as archivists. The group existed for only three years, but during this time, Suzuki said, they did a great deal of collecting. “To be honest,” she admitted, “we didn’t really know why we were saving these

things. We just knew that it was important, and we needed to preserve them.”

A great deal of her and others’ efforts are placed on capturing as many materials as possible, from as wide a population as practicable. Indeed, archivists’ initial search for materials was indiscriminate. Further, archivists like Suzuki and groups like *Shinsai Machi no Âkaibu* are ambivalent about the scope and purpose of the archive: whom does it serve? what is it for? Why are we doing this work? The moral, reflexive commitment of the archivists to creating an as-comprehensive-as-possible collection of the Kobe disaster through the gathering together – the consignment – of a variety of artifacts from the catastrophe suggests that the Hanshin quake archives is another counter-example to Derrida’s institution of authority.

Toward the end of my conversation with Suzuki, I asked her about something I had noticed when visiting with quake survivors. Even those who did not suffer damage in the quake often had what I thought of as personal archives: a bookshelf or a sheaf of newspaper clippings and photos that chronicled the disaster. I asked Suzuki why she thought people did this. She paused, took a breath, and gave a small shrug. “*Ato ga nagai desune* [The after is long],” she responded. Suzuki’s statement suggests that the “long after” of the quake has become an ontological issue among quake survivors, disaster researchers, and information activists in Kobe. How does one continue to live after surviving a major catastrophe? To Mitsui, Yoshimoto, and Suzuki, the earthquake became a pivot point around which their professional lives and

personal interests turn. The private archives in people's homes seems to suggest that to those who did not consider the earthquake to be an obvious turning point, it still represented something worth keeping at hand, if not in one's day-to-day life, then on a bookshelf or in a closet.

And to be sure, preserving the texts, photos, and objects contained in the archive is undoubtedly the most obvious aim of institutional archives. But equally key is the possibility that another aim of the archive is to enable Kobe and the survivors of the Hanshin quake to lay claim to something deeply relational: a connection to a greater sense of history, and how it is an experience both extraordinary and held in common with others. The archive, aside from being a repository of knowledge and history about a particular disaster, is consequently also a search for why the quake happened when and where it did.

Such a possibility resonates with other self-chronicling efforts in Japan, particularly an alternative knowledge-making practice that emerged in 1960s called *jibunshi*, or self-histories. Figal (1996) writes that *jibunshi* refers to "any kind of historiography (that is, 'history-writing'), regardless of form and medium, that takes as its base reconstructed memories of one's own individual life experiences and places them in relation to broader historical events, from local to regional, national, and even global levels" (904). Most often practiced by women who were born around the end of World War II (Nozawa 2012: 67), leaders of the *jibunshi* movement consciously place what Figal and Carol Gluck term "little histories" against the dominant histories

written by academics and those in the media (Figal 1996: 905). Figal notes that the movement has its roots in the postwar *fudangi* movement that fostered literacy among Japanese by encouraging them to write everyday (Figal 1996: 906).

Important to the practice of *jibunshi* is the non-fetishization of writing; one's self-histories, which they call "records" (*kiroku*) rather than "histories," are not supposed to be poetic or beautiful, but are rather plain, unembellished narrative accounts of one's everyday life. While the practice of *jibunshi* is carried out in a discourse of humility, it also carves out a space for *jibunshi* authors to position themselves within a larger arc of history. Further, as linguistic anthropologist Shunsuke Nozawa (2012) writes, the publication of *jibunshi* outside of the usual publishing industry is a demonstration of writers' "counternormative stance away from the national and Tokyo-centered mediatization" (68).

These home-grown histories that are meant to capture the small but meaningful moments of a person's life share striking themes with Mitsui, Yoshimoto, and the archivists' efforts to preserve a diversity of narratives about their individual and collective experiences. Practices like *jibunshi*, the crafting of home archives, and the amateur-led collection of disaster artifacts suggests that these practitioners are exercising an ethos of alternative knowledge that values acknowledging a diversity of experiences.

CHAPTER 3: The Politics of No Politics

While many narratives about the Hanshin Earthquake incorporate stories of decline, loss, and failure, a more hopeful theme credits the quake with the genesis of widespread volunteer efforts in Japan. News reports from the days after the earthquake describe more than 1.5 million people — particularly college-aged youth — descending upon Kobe to offer labor and other forms of help. Reporters and news agencies commented on what seemed like the unprecedented nature of such a spontaneous impulse to help strangers, and Kyudo News Agency, among other outlets, later labeled 1995 as the *borantia gannen* (“the origin year of the volunteer”). Scholars of civil society in Japan and abroad commented on the revolutionary potential of volunteerism spurred by the quake (Honma and Deguchi 1996; Hirata 2002; Yamamoto 1995, 1998). They suggested that it held the possibility of opening up a new era in Japanese civic politics. The implicit critique here, which I return to later in this chapter, is that Japanese society by the early-mid 1990s had been characterized by apathy and a hesitancy to step outside of one’s natal, educational, and occupational affiliations in order to participate in a broader range of public life.

Moreover, the view that volunteerism offered a redeeming narrative to the Hanshin earthquake story functions as the positive pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. The just-so origin story of the birth of a new style of civil society

(*shimin shakai*) in 1995 ostensibly fills the gaps left by the negative puzzle pieces of social decline, economic loss, and personal and political failures. Celebratory suppositions that the nagging puzzle of an apathetic Japanese public could be at least partially solved with a revitalized sense of community spirit also leaves out a more pessimistic perspective: that volunteerism becomes essential to society as the neoliberal state increasingly withdraws from providing public welfare services (Kaneko 1994; Nakano 2005). And, as I discuss later, such stories that date the birth of volunteerism to 1995 elide a long history of community participation and activism.

While there was indeed a massive influx of volunteers in the immediate post-quake days and weeks, the ensuing months and years saw a sharp decline in volunteerism, and nothing like the dramatic “associational revolution” predicted by some civil society scholars (Salamon 1994; see also Kaneko 1994).³⁰ As a result, writes anthropologist Lynne Nakano, in ensuing years observers “revised their hopes downward” to the point that volunteerism became viewed by many in Japan as “largely media and state rhetoric with little substance in everyday practice” (2005:2).

The result has been a scholarly wrestling, especially among political scientists and economists, about the relative existence of civil society in Japan and the institutional and cultural constraints that may be inhibiting its development (Pekkanen 2006; Schwartz and Pharr 2003; Yamauchi 2003). This is not my concern. Rather, I am interested in the cultural narrative of 1995 as

³⁰ See also Slater (2013) for a parallel example from the Great East Japan Disaster of March 2011.

the “first year of the volunteer” as just that: an origin story that forecasted a new era of associational life and politics in contemporary Japan. If the previous chapter considered the ways by which individual earthquake survivors and disaster information practitioners formed connections and relationships among themselves and with the disaster, then this chapter considers the broader question of how the earthquake has become symbolic of the need for a renewed sense of associational life but not necessarily the formal civil society definition posited by civil society scholars such as Salamon (1994). The implication of this symbolism is that Japanese people’s sense of community and willingness to work to maintain those ties have been lost somewhere along the road to postwar economic success (Yoda 2006; McCormack 1996).

I use the term “associational life” to denote the breadth of relationships created by and among individuals with people and institutions beyond just their families, workplaces, and school affiliations. These associations might include participation in non-profit organizations, interest or hobby clubs, study groups (*gakkai*), or other informal and formal organizations. Many of these groups are very small. Importantly, “associational life,” or what Frank Schwartz and Susan Pharr have called an “associational landscape,” (Schwartz and Pharr 2003:330) allows ethnographic purchase on two issues. First, it allows us to draw from, and not depend upon, civil society literatures that tend to be concerned more with incentives and constraints to democratic participation (Putnam 2000; Salamon 2004). Second, it offers ethnographic

specificity to discussions about publics and the public sphere (Fraser 1992; Habermas 1989; Warner 2002, among others). These two benefits of thinking about “associational life” are particularly salient to disaster-related public activities because many of these do not entail the overt practice of politics in terms of advocacy or activism. Rather, these activities often involve more modest engagements that espouse the importance of fostering human relationships (*ningen kankei*) and community ties between and among individuals, non-profit organizations, clubs, and other interest groups. Finally, thinking about associational life also does not require an evolutionary view of association-forming “habits” as a precondition for a thriving democracy (de Tocqueville 1966; Putnam 2000). Such a teleological view of civic engagement skips over a thorough understanding of the historically-situated cultural meanings and resonances of associations between people and organizations.

Consequently, this chapter considers the relationship between democracy, associational politics, and neoliberal ideas of responsibility in contemporary Japan through the lens of citizen-led disaster preparedness and education groups. It argues for maintaining an appreciative eye for subtle forms — and maybe even seemingly superficial, but no less meaningful — forms of citizen participation. Such an emic engagement, I suggest, allows for a view of citizenship that looks and acts markedly different from what Habermasian analyses might envision as a public sphere in which people gather together in coffee houses and discuss and debate issues of the day

(Habermas 1989). I argue that the kind of public participation most salient among disaster-related activities and organizations in Kobe is one that follows a kind of “politics of no politics.” That is, civic activities are consciously depoliticized and silent — or at least rendered subtle — with regard to political action.

The first section of this chapter offers an analysis of a disaster preparedness club in Osaka. Through this ethnographic vignette, I suggest that preparedness club participants see their actions not, or at least not primarily, in terms of civic duty, but rather as a pragmatic obligation to friends and neighbors. I then consider a very different case of a non-profit organization in Kobe that desires to effect political change, but whose activities are shaped by a sustained strategy toward accomplishing its work through activities designed to seem apolitical. I then work backwards from these accounts, offering an historical means for understanding how words like “citizen,” “democracy” and “activism” are used cautiously and sparingly by participants in my study. Finally, the chapter looks more narrowly at the content of the projects and programs conducted by citizens and non-profit groups engaged in disaster mitigation and preparedness. I consider in particular how participants’ emphasis on local knowledge both subverts and supports government-led educational campaigns on disaster preparedness, and argue that looking at alternative knowledges in the form of the production, consumption, and circulation of information (*jôhô*) provides a useful rubric for understanding the complexity of public participation in a

place that has been labeled not fully democratic — especially when the goal of democratic practice is to not appear as such.

Disaster and Community Participation

The sprawling city of Osaka, the mercantile heart of the western region of Japan known as Kansai, is located only 20 miles from what was my fieldwork home base in the city of Kobe. The heavy, sticky air of the early summer *tsuyu* (monsoon) season has sapped my energy. I am not alone; my fellow passengers on the train, which is only slightly air-conditioned as part of a nationwide “eco” energy-saving campaign, are nodding off in the warmth of the car. The short trip to Osaka begins to feel like a sleep-inducing journey. Riding from downtown Kobe to Osaka on JR, Japan’s national rail network, I watch the landscape change through the window as my express train speeds from Kobe’s fashionable Sannomiya city center to the more rough-and-tumble Osaka. Transferring to successively slower trains leads, finally, to the local line, which takes me to one of the smallest stations on the route, the kind of stop staffed by a single employee at a solitary wicket and encircled by neighborhood mom-and-pop *okonomiyaki* and *ramen* restaurants, a small grocery, and a convenience store.

The sun was starting to descend as I finally reached the quiet suburb of Hamaishi, located on the southernmost tip of land lining Osaka Bay. The early evening breeze was a welcome relief from the train cars. Alighting from

the train, I soon realized it would be impossible to get lost here: there is only one exit, and so I was sure to be able to find my host easily. Sure enough, I stepped through the wicket and immediately noticed an older gentleman in his 70s, trim and neatly dressed in khakis and a tucked-in striped polo shirt, leaning against a beige Honda that has been carefully wedged onto the slim shoulder of the narrow road fronting the station. This must be Matsumoto-san, I thought, and tentatively smiled and bowed. Nodding, he returned my smile and bows with a hurried bob of his torso. He asked me about my journey, and then quickly waved me into his car as he hopped into the driver's seat. Matsumoto, like many of the retired men I would come to know during my field research, operated at a quick pace; it is as if the years of working in a big city and hurrying to crowded commuter trains had trained my interlocutors' bodies in a practice of speed that they carry with them even after leaving their careers behind. I could barely buckle my seatbelt before he started the ignition and pulled out onto the street. We were headed for the monthly meeting of the Hamaishi Disaster Preparedness Club (*Hamaishi Bôσαι Kai*), of which Matsumoto-san was the chair.

I had met Matsumoto briefly only once before, when he was a speaker on a panel on disaster prevention at an annual industry expo for risk specialists in Osaka. Clad in the same flavor of khaki-and-polo shirt outfit, he had stood out from the other suit and tie-clad presenters, as he was neither a professional disaster management specialist, nor a businessman engaged in the sizable *bôσαι* (disaster prevention) industry. In a lengthy caveat before

beginning his presentation, he had described himself instead as a simple pensioner — a retired architect who in his former career had helped design factories for a major Japanese sporting goods company — and in addition the leader of a disaster preparedness club in his small town. While my own research was based primarily in Kobe, I was familiar with his town of Hamaishi, as it adjoined the area where I had lived the year before while completing a language study course. Listening to Matsumoto's panel, I thought it would be useful to see disaster preparedness efforts in a location outside of a disaster zone, and after the session I asked if I could attend one of his meetings. He was surprised by my request, but quickly and politely invited me to one of their monthly gatherings. Now, in the car, he told me that the other members were excited to have an American researcher visiting their small club, a fact that gave me a bit of performance anxiety. He also informed me that they had prepared a little *bôσαι* (disaster preparedness) party in my honor. I thanked him and asked what a *bôσαι* party might be. "Well," he said thoughtfully, "we'll have beer. And the women are preparing disaster foods — you know, things like rice and instant miso soup that they have on hand, that they can all cook together in the event of a disaster (*saigaiji*)." He mentioned that they do these events periodically, both as practice for an actual emergency and as an opportunity to take a break from the business of the club. I thanked him again, silently grateful that I had brought with me the obligatory *omiyage* (souvenir present) from Kobe that I could offer the club members in return for their kindness.

He drove quickly, navigating with an easy familiarity the twisting roads to the Hamaishi Senior Center, where the preparedness club's meetings are held. But he also took care to give me an impromptu tour of the town along the way, which became a mobile demonstration of how the town had weathered waves of change. He slowed the car to point out a curving road that had originally served as a tributary route connecting Hamaishi to Edo (modern-day Tokyo). Next we drove past an old building that appeared empty; he gestured to it and said it had once been a towel factory. Matsumoto then ushered me out of the car for a photo op at an enormous municipal storehouse and evacuation shelter built after the Hanshin earthquake that holds emergency food rations and supplies. As we neared the senior center, which is located in the hilly section of town, Matsumoto again led me out of the car to make a brief stop at a bright red, thoroughly modern, and very short suspension bridge that connected two small suburban neighborhoods across a small ravine. The bridge was an infamously expensive product of the government's many make-work public works projects of the 1980s and 1990s that sought to jump-start the flagging economy. Pointing to the bridge, Matsumoto said incredulously, "This is what the government is spending money on!"

During our tour of the town, I learned more about Matsumoto's own interest in disaster preparedness. As an architect, he had to understand seismic engineering principles for the factories that he had helped design in quake-prone Japan and China. Now that he was retired, he had immersed

himself in his hobbies and community activities, including teaching Japanese taiko drumming and serving as the head of the Hamaishi *bôσαι* club.³¹ The group itself had been established only the year before, though such organizations have been ubiquitous in communities throughout the country since the 1980s. Disaster preparedness clubs have also existed in a related form since the early 20th century (Bestor 1989; Kitahara 2006).

The Hamaishi club, like most disaster prevention clubs, was a semi-public entity only nominally funded by the local *jichikai* (neighborhood council).³² While they had to report their activities to the *jichikai*, the group acted more or less autonomously, and met monthly to plan disaster awareness efforts, discuss the retrofitting of public buildings in the neighborhood, and debate mitigation measures that could be taken against potential disasters including typhoons, tsunami and earthquakes. Matsumoto himself admitted, however, that their area of Osaka had been determined by scientists to be at a low risk for any of these events.

³¹ Matsumoto fits into statistical categories that describe the typical Japanese volunteer as a retired male (Nakano 2005). The other largest category of volunteer is comprised of middle-aged housewives (Nakano 2005; see also LeBlanc 1999).

³² See Nakano (2005) and Bestor (1989) for ethnographic descriptions and analyses of neighborhood associations in Tokyo. These organizations are comprised of and led by residents of designated neighborhoods, and generally report to local ward offices. They serve as a kind of self-patrol, wherein neighbors work together to coordinate neighborhood children on their walks to and from school, ensure conformity with garbage disposal rules, etc. Paying dues is necessary, and participating in volunteer activities is a social obligation often thought of as tiresome, particularly by younger residents. While technically all residents in a designated geographic area are entitled to participate in their *jichikai*, the structure privileges single-family homeowners. Apartment dwellers in these suburban spaces are frequently viewed as transient and are left out of the *jichikai* communication network. For example, as an apartment-dweller in short-term rental housing, I was never approached by or given notices from my local *jichikai* in Nagata, even though their meeting room was less than a block away from my apartment building.

More than anything else, however, Matsumoto described the group as one of old friends. "There are about 20 of us. We're all around the same age: old!" he joked. "We all moved to Hamaishi around the same time in the 1970s when houses were being built here. We're all in the same *jichikai*, and most of us are retired now." From my observations at subsequent group meetings, members enjoyed describing their participation in the club with a combined air of self-sacrifice and easy companionship.

As we finally arrived at the Hamaishi Senior Center, Matsumoto turned serious, explaining that the most important quality about the group and ones like it across Japan is that their activities are *jishu bôσαι katsudô* (autonomous disaster prevention activities). Self-motivated and self-planned, these clubs are mostly, but in practice not entirely, separate from the local and national governments. The rationale for *jishu bôσαι*, Matsumoto told me, was that residents know their neighborhood better than any outside emergency workers or government officials could. His group's activities thus sought to utilize residents' intimate knowledge of the social, political, and geographic features of the neighborhood and the people who live in it. "We can't rely on the government in times of disaster," he said. "They'll be busy and might not be able to get down to us, so we know that we must help each other (*tasukeai*)."

Our conversation, however, was cut short by our arrival at the one-room senior center, an aged building located in a green, almost forested section of the hilly residential part of Hamaishi. After we removed our shoes at the

door, he ushered me into the meeting space, a long rectangular room with mismatched chairs pushed against the walls and windows where vines and other greenery threatened to envelop the building. The members had already gathered, and I could smell wafts of *miso* soup coming from the kitchenette directly in front of the entrance. The men, most of them in their 50s and 60s and clad casually in t-shirts, jeans, and brown vinyl padded houseslippers, were sitting around a long meeting table and chatting. Meanwhile, their spouses carried on their own animated conversations as they moved swiftly between the meeting room and kitchenette, setting out chopsticks and bowls along a long table, and making final preparations for the disaster preparedness party. Matsumoto introduced me to some of the members, but most gave me only a passing greeting; formal introductions would be saved for the actual meeting business, and until then I was expected to wait quietly until my hosts were ready.

When Matsumoto finally called for us all to take a seat at a long table in the center of the room, he distributed a photocopied agenda and formally called the meeting to order. The mood of the room changed to one of seriousness, and after a round of self-introductions, Matsumoto called on members one by one to report on their assigned tasks for the previous months. He called on Takeda-san first, who was the youngest of the group in his late forties, and not yet retired. Takeda was in charge of the group's disaster preparedness map. Creating a *bô sai* map is a common exercise at *bô sai* clubs, public schools, and disaster festivals. Its goal is to offer a way for

people to visualize and experience their familiar neighborhood in terms of potential hazards and likely safe zones. Earlier in the year the Hamaishi group had walked the breadth of the town with maps in hand and noted places that could be hazards: uneven terrain, slopes that could be susceptible to landslides, places prone to flooding, the coastal area that could be the site of a tsunami, sidewalks that needed repair. All of these had been compiled and then overlaid onto an official map of the town. Takeda said the *bôσαι* map was being prepared for distribution by the neighborhood association. He would later eagerly show me a binder full of *bôσαι* drills, scenarios, exercises, and games that he had been reading and collecting in his spare time. Most of these materials had been developed by disaster mitigation researchers.

Indeed, a major portion of this and subsequent meetings was spent discussing matters of expertise: they shared knowledge that members had gained about disaster management and how the knowledge could be enfolded into their own club activities. They also sought out expertise from seismic engineers and others who could provide advice on constructing safe homes. Members read books by disaster scholars and frequently consulted handbooks on disaster training exercises that they could use to model their own activities. They then applied and adjusted these frameworks to their own needs.

The *bôσαι* party was one example. After the group's formal business for the month had concluded, Matsumoto adjourned the meeting and announced that next we would enjoy some food. The women in the room immediately

got up and started bringing out steaming bowls of instant *miso* soup, platters of noodles and pickles, rice balls and beer. Out of hospitality, they refused my help, so I sat a bit awkwardly with the men as they all poured each other beer and waited for Matsumoto's opening toast before drinking. Fukuda-san and Nakamura-san, two members sitting near me, explained the purpose of the *bôσαι* party. "We have to use what's at hand in emergencies," Fukuda said. "So tonight we brought all of the things that we would have at home on an ordinary day so we can cook together and share our food. Just like we would have to do in a real emergency." Nakamura added, "Helping each other (*tasukeai*) is crucial. You know, it's these kinds of activities that are *jishu bôσαι* (independent disaster preparedness)."



Figure 2. Members of the Hamaishi Disaster Prevention Club during a disaster role-playing exercise.

The club members' activities open some of the dominant narratives in disaster preparedness efforts, and civic participation in Japan more generally. First, in the name of *jishu bô sai*, it relays a story of self-responsibility and self-reliance, virtues that are not necessarily placed in opposition to a perceived failure or unwillingness on the part of the government to provide services to safeguard the welfare of its residents. Rather, members voice the motivation for their work in simultaneously pragmatic and moral terms: we are ultimately responsible for our own safety. Being responsible for one's own safety depends on the ability to understand one's environment and surroundings. Much of the group's labor, then, is centered around attempts to know the neighborhood in greater detail, in the belief that this intimate knowledge will help the group respond more quickly in times of disaster.

Other aspects of Matsumoto's and his neighbors' participation, too, are indicative of the social ties that place neighbors in frequent contact through institutions such as the *jichikai* (neighborhood council), and which lead to friendships or at least a sort of neighborly intimacy that can span decades. Matsumoto's involvement with the disaster preparedness club is bound to his long-held social relationships with neighbors who are also friends.

Finally, the structure of the club, funded by and based on the membership of the local neighborhood council (*jichikai*), also drew upon educational and other resources offered by the city fire department and

disaster planning office. The club's claim to being a "self-autonomous" group despite these ties highlights the lack of clear boundaries between private and public activities, between volunteerism as a public service and volunteerism as a social obligation to one's friends and neighbors.

Matsumoto, Fukuda, and Nakamura's words were an echo of what I had been hearing throughout Kobe, and indeed throughout Japan: that disaster prevention is a zone of personal responsibility. This is because, the reasoning goes, not because the government is unwilling or unable to offer aid, but because of what everyone — including the state — says is common sense: people cannot and should not rely on others in times of emergency, but rather need to help themselves. Only after helping oneself can one help others. And the most fundamental way of helping oneself is to know one's community.

This message is a continual refrain in post-Hanshin quake Japan, and became a national lesson learned through the deaths of victims who, trapped beneath rubble, could not be saved in time. Many of my interlocutors mentioned this lesson came from the shocking realization that help from the local and central governments would be too little, too late in the immediate aftermath of disaster. Instead, they found that areas with tight community ties, areas where neighbors knew other neighbors, were the most effective at pulling people from the rubble or away from fires immediately after the

quake.³³ In these lifesaving cases, it was acts of self-responsibility and reciprocal help, my interlocutors said, that made the difference between survival and death.

The government came under heavy criticism for its inability to provide a timely emergency response to the 1995 disaster in ways very similar to what we would see a decade later with Hurricane Katrina in the U.S. (see Lakoff 2007). However, in some ways this criticism has faded and transformed to reconfigure responsibility for emergency response not to emergency crews or the Self Defense Force (SDF), but to bare statements of self-evident fact that people need to care for themselves.³⁴ The SDF, firefighters, and other emergency personnel simply might not be able to make it to the most heavily damaged areas because of blocked roads, collapsed freeways, or fires.³⁵ The most logical alternative to residents, then, is to practice self help. While true, this statement also effectively depoliticizes the issue: saying that obstacles like collapsed bridges and crumbled roads could cause the government to delay

³³ Awaji Island, located just off of Kobe's coast, is often held up as a prime example of the importance of community ties. While the island is located directly on top of the Nojima fault line — visitors can view the displaced earth at the Hokudan-cho Earthquake Museum on the island — not a single life was lost. Those who were trapped in the rubble of collapsed houses were pulled out within minutes of the earthquake by neighbors who knew lived in each other's homes and could quickly see who was missing.

³⁴ The SDF performs a function similar to the U.S. National Guard during domestic natural disasters.

³⁵ Another particularity of Japanese disaster response is the absence of a centralized, federal management agency such as the United States' Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Instead, disaster response is negotiated between central government ministries, the Prime Minister's cabinet, and local and regional governments. Researchers I spoke with would often refer to FEMA-like structure as desirable because it offered a centralized way of managing disaster response. They would also mention the agency's failure in the Hurricane Katrina disaster, however, as evidence that FEMA also was not a perfect solution.

sending emergency assistance to disaster zones makes it simply practical, and not political, for residents to take on the responsibility of disaster mitigation themselves (Lakoff 2007).

The unquestioned practicality of this perspective is, however, deeply rooted in a state history of shaping citizen actions and perspectives on the relationship between state and citizen through a moral discourse of pragmatism and individual responsibility. As Sheldon Garon (1997) has demonstrated, moral suasion programs that advocated self-reliance and mutual community assistance date to early modern Japan and are well-known for serving extreme ends during World War II. These programs, as Maruyama (1946) famously argued just after World War II, resulted in a state system in which divisions between public and private are null, because no private sphere existed that had not already been shaped by the state. The consequences of such a moral-institutional framework was “the absolute identification of an individual’s personal desires with the goals set by the state ... and the inability of the Japanese population to construct a ‘free’ subject with the capacity to acknowledge responsibility for one’s own acts, as widely observed in the immediate postwar years” (Hook and Takeda, 2005:107).³⁶

³⁶ See also Barshay (2003) for a discussion of Maruyama Masao and other thought leaders in the immediate postwar discussions about civil society. His analysis of Maruyama’s refusal to use the term “civil society” also points to the thinker’s more radical commitment to an ethics of dialogical politics. Barshay writes, “To be sure, Maruyama never ceased to affirm a modern, democratic, and open society as his critical ideal. But in the end, he was most concerned with its ‘spirit’ or ‘gut feelings,’ speaking of a ‘sense of the other’ (*tasha kankaku*) as essential to the kind of society

While Maruyama's characterization that individuals' goals are in absolute alignment with the state could certainly not be argued for the contemporary moment, his observation about public and private spheres does point to the immense social consequences moral suasion programs continue to have (Garon 2003). In contrast to pre-war and wartime Japan, early discourses of "self help" circulating largely from Britain and the United States from the 1960s and 1970s led Japanese leaders to refine their approach. The result was a rejection of the notion of the (modern European) welfare state, and the public adoption of what was termed a "Japanese-style welfare society" (*Nihon-gata fukushi shakai*) (Garon 1997: 26). A Japanese-style welfare state consisted of two primary entities: the state and the family, both of which were supplemented to a large degree by the lifetime employment system in which employers provided care for (male) employees and their families from just after college through retirement. Most importantly, the Japanese-style welfare state proposed that families and, by extension, their communities, were themselves almost solely responsible for most welfare provisions, including care for children, the sick, the elderly, and the poor (Garon 1997:38; Hook 2005). The result was a state-citizen relationship in which the state is deeply embedded, and yet largely invisible, in citizens' daily lives.³⁷

The gradual collapse of the lifetime employment system from the 1990s meant that corporations simultaneously withdrew as the welfare-providing

that [Marxist economist Takehiko] Uchida, looking through idealizing lenses at a purified market relation, would call 'civil.' (79).

³⁷ I discuss the term *shimin* later in this chapter, but see also Barshay (2003) and Avenell (2010) for a discussion of the concept of "citizen" in pre- and post-war Japan.

mediator between state and citizen. Despite the massive social consequences of this change, moral suasion programs have continued, but in altered and sometimes contradictory forms. Hook and Takeda (2007) note, for instance, that by the early 2000s the state had curtailed financial incentives for a “traditional” postwar Japanese family consisting of salaryman, housewife, and child, and instead placed through new policies that were meant to “foster individual initiatives and the autonomy to organize one’s own life—in other words, a ‘productive self,’ a type of subjectivity to govern oneself as a productive and autonomous member of the state” (109).³⁸ The crucial implication of these historically-situated arrangements between state, family, and individual is that, as elsewhere but especially in Japan, we cannot consider private and public spheres as ever separate; rather, they are co-constitutive and blurred (Garon 2003).³⁹

Matsumoto’s account could easily be read, then, as an example of the triumph of neoliberal measures that promote the individualization of risk and slough the burden of citizen safety off of the state and onto its citizens (Hook and Takeda 2007; Lakoff 2007, Paley 2001). Such arguments emphasize the withdrawal of state provisions of welfare and other services, and the need for individuals and non-profit organizations to fill the gap left by the state. In this reading, it could be argued that Matsumoto and his neighbors have been

³⁸ See also Gluck (2009) for a discussion of the historical “transits” of the word “responsibility” (*sekinin*) in Japanese, especially after World War II.

³⁹ This observation, made by Garon (2003) and others, is in direct conversation with the conventional view of “civil society” as a Habermasian concept that comes from particular European historical contexts and language about citizenship and what is public and private (Habermas 1989).

successfully disciplined into proclaiming their autonomy and responsibility. The neoliberal shifting of responsibility for citizen safety from the state onto the citizen is described by Matsumoto not as a burden, but rather as a form of empowerment. Such a perspective, some scholars have noted, are effectively re-voicings of messages about self-responsibility that originated from the state (Allison 2012; Avenell 2010, Garon 1997, Hook and Takeda 2007).

I follow those arguments to a point. However, I wish to take Matsumoto's statements seriously as pragmatic ones, because it IS true that municipal and central government emergency personnel would take longer to reach Matsumoto than his next-door neighbors would. In the event of an emergency, a speedy response time can certainly mean the difference between life and death. Knowing one's neighbors — and being able to immediately see if any are missing amidst the chaos in the immediate moments after a natural disaster — can be lifesaving knowledge. It is indeed appropriate, then, that Matsumoto and his neighbor-friends would want to know how they can best help themselves and those around them if the worst were to happen. It is also necessary to have the proper information and knowledge necessary to prepare for the worst case, and this is precisely why the Hamaishi disaster preparedness club was established.

How, then, can we think about the double facts of the state disciplining citizens into practices of self-responsibility, and the pragmatic truth that self-preparedness is indeed one key to mitigating disaster? We might look at the way Matsumoto frames his participation in the Hamaishi Disaster

Preparedness Club: voiced in terms of friendship and practicality, his characterization of their involvement renders the vocabulary of citizenship conspicuously absent. Rather than narratives of *shimin shakai* (civil society) or *shimin no sekinin* (citizen responsibility or civic duty), Matsumoto spoke instead in a pragmatic language of universal humanism. The simultaneously common-sense and moral prescription to know one's neighbor is a narrative that depends upon the fundamental notion of a relational self that keeps everyone alive, in senses both social and literal (Bachnik and Quinn 1994; Kondo 1990). Subsuming questions of civic duty and dissent into broader and more easily digestible narratives of neighborliness and collective community effort renders the state into an outsider, an external figure, and characterizes disaster preparedness work as an obligation among fellow humans, not citizens.

My ensuing months of involvement with the Hamaishi Disaster Preparedness Club continued to suggest that to members, the state was at various times disaster expert, potential source of funding, stiff bureaucracy, and interloper in community affairs. But most of all, the state was a source of sanctioned knowledge and information, which club members drew upon at will and supplemented with what they saw as their own personal and much deeper knowledge about their neighborhoods and the risks their community faced. The Hamaishi Disaster Preparedness Club's activities were one demonstration of how members took knowledge and guidance from the state

about disaster provisioning and placed it into terms that fit into their own neighborhood sociality. I return to this point in the conclusion of this chapter.

Activism from the Ashes

I contrast Matsumoto's story with another arrival story placed at the heart of the Kobe disaster. On a typically sweaty summer day in Kobe, a group of students from a local primary school in Nagata ward visited Minatogawa Community Center (MCC), where I had been conducting fieldwork as an unpaid intern. Clad in their school uniforms and holding towels to pat the perspiration on their foreheads, the students quietly lined up with their teacher along the length of MCC's office. MCC, located west of Kobe's city center in the mixed urban industrial-residential ward of Nagata, had been founded, quite literally, out of the ashes in the days after fires started by the earthquake swept through Nagata. Since then, the Center has grown from a loose conglomeration of Japanese and ethnic Korean, Vietnamese, Peruvian, and other "foreign" residents, Catholic church clergy, and researchers into a registered non-profit organization, another kind of institutional entity made legally possible only in response to the sociopolitical changes catalyzed by the quake.⁴⁰ MCC now serves as an incubator of sorts: it

⁴⁰ Later in this chapter I discuss legislative changes provoked by the quake. Briefly, however, official NPO status was extremely difficult to obtain in pre-quake Japan, and required financial and personnel resources that most grassroots groups could not muster. The sheer scale and spectacle of what has been estimated as 1 million volunteers who descended on Kobe in the days and months after the quake prompted a nation-wide discussion about volunteerism and not-for-profit groups. Researchers have called it a watershed moment in civil society in Japan, though the

houses a handful of local non-profits, each with a distinct but often blended history, but all dating to 1995 or later.

On this day, the office space on the second floor of the center, which houses a women's organization, a technology assistance group for seniors, a grassroots translation service, and the community radio station FMX, was in its usual messy state. The office is laid out in an open plan typical of work spaces in Japan, where private offices and even cubicles are rare, and desks are often overflowing with the detritus of desk labor.

The visiting students looked uncomfortable and unsure as they bowed to us when the teacher, a friend of one of the group's founders, introduced them to the office staff. Dressed in their cooler summer uniforms, the trip to this place — not a store, but not quite a real business — was undoubtedly outside of their experience. They were greeted in a brisk but not unkind way by the staff, who had become inured to this kind of interruption during their work day. One of them asked the students to introduce themselves. Some of the shyer students hung back, but eventually one by one they straightened their posture and recited their last names, grade level, and homeroom number. Throughout this exercise the staff and volunteers also stood up,

long-term effects of disaster volunteerism are less clear (for example, there was a quite drastic tapering off of volunteers once reconstruction efforts were underway, and this holds true for disasters after Kobe, including Fukushima). The state, pressured to offer non-profit groups the possibility of institutionalizing and becoming self-governing, state-sanctioned bodies, created in 1998 the "Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities" (Hirata 2002; Pekkanen 2006; Yamauchi 2003). Following the passage of the law, more than 40,000 organizations have received NPO status. However, the vast majority of these organizations are not tax exempt. Only after the Fukushima disaster was the law changed to make tax exempt status easier for small groups to obtain, thus enabling them to solicit donations from tax-deductible donations.

looking on with attentive authority, nodding but not smiling at each in acknowledgement.

Introductions done, the students stood a little awkwardly, obviously uncomfortable in the heat and with so many new eyes upon them, but also careful to behave respectfully. Ogawa, head of FMX, asked the group from his desk, “Do you know what we do here?” None of the children answered, as they shyly looked to one another in case the bravest among them was willing to step forward. Hearing no response, Ogawa answered for them: “We do *shimin katsudô* (citizen’s activities). Do you know what that is?” Again, his question was met by more silence, so Ogawa stood up from his desk and walked over to the group, picking up from a cabinet along the way a colorful brochure introducing MCC and leading them to a back table, where he gave a brief lecture on what it is to participate in civil society, or *shimin shakai*.

Indeed, the question of what is *shimin shakai* (civil society), and what *shimin katsudou* (citizen’s activities) represent is not one limited to these elementary school students. The terms themselves are relatively recent, and only since the growth of non-profit organizations after 1995 has the term meant something in the daily lives of Japanese. The historical development of the term and its widespread use first in the initial postwar period, and then more intensively in the 1990s begs the question of the relationship between democracy and citizen participation (*shimin sanku*) in postwar Japan.

For many observers of Japan, routinely seeing the country described in news outlets such as the *New York Times* as apolitical or even apathetic is frustrating.⁴¹ Contemporary Japanese activism is not an oxymoron, as some have argued (Miyoshi 2010), but it is the case that activism in Japan does not necessarily conform to the highly visible genre of activism in the form of picketing, mass gatherings, or other kinds of public demonstrations elsewhere in East Asia.⁴²

Rather, Japanese often instead practice a politics of no politics; that is, individuals often do not broadcast their political views publicly, but withhold them for private conversations or anonymous online or other venues. As Masao Miyoshi (2010) has noted, vocal dissent and public disagreement following the tumultuous years of widespread public protests in the 1960s and 1970s have been seen by moderate Japanese as socially distasteful and uncomfortable. He argues that a consequence of avoiding such discomfort was a cultural lifeway that became marked by bland diversions, rampant consumerism, and a cultivated superficiality that, as Stefan Tanaka writes, is so "banal that Japanese themselves utter the equivalent in Japanese, "*Nihon wa tsumaranai* (Japan is boring)" (2004: 201). In deliberately provocative words, Miyoshi argues that in 1990s Japan, "amidst the bourgeois satisfaction, people are ill at ease with the absence of direction and purpose, which inane

⁴¹ Fackler (2012) offers one example of the narrative that the status quo in Japan is one of political apathy.

⁴² Of course, there are quite a few visible exceptions, such as an ongoing protest by homeless people and homeless rights supporters against a Nike skateboard park in Tokyo. Enormous protests were against nuclear power were also catalyzed by the Fukushima disaster in March 2011.

abstractions like 'peace,' 'prosperity' and 'culture' cannot conceal anymore. If the economic stagnancy since 1990 had any cause in the inner workings of the public mind, it must be traced to this general malaise that permeates everywhere and everybody" (Miyoshi 2010: 1999). Concepts such as "peace" have indeed been used as innocuous keywords in everyday citizen politics, though this is not unique to Japan. Moreover, glossing them over as merely "inane abstractions" misses an opportunity for examining the ethical and political commitments among ordinary Japanese residents who employ language of peace and prosperity as a subtle, but no less trenchant, cultural critique.

Individuals who are themselves involved in *shimin katsudô* (citizen activities) offer a more textured view of what has been perceived as the blandness of contemporary Japanese participatory politics. I now turn to Takahashi Kazuko, the charismatic executive director of one of the largest organizations within MCC. The translation business she leads, which I refer to here as ProLingua, focuses on matching multi-lingual Kobe residents – especially migrant workers – with interpretation and translation projects. ProLingua's clients range from health care services to municipal offices and local businesses. The project is the result of Takahashi's personal interest in multiculturalism and human rights, issues that came to the fore through her volunteer involvement after the Hanshin quake. Indeed, the quake catalyzed her transformation from a wealthy housewife to an NPO executive director and an associate professor at a local university. While I had been interning at

ProLingua and MCC more generally as a way to understand citizen-led disaster preparedness activities, after office hours we often met together to practice Takahashi's English skills, since she frequently traveled to disaster training workshops and conferences in Southeast Asia and elsewhere where English was used as participants' common language. We chatted in a mixture of English and Japanese, and I enjoyed these opportunities to learn more about her as a person, and to understand how ProLingua and its sister organization, FMX, fits within a wider ecology of Japanese civic participation.

In these sessions, Takahashi credited the earthquake with catalyzing a new political subjectivity that was determined to improve treatment for migrants in Kobe. Prior to 1995, Takahashi was a self-described "ordinary housewife" and mother of two primary school students. She was married to a wealthy company president, who for the sake of preserving their public image had asked her not to work or to do household chores. This was quite a difference from her pre-married life: in college, she studied Latin American literature, became fluent in Spanish, and worked for various Central and Latin American consulates in Kobe. She had retained social ties to the Spanish-speaking expatriate community over the years, and after the quake was swiftly recruited into participating in relief efforts by non-Japanese speaking quake survivors from Peru and Brazil. They called her for help because they were desperate for advice on navigating the aid bureaucracy. Moreover, a former classmate who was the head priest of a Catholic church in Nagata, the area that sustained the heaviest damage in the quake, also

enlisted her help with emergency aid activities. It was in this way that Takahashi's post-quake volunteer work quickly evolved into an unexpected career. Her ready smile, approachability, and eagerness to bring new volunteers and contacts into the organization made her a natural spokesperson for what would later evolve into a licensed community radio station and a for-profit translation business that sought to provide work opportunities to foreign residents. She deejayed radio programs and worked with local Spanish-speaking migrant laborers and members of the Korean and Vietnamese ethnic communities in Kobe to spread information about disaster aid, recovery work, and other news.

More than 15 years later, Takahashi, now divorced from her CEO husband, is remarried to Ogawa, a fellow former Hanshin quake volunteer. He works alongside her as the director of ProLingua's sister radio station. She has earned a doctorate from the prestigious Kyoto University, and divides her time between university teaching, writing about social problems faced by foreign residents, and running a busy non-profit organization. Takahashi's work is motivated by a politics of inclusion, and her main focus now is creating a multicultural Japan in which foreign migrants are valued not for their labor, but for their individual, human talents. In her office at home hangs a Che Guevara flag, and upon returning from a business trip to Cuba, she presented each of us with a small Che Guevara pin as her coming-home *omiyage*.

Given her activities, then, it surprised me when during one of our evening discussions Takahashi offhandedly asked, “Do you know that I think that Japan is not a democracy?” Sitting together on couches at the front of MCC’s second floor office, she reclined a bit, smiled, and explained that democracy (*minshu*), to her and other Japanese, is seen as a foreign concept that had been imported from the United States through the promulgation of the U.S. Occupation authority-penned postwar constitution. “We vote,” she continued, “but we think that is all that we need to do⁴³. Young people don’t really learn about democracy in school. They have no concept of what it means. We don’t use words like *shimin* (citizen), but say *kokumin* instead.”⁴⁴ She added, “There is not much awareness about citizen participation (*shimin sanku*). You know, harmony is crucial to Japanese people, so people try to avoid conflict.”

It is this social value of harmony, an absence of public conflict, that Takahashi described as molding her organization’s work. She told me about having to promote her organization’s programs with an eye toward preserving harmony. That is, there is very little overtly political material in any of her organization’s programs, yet her own stated goal is to transform Japanese society into one that welcomes immigration — a controversial

⁴³ Indeed, voter turnout in Japan — particularly in the national elections in 2009 where the turnout was 69% — are high in comparison to U.S. voting participation rates

⁴⁴ *Kokumin* is often translated as “citizen,” but with the strong connotation of membership in the national — that is, ethnic Japanese — body. See Doak (2007), Gluck (1985), Gordon (1992) for a discussion of the nuanced usages and deployments of the terms *kokumin* (nation, national citizen), *shimin* (citizen), and *minzoku* (people, ethnos).

stance in contemporary Japanese political discourse and one that goes against widespread public sentiment. She admitted she does not seem very Japanese to others; she has a love for Latin American cultures because, she said, “I like to express passion,” and relishes the ability to have lively, political conversations with her Spanish-speaking friends. She described how Japanese people, by contrast, value an atmosphere of respect for others’ beliefs and feelings, to the extent that etiquette is often expressed as silence, a polite reluctance to challenge dissenting opinions of those with whom you do not share close ties. To do so could be registered as unattractive self-promotion and self-regard at the expense of others’ feelings, social position, and beliefs. The tactics she and the staff of ProLingua use, then, consciously subvert an obvious agenda for political change in favor of attracting participation from local residents through the practice of a kind of palatable politics. This politics of no politics uses seemingly apolitical and even frivolous activities such as seasonal festivals that feature multicultural foods, performance groups by Vietnamese teens aimed at ethnic Japanese audiences, and disaster preparedness education programs that join participants from developing countries with Japanese citizens as a way of exchanging ideas and promoting mutual understanding.

Civic Histories

While scholars (Bachnik and Quinn 1995; Hamabata 1994; Kondo 1990; Rohlen 1974) have written about what Takahashi described as the Japanese

social value of harmony and equality, it is important to note that public dissent has in fact been vigorously pursued in pre- and post-war Japan (Doak 2007; Gordon 1992; Hasegawa 2004; Nakamura 2008; Ueno 2004, among many others). Crucial to understanding this change is to look at the more recent history of public participation and activism in postwar Japanese society.

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, scholars both in and outside of Japan have frequently referred to the Hanshin earthquake as a watershed moment (Yamamoto 1995, 1998) for Japanese civic participation. In this narrative, the earthquake is an origin story in which citizens discovered the depths of their own unpreparedness, false knowledge, and misplaced security in what the state could realistically provide its citizens. Kobe residents had been unaware that an active fault line ran under the city and so thought major earthquakes were events that happened elsewhere. Citizens criticized the state, too, for not quickly responding to victims' needs. These massive failures are often credited as productive in the sense that they finally catalyzed a viable civil society in Japan. Food and bed shortages in Kobe, along with images of survivors huddled in the mid-winter cold, were widely reported across the country and prompted more than a million volunteers to spontaneously travel to the city and the greater Kansai region to deliver supplies, help clear detritus from homes, and offer food and other services at shelters. This sudden outpouring of support was until then seen as rare in Japan; volunteerism had been viewed as a Western practice based on

Christian ideals of charity. Following the earthquake and concomitant rise in informal citizen groups, however, legislation in 1998 simplified the non-profit registration process.⁴⁵ Since then, the number of registered non-profits in Japan has soared (Yamauchi 2003) and volunteerism has become a more socially recognizable form of public participation.⁴⁶

Others, however, have persuasively argued that this origin story elides a much longer state agenda to promote volunteerism and citizen participation since the immediate postwar era. Accounts of the historical use of the term *citizen* (*shimin*) vary, but here I focus on one rendering. In his exploration of the history of the word *shimin*, Simon Avenell (2010) writes that the term — first coined in the mid 19th century to denote the French *citoyen* and English “citizen” or “burgher” — had been actively utilized by the postwar government to encourage political participation among citizens, both to help modern democracy take root in this formerly totalitarian state, and also to share with citizens’ groups the burden of providing welfare and education

⁴⁵ Prior to the promulgation of the NPO Law in 1998, Japanese not-for-profit organizations had to navigate a time-consuming, bureaucracy-heavy process to become officially recognized as non-profit entities (*NPO hōjin*). This meant that only large organizations — and, often, multinational groups such as Save the Children or the Red Cross — had the resources to apply for such official recognition. Avenell (2010), however, notes that the NPO Law applies to primarily to groups wishing to incorporate for welfare or education services. Political activism-oriented groups have more difficulty obtaining certification (Pekkanen 2000, Avenell 2010).

⁴⁶ In interviews with a variety of non-profit staff and volunteers in Kobe, Osaka, and Kyoto in 2007, NPO staff reported that the general public still views their involvement as sometimes “different” or even suspicious, especially if they are thought of as activists of a more radical persuasion. The “third sector” (*dai-san sekuta*) has been the subject of media debate, as well, about the nature of third sector activities, and the sources of third sector funding. Also important to note is that many of these registered non-profits are quite small and most frequently are staffed by fewer than 10 people (Pekkanen 2010).

services. Democracy was not an unknown word prior to the promulgation of the postwar constitution. On the contrary, the imperial state instituted universal male suffrage in the 1920s, and the idea of civic participation had been a major moral component of the war effort. Yet Garon (1997) cautions that civic participation during this time does not meet the definition of a civil society, if civil society is understood as citizens governing themselves. He also suggests that the idea of a civil society often assumes progressivism, which means that descriptions of pre-war civic participation as a part of civil society mask the “possibility that assertive individuals or groups might cooperate with the state on some issues, while criticizing it on others” (Garon 1997: 44).

After the war, political participation in which (male) Japanese had the right to vote but were also conceived of as subjects of the emperor, was abruptly replaced — on paper, at least — with the 1946 constitution that fashioned an American-style democracy. Japanese suddenly became “citizens” rather than subjects, and since then the state has enacted programs and policies aimed to promote political participation as a civic responsibility of all Japanese. Yet in practice the distinction has been blurry: wartime youth and women’s associations, as well as *jichikai* (neighborhood councils) of the kind we saw in Hamaishi earlier in this chapter, proved stubbornly unalterable to the U.S. occupation authority’s attempts to make them fully autonomous from the state (Garon 1997:58). *Jichikai* continue to operate as

not-quite-private, not-quite-public bodies whose ambiguity frustrate attempts to categorize them vis-à-vis a truly public sphere.

Key to this conversation has been the trouble of differentiating public from private, voluntary from obligatory. Organizations like *jichikai* are voluntary, but nominally so; some residents I spoke with described them as obligatory associations that they took on with some reluctance. Nevertheless, the interactions contained within *jichikai* are not necessarily political; they figure instead as associational life in the form of clubs and hobby groups that Tocqueville (1966) discussed as so vital to the practice of democracy in the U.S.⁴⁷

Indeed, associational life outside of political organization – such as in the form of *jichikai* – is far from new to Japan. Further, omitting groups like these from consideration as part of civil society because they have ties to the state means that a great deal of associational life in Japan is correspondingly obscured. The radio station at FMX, for example, received funding from state agencies for its disaster prevention programs, but the station's leaders nevertheless conceive of themselves as an independent organization and does not preclude itself from being able to criticize the state. Moreover, the civil society concept's focus on a discursive and practice-oriented space located outside the state does not easily allow for attending to the ways in which people lead active associational lives, but not necessarily toward overtly

⁴⁷ See also *Bowling Alone* (2000), Robert Putnam's influential treatise on the perceived decline of associational life in the United States.

political ends. For example, Avenell's (2010) description of the 1995 volunteerism phenomenon as "fifty years in the making" assumes a conceptual and historical trajectory from postwar political activism to the kind of widespread volunteerism witnessed in Kobe in 1995. Yet the volunteers I spoke with were not interested in making overt political statements through their participation; instead they phrased their activities as motivated by a simple desire to help others. I argue, then, that placing political activism and consciously-apolitical volunteerism within the same analytical sphere risks making volunteerism appear to be a necessarily political activity, on the one hand, or a mere co-optation on the part of the state to enlist private citizens into their own agenda, on the other. I suggest that we need the conceptual tools to understand the complex social negotiations among individuals, non-profit and other interest organizations such as neighborhood associations, and the state even when their negotiations seem consciously outside of the political realm.

To do this we must consider why many of the volunteers and non-profit workers I spoke with in Kobe take pains to characterize their work as non-political.⁴⁸ I argue that the central reason so many of my interlocutors in Kobe are so careful to downplay sounding or acting like an activist stems from two issues: the discursive values of harmony and collective effort that Takahashi

⁴⁸ See also LeBlanc (1999) for a political ethnography of Japanese housewife-volunteers who were careful to speak of their work outside of political terms, and even actively avoided calling themselves "citizens." See Bestor (1989) and Nakano (2005) on participation in neighborhood associations and Stevens (1997) for an ethnography of religiously-motivated volunteers in downtown Tokyo.

described as ordering day-to-day interactions; and an apprehension that politics and public criticism risks running counter to the skillful preservation of human relationships.

To be sure, self-described “activists” exist in Kobe; among other things, they advocate for the better treatment of vulnerable populations and criticize the state’s handling of disaster management. But, as one non-profit leader told me, others deployed the term selectively because the word “activist” (*akutibisuto*) held connotations that might misrepresent their work to ordinary residents who associate activism with the political and social instability of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, the head of a family I befriended outside of my research spoke at length with me over coffee one day as he described his experiences as a young boy in 1950s Tokyo. Those years were tough, he told me. But when he recalled his experiences as a teenager in the 1960s, he described a feeling of increasing social chaos stemming from the student movements and protests against U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (abbreviated and colloquially treated as AMPO). He recalled the famous black helmets worn by student activists demonstrating against AMPO in Tokyo, and said that even now, he negatively associates the word *activist* with the mental image of those helmets.

The association of activism with social disorder and disruption underscores Takahashi’s strategy of crafting social change under the guise of harmony. Harmony, to Takahashi and others, is the means by which social relationships can be created and maintained. Further, as Robin LeBlanc (1999)

has shown, the practice of crafting and honing social relationships are seen as categorically different from the practice of politics. In her study of housewives who volunteer in their Tokyo community, she notes that the volunteers contrast their motivating spirit (*yaruki*) with an administrative (*gyôsei*) ethic that governs politics.⁴⁹ She writes, “The volunteer’s *yaruki* ethic and the *gyôsei* ethic were so differently ordered that neither could easily maintain its value when combined with the other. The *gyôsei* ethic, at least as volunteers saw it, was task-driven, but the *yaruki* ethic was spirit-driven. In *gyôsei*, human individuals were subordinated to the process of completing tasks. In *yaruki*, tasks were undertaken for the support of human individuals” (110). Accordingly, LeBlanc notes that the women volunteers did not consider their efforts as citizenship-based practices because it “requires a different ethic, a willingness to see politics, daily life, and community service as rightfully integrated” (120).

This conceptual difference between politics as an impersonal domain that runs counter to human relations makes it easier to understand why volunteers in Kobe frame their work in terms of pragmatically helping others, rather than acting as political participants in a democracy. It also explains why Takahashi and other leaders adopt a strategic politics of no politics in which their organizations’ work is one that operates within a cultural paradigm of harmony above all else.

⁴⁹ While *gyôsei* is most often translated as “administration,” LeBlanc’s usage is close to the actual Chinese characters that make up *gyôsei*: “to undertake” and “politics.” (LeBlanc 1999: 110).

Simply renaming their work to avoid the danger of words such as “activist” and “activism,” however, does not address the methodological challenges that organizations such as Takahashi’s face. Her frustration that Japanese avoid speaking directly requires her and her organization’s supporters to enact, in a very literal sense, change from within: the radical changes in society regarding acceptance of foreigners and immigration, for example, that her organization seeks can only be pursued in a way that is so subtle that it passes for something other than activism. The drawback of this tactic, Takahashi told me with a rueful smile, is that “it takes so much time, sometimes I feel discouraged.”

Information as a Site for Political Critique

The often unvoiced tension between preserving harmony and enacting change between the political “citizen” (*shimin*) and the ordinary Japanese “national” (*kokumin*), serves to structure the activities and goals of groups like those to which Matsumoto and Takahashi belong. This tension renders political action difficult to apprehend, and ethnographically it calls for alternative entryways into observing democratic participation in places like Japan. My conversation with Takahashi about democracy calls to mind Julia Paley’s characterization that the word’s multiple referents and semantic instability make it continually “ethnographically emergent” (Paley 2001: 486). While Takahashi felt that Japan is not a democracy, the very practices on which she and her group relies illustrates a fierce commitment to democratic

principles of collaboration and community participation. From my own research among disaster recovery, memorial, and preparedness groups in the Kansai region, I suggest that framing this emergence in terms of informational practices is a useful site for interrogating how alternative — and potentially critical — knowledges are created and circulated beyond the polite, depoliticized words of activists, volunteers, and ordinary citizens. Because everyday politics is often practiced almost imperceptibly, this chapter suggests that one way of apprehending the “politics of no politics” is through the study of the aesthetics, production and circulation of *jôhô* (information).

Thinking about information as a democratic practice requires that one, as Jasanoff writes, “change the angle of observation” (Jasanoff 2010: 34) by looking obliquely at seemingly mundane artifacts and practices (e.g., Brenneis; Fortun 2004; Harper 1998; Mathews 2008; Miyazaki 2013; Strathern 2000; Riles 2000, 2004). It is more conventional to consider the production of newsletters, radio shows, and educational pamphlets as the means, rather than the ends, of political engagement and activism. I suggest, however, that it is productive to look at this relationship in the reverse: in Kobe, people talk about disaster information not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. My interlocutors’ most frequently-voiced criticism of the catastrophe was that Kobe and its residents experienced an information shortage (*jôhô busoku*). Before the disaster, residents did not realize that a massive earthquake in Kobe was even a possibility. During the immediate aftermath of the quake,

they existed in an “information vacuum” (Sato 2007: 83) in which they did not know where to go and how to meet their daily needs. And during the reconstruction period, residents voiced anger about a lack of clear, citizen-informed process about rebuilding efforts.

It is in this environment that I came to Kobe and was overwhelmed by the sheer volume and diversity of disaster-related information that had been produced by residents, researchers, activists, and officials after 1995. It is as if the mere existence of this information — of diverse and alternative forms of knowledge — already interrupts, subverts, and joins together with official reports and narratives about the disaster. Practices of disaster information production and circulation, then, are implicitly political: knowledge is always in close relationship with power, and the kinds of alternative knowledges offered by Kobe volunteers, activists, and “ordinary” residents demonstrates that public participation is vibrant in Kobe. Recognizing it as such, however, requires reconsidering how we conceptualize the words “public” and “participation” in the practice of democracy.

Indeed, transparency and fair access to information is widely characterized as a hallmark of democracy. The Japanese state has certainly been accused of being less than forthcoming: accusations of cronyism, closed-door politics, and the system of government press conferences open only to journalists from pre-approved news outlets have been made for decades. After a series of government scandals, including the 1995 quake and the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway in March of the same year,

criticisms of this lack of transparency have forced the state to become more transparent about some of its deliberative processes. However, what this chapter is concerned with is not access to government information as an indicator of democratic openness, but rather the practice of citizens offering back to the state alternative knowledges formed outside of official channels.

Anyone who speaks with disaster researchers, earthquake survivors, and former volunteers in Kobe — or in Hamaishi, for that matter — will quickly learn that information remains a key area around which disaster preparedness efforts are centered. In my interviews, quake survivors describe the feeling of no one knowing what was going on: no one seemed to have official information about which evacuation centers were still accepting people, or where food would be distributed. The local media was hamstrung by personnel shortages and equipment damage, and the national media is still spoken about with resentment as survivors recall eager reporters trampling through neighborhoods where victims were still trapped, hoping for good footage to broadcast back home in Tokyo. In any case, without electricity, working televisions were scarce in this devastated city, and cell phones and the internet were not yet widely used in the mid-1990s. People resorted to the most pragmatic means of communication: *kuchikomi* (word-of-mouth), battery-operated radios and, most of all, paper. Handwritten signs and scraps of paper tacked to walls were the primary means of spreading information about food, shelter, and *anpi jôhô* (messages left in search of the whereabouts or condition of friends and family). Frustrated with the lack of

information from the local, prefectural, and national governments, neighborhoods took it upon themselves to use *minikomi* (“miniature,” or hyper-local communication) in the form of hand-drawn newsletters and distributed for free throughout local neighborhoods.

Indeed, survivors’ use of *minikomi* articulates with a vibrant history of activism in Japan. As Sasaki-Uemura (2002) has shown, by the 1960s, citizens’ movements developed methods of communication outside of dominant media venues. *Minikomi*, often in the form of hand-printed and mimeographed magazines and newsletters, were positioned by citizens’ groups such as the women-led Grass Seeds (*Kusa no mi Kai*) and the spontaneously-formed anti-AMPO group Voiceless Voices (*Koe Naki Koe no Kai*) as an alternative to the information controlled by the mass media (*masukomi*) (ibid. 87-88). With a membership spread across a broad geographical region, *minikomi* were described as a metaphorical form of village gossip sessions (*idobatakaigi*) that “serve important community functions in exchanging information, criticizing misbehavior, and enforcing social sanctions and mores” (ibid. 89).

Indeed, this was precisely the kind of information that was necessary in immediately post-quake Kobe. One response to this need was a newsletter called “Daily Needs” (*Dêri Nîzu*) that was produced everyday with the aid of volunteers, photocopied on a machine lent by the non-profit peace education organization PeaceBoat, and distributed to Kobe residents at evacuation centers. The “Daily Needs” *minikomi* functioned as the source of on-the-

ground information about where to find food and water, the state of city infrastructure, and other intelligence that would be immediately useful to quake survivors. The news bulletins did not necessarily include words of political advocacy per se, but rather its very existence was its own form of critique. The fact that a bulletin like “Daily Needs” needed to be prepared at all served as a subtle commentary about the profound disconnect between the state and municipal governments and the actual, day-to-day needs of its citizens.

After the immediate crisis had passed, the memory of that initial lack of information meant that *jôhō busoku*, or “information shortages,” became widely discussed among survivors, researchers and government officials as a primary lesson from the Hanshin quake. It was posed as a problem that had to be remedied, both for the sake of the sacrifices made by Kobe victims and survivors, and for those who would be caught in future disasters anywhere. As I showed in Chapter 2, the result has been an abundance of information production activities, from testimonies to haiku poems, photo anthologies to transcripts of radio shows, that seek to document every possible relic of the Hanshin quake experience. Much of this information has been carefully archived on the internet, in survivors’ home libraries, as well as public archives and other repositories around Kobe and Osaka. Much of it has also been utilized as data by researchers, disaster planners, and local neighborhood groups who examine the material for moral, managerial, and scientific “lessons” (*kyôkun*) that can be learned from the Kobe survivors’

experiences. The Hamaishi disaster preparedness club's activities, including the practice of pooling food from one's larder during times of hardship, role playing disaster scenarios, and creating *bô sai* maps are all direct lessons taken from the Hanshin quake and popularized as key forms of knowledge and self-preparedness.

The diversity of informational practices that have flourished in post-quake Kobe illustrate the degree to which participation in public and political discourses about disaster recovery and management have been rooted in a seemingly apolitical space: the sphere of information production and sharing about what to do in the event of a disaster. Yet we understand that information production as political action has historical precedent in 1960s and 1970s Japan (Sasaki-Uemura 2002). Moreover, what is most striking about the information in Kobe is that while much of it is produced by government outlets and research organizations, a correspondingly large part of writings and analyses on disaster mitigation in general is produced by ordinary citizens. These individuals do not have any particular expertise about disaster management, but nevertheless stake claims to authority, arguing that their experiences have earned them the right to tell their stories, inform audiences about what living through a disaster feels like, and how they should best prepare for future calamities.

The books, reports, and other materials produced through these efforts are decidedly eclectic. One, entitled *Toire ga Taihen!* ("The Bathrooms are Terrible!") describes what it is like to live in an evacuation center for an

extended time, where hundreds of people share a handful of toilets in school gymnasiums and where facilities are quickly overrun with waste despite everyone's best efforts to keep common areas clean. In a place where bathing is a cultural symbol of Japanese-ness and a regular and deeply enjoyed ritual, going without nightly baths and having to use soiled toilets served as a disgusting, embarrassing and bitter reminder that one's way of life has been cruelly compromised.⁵⁰ The author of *Toire ga Taihen!* goes on to instruct readers on the importance of preparing for disaster and pushes for a reconsideration of how sanitation might be better ensured at evacuation shelters.

Writings like *Toire ga Taihen!* are, at first glance, a strange genre: they are simultaneously memoirs of personal experience reminiscent of *jibunshi* self-histories, historiographies documenting conditions in evacuation shelters in 1995, and calls to action to improve living conditions during times of disaster. It is a genre easy to dismiss or overlook. Such authors are private citizens intent on making public what they see as a public health problem and a source of unnecessary distress to people already operating at their limits.

This political move is at odds with many representations of how scientific knowledge about risk is the domain of experts, officials, and others with social or educational positions of authority. Much has been written (Beck 1992, Hacking 2003, Jasanoff 2005, Lakoff 2007, Rose 2002) about global

⁵⁰ The popularity of visiting the onsen (hot springs) as a leisure activity is the most visible manifestation of this.

trends toward making risk into an object of knowledge by undermining local or “folk” practices and ways of knowing. Instead, experts use statistical probabilities to calculate and render risks into seemingly objective, knowable objects (Hacking 2006; see also Bowker and Starr 1999). These practices of calculating probabilities place problems caused by catastrophe into economic terms that are made commensurable and comparable (Espeland and Stevens 1998). What makes this logic possible is the faith and authority placed in scientists, engineers, and others to exclusive knowledge about what is risky, and what must be done to mitigate these risks. As disasters have borne out too often, however, expert calculations often fail: the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant disaster, for example, sadly demonstrated that attempting to calculate and plan for worst-case scenarios contains more uncertainty and chance than experts can control for.

Practices of producing and consuming alternative knowledges by citizens in Kobe, then, offer a counterpoint to monolithic accounts of experts holding the reins when it comes to public knowledge about and practices of dealing with risk and danger.⁵¹ The Hamaishi Disaster Preparedness Club is engaged in precisely this kind of alternative knowledge production work.

The group has worked with other members and neighbors to tour the

⁵¹ On the contrary, much of the writings, photos, television and radio materials created by citizens have been incorporated into research by Japanese scholars in the field of disaster management. My observations of seminars and conferences, and one-on-one conversations with researchers likewise revealed a respect for the materials created by earthquake survivors and volunteers, acknowledging that their experiences were valuable ones that could lend insight into future disaster response efforts.

community by foot, examining each area and creating a map that visually identifies potential hazards. They have also polled all households in the area to determine the names, ages, and mobility level of residents so that they can be aware of who might need help with evacuation, and also to have baseline data that will allow them to more easily identify anyone missing in the event of a disaster. These information-gathering practices were not prompted by the city government, nor even the neighborhood council. Instead, Matsumoto told me, they felt the need to know who they were trying to help, and wanted to take any steps necessary to facilitate their work. “We are the ones who know our neighborhood,” he said, and he credited their mapping project with giving them access to a better, more comprehensive understanding of their surroundings that made them better suited to quickly helping their neighbors than Self Defense personnel or even the local fire department.

These alternative practices of knowledge production in the service of public welfare do not look like the kind of public participation that we see in concepts such as Habermas’ public sphere. A public sphere in which citizens gather spontaneously and discuss and debate issues of concern is an ideal that I did not see often in practice in relation to disaster mitigation and preparedness in Kobe.⁵² Neither, however, did their activities bear any resemblance to Maruyama’s accusation of a non-existent private sphere. Rather, the “politics of no politics” that Matsumoto, Takahashi and their

⁵² The lack of such activity was, indeed, lamented by a number of people I met. My conversations with academics in Osaka, for example, centered around their concern that Japan did not have much space for public debate, nor active public life of the sort valorized in Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (2000).

colleagues practiced resonates most with the associational activities described by Tocqueville (1966) in the United States of the 1830s. Tocqueville's descriptions of citizens engaged in clubs and league activities that were not necessarily tied to political action holds parallels with contemporary Japanese disaster preparedness clubs and community centers. While it is crucial to remember that such associations have been shaped by a history of state programs that advocate a particular kind of responsible citizen, it is also the case that people like Takahashi and Hamaishi Disaster Preparedness Club members actively reflect upon their ideas of responsibility and self-determination. Most of all, they ascribe their engagements in terms of an ethos of civic relationality, in which their goal is to create and maintain a livable, safe community.

CHAPTER 4: Failure and the Limits of Experience

Deeply embedded in the relationships between the individuals and groups we saw in Chapter 3 is the notion of responsibility. Members of the Hamaishi Disaster Preparedness Club framed their involvement in the language of self-responsibility (*jishu sekinin*) and self-autonomy. The air of self-sacrifice with which they spoke of their efforts implied a feeling of obligation to fulfill duties to maintain their relationships with friends and neighbors. One of the most-recited lessons following the quake was, after all, to know one's neighbors, because neighbors save each other's lives.

Yet another side of this story is the oscillating relationship between the kind of responsibility felt and practiced by people like my interlocutors in Hamaishi, and the rejection of that responsibility. If obligation and mutual self-interest at least partially serve as motivating factors for members of the Hamaishi Disaster Preparedness Club to continue their efforts with the group, then the disavowal of such responsibility can also spell the subsequent dissolution of personal and affiliational relationships.

Shimizu, an engineer in his late 20s, offers stories that may help us envision this kind of disavowal. Shimizu works for a Japanese technology manufacturing company near Kobe. He did not enjoy his work there because of the long hours and his lack of personal investment in his job. One day over lunch, our conversation turned to the quality of his company's products. He explained how employees are recruited into performing quality control

through their placement in quality control "circles."⁵³ In these circle meetings, he said, "we all have to get together and talk about how we can do things better," he said. "If we make a good suggestion, we might get a bonus. Sometimes they use some of our ideas. But those are just superficial (*hyōmenteki*) measures," he continued. As an engineer, Shimizu would see and work on products as they moved down the production pipeline. "We see mistakes all the time," he said. "But everyone would ignore them. We don't want to say anything, because then we'd have to be responsible for it. It's easier if it just goes to the next step and someone can correct it then. But most often it never does get fixed, because everyone does that all the way down the line." Shimizu told me that it is not uncommon for products to make it to the market with known errors that no one had taken the time to address.

Another conversation with Shimizu and his friend, Minami, discussed their shared experiences with working around co-workers who had been diagnosed with depression (*utsubyô*). Everyone knew, they said, who was being treated for depression, because those with a diagnosis were allowed to take short-term disability leave. One co-worker, Minami told me, was apparently taking depression medication that made him drowsy. She described him as dressed for work but spending all day, every day slumped over on his desk sleeping while she and other co-workers had to work around him. The manager said nothing, she said, because that would entail dealing with an unpleasant issue. While of course the man was not being productive

⁵³ See Tsutsui (1996) for a discussion of the development of quality control in Japanese companies.

for the company, it was more comfortable for everyone to simply let him sleep. She laughed ruefully at the ridiculousness of the situation, but remarked also that the circumstances grated on her. The sleeping man was a permanent employee, but Minami was employed as a contract worker without job security nor benefits. She found it ironic that while he was allowed to sleep all day at his desk, she and her fellow contract workers did his job for him. Similarly, one of Shimizu's co-workers who was diagnosed with depression had a pattern of being out of the office for three months for short-term disability, return for a day when the disability period had expired, and then almost immediately start a new period of disability leave. He and Minami saw this not-uncommon practice as a darkly humorous but also maddening evasion of responsibility by their managers. More seriously, it signaled to them a broader social problem: why were so many people depressed? Why did their employers think it better to simply let them disappear in plain sight? And why did managers and co-workers not care enough to try to help these people?

A situation in which it is appropriate to ignore a mentally ill co-worker sleeping in the middle of a busy office is at odds with the image of neighborly care advocated by Hamaishi Disaster Preparedness Club members. Such a difference is also the source of public anxiety and discussion in homes, classrooms, and in the media. Many of these narratives are dominated by a motif of loss in which the economic growth of the postwar period came at a great social cost. Marilyn Ivy (1995) describes this sense of loss as a kind of

phantasm: postwar economic success has produced "a certain nexus of unease about culture itself and its transmission and stability. This anxiety indicates, conversely, a troubling lack of success at the very interior of national self-fashioning..." (8). The undesired side effect of national success via a capitalist modernity, she argues, has been a loss of "a past sometimes troped as 'traditional'..." (Ivy 1995: 9).⁵⁴

Indeed, a sense of deep relationality has long been a mainstay of cultural and political characteristics that supposedly define "Japaneseness" (Befu 2001; see also Miyazaki 2013). This sense can sometimes take on a mythical quality; a few of my interlocutors in Kobe, for example, described the practice of *tasukeai* (helping one another) as an ancient practice that has become sedimented in Japanese people.⁵⁵ In this figuration, developing social relationships and helping one another through human bonds (*kizuna*) is a practice that is not just good, but natural.⁵⁶ The world that Shimizu and Minami inhabit at work, then, is one in which these values have eroded into an unnatural, dystopian capitalist modernity.

These contrasting stories of past versus present, of maintaining community bonds versus ignoring one's ailing co-workers, suggest a cultural narrative of decline. Ivy (1995) ascribes this narrative as part of the practice of

⁵⁴ Ivy also suggests that cultural institutions that run programs such as tourism campaigns are reluctant to acknowledge this loss.

⁵⁵ Some of my interlocutors would credit this sense of national cohesiveness to ancient Japanese practices that arose out of a tough life on the archipelago's difficult, isolated terrain. See Befu (2001) for a discussion of this trope as central to the genre called *nihonjinron* (theories of the Japanese). See also Amino (2012) for an counterhistorical account of Japan's supposed isolation.

⁵⁶ Indeed, *kizuna* became a keyword in public discourse following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in Tohoku.

modern capitalism. Indeed, conversations I had on this subject with interlocutors in Kobe often utilized examples of rampant consumerism and a pervasive sense of anomie. I discuss the sense of historicism embedded within these contrasts between past and present later in this chapter, but here focus on a parallel narrative: that Japanese modernity has, in ways that matter greatly, been a failure (cf. Gerteis and George 2014).

Indeed, valorizations of supposed Japanese cultural traits (such as an inherent sense of connectedness with other Japanese) are just as often voiced alongside self-reflexive observations of this same Japaneseness that are more ambiguous. Some of these fall along the lines of stereotypes easily tossed out in casual conversation as matters of course: two such generalizations that people expressed most often to me were that Japanese are not good at speaking their minds, but rather tend to accept circumstances that are less than ideal. Writer Haruki Murakami phrases it in terms of stoicism, or *gaman* (perseverance): “We are good at enduring things,” he writes, “but not very talented when it comes to letting our emotions pour out” (Murakami 2012). But here I am concerned with a related and also common self-observation: that Japanese people are taught to have a complex relationship with failure (*shippai*).

Failure has long been both a quality of fascination and a source of anxiety in Japanese popular culture. Anecdotes abound: failed heroes make for the most simultaneously scintillating and empathy-inducing story material in Japanese literature and history. Ivan Morris's (1975) *The Nobility of Failure*, for

example, offers a compendium of Japanese historical and literary figures who are considered to be glorious in their failures. Heroically public failures, Morris writes, are captivating because they are sympathetic figures who had the courage to take chances. Similarly, Kon Ichikawa's elegiac film, *Tokyo Olympiad* (1965), details the successes, but more often the failures, of elite athletes competing in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. The disappointed competitors are no less admirable for having lost; instead, their commitment to push themselves to their limits, even if they do not win, is the stuff of heroes. Rather than being drawn to the strong man of history, then, it would seem that many in Japan have instead found empathetic resonance in those possessing the personal wherewithal required to try, fail, and carry on.

The Possibilities of Failure

In other words, failure exposes what we are really made of. This is key to understanding its mystique. Shibusawa Keizo (1896-1963), the son of a banking magnate and the future minister of finance for the new postwar government, offers one intriguing historical illustration. Shibusawa himself was deeply interested in culture. As patron of the nascent field of ethnology in Japan, he encouraged a generation of scholars who were intensely curious about Japanese material culture and compiled a self-inventory documenting the diversity of native Japanese traditions (Christy 2012). Shibusawa's reflections upon Japanese culture and what he thought of as Japanese habits of mind are illustrated in one of his essays, a brief reflection published in

1946? entitled "Can we write a history of failure?" In it, Shibusawa discusses a ship that had been donated by the US Occupation Authorities to Japan as part of its rebuilding phase. The ship was a secondhand donation from the US Navy, and when it was transferred over to Japanese hands, the ship's log was also included in the handover. These logs ostensibly contained a life history of the ship: where it had been, maintenance that had been done, and the like. Shibusawa expresses astonishment, however, that the logs were included in the transfer at all: only a nation secure in its worth and capabilities, he reasoned, would be so willing to expose its own faults.

Most notable about this passage is Shibusawa's interpretation of the ship's logbook itself. More than a simple record of facts and journeys, Shibusawa saw in the log an openness about failure that struck him as profoundly confident and potentially instructive for a defeated Japan. We might imagine what these logs contained: brief accounts of repairs that had been done to the vessel, courses that had been charted and corrected, personnel changes — various forms of information and knowledge that, to his eyes, read as intelligence that most people would naturally prefer to keep private, particularly from those who were so recently wartime foes. In Japan, he writes, this sort of knowledge would never be made so freely available.

I emphasize several aspects of Shibusawa's essay for our uses. First, he traces a precise definition of failure. Failure is not simply subpar quality, disappointed hopes, or unwanted results. Neither is it an exceptional event. Rather, the crucial element of failure is the fact that it REVEALS. Revealing so

much places oneself in a position of vulnerability. Yet failures are also very ordinary; mistakes happen to everyone everywhere. Thus the very ordinariness of failure makes its revelation — a moment in which it is publicly acknowledged and remarked upon, or not — an extraordinary event. It is the novel juxtaposition of transparency with failure, then, that Shibusawa saw as so striking. We might conclude that Shibusawa connected transparency with democracy, and with transparent failures a demonstration of America's supreme confidence in the viability of its own democracy.

Second, Shibusawa, like many individuals I encountered during the course of fieldwork, expresses a combination of nationalism and self-critique in his argument that Japan and Japanese have been too private, and that this privacy arises from a deep ethnic-cultural discomfort with having to face uncomfortable realities without the benefit of concealment. He advocates learning from and emulating America's confidence. By the time of my own fieldwork just after the US economic crisis, America was seen as less a place for emulation than a model of economic and cultural arrogance. While my interlocutors did not echo Shibusawa's sentiment in that regard, they did privately and frequently voice strong critiques of Japanese culture and what they deemed to be traditional and closed ways of dealing with losses and failures. Importantly, these critiques were not condemnations of the worth or quality of Japan or Japanese culture; rather, those making these statements would in the same conversation highlight how these negative cultural traits

were, like two sides of a coin, actually the flip side to what they treasured most about their society.

Often this cultural critique is written off, perhaps ironically even among critics of *nihonjinron* (theories of Japanese uniqueness), as simply another form of cultural essentialism. Certainly this is a valid observation; left implicit in Shibusawa and my informants' critiques is the assumption that Japanese culture is something whole and observable, an actually existing thing. Michael Herzfeld (1997) describes this sense of national-cultural identity – yet also a feeling of shame about aspects of this identity – as “cultural intimacy.” Cultural intimacy, he writes, is “the recognition of those aspects of cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality...” (Herzfeld 1997: 3). Elsewhere he describes this sense as the “social reality of stereotypes” that is consequential for both anthropologists and the people with whom they study. While ethnographic writing cannot conflate stereotypes with cultural analysis, at the same time, Herzfeld argues, “we should not ignore their forceful presence as locally valued models for everyday life” (Herzfeld 2004: 23).

Herzfeld's insights are helpful when considering how culturally essentialist self-critiques related to disaster. After the March 2011 “triple disaster” of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident, for example, Kurokawa Kiyoshi, the chairman of one of the Fukushima investigatory panels, released a controversial introduction to the panel's final report that

described the nuclear catastrophe as human-made. The cause, he wrote, was Japan's cultural pathologies. He writes,

What must be admitted – very painfully – is that this was a disaster 'Made in Japan.' Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to 'sticking with the program'; our groupism; and our insularity. Had other Japanese been in the shoes of those who bear responsibility for this accident, the result may well have been the same (Kurokawa 2012).

As Kohta Juraku (2013) has noted, it is intriguing that this statement appeared only in the English version of the report.⁵⁷ Kurokawa was also widely criticized in the English language media and by foreign scholars for hewing to cultural stereotypes of so-called traditional Japanese behavior. However, in keeping with Herzfeld's observations, in my own everyday interactions with Japanese friends and informants, most did indeed feel this way. They did see as real their own tendencies toward groupism and predilections toward ignoring what was wrong; often, they described these cultural habits as the cause of very real socioeconomic problems, from youth violence to economic decline.

Finally, Shibusawa's essay deserves some historical contextualization. These essays were written in the immediate postwar period, while Japan was still occupied by the Allied forces and had been focusing on rebuilding not just its war-torn landscape, but democracy itself. As the nation engaged in what Dower (1999) has called "embracing defeat," Shibusawa must have seen

⁵⁷ There was some media attention in Japan to the forward, but not much, presumably because Japanese reporters read the report in its original Japanese.

a particular timeliness in pushing for cultural change at a moment in which everything else was already changing. His reflection was an exhortation for Japanese to find a new way of being in a changed world. In finding failure in the war, Japan could seek growth and improvement. The loss of the war offered, he saw, an opportunity for openness and transparency, and a kind of freedom in that openness. But these changes would need to begin, he reasoned, from Japanese culture itself.

It is crucial to understand, however, that this push toward improvement and learning from failure was not a concept new to postwar Japan. Shibusawa's advocacy for a clear-eyed and frank engagement with the past is instead part of a longer moral trajectory about self-reflection and learning from one's actions that has been an elemental feature of modern Japanese moral life. Longer ethico-religious historical trajectories, including those from Buddhism, art and literature, have as a central feature the belief that responsibility — and self-responsibility in particular — is a moral virtue (see Gluck 2009).

Thus, while Shibusawa and others' drive for self-improvement, for example, could be read as an urge born from a nascent capitalist society, it is one that is also deeply rooted in religious and cultural ethics. Shibusawa's essay is striking because it seems to traverse this line between an old way of thinking and a new, finding fault with the old and advocating for the new, while also subtly acknowledging that the new was always latent in the old. His essay could also be read, then, as a philosophy of history; in this sense it

shares common ground with Benjamin's angel of history, with her back turned to the future, seeing in the past a long string of catastrophes. For Shibusawa, the inability to rectify what had gone wrong would doom Japan to the repetition of history. Only by looking at the failures of the past with clear eyes and an openness to change could transformation be possible.

Recuperating the Past

Shibusawa's argument is voiced in the contemporary moment by the Failure Studies Group (FSG), the group I introduced in Chapter 1. The FSG is dedicated to studying failures of all kinds in order to learn from them. All failures are game for study, from disasters such as the sinking of the Titanic, to personal disappointments including divorce and bankruptcy. Above all, members argue that failures are learning experiences, and turning away from that experience without having done the hard work of self-scrutiny is to turn away from valuable knowledge. Further, declining the opportunity to gain such knowledge leaves one vulnerable to increased suffering because these same failures can occur again and again. Over time, un-analyzed failures can have a profoundly negative impact on one's personal and professional life.

The FSG was established in 2001 by a group of former students of Yotaro Hatamura, professor emeritus of engineering at Japan's most prestigious university. At the time of my fieldwork membership in the FSG was fluctuating, but consisted of about 200 members from around the country. The vast majority of its members are male, and many of them work

in fields related to science, technology, engineering, and business. Other members included people such as Nishida, a shy and gentle CEO of his family's parts manufacturing company; Takenaka, a teacher who played bass in a jazz band at night; and Mitsui, the rugby-playing firefighter I introduced in Chapter 2.

The founder was not an active presence in FSG meetings, but has written multiple popular books about failure based on his experiences as an engineer and as a college professor. These books espouse a practice called "failure science" (*shippaigaku*); *shippai* means "failure," and *gaku* refers to the study of something. Sociology, for example, is *shakaigaku* and mathematics is *sûgaku*. The neologism *shippaigaku* can thus strike an ordinary listener unfamiliar with the FSG as a bit humorous, but its practices and methods are very similar to the common practice of failure analysis in engineering fields. Because of *shippaigaku*'s attention-getting name and Professor Hatamura's prestige, the FSG has received national media attention, such that Hatamura is regularly called upon by the media to comment when accidents or other failures occur. When I mentioned the FSG to friends unrelated to the organization in Kobe, quite a few nodded their heads in recognition because they had come across the FSG in their habitual reading of the newspaper. At one seminar I was surprised to hear the speaker, the head of a non-profit formed to assist people suffering from long-term disabilities from injuries suffered in the earthquake, bring up *shippaigaku* in reference to the Hanshin quake. "This professor," he

said, referencing Hatamura, "is right. The disaster was a failure, and we haven't fully faced its consequences."

The speaker's critique of the lack of what he saw as the mishandling of the Hanshin quake emergency taps into one of the FSG's own critiques of Japanese culture: despite a love for the underdog, they argue that Japanese people are not actually skillful at dealing with failure. One of the FSG's key arguments is that it is human nature to want to avoid facing difficult truths, but that Japanese people in particular are enculturated to have a negative relationship with failure. Ordinary Japanese people, they claim, are conditioned to ignore failure because of the pain and discomfort it brings, or to altogether avoid risky situations.⁸ It relates to why, for example, Shimizu and Minami's managers felt it preferable to ignore the problem of their depressed employees.

This representation also runs parallel to public criticisms of the many bureaucratic failures following the Hanshin earthquake. The central government, and Socialist Party Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in particular, was blamed for overly-deliberative, bureaucratic plodding during the crucial rescue window in the hours following the earthquake. At the time of the quake, Murayama himself was the fourth person to hold the office of prime minister in just 18 months. He surprised some observers when soon after the earthquake he accepted responsibility for the government's bungled

⁸ Of course, a negative response to failure is certainly not limited to Japanese culture, as a quick glance at U.S. self-help section bookstores can confirm. See also Petroski (1992) on engineering failures written for mainstream readers. But the FSG does suggest that Americans are more likely to maintain optimism despite failure.

response, but refused to resign in order to spearhead the strengthening of disaster prevention infrastructures.⁵⁹ The serial procession of new prime ministers is an example of the kind of reaction to failure that the FSG criticized most. The resignation of a leader in the wake of a grave error or failure is a cultural ritual conveying the leader's acceptance of responsibility. This ritual response is certainly not unique to Japan; the resignation of a public figure is often performed as a gesture of taking responsibility for something having gone wrong on their watch. The FSG, however, instead viewed this practice as a pathological response of evading responsibility. They argued that simply resigning from a position effectively allows an individual to avoid truly facing her failures. This is crucial not only to the individual, but to society at large: individuals who quit their positions fade from view, and their failure often fades away with them. Forgotten failures are inherently unproductive and even damaging; just as in the cliché that history is doomed to repeat itself, FSG members argue that declining the opportunity to learn from failure means that potentially valuable information and knowledge can never be gained from it.

In order to correct this cultural habit, Hatamura and the FSG suggest facing failures squarely (*shôjiki ni*) and objectively (*kyakkanteki ni*) rather than avoid them or automatically resign their jobs like many politicians and business people do when their failures are made public. The FSG's method for such objective analysis is adapted engineering principles of failure

⁵⁹ Murayama did eventually step down after 555 days in office, but continued in leadership roles in the Socialist Party.

analysis. The use of failure trees in engineering, for example, attempt to map out all the contributing factors of a failure so that they can be seen and dealt with clearly. The practice of *shippaigaku* thus involves using a structured analysis to chart out as many elements of one's failure as possible. While the method was inspired by engineering methods, the logic could be applied to business, scientific, technical, and even personal failures such as divorce.

Indeed, the FSG's message about learning from failure articulates a practical philosophy of experience through failure. Failure experiences need, the FSG argues, to be dealt with not in a way that eliminates emotions, but in a way that tames them. Most of my fieldwork with the FSG involved their Osaka chapter, which was closest to me in Kobe and considered to be the liveliest and most active *bunkakai* (subcommittee or chapter). One of their general promotion flyers offers a succinct expression of such a pragmatics of failure. Sprinkled throughout with photos of members engaged in various workshop *taiken*, it uses a sort of corporatized language of vague persuasion:

Won't you liberate yourself from past failures?

The saying that 'the more you fail, the harder it is to start something' [presumably because you think too much about failing] might prompt you to think, "Well, I'll just quit my worrying." But no sooner do you think that when your head feels heavy and you start to dwell [*hansei*] on things.

For humans, changing one's feelings simply by conscious thought [*ishiki*] alone is a difficult thing.

So what should one do?

All of us who live in society perpetuate a variety of failures. Spiritual solutions [*seishinteki na kaiketsu*] [for failure] offered by a stakeholder society [*rigaikankei no aru shakai*] are problematic.

The Osaka chapter is a gathering of mature adults [*shakaijin*] who are absolutely not among society's stakeholders. Together, we bring our problems [*mondai o mochiyori*], share information, and think.

It's fine if at first you just want to listen. What is important is that you are there. Eventually you will look for your own solutions.

The FSG's criticisms of a "stakeholder society" (*rigaikankei no aru shakai*) are based on the premise that conventional, socially-acceptable ways of dealing with failure in Japan are deeply flawed. One of the founder's key claims is that Japanese culture teaches people to react unhelpfully to failure: the tradition for public figures to resign their positions after failing, for instance, does nothing except to ensure that the perpetrator's knowledge never gets passed on for others to learn from. One of Hatamura's books, *An Invitation to the Study of Failure*, puts it this way:

It is true that there were times when the shortcut to success was to follow [the] success stories of others, and back then, quickly reaching the correct answers to well-defined quizzes was effective.

However, Modern times do not promise our success by just mimicking the success stories of others. Yesterday's successes do not apply today. For such times, creativity is more important, and as long as creativity means the power to produce something new, we cannot create without experiencing failure.

Given the task of gaining creativity, the first lesson is not to find an answer to a known problem, but is to gain the ability to define the

problem ourselves. The learning process of driving the solution to given problems in the quickest way, that we Japanese are so accustomed to, will not offer us the real creativity that modern society is looking for (Hatamura 2002:2).

In this passage Hatamura makes clear that the key to transforming the experience of failure into lasting knowledge is through disciplined practice. The affective disposition necessary to face one's mistakes can only be cultivated through analysis. Strikingly, he says that this analysis should not—and indeed cannot—be purely rational. Rather, one's turbulent emotions are the very rational outcome of failure; what is necessary is not to suppress these emotions, but to make them work for you.

The process is illustrated by the FSG's use of engineering fault tree analysis to dissect failures. Engineers use the biological metaphor of trees. Missteps, miscalculations, incorrect assumptions — all are placed on the tree and arranged in a way that ideally leads the analyst to discover the literal “roots” of the failure. Hatamura, and the FSG in general, argued that such trees should not be confined to technical analyses. Using the figure of the mandala as another form of mapping, Hatamura instead suggested that charting failures must involve detailing both technical AND personal missteps—both worked in concert, after all, to produce the failed event. Transferring all of the deeply painful attributes of one's failure onto paper

also does the ancillary work of allowing the practitioner some analytical distance from his emotions.⁶⁰

Such a mapping of an entire universe of failures of course begs the question of indeterminacy, “flukes,” and the complex interplay of human and non-human factors. It also suggests that a failure can be considered as a universal whole comprised of discrete, mappable causal events. Yet the FSG's focus is on the mere process of doing such an exercise, which ostensibly then leads to an experiential understanding of failure as a complex coalescing of various factors. Most importantly, constructing a failure mandala or fault tree requires opening one's eyes to painful experiences that would often be easier to try to forget. In this way the FSG's practices are attempts to fashion a narrative thread linking the past to the present in the hope of creating a better future. In other words, they are exercises in creating a continuous history in which failures enhance, rather than rupture, lives.

Reorienting Failures

It is important to recognize that the FSG's advocacy of learning from failure ties in closely with scientific discourses about *shippai* (failure) as emotionally painful, but potentially valuable. I illustrate this with an

⁶⁰ See Rohlen (1974) for a discussion of another kind of ritual on failure: the *hanseikai*, or reflection meeting. These meetings are often convened in schools, workplaces or other institutional settings following the conclusion of a project. Members are expected to publicly reflect on failures or what they could have done better. An acquaintance, a Japanese graduate student who had participated in daily *hanseikai* while in primary school, dismissed them as an empty ritual. She characterized *hanseikai* as performances in which people said what they thought they should say, but intentions to actually enact changes were either short-lived or non-existent.

encounter between Japanese Nobel Laureates and Kansai-area high school students.

On a June day in the lush forested northernmost outskirts of Kyoto, more than 500 high school students and their parents gather in a darkened auditorium to the background music of opera and theme songs from American movies. There is a quiet hum of voices in the room as teenagers shuffle into the hall, looking to sit by friends. Their parents, among whom I am sitting, wait patiently, as I imagine they have for many of their kids' school activities. This event, however, is billed as special: we are awaiting three Nobel Prize winners to emerge on stage. At precisely 1 pm, the lights dim and the crowd goes quiet. The emcee, a television journalist named Shiraishi who works for one of Japan's largest TV networks, welcomes the audience, singling out the high school students for acknowledgement.

He begins with an aphorism: "There are three kinds of crises," he begins. "There are the known knowns, the kinds of cyclical events that we can expect and prepare for. The second are the known unknowns, that class of accident that we know will occur, but lack the knowledge to prevent or address." And in a surreal echoing of former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Shiraishi then concluded with the "scariest thing" (*ichiban kowai*): the "unknown unknowns," a possibility that cannot or has not been envisioned and thus cannot be mitigated or prevented. He uses this frightening proclamation as a segue to introduce the three Japanese Nobelists who have taken seats behind a long table on the stage. These prize winners,

Shiraishi introduces, are ones who have tackled the unknown unknowns, thereby showing original thinking and a dedication to knowledge. The Nobelists gathered here include a physicist in his 80s named Koshihara, his bolo tie and shock of white hair perfectly capturing the image of the eclectic scientist. To his left sat a middle-aged physicist named Kobayashi, who was clearly uncomfortable in front of the audience. And to Koshihara's right sat the youngest of the three, a chemist named Tanaka, who described himself as a "craftsman" rather than "scientist."

Because their presence was meant to inspire this new generation of Japanese youth to tackle science, the laureates were asked to describe their childhoods (though all admitted to forgetting what they actually did in high school) and their paths to science. All three mentioned a sense of chronic self-abnegation and hesitancy among students to adopt the kind of creative courage and even bravado necessary to forge scientific discoveries. Dr. Koshihara put it this way: "We Japanese must have confidence. I believe that Japanese are an excellent people (*yūshū na minzoku*). Despite its small population, Japan has the most Nobel prizewinners in Asia. It is the best in the world in natural science. Try your best and be confident."

The pattern among all three laureates to push students into believing that they were good enough to do international-caliber science was also echoed in a question and answer session with three students. The first two were impressive in their own right; both were winners or attendees of the Intel Science Fair in California and students at one of the nationally-

designated “super science” high schools. They asked specific questions about paths to scientific careers. The third student, however, was a stocky high school sophomore who endeared himself to the crowd by smilingly introducing himself as an ordinary (*futsû*) student in a regular public high school who had never won any awards. His own question for the Nobelists was an eager appeal for advice: “How do I deal with failure?” he asked. The audience gave an appreciative laugh. All three panelists smiled in recognition and nodded, but Tanaka answered first. “*Shippai saretemo, takusan no keiken o ikasu* (Even if you fail, you’ll gain a lot of experience),” he said. “In earlier times, a good student was one who copied his teacher. But in this era, you can’t imitate (*mane*); you have to push yourself toward failure (*zasetu*) in order to do something that no one else has done. Although you can copy others and succeed, you won’t be very happy. But if you follow your ideas and you succeed, you’ll feel great. Even if you fail, you’d have tried. Follow your own ideas (*jibun no kangaetakoto*).”

Interestingly, the Nobel laureates in this panel were less concerned with science in particular, but a broader methodology of happiness through self-confidence. Failure, the laureates intimated, is the natural outcome of having the courage to address the “unknown unknowns.” Such courage does not guarantee success, but it offers a key ingredient for the kind of original thinking required of the kind of person who wins a Nobel Prize. In many ways Tanaka’s advice to foster creative independent thought and self-motivation echoes the many self-help books (often translations from

American titles) I encountered in Japanese bookstores that held very similar messages.

Learning from Experience

The common theme among the laureates and members of the FSG is that failure is a universal experience that should not be avoided, but taken as a valuable learning opportunity and as a mark of one's courage to reach beyond the conventional. They emphasize failure as an experience, rather than a product or some sort of quality. In doing so they imply that failure is inherently embodied and affective. This is why so much of the FSG's analytical practices focus so heavily on practitioners' emotional labor toward learning how to self-organize and self-regulate their feelings.

It is helpful here to briefly consider the semantic differences between *taiken* and *keiken*, particularly as they relate to failure.⁶¹ Both terms are translated in English as "experience," but the words offer different connotations.⁶² *Taiken* is comprised of the Chinese characters for "body" and

⁶¹ See Leslie Pincus (2006) for a much more detailed discussion of the complex relationship between *taiken*, *keiken*, and Japanese-German philosophical engagements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries between Japanese philosopher Kuki Shuzo and ideas from German thinkers including Heidegger, Husserl, and Bergson.

⁶² Despite their codification within these dictionaries, it is important to note that the semantic differences between *taiken* and *keiken* are not inherent to the words themselves. Rather, like all words, they are shaped by their historical, political, and cultural environments. The contemporary meaning of *taiken* and *keiken* date to the early Meiji era (1868-1912), commonly considered the period of modernization and the contested, greatly ambivalent Westernization of Japan (Sharf 1995; see also Howland 2002, Oguma 2002). As Douglas Howland (2002) has shown, during this period the Japanese language was in constant flux as scholars and other elites debated and shaped the trajectory of foreign words as they traveled into the Japanese lexicon. These debates about concepts such as "rights," the "individual,"

"testing" or "verification." The dictionary definition is instructive to a degree: one describes *taiken* as "something that one experiences firsthand (*"mi o motte,"* which can also be translated as "with one's own body"). Another dictionary adds that the word was originally imported from the German words *Erleben* and *Erlebnis* (literally "lived-through") in relation to *lebensphilosophie* (the philosophy of life), in which *taiken*, like *Erlebnis*, refers to a direct encounter with reality (Pincus 1996:73). In other words, *taiken* is often conceived of as an experience located in the body (Pincus 1996: 78).⁶³ In other words, *taiken* carries the nuances of both felt sense and total experience located in the body. For example, in the field of Japanese education it is said that teachers cultivate *taiken* in the form of club activities and hands-on experiences because they are seen as crucially integrative to a child's development; they develop the mind through the body (Sato 2003:87). Similarly, as I discuss in Chapter 6, disaster prevention centers (*bôsai sentâ*) and disaster prevention festivals are commonly equipped with *jishin-sha*, literally "earthquake vehicles" that are fitted with hydraulic shake tables. The apparatus is decorated as a household kitchen or living room, and

and "freedom" were part of a broader national anxiety about Japan's rapid social change during this time, and the process by which Japan would navigate such changes.

⁶³ Japanese philosopher Kuki Shuzo (1888-1941) was instrumental to developing the connotation of *taiken* as an immediate experience. Historian Leslie Pincus (1996) writes that in Kuki's treatment, *taiken* "...facilitated the tendency of Japanese theorists to embed experience in nature and thus remove it from the reach of critical thought." Indeed, Kuki's own philosophy of Japanese thought assigned to *taiken* what Pincus has argued is a "simultaneously ontological and epistemological role" such that the word "insured the continuing presence of the past to consciousness and tapped an enriched and fundamental mode of apprehending the world far superior to the limited scope of reason" (Pincus 1996: 78).

participants are told to sit normally as an operator activates the shake table. The experience, called an earthquake *taiken* (*jishin taiken*), is meant to offer participants a visceral understanding of earthquakes through their bodily sensations of imbalance and surprise. That it is also considered as a novel or even fun adventure also suggests that *taiken* can also carry the connotation of a superficial experience.

Further, because the definition of *taiken* is, as Yoneyama gracefully writes, “the effects and outcomes of events undergone and evidenced by and through bodies” (Yoneyama 2001: 234), *taiken* also suggests limitations of scale and temporality. *Taiken* belongs to the realm of individual experience and visceral sensation. This is why, for instance, survivors of earthquakes often describe the experience of living through the disaster as “*sono taiken*” (that experience).

Keiken, on the other hand, cultivates an understanding of experience in terms of duration and effort. Dictionary definitions place *keiken* as a word that “describes past interactions between humans and the external world.” Whereas *taiken* was taken from the German *Erlebnis*, *keiken* is a cognate of *Erfahrung*, which is described by Heidegger as a transformative experience.

While *keiken* and *taiken* share a same second character 験 (“testing,” or “verification”), the “*kei*” (経) in *keiken*’s character compound signifies longitude, or passing through something. In contrast to *taiken*, *keiken* is often, though not necessarily, imbued with the connotation of sustained experience

gained over time through conscious effort. In the dialectic between *taiken* and *keiken*, *keiken* thus signifies cumulative, cognitive knowledge versus direct sensory experience.

The qualitative and temporal differences between *taiken* and *keiken* was the fodder for one of my conversations with two FSG board members. We had been discussing the FSG's Failure Knowledge Database, a project funded by the governmental Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) to analyze a variety of engineering, economic, and other failures through the lens of failure science (*shippaigaku*).⁶⁴ The database was made public on the Japan Science and Technology's website in the hope that engineers and others would consult the information it contained in order to learn from the mistakes of others. Our discussion turned to the nature of knowledge (*chishiki*) and the process by which people learn from the experiences of others. Hagiwara sensei, a professor of engineering at the University of Tokyo, put it this way: "You could say that the difference between knowledge and experience (*keiken*) is subtle. But, well, I think that experience (*keiken*) is a necessary condition for knowledge." Ono sensei, one of the board members of the FSG, agreed. Thoughtfully, he added, "Yes, *keiken* can imply time and effort. But you can still take knowledge from someone else's failure. You need *keiken*, but it is *keiken* in the form of training to recognize where mistakes were made." Ono was referring to engineering, in particular; one requires technical knowledge in order to diagnose a problem. But his observation can be carried

⁶⁴ The database can also be seen as another inheritor of the state's information society policy discussed in Chapter 3.

over to a general discussion of *keiken* as a form of intellectual and affective labor that can only be reached through time. Crucially, both Hagiwara and Ono's conceptions of knowledge are founded upon the conscious, effortful act of cultivating experience.

The potential of failure to be a transformative experience finds resonance in mainstream business writing on success and failure in Japan. For example, in a 2004 newsletter column entitled "*Taiken* and *Keiken*," Sony Bank President Ishii Shigeru began with an aphorism that given the same experience (*taiken*), people can react in two ways. A person can reflect on the *taiken*, or can choose not to revisit those feelings. The person who studied the situation could be said to have "*keiken*," while the other would leave the experience as a simple "*taiken*." "It can be seen," he wrote, "that there are more people who simply leave the *taiken* as-is (*sono mama*)." He continues by saying that success can be considered this kind of "as-is" experience:

In order to transform *taiken* into *keiken*, one must objectively retrace the *taiken* and engage in a kind of effort to think about its meaning. Simply remembering the experience as a whole is like taking a photo: it holds no relationship nor meaning to you now, other than simply being able to say, "that happened."

Furthermore, this discourse posits that success is actually a kind of *taiken*, a singular occurrence. Failure, on the other hand, holds the potential for *keiken*. Another essay, titled "*Success Taiken* and *Failure Keiken*," written by financial planner Kinoshita Toshinobu points out that while in Japanese one can say "*Success taiken*" (*seikô taiken*), one does not say "*failure taiken*"

(*shippai taiken*). The reverse is also true: one says “failure *keiken*,” (*shippai keiken*) but one rarely hears the phrase “success *keiken*” (*seikô keiken*). This difference, he writes, is key in the “business world” (*bijinesu no sekai*):

What happens if a failure happens at work? If you’re an engineer, you might create defective products. If you’re in enterprise, it might directly result in a claim on you from a customer. It might lead to being scolded by your boss...Even if you weren’t reprimanded by your boss, you would still bear the blame, and you wouldn’t be able to escape the personal feeling of pain. I think that feeling this pain and thinking about your suffering leads you to not want to repeat that failure next time. Toward that end, you work to think of new ways of doing things.

Conversely, what happens if you have success at work, or if you are able to achieve a goal? It all went well, so the next time you do that work you don’t think about how you might change the way you think or the techniques you use. In other words, success as an experience does not give birth to change. ... I always tell young people this: if a boss or older colleague does the favor of telling you of a past mistake, that is a mountain of treasure. Why did it fail, what happened after the failure, what kind of response was there...a person who tells a young, inexperienced worker these things is a treasure (Kinoshita 2009).

If Shibusawa was advocating for reorienting Japanese apprehensions of failure toward a historically redemptive end, then people like Ishii and Kinoshita and FSG members are concerned with more entrepreneurial ends. As Hirokazu Miyazaki (2013) writes, deregulation and privatization programs started in the 1980s led to its maturation in 1990s financial reforms that "entailed a radical reconception of Japanese subjectivity and ultimately of Japanese society. Reformers championed the 'strong individual' (*tsuyoi kojîn*) willing to take risks (*risuku*) and responsibility (*sekinin*) as the antidote to the

'company man' (*kaisha ningen*) devoted to the promotion of the collective interest of his company" (92). Such structural changes overlapped with a cultural grappling with the relationship between society and the individual -- and how each are responsible to the other -- that has continued over the postwar period (Koschmann 1996).

The neoliberal emphasis on a strong man who pursues his own individual interests, Miyazaki argues, means that success is contingent on one's ability to withstand risk. Accordingly, concepts such as logic (*ronri*) and rationality (*gôrisei*) are harnessed into this discourse as characteristics of a person who can "withstand the burden of freedom" (quoted in Miyazaki 2013: 93). It is crucial to note here that logic and rationality are meant as tools for controlling its inverse: the emotional pressures of such high-stakes responsibility. The FSG's exhortations for Japanese individuals to analyze failure in order to objectively separate emotions from fact thus places them squarely within this economic discourse of the late 1990s. Similarly, the Nobel laureates who encouraged science students to pursue their own ideas despite the possibility of failure were also expressing that success comes from an individual, entrepreneurial logic.

Moreover, Miyazaki emphasizes that a tremendous consequence of this neoliberal turn has been its transformative effect on Japanese society as a whole (Miyazaki 2013: 93). The economics-inflected language of "success" and "failure" in relation to experience, then, joins uneasily with longer cultural orientations toward moral practices of reflecting on past action.

Survivors of the Hanshin Earthquake likewise speak in a vocabulary of learning from past experiences. My interviews and informal conversations with survivors usually revolved around two forms of earthquake experience: *taiken*, or the actual experience of living through the catastrophe and its immediate consequences, and *keiken*, which often referred to the much duration of time including and following the earthquake.

I circle back now to the FSG's desire to create a continuous history beyond failure. While I recognize that the German and Japanese parallel words for experience are not mirror images, it is helpful to think laterally between cognates as a way of thinking through the differences between *taiken* and *keiken* and why they matter to quake survivors. Writing on the qualitative differences between *Erlebnis* (or *taiken*) versus *Erfahrung* (or *keiken*), Walter Benjamin suggested that *Erlebnis* was a precursor to *Erfahrung* because it signaled a gulf between lived experience and integrated history in the modern capitalist world. Benjamin utilizes Freud's theories of psychoanalysis (Benjamin 1986; see also Elsaesser 2009), in which the bodily experience of *Erlebnis* (or *taiken*) is a form of isolation because it is based on an individual, presumably one-off event. The vacuum of sociality and lack of sustained action implied by this form of experience relegates it to a fragmentary, and thus ultimately superficial, form of experience.

The isolation inherent to *Erlebnis* (or *taiken*) is most apparent in Freud's notion of trauma. To Freud, an individual life is constantly punctuated by small shocks that the consciousness tries to repel in order to protect itself.

These shocks, or traumas, can only be integrated into the self if the consciousness can be persuaded to allow the shocks through its protective barrier. Opening oneself up to consciously, albeit painfully, attending to these shocks allows an individual to gradually transform them into *Erfahrung*, what Heidegger termed "transformative experience" (Benjamin 1986).

Central to the movement between superficial to deep experience, then, are questions of duration and the relationship of individual memories to culture. According to Benjamin, the transmutation of the transient experience of *Erlebnis* (or *taiken*) into the integrated experience of *Erfahrung* (or *keiken*) requires time and quietude or, as he would write elsewhere, a sort of boredom. He argues that the time and emotional and intellectual space required to assimilate a trauma into an integrated self could only be achieved through "long practice" (Benjamin 1986: 337). Long practice, however, is a habit Benjamin lamented as lost to the restrictions placed on human activity by modern urban life. The inability to integrate isolated and cumulative experience is a "failure of experience" as film studies scholar Benjamin Elsaesser writes, "not only because the traumatized person cannot put his or her experience into discourse, but because the shock of trauma is often said to leave no visible symptoms, no bodily marks" (Elsaesser 2009:307).

The Impulse to Tell

The act of putting "experience into discourse" as a condition for integrating a traumatic experience within one's personal history and identity

strikes a chord with earthquake informational practices as well as general talk about the disaster that I heard and read frequently in Kobe. One of my interlocutors, an Australian radio show host at FMX who had lived for decades in Kobe with his wife and children, once told me, "Why do people keep talking about the quake? Because it continues to affect them every day." As this study illustrates, such "talk" takes various forms. But a common feature is that their contents are framed in a model of inheritance; these are stories that are meant to be remembered and passed on.

One example of such narrative practices are those by *kataribe* in Kobe. Most often translated as "storyteller" -- the Chinese compound for the word is literally "talking head" (語り部) -- *kataribe* date back a thousand years to the courtly Heian period, during which they were professional reciters who passed on oral histories, folktales, and ghost stories. The word had receded in popular contemporary usage until victims from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings began emerging from a self- and socially-enforced anonymity to offer accounts of their experiences in and after the US attacks. As Takashi Fujitani (2001) and others have written, the dominant narrative of progress and growth in post-World War II Japan left no place for nuclear bomb survivors (*hibakusha*). While most survivors were civilians who had nothing to do with the attacks, the *hibakusha* were socially stigmatized; their victimhood became a source of blame, and for decades those who survived the nuclear bombings were silent about their experiences. As survivors aged, peace activists, human rights organizations, and victims themselves began

calling attention to the need to preserve and pass down the experiences of those who lived through the world's only nuclear attack. Their efforts to organize an oral archive of experiences led them to reclaim the title of *kataribe*. It was through this movement that the word *kataribe* has again become a recognized term in contemporary Japan.

Within this historical context of activism through memorialization, some survivors of the Hanshin quake have self-organized as *kataribe*: they speak of their experiences during and after the quake as a way of expressing what they believe no one should ever forget. Honda-san was one such *kataribe*. I first met him at a pre-taping meeting at Minatogawa Community Center, where he was scheduled to be a guest on one of FMX's radio shows, a monthly program by a man named Nakano entitled, "Handing Down the Disaster" (*Daishinsai o Kataritsugu*).⁶⁵ Honda was a trim man in his early 70s, with close-cropped salt and pepper hair. His neatly-pressed slacks and button-down shirt was overlaid by a neon yellow windbreaker emblazoned with the name of the non-profit group where he volunteered as a *kataribe* at schools and events. After he, Nakano, Maeda, and I had settled ourselves on the sofas in the crowded upstairs reception area, Honda took out of his bag several CD-ROMs. Handing one of the CDs to me, he explained that his group had completed a survey of every earthquake-related memorial in the greater Kobe area. The CD-ROM contained the fruits of this effort: a clickable, searchable, illustrated database of all memorial sites, statues, and signs

⁶⁵ This is an awkward translation, as the verb *kataritsugu* means to hand down orally from generation to generation.

relating to the Hanshin earthquake. He also handed over some flyers for his group, and invited us to attend an upcoming earthquake memorial event at which he and other *kataribe* from the group would be speaking. This invitation soon segued into a discussion of the show; Nakano planned on asking Honda about his work as a *kataribe*, and what prompted him to voluntarily relive his experiences over and over again. Honda's family had been gravely injured in the disaster, and his son had been crushed to death when their family home in the neighborhood of Mikage partially collapsed. He began telling us about the morning of the quake:

It was early in the morning, not even light outside yet. I had just gotten up, and my wife was starting to get breakfast ready. Then there was violent (*hageshi*) shaking. Dishes crashed and our bookshelves fell over. We tried to hold on. My son was in his room sleeping when the shaking began. The sound was so loud, and things were falling. The ceiling fell, the floors came up. It lasted maybe about 20 seconds. When it was over we called out to each other. My wife was OK. But my son didn't answer, so I tried going closer to where he had been sleeping. The wall had collapsed there, but I could see his face. He was on his back, but there was a lot of rubble on top of him. He didn't move. We tried to get help, but there was no way anything could get to us. The houses around us had collapsed, too. We had to wait for emergency personnel to come. I looked into the house again later, but by then my son's face had started to change color, darken. He was young. He had just been talking about jobs he wanted to apply for the night before.

We had been silent during Honda's recitation, punctuation only by the occasional "*un...*" backchannel communication Japanese speakers use to signal that they are actively listening to an interlocutor. Honda spoke without much obvious emotion; he didn't pause or stutter. He did not have to search

for words to describe his experience. His narration was one that had obviously been told before; indeed, in his capacity as a volunteer *kataribe*, he regularly told his story to others, both in small groups and at large events. I would later see Honda again at the annual 1.17 memorial event on January 17 in downtown Kobe; he and other *kataribe* were gathered under a white tent in the cold, rainy evening, facing a small crowd of listeners who sat or stood along a semicircle of metal folding chairs. He and his colleagues wore that same neon yellow jacket, speaking into a microphone connected to a tinny speaker. He told the same story again, similar to the one that I heard that day at FMX.

Honda is not alone among the cadre of *kataribe* who travel around the Kansai area and beyond in order to tell their stories to schoolchildren, passersby at memorial events, and participants of disaster seminars. His *kataribe* colleagues under the tent at the 1.17 memorial were a mix of men and women, most of whom looked similar in age to Honda. They told similar stories about the experience of losing family members or homes, and the work it required to come to terms with their changed lives. As retrospective narrations, these stories are embedded within a particular historical moment. As survival stories, *kataribe* storytelling divides past from present, but also utilizes the past as a way of providing moral instruction for the present by presenting the speaker's experience as possibly useful example for others. In other words, survival stories are time-delimited; they can only be told once one's survival — and I mean here both physical and emotional survival —

has been at least temporarily secured. In other words, these stories can only be told now, at some temporal and emotional distance from the immediate trauma of the event. In this way Honda and other *kataribe*'s efforts are a quite literal way of "putting experience to discourse." *Kataribe* narrations illustrate the transformation of a brief but deeply traumatic *taiken* into the clarity gained through *keiken*, the deep experience gained over time and effort.

The work of *kataribe* is a genre of disaster prevention information because one of the goals of such storytelling work is for others to learn from their self-reflections. While their style and audience is quite different from those of the FSG, they are very similar in that they share the aim of bettering themselves and improving circumstances for others by reflecting on their losses and turning them into lessons that are shared with the world.

Continuous Histories

Kataribe, as with FSG practices, also suggest a concern about one's role and position in history. Shibusawa, writing in the midst of social rebuilding after the war, makes this interest acutely clear. But such a concern about one's relationship to a larger national and world history exist also in the contemporary moment. Analyses of Japanese cultural life published in the 1990s (Field 1997; Figal 1996; Gordon 1993; Ivy 1995; McCormack 1996), for example, have described ordinary Japanese people as possessing a sense of historical awareness, particularly in relation to social transformations from the pre- and post-war periods.

This sense of historical self-awareness is particularly relevant to the cultural atmosphere in which the Hanshin Earthquake occurred. In 1995 the social and economic results of the postwar period had already become a topic of public discussion and epochal reflection because the year marked the 50th anniversary of the end of the war (Figal 1996; McCormack 1995). The symbolism of the anniversary year was underscored by the Hanshin Earthquake and its occurrence at the beginning of the year, which is already traditionally a time of reflecting on the past and planning for the year ahead.⁶⁶

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the disastrous events and lingering economic woes of 1995, along with troubling incidents like the Youth-A murder case in Kobe, resulted in a diffuse sense in public discourse and the media as indicative of something having gone wrong in Japan (Allison 2013; Ivy 1995; McCormack 1996). This vision of history is one of rupture and wrong trajectories. It carries the unnerving implication that the successes and sacrifices of the postwar period were hollow. This rendering also implies that the lessons that were taken from the failures of the major rupture of World War II – namely, economic growth – were the incorrect ones. And yet the late 1990s saw the continuing advance of neoliberal reforms that have had vast social implications for Japanese people at large.

The practice of taking lessons from disasters of all types, then, is no small matter. They bear significant social, political, and historical

⁶⁶ The somber mood also took form in the practice of self-restraint (*jishuku*), in which Japanese nationwide scaled back on consumer and leisure activities as a form of expressing respect for earthquake victims (En 1995:5).

consequences. The lessons taken from the Hanshin Earthquake, and the 1990s in general, are thus fraught with questions about the past and the future. What did we learn from this experience? What can we do differently? These questions, along with the practices of *kataribe*, FSG members, and the business writers discussed earlier, are grappling with crafting a continuous history, both for themselves and for a larger cultural narrative of national and human progress. Miyazaki (2013) describes his arbitrageur interlocutors as holding a similar perspective that was “predicated on a certain continuity between past and present” (97). In this sense they all practice a sort of Benjaminian fragmentary historiography that seeks to identify points of past rupture and restore them as “incitations” for the present (Brown 2001: 168). Hannah Arendt describes this process as locating “forgotten treasure” — those significant moments in the past — that might hold redemptive value for our present (quoted in d’Entrèves 2002: 4). Of course, *kataribe* and business writers, for example, did their historical work toward different ends. But I suggest that they shared the same *moral* goals of taking momentary, fragmented experiences of loss and recuperating them into a narrative of continuity, if not progress.

CHAPTER 5: Aestheticizing Safety

The previous chapters of this study have focused on the conceptual significance of information, practices of "informating" (Fortun 2004: 55), and the ways in which information is used to stabilize the earthquake into a series of lessons that allow survivors and safety advocates to craft a continuous history. But how does this information fit into the material landscape of everyday life? As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Kobe has been scrubbed clean of most signs of the catastrophe. In my daily walks around Nagata, one of the city's poorest and hardest-hit neighborhoods, I was hard-pressed to locate old buildings, or even structures that were in disrepair. Every couple of months during fieldwork, I would notice that another of the older, more run-down buildings had been taken down. These bare lots left a noticeable negative space in such a densely-built area.

Nagata is a special case in that the fires following the quake claimed most of the area; other parts of Kobe are a mix of pre-quake buildings and post-quake developments (Edgington 2010; Tsukahara 2011). But many of these spaces do still evoke what writer Haruki Murakami described as an unsettling reverse set of positive and negative images, in which what was empty before the quake is now occupied with new developments, and spaces filled with older structures are now cleared and still awaiting development.

Murakami's sense of things having been unnaturally switched resonates with what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2003) has called the sensorial

“negative space” left once the sensory traces of disaster have been erased from a place. Writing from Manhattan two years after 9/11, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett poignantly observed that just as the smoke drifting from the World Trade Center dissipated, the catastrophe was increasingly difficult to sense even as it remained present in the memories of New Yorkers. She writes, “Once the smoke cleared, the wound in the sky left no visible trace. There is simply nothing there. The skyline has become doubly historical. It is at once the skyline before there was a World Trade Center and the skyline after its disappearance. Nothing in the sky indicates that the towers ever existed” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2003: 12).

Just as in Manhattan, “negative space” has also become a political issue among quake survivors and activists. For example, the *kataribe* (disaster storytellers) of whom I wrote in Chapter 4 expressed dismay that the quake was in danger of fading from memory. They cited this fear as a major motivation for their volunteer work. The influx of new residents and the birth of new generations of post-quake Kobe natives raised the very real possibility, they felt, that the disaster would eventually be forgotten because it could no longer be directly sensed. Thus the clearing of rubble and run-down buildings may have left empty spaces remembered differently only by long-term residents of the city. But in fact there are signs of disaster everywhere in Kobe in the form of visual and audio information intended to engineer safety into residents' everyday interactions with the urban landscape.

For example, a walk down any busy street in central Kobe will result in encounters with multiple modes of sensory information. There are the large, rectangular maps pinning street corners to their adjoining roads. These maps pinpoint pedestrian's location, and also their position vis-à-vis the nearest disaster evacuation area. Dotted lines indicate the route one should follow from that location to a designated disaster shelter. A pedestrian will likely pass several of these large signs within a handful of blocks. At each crosswalk pedestrians wait until the light changes and the signal begins playing a digitized version of an old folksong or, in some places, the sound of birds chirping.



Figure 3. Safety evacuation sign at Okurayama Park, Kobe.

Continue walking down that busy street toward Kobe's central landmark, the Japan Rail Sannomiya train station, and hop on an escalator to the second-floor ticket wicket. The short ride is narrated by a female voice repeatedly exhorting passengers to exercise caution. Her smooth reminders are underscored by safety signage near the escalator's entrance and exit. Once through the ticket wicket and waiting on the station platform amid a crowd of fellow passengers, a short musical chime is followed by a recorded voice piped over the loudspeaker. This male voice, so familiar to daily commuters, gently reminds passengers to please stand behind the yellow safety line painted on the concrete beneath waiting passengers' feet. The chime and the man's recitation comes on every few minutes, such that the tune and the message are embedded in the memories of young children who reenact these sounds as part of their make-believe play. Now on the train and looking out the window, a construction site emerges below. A sidewalk there is cordoned off in pale blue plastic fencing, and is dotted by plastic sandwich board-like stands molded in the shape of smiling cartoonish monkeys. The monkeys offer a friendly reminder to passersby to watch their step.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ See Nozawa (2013) for an analysis of the widespread use of cute cartoon-like characters in signage and other forms of information in Japan.



Figure 4. Advertisement for a disaster preparedness drill in Nagata Ward.

The experience of traveling through landscapes of safety like these are not at all unique to Kobe, or even to Japan. But it is worth reflecting upon the quality of safety information in Japan in general, as seemingly superficial characteristics of such materials offer important clues to their affective significance. Krisztina Fehérváry's (2013) Peircean analysis of the materiality of socialist life in Hungary, for example, shows how ubiquitous gray concrete – so easily dismissed as drab and featureless – shares features with other materials that, when bundled together, form a social aesthetic. The materiality of safety signage in Kobe can be read in a similar way: qualia such as the pastel colors of the construction fence and the lavender monkeys, for example, evoke a sense of harmlessness. The escalator and train stations'

soothing voices, the old-fashioned melodies playing from crosswalk signals, too, offer sights and sounds that serve as icons of wholesomeness and friendly intimacy.

Taken together, such icons of care reflect a cultural aesthetic of disaster. I employ Marilyn Strathern's sense of the term here, in which aesthetic refers only distantly to the European notions of aesthetics as the appreciation of beauty (Simoni et al 2010: 2). Rather, Strathern designates aesthetics as something that describes "the persuasiveness of form, the elicitation of a sense of appropriateness" (Strathern 1991:10).

Strathern's definition describes precisely what disaster information in Kobe attempts to do: in various ways it tries to persuade and elicit a particular register of emotion and a circumscribed set of actions among viewers and listeners. I discuss aesthetics in the conclusion of this chapter, but briefly, Strathern describes the term in the Melanesian context: "When people display objects, artifacts, and so forth precisely as 'things' to be displayed, what invitation are they making, what is behind the invitation to the audience to see?" (Strathern 2013:25). Similarly, friendly lavender monkeys and the digitized hum of nostalgic music playing at crosswalks also extend an invitation to pedestrians to participate in an ecology of safety.

Strathern's description of aesthetics as an "invitation" is enriching because it allows us to understand that artifacts on display put people and things into relationship. Such a definition carries profound implications: Strathernian aesthetics is an attempt to communicate with one another by

understanding how others think and where they come from, in both a cultural and material sense. Similarly, Annelise Riles's (2000) ethnography of the aesthetic practices of networking among women's groups in Fiji offers a literal illustration of an analysis of Strathernian aesthetics. Riles observed that women's group leaders seemed less interested in the potential collaborative projects that could come out of networking with other groups, than the outward display of their social networks through artifacts such as organization charts. The women's literal display of their relationships allowed them to display and perform their authority as well-connected experts on women's issues.

Just as Strathern and Riles demonstrate how aesthetic form actually performs relationships, architect Robert Venturi (1977) attends to material signs and advertisements as a literal "communicative system" that is "designed to persuade" viewers (9). His study of signs that lined the Las Vegas Strip in the 1960s and 1970s suggested that seemingly superficial, garish advertisements serve as a key means of communication as important to the landscape as the views they obstruct. Their size and placement indicate, Venturi argues, a new mode of urban living in which the vehicle, rather than a human's footstep, sets the pace and scale of the city.

Venturi's insight about the ubiquitous signs lining the Strip implies that such visual information are not just features of the Las Vegas landscape, but are constitutive of it. Ola Stockfelt (2004) makes a similar argument about audio information, suggesting that a music's genre and its sensory

environment are co-constitutive (see also Kassabian 2013). In this sense, opera music is composed of the acoustic capabilities and grand architecture of opera houses as much as by its melodies and lyrics.

I extend both Venturi and Stockfelt's insights to Kobe, where sights and sounds create the city as a post-disaster, post-1990s recession landscape. While Kobe is a place where visual reminders of disaster damage have been erased through years of reconstruction projects, it is also a place where signs of disaster – in the form of caution signals, evacuation maps, audio announcements, and the like – are at every turn. Indeed, the ubiquity of disaster and safety information in Kobe runs in parallel to the ubiquitous *invisibility* of traces of the Hanshin disaster in the city's topographical landscape.

Ubiquity and Attention

Ubiquity offers a conundrum to those concerned with information, particularly in contemporary urban environments in which stimulation saturates the landscape and noise, rather than quiet, is the norm. The fact that something is ubiquitous implies that it is important, even essential, to ordinary life. In contemporary late capitalist life, tools such as telephones (or more specifically, cell phones) have become ubiquitous to the point that not having such technology can be interpreted as an indicator of socioeconomic class. But the safety signs embedded in everyday life, such as the exit sign glowing green in every public space, often escape comment. The fact that

these signs blend into the built landscape does not mean that they are unimportant, but rather it means that they *are* important: they are the parts of life that become so normal and expected that they are invisible.

Therefore, it is the very ubiquity and necessity of safety signage that often makes them unseen in plain sight. Quite often the signs are simply ignored. Indeed, signs and reminders of safety are so commonplace that a friend remarked to me that she paid them no mind (*ki ni shinai*). For her, as I suspect for many others, the signs' omnipresence and aural-visual intrusiveness made them more like background noise rather than something to heed. Such willful ignorance stands in stark contrast to one of the most abiding post-quake narratives that there was not sufficient and appropriate information available for quake survivors.

And yet, the fact that signs are viewed by at least some of the public as something so commonplace that they can be ignored means that these same people do in fact notice the signs. They notice them enough to exclude them from their conscious attention. Musicologist Anahid Kassabian (2013) calls this ubiquitous listening as a form of distributed subjectivity. She observes that people do not listen with rapt attention to music such as the Muzak piped into elevators and the in-store pop music that serves as a soundtrack to grocery shopping. But she claims that such superficial listening experiences do not mean that people do not *hear* the music. In fact, such music does capture listeners' attention, at however low levels. Importantly, just as Charles Hirschkind (2006) described drivers in Cairo listening to

audiocassette Islamic sermons, these sounds are absorbed into the body and thus have affective resonances. Muzak, so often derided as sanitized music rendered so unobjectionable that it is devoid of personality, is actually designed to evoke a sense of warmth and familiarity among listeners (Kassabian 2013). And grocery shopping, notes Kassabian with some humor, would be an eerie experience if carried out in silence punctuated only by the pernicious squeaking of grocery cart wheels. In this way while we might not take conscious note of the music occurring around us, we might notice their absence.

Ubiquity, then, does not necessarily connote superficiality. Cute safety signage featuring smiling cartoon animals and pleasant-sounding female voices piped over escalators instead have profound implications for how people navigate the landscapes in which they live. This shared audio soundtrack and visual scenery also creates a common experience of living in post-quake Kobe.

Distributed Anxiety

An ethnographic examination of ubiquitous safety signage can also offer clues about cultural anxieties that are distributed – and thus public and visible – across material landscapes. I illustrate with an example from Kobe. Journey anywhere in the city circa 2010-early 2011 – to a grocery store, along a construction site, a pharmacy, an alley lined with advertisements – and you will almost certainly encounter the term *anshin anzen* (usually translated as

“safe and secure,” or “at ease and safe”) somewhere along the way.⁶⁵ Even here in pre-Tohoku nuclear disaster Japan in which concerns about irradiated foods from the areas surrounding Fukushima became a source of national concern, supermarkets display their produce alongside a national flag indicating provenance. In this visual hierarchy of value, Japanese produce is set apart as being particularly trustworthy and nutritious. Vegetables in bins marked with the Japanese flag are often accompanied by a small blurb attesting to its status as *anshin anzen*.⁶⁶ Similarly, alongside the ubiquitous “safety first” signs at construction sites, the site might be festooned with a banner proclaiming the site to be *anshin anzen*. And at fire stations, police stations, municipal offices, and other public spaces, *anshin anzen* is emblazoned on signs, promotional materials, and handbooks. In other words, proclamations of safety and security are everywhere.

But it was not always so. The frequency with which I heard and read the phrase was a stark contrast to my first stay in Japan in the mid-1990s. In 2010 I remarked to friends in Japan about seeing *anshin anzen* everywhere; they all told me that they, too, had noticed a marked increase in the phrase since the late 1990s. In this historical context, *anshin anzen* makes perfect sense

⁶⁵ This was my first year of full-time fieldwork. Since the Great East Japan Disaster in March 2011, the *anzen anshin* discourse has become even more prevalent, especially in reference to food safety.

⁶⁶ *Anzen anshin* discourse is often linked to food safety issues in Japan. The use of the national flag to indicate Japan’s automatic *anzen anshin* qualities is in implicit comparison to produce from China or the United States, which is thought to be inferior at best and contaminated at worst. As one of my interlocutors complained about her local grocery store: “I don’t want my cabbage to come from America!”

as a catchphrase for the economic, political, and geological tumult of 1990s Japan.

Moreover, the phrase's alliterative quality makes it feel almost like a mantra against crisis. Indeed, social psychologist Kinoshita Tomio has argued that *anshin anzen* is actually a euphemism for risk. "Instead of risk," he writes, "the words Japan favors are *anzen* and *anshin* (safety and peace of mind)...Given a choice between two opposites such as safety and danger, or peace of mind and anxiety, the answer is surely clear, but this is not science" (Kinoshita 2013:14). Kinoshita's criticism that *anshin anzen* is a phrase of emotion and reassurance rather than science is clear: "In other words, *anzen* and *anshin* are smooth-sounding terms of propaganda," he writes. "Indeed, the use of such sentimental words seems to prevent Japanese from correctly understanding the concept of risk" (Kinoshita 2013:14).

While Kinoshita pathologizes the use of *anshin anzen* as a barrier to a true understanding —and thus effective management—of risk, I argue that the phrase provides one way to map an aesthetics of danger in contemporary Japan. The rise of *anshin anzen* discourse charts a period of growing economic and social uncertainty. As a literal sign of crisis and a desire for reassurance, *anshin anzen* is less a euphemism for risk than an affective practice of managing it. Further, the mundane spaces in which *anshin anzen* discourse is deployed — in grocery stores, on baby products, in disaster safety materials, among other things — speaks to the ordinariness of living with crisis (Berlant 2011).

Saying Too Much

There is a tension, then, between earthquake survivors and safety advocates who assert the importance of safety information, and those who see such information as annoyances that can be safely ignored. I depart briefly from a close discussion of disaster information in order to offer a brief ethnographic story that opens up questions about modes of information communication and the challenges they posed to my interlocutors.

In 2010 I attended a spring seminar held by the FSG in Tokyo. At the post-seminar get-together at an *izakaya* tavern near the University of Tokyo, I found myself sitting next to Tanioka-san, a stylish single woman in her early 40s. I was surprised to meet her, because I had become so accustomed to being one of the only women at FSG events. Tanioka introduced herself to me as a rarity in other ways: she was a public relations consultant, an occupation that she said was just gaining ground among Japanese companies. When I asked why she was a rarity, she brought up the recent scandal with Toyota Motor Corporation. The company was ensnared in a public relations nightmare: a family in California died in a horrific crash when the brakes on their Toyota Prius apparently failed. The incident was followed by others in the U.S. and Japan, yet Toyota was being reticent to acknowledge the problem. The issue was making front-page news in Japan; some in the FSG seminar earlier in the day had brought it up, questioning American motives for shining such a harsh investigative light on a Japanese car company.

Tanioka, however, had a different take on their troubles. Rather than focusing on whether the company was dealing with a technical fault in their vehicle design, she instead used gentle sarcasm to chide the company's traditional ways. "They're a traditional old Japanese company," she said. "They still haven't realized that they're a global corporation. They believe that everyone should already know about the values they hold and what they're doing. So when something happens that is beyond what they're used to dealing with, they're not very good at communicating with the public. It's like *ishin denshin* (mental telepathy), you know?"

Tanioka's mention of *ishin denshin* refers to a classic *yôjijukugo* (four-character Chinese compound) that functions as a proverb. *Ishin denshin* literally translates as "as the mind thinks, the heart transmits." As Ikegami (2005) has shown, the idea of Japanese people being supremely skilled at tacit, nonverbal communication with other Japanese is based on nativist political discourse dating to the 19th century. The implication of Tanioka's criticism of Toyota as practitioners of *ishin denshin*, then, was that the company remained an "old boy" entity that believed in a mode of relationality between itself, its customers, and the public that was at best insular and outdated, and at worst arrogant and dangerous.

Beyond its moral and historical valences, *ishin denshin* is interesting to this chapter because it positions communication as beyond signs: as an ideal aesthetic form, *ishin denshin* purports to obviate the need for explicit talk because such explicitness is unnecessary for a perfect felt understanding. In

this way *ishin denshin* implies communication without the use of -- or the need for -- overt visual or aural sensory information.

The mythical ideal of *ishin denshin* is quickly dispelled by my friend Yamamoto Kinuko, a quake survivor and mother of two grown children who runs an after-school tutoring service out of her home. Yamamoto had studied abroad in England as a college student and as a result was skilled in English. She said the experience, however, had also emphasized a feeling of being an outsider that she had already felt all her life. She related to this feeling of otherness as a kind of linguistic exile. Eloquently reflecting upon the cultural inflections of language, Yamamoto echoed others I have spoken with when she called English "hard" in contrast to Japanese "softness." She was referring not to the contrasting sounds of the language, but rather their feel: English, she felt, was direct -- to the point of lacking subtlety -- but vibrant. Japanese, with its passive tenses and indirect sentence structures, felt to her comparatively flexible, opaque, and circuitous. She expressed that while she was a native Japanese person, she wasn't a very good one, because she often had difficulty understanding what people were talking about. "Sometimes I get in trouble," she confessed to me in English, "because I'm too straightforward. But I just don't have the patience to try to guess what the other person is saying."

While Tanioka brought up *ishin denshin* in a sardonic way, Yamamoto's challenges with expressing herself appropriately illustrates how the mythos of *ishin denshin* is actually carried out to some degree in everyday

conversation. Yamamoto nevertheless emphasized a normative aesthetics of “communication by implication” in which the appropriate expression of oneself in Japanese depends on a certain vagueness with some things left unsaid. In this way she and Tanioka voice the cultural and communicative implications of saying both too little and too much.

Airwave Aesthetics

This challenge is brought to the fore with communication via radio technologies. With radio, of course, speakers and listeners are separated by distance; like speaking by telephone, in radio broadcasting it is not possible for those in the broadcasting booth and those at home or in their cars to examine each other's faces as a way of interpreting pregnant pauses or passive sentence constructions. As Erving Goffman (1981) has shown, radio producers instead use their voices, both in the form of speech conventions and in the sound of vocal modulation and tone, as a way of expressing that which cannot be seen.

The producers at FMX, the radio station I mention in Chapter 3, phrase this in a reworking of *ishin denshin* discourse. I offer my own experience as an example. Early on in my fieldwork at the station, Maeda, FMX's charismatic director of programming, had tasked me with translating and reading a radio spot. The spot was a simple ad for a tire company, and she asked me to translate it into English and then record it later that afternoon for playback on air. The English version of the ad wasn't aimed at English-speaking residents,

but was supposed to simply add a bit of exotic color. She handed me the ad copy, and I converted it into an English-language script I could read in the recording studio.

Maeda had also recruited Inoue, a very quiet female Japanese college intern. Also enlisted was Mariana, a Peruvian migrant who worked in the office and helped run a non-profit group dedicating to supporting female Spanish-speaking migrants in Kobe. Maeda told us all to report to the studio, a small room at the back of the second floor of Minatogawa Community Center, right after lunch.

At our appointed time, I dutifully reported along with Inoue and Mariana to the studio, where Maeda had us sit around a pentagonal meeting table. She supplied each of us with headsets and positioned a microphone under our chins, instructing us to direct our breath past the microphone, rather than down into it. Maeda then sat at the head of the table in front of the recording equipment, and silently signaled to each of us in turn. Mariana went first. She was the deejay for her own Spanish-language FMX talk radio show, so she read the ad in Spanish with ease and a cheery sort of flair. Maeda then pointed to Inoue. Because she had seemed so shy in the office, I had assumed that she would behave similarly in the studio, especially when she was aware of her own voice being recorded. But it was quite the opposite: while she read the ad copy in front of her, she sounded upbeat and sincere.

And then it was my turn. I was unexpectedly nervous, even as I chided myself for being so anxious over a 15 second radio ad. As Maeda signaled to

me to begin, I read my prepared translation with what I had thought was the appropriate level of vocal peppiness required for a broadcast advertisement.

Apparently I was mistaken. Just after I finished reading the advertisement, Maeda pressed a few buttons on her control board and nodded. "Thank you," she said. She also added with a cajoling voice, "But you know, Carla-san! You sound so gloomy (*kurai*)! We want people to enjoy listening. That's why I want you to speak in a bright (*akarui*) voice!" She demonstrated by raising the pitch of her voice nearly an octave and read part of the ad again aloud in a cheerful, singsong-y tone that carried across the studio. "We have to remember that they can't see us, you know? That's why we need to use our voice. Radio transmits our voice directly to listeners' *kokoro* (literally "heart")."

Maeda's determination to inject a sense of cheer in a 20-second tire advertisement demonstrates the degree to which she and others at FMX took care to convey a particular kind of neighborly intimacy with their listeners. My inability to express cheer and lightheartedness was also an aesthetic failure in that my inappropriate gloominess implied a distance in this neighborly relationship. Goffman (1981) offers a way of understanding these failures in terms of transgressions of norms in broadcast radio talk. He writes that successful communication requires deejays to perform what sounds to others like unscripted "fresh talk"; that she must impart a feeling of sincerity; and that she must engage in an ongoing "imagining of listeners" such that when she speaks, she feels that she is speaking directly to people (Goffman

1981: 241). Failing to accomplish any of these elements can result in a jarring experience for the listener because it becomes a moment when the technologically mediated nature of the speaker-listener relationship suddenly reveals itself.

Bessire and Fisher (2012) call this a characteristic of the curious situation in which radio is "objectless" yet "inextricable from its sociality" (364). For example, listeners might feel surprise when they are reminded that they do not actually know the physical location of the deejay they are listening to. A listener may realize that she does not, after all, know the deejay personally. And she might even think that the deejay had in fact been trying to sell or otherwise convince her of something all along. A deejay's failed performance, then, unsettles the imagined relationship between individual listeners and speakers.

Taken in this way, Maeda's exhortation for me to read the tire ad with the high-pitched sound of brightness and good cheer was a reminder for me to hold up my end of the imagined relationship between broadcaster and listener. The direct heart-to-heart connection between speaker and listener that she described is certainly not the same as the mental telepathy of *ishin denshin* discourses, in which perfect communication occurs in the absence of a communicative act. But it is similar in that Maeda implied that the technology of the radio enabled the speaker's voice to travel directly to the minds of listeners because the speaker's vocal tone and other prosodic elements convey as much information as their spoken words. Writing about affective

attachments created through community radio broadcasts in Nepal, anthropologist Laurel Kunreuther (2006, 2014) calls such disembodied communication between radio deejays, unknown listeners, and listeners who participate by phoning in as performing “technologically phatic” speech (Kunreuther 2014: 39). Such instances are communicative acts that “...don’t convey any information, but simply reiterate the strange fact that people seem to ‘connect’ through technology” (ibid.).

An important implication of this feeling of “connection” is the theme of universal humanism underlying radio. Maeda and other radio producers I spoke with described the possibility of anyone to access anyone else's *kokoro* as a sort of leveling quality unique to radio broadcasts. Radio enables direct connections between speakers and listeners beyond the potential distractions and preconceived notions that accompany one's physical presence. In other words, people who might be unable or unwilling to speak to others face-to-face could find a connection through the democratizing technology of radio. This theory played an important role in FMX's goals of fostering communication between migrants and ethnic Japanese in Nagata. It also spoke to the socially vulnerable listeners – the elderly, the disabled, and those who refused to leave their homes – hinted at by Maeda in her lecture to me.

Broadcasting Community, Broadcasting Care

As Kunreuther's (2006) study of Nepali community radio illustrates, community radio stations like FMX have been singled out by anthropologists as holding precisely this kind of democratic potential. Such stations are often staffed by volunteers, operate on tight budgets — if they have a budget at all — and utilize equipment that broadcast only to a limited geographic range. Because the signals stations emit are constrained by wattage and geography, community radio is by necessity self-referential, constantly pointing back to its own delimited community.

Crucially, however, the information that community radio stations transmit is not necessarily limited to a geographic range. Community radio stations like FMX describe themselves as nodes of information that use their technological capabilities to broadcast news about the wider world to their local communities. In the chaotic days following the Hanshin earthquake, for example, Korean and Vietnamese migrant volunteers would translate Japanese national newspapers into their native language for the benefit of fellow migrants in the area. One male volunteer, who in 1995 was a young Vietnamese migrant laborer, was well-known for his ability to translate Japanese newspaper articles into Vietnamese on air as he was reading them.

Thus, while community radio stations like FMX constantly cite their local community, however they define it, as their *raison d'être*, often these stations are networked with others across the country and even around the globe. FMX itself is networked nationally with other community radio stations across the Japanese archipelago; the stations share an internet portal

through which listeners can tap into live broadcast feeds. The station is also globally networked through transnational organizations such as AMARC, the World Association for Community Radio Broadcasters.⁷⁰

FMX's sense of connectedness to both home and the globe through formal and informal contact with other community radio stations made it an ideal space for another kind of project: disaster information. AMARC, which describes itself as a transnational grassroots organization, boasts 4,000 member stations in 117 countries (AMARC 2014). Many of these countries are in disaster-prone areas with limited financial resources. Even in wealthy countries like Japan, community radio advocates say that their stations have an advantage over many other forms of media: it is cheap, it is instantaneous, stations can be run with a generator, and listeners can tune in with battery or solar powered radios. Accordingly, disaster prevention and response have been issues that the organization and its affiliated radio stations have actively promoted.

FMX has been one of the leaders in these projects. In FMX leaders' narrative, the station became an unlikely pioneer in the days after the quake. Before the earthquake, community radio stations in Japan were tightly regulated by the state. They were constrained to one watt and had to be licensed as a for-profit organization. FMX thus operated as a pirate station

⁷⁰ Japan is a relative newcomer to this community; prior to the Hanshin earthquake, the use of radio frequencies were tightly regulated by the state. In its early days FMX existed as a pirate radio station, and only reached official sanctioned status once the state established a community radio permit process in 1998. Even in 2010, Ogawa, the head of FMX, showed me a two-inch thick file folder of documents that had to be submitted to the regulating agency in order to renew the station's broadcast license.

until the state relaxed licensing requirements and increased allowed transmission wattage. The station's grassroots efforts in the immediate aftermath of the quake also garnered a great deal of domestic media attention. Ironically, its compelling founding story of a diverse community of ethnic Japanese and migrants coming together in a time of crisis made the radio station one of the most televised and photographed symbols of grassroots organization during the disaster.

In the years following the quake, the station formally incorporated into a for-profit organization. The original leaders also left the station. This period in the late 1990s was when Takahashi, one of the founding members of the station and a key interlocutor I discuss at length in Chapter 3, told me that FMX had lost its way. The station's board members were forced to consider new options, and coaxed its original leadership to return. Takahashi believed the station was foundering because it had lost touch with its community; people stopped listening to FMX because they felt it did not relate to their lives. The original leaders, including Takahashi, converted FMX into a non-profit organization. They also focused the station's efforts on what they saw as the natural offshoot of FMX's history: multicultural radio programming that would help promote a multicultural society.

Today, the station proper is a cluttered one-room studio, but otherwise there are very few boundaries between FMX and its sister organization, ProLingua. Takahashi is now the CEO of ProLingua which, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, operates as a for-profit organization dedicated to matching

multilingual foreign residents with translation and interpretation gigs. Many of the organization's clients are municipal or semi-private organizations that need information translated into English, Korean, Chinese, and other languages. The organization charts of ProLingua and FMX resemble a kinship chart depicting a large extended family; many of the half-dozen staff members and dozen or so regular volunteers and interns overlap between ProLingua, FMX, and other projects housed within the Minatogawa Community Center complex.

On any given day FMX's timetable might include a show by Okinawan music enthusiasts, electronic music selected by an Aussie expat duo, or an hour-long interview with Hanshin quake survivors. Here, however, I focus on a background project organized jointly by FMX, ProLingua, and Radio Kansai, a larger community radio station in Kobe. The project was to prerecord emergency disaster information (*saigai jôhô*) that would be broadcast in actual times of emergency or danger. The project was funded by the City of Kobe, but the aim was to provide an online open-access sound archive of safety warnings and evacuation information in multiple languages, including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Spanish, English, and Vietnamese. Smaller community radio stations and local governments in Japan that did not have the resources to translate their own materials into multiple foreign

languages were welcome to download and adapt the materials for their own use.⁷¹

I worked with the office manager and resident tech expert, Hirata, a woman in her twenties whose rapid-fire speech and plainspokenness often masked a deep tenderness. Joining her was Park Yuna, a *zainichi* (ethnically Korean born and in Japan) woman in her 20s who was relatively new to the staff; she served as the project manager and liaison between Radio Kansai, FMX, and ProLingua. Confusing for all of us was the various previous iterations this project had gone through; we soon learned that two very similar projects involving translating disaster information from Japanese into multiple foreign languages had been completed several years before. Subsequently, a major concern for Park and Hirata was whether or not we would be reinventing the wheel.

This confusion highlights the fragmented nature of various disaster information projects, in which similar projects may be carried out by multiple groups. Some of these programs, such as the creation of databases that store information about historical databases, were carried out simultaneously by different research institutions. Others, like this multilingual disaster information project, had already been done in the past but were slated for revision and expansion. These overlaps and repetitions were not, I believe, a form of competition among disaster prevention groups, but were rather the

⁷¹ Theoretically, anyone anywhere in the world were welcome to download the open access files, but the project organizers noted that many of the recordings were specific to a Japanese method of warning systems, evacuation procedures, etc.

consequence of the absence of an organizing body that coordinated activities among the many disaster prevention-related groups in Kobe and elsewhere in the country. The result was that oftentimes the content of disaster information produced by different groups overlapped or otherwise resembled each other. This contributed to a sense of abundance of disaster prevention materials.

The raw materials we inherited for this particular translation project were similarly partial: Hirata and Park were simply given a list in Japanese, Chinese, English, Korean, and a few other languages, of one-sentence, terse statements of warning and caution. These are phrases that were intended for use by broadcasters during an actual emergency. Appended to the list of phrases was a number that linked that particular phrase to an audio track. This was so that in the event of an earthquake, landslide, typhoon, or other disaster, a deejay could quickly locate the appropriate warning statement from the list, match it to a digital audio track, and broadcast it in multiple languages.

The warnings themselves sounded relatively straightforward. Statements such as, “An earthquake warning has been issued,” or “A directive to evacuate has been announced. People in the following areas must evacuate,” are similar to what we in the United States might recognize as part of the emergency broadcast system. Other messages were striking — and also felt to us unnecessarily alarmist— in their specificity. One warning read, “If you do not move your legs for a long period of time, there is the possibility of lung embolism which can result in death.” Another instructed that “Drivers

should park their car on the left side of the road or in a vacant lot and switch off the engine.”

As an FMX intern, my own role in the project was to help Hirata and Park revise the English translations for each of the warning statements. In each case we discussed the nuances of a specific warning: first of all, would listeners understand what the phrase means? Second, what kind of unintended effects might occur from hearing the phrase? Did it sound too panicky? Did it encourage complacency? Hirata and Park, neither of whom are English speakers, were particularly concerned with evoking the correct response from listeners, a point that I return to shortly.

During one of our meetings in mid-October, our discussion revolved around the word for “landslide.” We had already been working on the project for several months, but were getting nowhere. This discussion was more of the same. The original phrase we debated was “*Dosha saigai ni gochuu ni kudasai*” (literally, “please be careful of landslide disasters”). The phrase that we had inherited from one of the previous translation projects had been translated into English as “Please beware of landslides.” Hirata pointed out that there were actually several different landslide-related warning phrases in Japanese, but all of them had been collapsed into the single English phrase, “Please beware of landslides.” She expressed her doubts about the translations. We looked at the original Japanese phrases, and realized that while the Japanese language contains multiple words for “landslide” (*doshakuzure*, *jisuberi*, *gakekuzure*, etc.), each depicting a particular

kind of landslide, in English we were simply stuck with a single word that lay English speakers would recognize: landslide. We joked about what seemed like the relative poverty of English to portray what Hirata seemed to be distinct things. But eventually, she, too, said, “Well, the average Japanese might not have even heard of these words, either! Maybe it would just be confusing to have different phrases for similar things. We need to translate these into easy Japanese (*yasashî Nihongo*), too.”

Our circular discussion about landslides obviously did not get us very far. We also had similar discussions with other words and other phrases. To some extent, our problem was a matter of closeness: by scrutinizing every word in a seven-word sentence, each word eventually felt artificial and insufficient.

But more importantly, I suggest that our problem was not the gap between Japanese and English translations of a word like “landslide.” Rather, we were at an impasse because of our inability to fully imagine a real, visceral situation in which these recordings would theoretically be used. None of us — Hirata, Park, nor I — had lived through a major disaster. And try as we might to imagine the experience of what it would be like to be interrupted in one’s ordinary day with a sudden warning to evacuate to the nearest shelter, the sensation was so experience-far that we could only strive to approximate the impact these messages would have on actual people in actually dangerous situations. As a result we resorted to debating the particulars of

words as a way to compensate for our inability to fully imagine the responses such words would generate in an emergency situation.

Like Maeda and Hirata, the ways in which certain words, vocal pitch, and other prosodic information can index things like mood and linguistic fluency was of central concern to researchers and radio broadcasters I met in Japan. A great deal of this anxiety was based on prior experience: studies of tsunami evacuees, for example, have found that calls for evacuation that did not actually result in the arrival of a tsunami made it less likely for residents to heed evacuation calls in the future. The problem is a classic case of the boy who cried wolf. But researchers and broadcasters were rightfully concerned that in cases of tsunami in particular, listening and quickly responding to a disembodied warning voice on the radio could literally mean the difference between life and death.

Just as people ignore everyday safety signage and other warnings, getting people to listen to disaster information was framed by researchers and broadcasters as an ongoing quandary. Kuroda-san, a radio show host for the Osaka arm of Yomiuri Radio, an offshoot of the national for-profit Yomiuri Television network, had a strong opinion about this problem. I met Kuroda at a monthly Osaka-based study group meeting of disaster scholars and media professionals when we sat across from each other at the *konshinkai* (post-seminar get-together) held at a small *izakaya* tavern after one of our regular meetings. He had been involved with disaster preparedness at Yomiuri, and

was deeply interested in creating *bôσαι jôhô* (disaster preparedness information) suitable for radio.

Our conversation turned to what he said was one of his motivations: the challenge of simply getting people to listen to disaster information. He told me, “In an actual emergency (*saigaiji*), we want people to act with a cool head (*reisei ni*), so we have to speak carefully when we tell people to evacuate or leave their homes. It’s important to speak calmly, slowly, and repeat ourselves. But the problem is if we’re too calm, people just ignore us.” At this he paused, widened his eyes, gripped the edge of the table and gave it an emphatic little shake, saying, “But what we actually want to do is yell, ‘Everyone! Get out!’ (*Minasan! Detekure!*) But of course we can’t say that. It’s important to avoid a panic situation (*panikku jôtai*).”

The other difficulty with *saigai jôhô*, Kuroda said, was the difference between live and recorded disaster information. Prerecorded disaster information in the form that I worked on at FMX, Kuroda said, was necessary but posed its own dangers. He put it this way:

It’s already difficult to inspire listeners to act, because they hear so many warnings that they’re inclined to ignore them. We don’t want to cause panic so we try to impart urgency without causing undue fear. But the hard part is we don’t usually broadcast live audio [Kuroda’s station also most often uses prerecorded disaster information], so it’s even more difficult to impart a sense of emergency through the voice without sounding canned.

He explained that people listen to live voices, and recorded information simply did not have the capacity to convey the quality of

measured urgency that he sought to imbue in his own broadcast voice during emergency situations. Here Kuroda implies that the fundamental value in radio — especially in times of disaster — is its sense of broadcasters speaking directly to listeners. His assertion about the importance of live voices echoes Maeda’s belief that radio transmits one’s *kokoro* (heart, mind) directly to the minds of others. In this way, as media studies scholar Paddy Scannell has argued, radio functions as “the expressive register of our essential being” (Scannell 2010: 5). Radio is thus inseparable from its “liveness” (Bessire & Fisher 2012: 365).

Essential characteristics of liveness are spontaneity and a shared feeling of responding to a situation in the company of others.⁷² The hand-drawn posters and informal bulletins that were circulated in the days following the Hanshin Earthquake were prized for the information they conveyed, but newsletters such as “Daily Needs” (described in Chapter 3) also offered a sense of shared struggle and circumstance (see also Sasaki-Uemura 2001). A prerecorded voice, then, not only violates the fundamental premise of radio’s liveness, but is also incapable of offering listeners a sense that it is responding to an urgent situation in which both speaker and audience are mutually enmeshed.

I further argue that Kuroda’s struggle to keep a calm voice while restraining himself from yelling, “Everyone! Get out! (*Minasan! Detekure!*)” signals an aesthetics of care and intimacy that broadcasters like him see as a

⁷² I thank Melissa Caldwell for this insight.

crucial element of disaster information. In Kuroda's example, intimacy is signaled by his use of informal Japanese; whereas prerecorded information would be voiced in standard (Tokyo) formal Japanese, Kuroda's more personal exclamation utilized a register of familiarity.⁷³

Moreover, Kuroda implied that both his "stage" voice, with which he would use standard Japanese to broadcast disaster messages, and his interior "backstage" voice where he could yell, "*Minasan! Detekure!*" contained a performance of his personal care that could not be accomplished with a generic prerecorded voice recording in standard formal Japanese. He admitted that balancing a level-headed voice with a deep internal desire to shout was challenging; how, then, could a recorded voice effectively straddle this balance?

This is another example of Kunreuther's technologically phatic speech. While disaster information does indeed convey information, it also conveys something else: an implicit sense of intimacy and care based on both language and vocal tone. This intimacy harkens at least partially to a tradition dating back to 17th century Edo period Japan, where wooden structures and cooking fires made fire a very real threat to neighborhoods. Fire brigades would walk the streets on winter nights, clapping sticks and calling out "*hi no yôjin*" (beware of fire). This practice still occurs in some areas of the country. I

⁷³ For example, "*mina-san*" (everyone), which is often used as a direct term of address when speaking to groups (especially when those present are either known to the speaker or who have some sort of institutional or other relationship to the speaker), is not used in formal recorded *saigai jôhô*. Neither is the verb *kureru* embedded in the phrase "*detekure*" which, broadly stated, implies that the listener is doing the speaker a favor by performing an action (in this case, *deru*, or leave / exit).

also suggest that Kuroda's emphasis on the importance of carefully modulating one's voice in order to provoke a particular, speedy response by listeners is most closely related to post-Hanshin earthquake discourses about a return to a sense of neighborliness and interpersonal intimacy that had been lost in the urbanization, rampant consumerism, and general busy-ness of high-growth Japan.

Disasters in common

I return to my conversation with Kuroda at the *konshinkai*. After our discussion about the fundamental insufficiency of prerecorded disaster information, our conversation drifted and eventually included Moriguchi, a newspaper journalist who had joined our table. Hearing about my interest in the Hanshin quake, we began talking about how the media had responded in the hours and days immediately after the quake. Both Kuroda and Moriguchi referred to criticism that the media had received for its perceived focus on reporting OUTWARD from the disaster zone, rather than reporting information INWARD to survivors in desperate need of news. Moriguchi acknowledged that the media had failed to meet the needs of survivors, to which I replied that, as an American, Hurricane Katrina had felt like a media failure in a similar sense. I recalled the image of helicopters hovering over the crowds overflowing the parking lot of the Superdome.

Moriguchi agreed, saying his image of America — and especially of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) — had been

unsettled when he saw that something so chaotic and crime-ridden could happen there. Then he added: “I think America hasn’t learned from Japan. You know, with things like the Lehman Shock... we went through all of that in the 1990s.”⁷⁴ Kuroda nodded, saying, “Yes, those days! We had such huge expense accounts!” Moriguchi added, “Yes, we were spending money without even thinking about it.” I asked if they ever looked back on those times with a sense of nostalgia. “No,” Moriguchi responded quickly, “People bought real estate they couldn’t afford. Acquaintances of mine ended up losing their homes. Everyone wanted name-brand merchandise. We would do business dinners and drinks and didn’t even look at the cost. People spent so much and ended up losing their families. We’ve learned since then that human relationships are more important than money.”

In this way Moriguchi drew a direct relationship between natural disaster and economic disaster. Both, to him, were signal failures of 1990s Japan. He also used the subtle language of *kyôkun*, or lessons learned, by implying that the United States had not learned to tame its own hubris in the way that Japan and Japanese people had learned during the lost decades of the 1990s and beyond.

Moral, political, economic, and social failures — in Moriguchi’s rendering, all of these formed a common thread between the Hanshin quake,

⁷⁴ This conversation took place in 2010, when the “Lehman Shock,” which referred to the US financial crisis that started around 2008, was a frequent topic of discussion in the news and in casual conversations about the United States. Whenever interlocutors brought it up in conversation, “Lehman Shock” was used in a way that I came to synonymize with an implicit criticism of American consumerism.

the burst of the Japanese bubble economy, Hurricane Katrina, and the US economic crisis. Moriguchi may have been the first to describe these events to me in this way, but he was certainly not alone. Just as the Hanshin quake came to represent the year 1995 – that *saiaku no toshi*, that worst of years – the social problems unearthed by the quake also made the disaster symbolic of a society that had brushed off *ningen kankei* (human relationships) for the short-lived pleasures of material indulgence. In this way Moriguchi, Kuroda, and my other radio interlocutors figured their own work as an attempt to rehabilitate a sense of community and person-to-person intimacy that had been lost somewhere along the way to economic success.

As anthropologist William Mazzarella has argued, media producers voice particular visions of the society and nation-state that their imagined audiences inhabit (2004:357). His emphasis on media producers, rather than the listening subject, echoes the perspective of radio producers like Maeda and Kuroda. Their claim that radio transmits *kokoro*, or one's heart, to listeners is premised on the belief that they understand listeners enough that they know how to provoke a particular response in them. Raising the pitch of one's voice and adopting a singsong tone, for instance, can provoke cheer. And injecting one's voice with a tone of measured urgency can provoke calm action.

Of course, the producers also acknowledge that they cannot know exactly who their listeners are -- in fact, one volunteer radio producer I spoke with at FMX admitted to not knowing if anyone actually listened to his show:

"Maybe I'm just talking to myself," he told me. Indeed, it is possible that people are NOT listening. Take my friend Tsuji-san as an example. A retail customer service representative who dreams of opening a ramen restaurant abroad, Tsuji volunteered during the Hanshin quake aftermath and reported seeing horrible things. But when I asked him about the disaster and safety information that he encounters in his present everyday life, he told me, "Ah, it's annoying [*urusai*," literally "noisy"]. I don't pay attention" [*ki ni shinai ne*]. To a person like Tsuji who had personally experienced disaster, warnings about potential landslides or approaching typhoons were just frequent and abundant enough that he felt the need to shut them out from his perception.

And yet, Tsuji is precisely the kind of person media producers like Kuroda are trying to reach. Where Kuroda wanted listeners to hear the care he tried to embed in the sound of his voice, Tsuji simply reported hearing noise. Tsuji's is the unseen face of individuals who producers of audio disaster information imagine might be cajoled into listening, if only the voice on the radio was a real person, with a real voice, conveying a real message.

However, I return to my earlier discussion of Kassabian's (2013) insistence that even sound that is not listened to consciously is still heard on some level. Referring to studies of music, she argues that musicologists and historians too often assume attentiveness on the part of listeners. She reasons that it is more likely that people listen to music with varying degrees of attention. Yet one thing remains constant: listening is a physical act.

Kassabian reminds us here that listening, as seeing, is a physical experience that is separate from the degree of attention that we give to aural or visual input. She suggests de-linking the question of attention from sound, and instead focus on the physical, affective experience of it. In this way she suggests following Deleuze and Guattari (1987) that listening is a haptic experience, not one that privileges active listening. Further, Laura Marks (2002) offers a way of thinking through the ethical implications of such a de-linking. Her examination of visuality and art suggests thinking of encounters with visual art not as a sensory experience confined to seeing, but rather as a haptic experience characterized by the eye's contact with the world. In this way a person does not consume art by looking at it, but instead physically interacts with it through the eyes and other senses. Her suggestion offers a deeply relational understanding of how people in Kobe are interacting with safety signage or over-the-air disaster information even when they dismiss it as unimportant.

Moreover, that they are engaging in this interaction – however unconsciously or unwillingly – means that they are also in relationship with people like Kuroda who wish to inspire people into a more thoroughly engaged relationship with the disaster information they produce. Drawing them in through techniques of the voice, for instance, is one subtle strategy they employ. Kuroda and those at FMX are not quite engaged in what Bruno Latour (1993) has termed enrolment, in which actors across a network are recruited into supporting some sort of sociotechnical project. Broadcasters

and signage producers do have the practical goal of convincing people to pay attention to what they regard as life-saving information. But more significantly, they are attempting to cajole people into a deeper relationship wherein the ultimate goal is the relationship itself (see also Riles 2001). Contrasted against the bubble economy years in which human relationships were subsumed by profit motives, disaster management projects in Kobe do their work by harkening back to an idealized, pre-economic boom time in which people already practiced a disaster awareness presumed upon a social structure of care and intimacy with others.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusions

The cool blue glass facade of the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI) in the Happy Active Town Kobe (HAT) section of Kobe city is a monument to the Hanshin Earthquake.⁷⁵ Built in 1998, DRI was envisioned by city planners, community leaders, and disaster scholars as a functional memorial to the quake. Its location in Happy Active Town, which I introduced briefly in Chapter 3, was also supposed to serve as an anchoring presence to what was designed to function as Kobe's second city center. The building is impressive; completely encased in glass, it appears to hover over a wide reflecting pool. The date and time of the quake are artfully arranged in large, graphic black type along the perimeter of the building. The reflective blue of the structure blends in with the bay behind it and the sky above. The building seems to call attention to its own fragility, while also belying it; the outer glass walls are suspended from large steel girders that showcase the structure's seismic engineering.

⁷⁵ The rather unwieldy English name of the organization is often shortened to DRI. Its Japanese name is *Hito to Bōsai Mirai Sentō*, abbreviated by staff and researchers as *HitoBō*.



Figure 5. External view of the Disaster and Human Renovation Institute, Happy Active Town, Kobe.

Inside the institute is a mix of museum exhibits, offices for non-profits relating to disaster, a Kobe disaster archive, and a research center that houses a stable of postdoctoral scholars and full-time research staff, including engineers, sociologists, and psychiatrists. The institute itself is funded through a mix of monies from sources including the Kobe city and Hyogo prefecture administrations, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA; the Japanese correlate to USAID), and the central government.

While the museum's temporary exhibits change every few months, the permanent collection is a carefully cultivated arrangement of artifacts from

the quake. These include pieces of buildings, personal possessions including golf clubs, money, and kitchen gear that were crushed or burned, and evacuation shelter posters offering information about meals and showers. The docents, many of whom are retired and in their 60s or older, are all earthquake survivors. They cheerfully greet visitors as they arrive to the exhibit hall, but their main job is to guide visiting groups of schoolchildren around the two museum floors as they recount stories from their quake experience. Often they try to encourage the kids to imagine what seeing all that destruction must have been like. The exhibits are meant to draw upon visitors' senses: there are laminated binders of documents pertaining to the *machizukuri* (participatory town-building) reconstruction process to flip through, video monitors with interactive screens that prompt visitors to select a survivor to hear his or her story, and a children's area dedicated to learning earthquake science and engineering principles through hands-on activities.

The key feature of the museum experience, however, is the quake reenactment theater. It is the first thing visitors experience. Upon entering the museum, visitors pay for admission and immediately queue at an elevator, where a female guide clad in a pink dress accompanies them to the second floor. The elevator opens up into the lobby of what seems at first glance to be a movie theater. After a brief introduction, the guide leads patrons into the dimly lit theater and onto an elevated platform bordered by a steel handrail.

On my first visit to DRI, I happened to enter the museum with a group of about two-dozen middle school students and their teachers. They rowdily

entered the theater area, and as the guide closed the theater doors we watched the lights dim further. Immediately a scene showing downtown Kobe flashed onto the screen. Just as suddenly, the platform under us buckled and jolted, lurching from side to side in a graphic and physical reenactment of the Hanshin earthquake. We all reflexively gripped the bars in surprise as the screen began flashing scenes of destruction and the surround sound boomed with the discordant noise of screeching tires, clattering dishes, and twisting metal. We saw pieces of buildings break off and fall, and cars sliding off a crumbling elevated expressway. We listened to sounds of beams cracking, and fires started by kitchen gaslines eating houses alive. I was caught unprepared by this full sensory experience and involuntarily gasped. Some of the children did so, as well. After about 20 seconds, the lights came back on and the seizing platform shuddered to a halt. I looked around me and saw faces settling from shock into relief. Some gave small, uncertain smiles. One schoolgirl was crying and dashed out of the room. I didn't see her again.

On a subsequent visit to DRI I was accompanied by three quake survivors, two retired men and their female friend, all in their 60s. The men, Kitada-san and Shigemoto-san, were best friends and former coworkers; the third was Kitada's neighborhood friend, Fujii-san, who had lost her home to one of the many fires that spread from house to house in the more densely-populated parts of the city. Kitada and Fujii lived in Nagata ward, where I also resided and where fires destroyed over half of the residential area. Our

rendezvous spot was near Shin Nagata Station, the primary Japan Rail station serving central Nagata Ward. From there, Kitada drove us to the museum in his son's borrowed Audi. For my benefit, Kitada had thoughtfully brought along a photo book published by *Kobe Shinbun* containing images of the disaster-stricken city. One hand on the steering wheel, he used his other to flip through the book in search of photos depicting the areas of Nagata we were driving through. Once he found a photo, he would say, "Ah, this, this, this," and thrust the book into the backseat for me to see. Gesturing out the window with his now-free hand, he told me to compare the photos of fire-ravaged buildings with the view just outside our window. He searched for words to describe Nagata: "It's a... a slum! (*Nandakke? Êto...suramu!*)" I replied that while Nagata was working-class (*shomin-teki*), its tidy and safe streets made it far from a slum to me. But Kitada was adamant: "It's really a slum," he said, and nodded to himself for emphasis.

I had been invited on this outing through Shigemoto, an acquaintance I had made through a chance encounter with the Kobe Goodwill Guides club, of which he was a member. He planned the trip to DRI with Kitada and Fujii because they had never been there, and because they lived in the *genchi*, the "actual place" where some of the worst damage had occurred. Upon meeting them in person for the first time, I had the feeling that neither Kitada nor Fujii were keen on going to the museum. Kitada said privately to me, however, that he thought that it would do Fujii good, as she had never recovered her verve and spirit since losing her home in the disaster. I sat with her in the

backseat of the car on the way to DRI, and after Kitada had finished with his tour of Nagata, we made small talk. She abruptly brought up the loss of her home. A thin, slightly stooped woman with shortly cropped salt and pepper hair, no makeup, and a modest outfit of khaki pants and a short-sleeved mauve floral cotton blouse, she sounded quietly angry when she recounted her story. "I watched it burn," she said. "It was early in the morning, and we were able to get out of the house. It started burning, and the firemen came. They connected the hose to water. But you know, no water came out." She paused, her face serious, and said again, "No water came out." Among the many unanticipated emergencies of that day, one was the fact that the emergency fireplug system lost water pressure after the quake damaged the city's sewer infrastructure. The firemen connected a hose to an in-ground fireplug – a flat connector on the sidewalk, unlike the fire hydrants commonly seen in the US – and got nothing but a trickle. They and the people whose houses they had meant to protect were powerless to do anything, and had to watch as the homes around them – and the memories and possessions they had contained -- burned to the ground. Fujii was just one survivor, but like many others, she and her husband lived in temporary housing (*kasetsu jyûtaku*) after the quake, and was eventually able to move back to Nagata. She still rarely talked about the experience, Kitada had warned me earlier. She had agreed to accompany us to DRI today, I guessed, out of pressure Kitada had put on her, probably for my benefit.

Once we arrived at the DRI parking lot, both Kitada and Fujii

remarked that they had never even been to the HAT development before, a fact that surprised me because they knew this area was supposed to be a second city center and is located just a few kilometers from Nagata. Just as with my previous visit, a pink-clad guide at the museum's reception desk ushered us into an elevator, and we ascended to the theater floor. There, however, Kitada refused to go any further; he simply said that he was not interested in going in, and resolutely sat on a bench fronting the theater doors. I guessed that he had heard warning stories about the nature of the opening film. Fujii, Shigemoto and I proceeded along without him and, just as in my first visit, I found myself surprised again by the heavy-handed quake reenactment. At one point during the quake reenactment I glanced over at Fujii; she was staring straight ahead, her face expressionless.

Following the reenactment, we were led down a hallway that was staged to resemble a Kobe street in its immediate post-quake state: street signs were slanted and bent, street lights leaned and flickered, and fake debris littered the floor. The hallway eventually opened to a second, more conventional theater with rows of black vinyl seats. Along the way, Shigemoto asked Fujii what she thought, and she responded evenly, "It was over-the-top (*obâ*), wasn't it?" We agreed with her, but were also surprised when she refused to go on and said she would instead wait with Kitada outside the second theater for us. Both Shigemoto and I expressed uncertainty about continuing without her, but at Shigemoto's behest we took our seats and watched a second film featuring images of a reconstructed Kobe city.

This other film featured the disembodied voice of a teenaged girl retelling a story about losing her sister in the quake and deciding to become a nurse to honor her memory.

When it was over, we hurried out to find Kitada and Fujii again. Both had been waiting for us just outside the theater. I tried to surreptitiously look at Fujii to see if she was upset; she didn't seem that way, but I had just met her, and she seemed to guard her feelings closely. Kitada later told me that she had been shaken by the reenactment experience and that he, too, had decided not to view it because he had heard about the dramatic shake table reenactment and didn't want to re-experience the quake, even a fictive one in the safety of a dark theater.

The reenactment was forceful enough to frighten a junior high school student to tears, and leave an actual quake survivor both cynical about the experience and disturbed by it. One of the researchers at DRI would later tell me that the staff was aware that the film was upsetting to many, but it was simply how the museum had been designed. The mimetic quality of the theater experience – the bodily sensation of almost being thrown off one's feet while watching the city of Kobe crumble before you, with the melodramatic addition of jarring, blaring music – seemed to cause in participants, including me, a sudden sense of visceral fear, despite the obvious actual safety of the environment.

This was, in fact, an objective of the experience. Shake tables like the one at DRI are commonly found at government Disaster Prevention Centers

(*Bôσαι Sentâ*) located throughout Japanese cities. These public education centers are ubiquitous in the Hanshin area; even small cities have a Disaster Prevention Center. Similar to the museum, Disaster Prevention Center exhibits and guides aim to educate visitors in the importance of knowing what to do in the event of an earthquake, and reinforcing this teaching by having participants actually experience a quake simulation. Mobile versions of shake tables called *jishin-sha* (earthquake vehicles) are also a common sight at neighborhood disaster drills and Disaster Prevention Fairs. These vehicles, commonly operated by the fire department or municipal disaster prevention center, most often feature a replica of an apartment-sized galley kitchen. A group of four or five participants are told to sit in chairs around the dining table and instructed to duck and cover when the shaking begins. The more sophisticated of these vehicles can mimic the magnitude of historical earthquakes. *Jishin-sha* I saw most frequently mimicked the Kobe (M7.3), Tokyo (M7.9), and the Niigata (M6.6) earthquakes. An LED display allows participants and observers to view the seismic intensity of the simulated earthquake they are experiencing.



Figure 6. Disaster Prevention Center visitors experiencing an earthquake reenactment, Rinkû Town, Osaka, 2009.



Figure 7. Mobile earthquake shake-table (*jishin-sha*) in front of the Disaster and Human Renovation Institution, 2010.

While these mobile hydraulic shake tables have elements of an amusement park ride, again and again I witnessed participants involuntarily gasp in shock as the floor jerked suddenly from side to side, smiles frozen in place as they struggled to take cover under a fake kitchen table or futilely grasped at the floor for a handhold. Oftentimes friends or family members would take cell phone photos of each other on the shake table, capturing those shocked smiles in what felt like a strange combination of amusement park ride and frightening lesson.

Indeed, the *jishin-sha* is a technology that is designed to offer those without actual experience of living through an earthquake a taste of the real thing. The premise of the *jishin-sha* is to shock participants into understanding just how violent an earthquake can be, and to encourage them to prepare for an actual catastrophe by learning to shut off the kitchen gas lines and take cover under a table. The spectacle of sitting in a movie set-like kitchen and being filmed by family members, friends, and passersby offers a surreal quality to the experience. As participants struggle to find their balance while crawling on the floor, or struggling to find a handhold while reaching beyond the fake kitchen sink to switch off the simulated gas line, they combine the intellectual knowledge that they are in a safe and controlled environment with the contradictory physical sensation of danger.

Therein lies the contradiction of disaster prevention information in Japan. It is simultaneously appealing and frightening, an attraction and a repellant. Most strikingly, disaster experiences such as the quake reenactment

theater and *jishin-sha* are strangely intimate encounters between technology and affect, and between the actual experience of living through an earthquake and the simulated experience of it. Survivors like Fujii who experience a simulated version of the disaster come away from the experience both cynical about the simulated quake and afraid of it.

The tensions here signal a continuing dilemma of disaster prevention planners and activists: how do they appeal to audiences? How do they get people to take action? Disaster planners take on the task of trying to prepare others for a calamity that no one knows where or when will happen, or if it will even happen in their lifetimes at all.

Their challenge is particularly great given the diversity of how people respond to disaster risk. There are people like my friend Tsuji, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder after his Hanshin Earthquake earthquake, yet still finds disaster prevention and safety information annoying. But there are also people like my teacher Yamazaki, who told me she grew up placing a full outfit next to her bed every night in case an earthquake were to strike and she would need to run out of the house dressed and presentable.

The disaster researchers and information producers with whom I worked felt compelled to address both people like Tsuji and those like Yamazaki. Their attempts to do so through disaster prevention fairs, radio dramas, and emergency broadcasts that projected a certain tone of voice, were all ways of trying to anticipate Tsuji and Yamazaki and others' reactions. I have argued in this dissertation that such practices of anticipation

are part of a broad attempt to foster a sense of neighborly intimacy and interpersonal care between and among people who may have nothing in common other than the fact that they all live in a disaster risk zone. Doing so is also a form of self-preservation: neighbors, disaster educators routinely told me, are the ones who will save you in an earthquake.

Disaster information practices also call attention to the continuing tension about who is responsible for managing and mitigating disaster risk. Is it the domain of the government? Or is it the purview of citizens? To my interlocutors it was both: disaster management was, above all, an associational affair. It required the active participation of residents, laypeople, experts, and bureaucrats, and many of their projects and practices relied on collaboration among scholars, students, pensioners, and others.

Such a commitment to respecting and collaborating with lateral forms of knowledge suggests an organizing ethos of democratic practice. As I discussed in Chapter 3, those involved in disaster prevention characterize their involvement in terms of a broad yet fundamental desire for community. Such practitioners emphasize that disasters are leveling experiences; they are democratic in that they impact everyone, even if to varying degrees.⁷⁶ In this sense, everyone is – or at least in the eyes of many disaster prevention practitioners, should be – implicated in securing the safety of themselves and others. Such a reality creates a space of political possibility, a potential space of mutual engagement and interest. People such as Takahashi see this space

⁷⁶ I am indebted to Melissa Caldwell for this insight.

as holding the potential for cultural change far beyond disaster prevention. Rather, she and others like her try to use disaster prevention as a starting point for people to begin to realize that they share common concerns and a common community. Their invitation for everyone to participate – or at least take an interest – in disaster preparedness is thus also an invitation to re-establish a sense of relationship with others that many feel has been lost.

This, I believe, is the true implication of Sasaki's statement that the "after is long." It asks how one should live once a certain kind of innocence has been lost. It asks how to continue going about one's everyday life with the intimate knowledge that the world is dangerous, and that anyone's circumstances can change in an instant. My interlocutors, many of whom learned to ask this question through their first-hand experience of the Hanshin Earthquake, answer by emphasizing the value of human relationships, community ties, and knowledge. They view as their challenge the passing on of this knowledge to others in the hope of creating a more livable world, both in times of disaster and of calm.

EPILOGUE: Another Tectonic Story

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

T.S. Eliot, *The Rock* (1934)

I completed my fieldwork period in late January 2011, just after the 16th anniversary of the Hanshin earthquake. After a flurry of goodbye dinners and even a few tearful farewells, I found myself just as I had been some 18 months earlier: in a new place, struggling to find my feet. But this time I was in Oakland, California, another quake-endangered zone.

The transition back to the United States was more difficult than I had expected. Beyond the usual cultural and linguistic acclimations were the stark contrasts between working class Nagata and middle class Oakland. Before leaving Kobe and deciding to settle in Oakland, one of my firefighter friends, an older gentleman named Iwaki who possessed an irreverent sense of humor, shared that he had been to the San Francisco Bay Area once on some sort of firefighter goodwill exchange trip. They had toured the Bay Area and had even taken BART, the rapid transit system, on a day trip to Oakland. When I mentioned that I might be moving there soon, he gave me a look of concern. "It's scary there," he said bluntly. "We didn't stay long. Dodgy people walking on the streets, I wouldn't feel safe walking at night!" I could see that he was trying to be diplomatic when he paused and struggled to

rephrase his words. "Japanese people...you know, it would be difficult for a Japanese person to live there. Japanese need to feel safe."

At the time I had understood Iwaki's interpretation of Oakland to be the unfortunate outcome of a poor first impression. But after moving to an established neighborhood in Oakland that bore resemblances to Nagata in the number of people who walked to restaurants and shopping at all hours of the day, I could not help but feel like I understood what Iwaki had meant. My unease was not due simply to the immediate visual differences between Nagata and Oakland, such as the increased visibility of mentally ill individuals or the obvious socioeconomic contrasts on display everywhere in the city. A large part of it, I eventually realized, was that the informational landscape was vastly different from Nagata. Absent were the neon signs, the hand-drawn advertisements, the indigo *noren* fabric panels in storefronts. Absent also was the constant visual and aural din of safety information in Kobe. Of course, Oakland's public spaces also featured signs to be careful of escalators and wet floors. But certainly such signage in Oakland was not illustrated with cutesy cartoon characters or made audible through the sounds of nostalgic melodies or birds chirping. In my walks I never saw a map indicating where to go in case of an emergency. Such differences seemed to imply a cold independence, and that feeling made me feel understanding for Iwaki's fear of my new city. And in my reentry fever, I read Oakland's safety signs with a jaded eye: rather than manifestations of concern for

pedestrians' safety, I caught myself regarding them with cynicism as talismans against litigation.

Dorrine Kondo (1989) has famously written about the moment during her fieldwork in Tokyo when she glanced at a Japanese woman in typical housewife dress walking with a feminized pigeon-toed shuffle, and then came to the shocking realization that she was looking at her own reflection. I had no dramatic experience like this, but my own realization that my vague sense of danger in Oakland was in part due to missing the ubiquitous sounds and sights of safety in Kobe struck me hard. Only then did I understand that I had joined into a distributed subjectivity in which safety and security are — and should be — a constant refrain.

A Triple Disaster

It is with a sorrowful sense of irony, then, when six weeks after leaving Kobe I watched, from the safety of my Oakland apartment, Japan become engulfed in another catastrophe. I learned about the disaster in eastern Japan from my parents. Because they lived in Hawaii, they had received warnings about a potential tsunami. My mother immediately called me in Oakland, telling me to turn on the television. Still on the phone, I rushed to the living room of our small apartment and changed the channel to CNN. With my mother still on the line, we shared a bird's eye view of enormous waves casting themselves upon Kesenuma, a small coastal community in Miyagi Prefecture. We could see trucks traveling along ruined roads seeking higher

ground. There were also men and women hanging halfway out of their second story windows, desperately waving what looked like white towels or pieces of clothing. I imagine they were trying to catch the helicopter's attention, not knowing that the helicopter's purpose was not to rescue, but to film for the watching eyes of people like me. Such voyeurism at the exact moment of total disaster felt very wrong. My immediate impulse was to go to Japan, not for research purposes but rather because through my fieldwork I had become personally enfolded in the notion of disaster prevention as a collective undertaking. I could picture the survivors and safety activists and researchers gathered in Kobe, and simply wanted to be there with them.

After hanging up with my mother, I quickly checked online for more news. Friends and interlocutors from my field were posting quick updates on Facebook saying that they were safe. Community radio stations in northern Japan were broadcasting messages via Twitter, and Japanese bloggers I read posted frequent updates. I sent email messages to people I knew through my research, and began receiving daily updates from a few of them. Other than limited forms of email, these were all communicative means that were unavailable to people in 1995.

The world followed the tense downward spiral of developments in the week after the earthquake. Incredibly, the massive 9.0 earthquake and tsunami seemed to pale in comparison to the global consequences of a potential nuclear catastrophe. In the weeks and months after March 11, researcher friends in Kobe sent dispatches about spearheading new programs

in Tohoku or participating in state-funded collaborations to provide aid to victims in the disaster zone. For example, Takahashi and Ogawa, the married couple that ran the FMX radio station, arranged for aid to be sent to Tohoku through their community radio network. Later that year they held workshops for Filipina migrants in rural communities in the Tohoku region in the hope that they could connect with others who shared their language and cultural experiences. I followed their work from Oakland, where I remained because I was pregnant and had been told by friends in Japan to not risk radiation exposure; some of them did not trust government assurances that radiation had been confined to the Fukushima area.

Now three years after the disaster, many of my interlocutors from Kobe are still working on Tohoku-related programs. Like the Hanshin earthquake, the Great East Japan Disaster (*Higashi Nihon Daishinsai*) is portrayed as a watershed moment in Japanese political consciousness. Some of the issues are similar to the Kobe disaster: survivors complain of flawed reconstruction plans, a lack of money to rebuild (or, in cases of some coastal communities, the inability to return to the land on which their homes had stood)⁷. But a great deal of civic engagement following the 2011 disaster hinged upon the question of nuclear energy. Such debates raised questions including public distrust of the government's reassurances about acceptable

⁷ Earthquake insurance is available to homeowners in Japan, but it is purchased as an optional rider on top of a fire insurance policy (General Insurance Rating Organization of Japan N.d.). These requirements, coupled with its very high premiums and residents' feeling that a catastrophic earthquake was unlikely, made earthquake insurance a rarity among Kobe homeowners (Edgington 2010).

radiation (Gill et al. 2013) and food safety. As Adriana Petryna (2002) and Ulrich Beck (1992) have pointed out in regard to the Chernobyl catastrophe, such distrust is founded upon citizens' frank understanding that scientists and those working for the state are themselves limited by the indeterminacy of radiation exposure science.

The public demonstrations in Tokyo in 2011 and successive years thus hinge upon a deep anxiety and anger about the risks of nuclear power in Japan.⁷⁸ Japan has relied on nuclear power to provide about 30% of energy supplies, which has greatly reduced the country's dependence on oil imports.⁷⁹ Major nuclear power plants were situated along the Tohoku coast. Immediately after the earthquake the central government shut down all nuclear power plants in the country; during this time consumers — including those who lived as far as Tokyo — coped with voluntary cutbacks on energy usage. Public figures, including Kenzaburo Oe, a Nobel laureate in literature, asked the government to remember the spectra of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when he called for the permanent shutdown of nuclear power plants. Novelist Haruki Murakami made a similar statement, but in doing so also described himself as an “unrealistic dreamer.” Indeed, in early 2014, the central government proposed reopening the plants that had been shut down in 2011.

⁷⁸ A Marcy 2014 *Al Jazeera* article (<http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/3/15/japan-protesterssaynotonuclearpower.html>) discusses one such protest.

⁷⁹ See Hein (1990) for an historical analysis of the development of Japan's postwar energy sector.

Questions about the country's energy future, disaster planning policies, and what will come of the irradiated areas around Fukushima pose immediate problems for Japan and Japanese people. Equally resonant are the more diffuse, troubling sociocultural and historical questions posed by the disaster. As with the Hanshin earthquake, the Tohoku disaster has led to great deal of retrospective thinking about what increasingly seem like false promises made to citizens during the postwar period of rapid growth. The debates about nuclear power are underscored the country's complex relationship with nuclear technology, given Japan's unique place as the only country to have experienced a nuclear attack.⁸⁰ Moreover, as Laura Hein (1990) has shown, Japan's energy policies have deep and direct connections to cultural and political decisions in the immediate postwar period to prioritize rapid economic growth.

Part of this soul-searching and more vocal public criticism of the state has taken on the kind of lesson-learning discourse that characterizes the Hanshin earthquake. Observers tend to acknowledge that the Japanese disaster management system has improved because of lessons about necessary decision-making, communication, and technological infrastructures learned from the Kobe experience. But observers on the ground, along with the survivors of the Tohoku disaster themselves, have also pointed out that disaster response procedures and reconstruction processes have not met

⁸⁰ Deeply fraught also was the revelation in 2010 that Japan had a secret pact with the United States to allow nuclear weapons into the country. The presence of nuclear weapons on Japanese soil or waters is in direct violation of the country's pacifist postwar constitution.

survivors' needs (Slater 2013). And as Ryuma Shineha (2012) points out, the much-vaunted social media response that started in the minutes after the earthquake has not been the revolutionary democratizing means of communication that it had initially seemed to be; much of the communication by Twitter, Facebook, and email were among those outside the disaster zone. In this way, the "information vacuum" (Sato 2007: 83) that plagued Kobe's survivors continued to pose a serious challenge to victims in the Tohoku region.

One form of the "lesson learning" discourse that characterizes the post-disaster landscape has been official fact-finding missions. The earliest of these was the creation of the independent Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Company (ICANPS). The committee was formed in June 2011 by the central government as an independent panel of experts who were determined to have no vested interest in the nuclear industry. The head of the committee was none other than Hatamura Yotaro, the head of the FSG. The panel released a scathing interim report, asserting that the central government and the privately-owned Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) had committed gross mistakes. TEPCO, the committee found, habitually underestimated risk and therefore did not take adequate precautions or measures to prevent the accident at Fukushima Reactor Number 1. The committee faulted the central government, too, for stalled officials paralyzed by an inability to make decisions in extremely time-sensitive circumstances.

These failures are strongly reminiscent of similar ones made about the government following the Hanshin quake.

Moreover, the committee's final report faulted the economizing logics that characterize state decisions to foster growth since the postwar period. Specifically, the committee discussed the concept of *sôteigai*, which refers to that which lies outside the realm of assumption. Disaster prevention — and all risk calculations in general — are based on a set of assumptions about what is possible. This means that everything from maps depicting hazard zones, risk assessments, tsunami models, and the like are based on what is *sôtei*, or within the realm of assumption or hypothesis. The ICANPS report clarifies, however, that *sôteigai*, or that which is beyond assumption, has two meanings. The first meaning refers to analytical blind spots; these are the “unknown unknowns” to which former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld famously referred. These are factors that are outside the scope of assumption because analysts simply do not know about them. The second meaning of *sôteigai* refers to that which is PLACED outside of assumption. At play is a logic of triage; faced with limited resources, plans and models must draw boundaries somewhere. This second meaning of *sôteigai* is therefore an economic determination, an artificial — and thus at least somewhat arbitrary — limit. Hatamura and the panel declared that it was clear that the state had operated from the latter definition. The terrible implication here was that the state had leveraged residents' safety according to an economic logic of risk.

Hatamura's personal conclusion to the final report suggested that such failures of decision-making reflected an innate human desire to avoid facing the unpleasant. Kurokawa Kiyoshi, the chair of another Fukushima investigatory panel that I mentioned earlier, pinpointed this practice of deep avoidance to Japanese cultural tendencies that rendered the disaster "made in Japan" (2012).

Assignations of blame to such diffuse causes as general human nature, Japanese cultural pathologies, and the indeterminacy of disasters in general mean that there are no satisfying answers to the question of how to prevent future disasters.

But this does not mean that the state and citizens are not trying. Most recently, in early 2014 the central government has proposed building 200 miles of seawall around the Tohoku coast. State authorities say that the wall, which would ostensibly serve as a literal fortress, would shield coastal communities from another tsunami disaster. But those living in these coastal communities object, arguing that such a wall would mean a metaphorical imprisonment for communities whose economic and cultural life revolved around ready access to the sea. There is also the not inconsiderable issue of the cost of maintaining such a large structure for decades to come.

Such schemes underscore that preparedness always has its limits, despite best efforts to learn from past disasters and come up with new solutions to constructing a safer world. Disaster planners and researchers recognize this fact. But the crucial difference is that there is a gap between

expert and technocratic knowledge about the cracks in disaster management plans, and the public's demands for safety.

The gap manifests in multiple ways within public discourse. Transparency is one of them. As with the Hanshin quake, post-Tohoku disaster Japan was rocked again by questions of what the state knows, what the citizens are told, and how private citizens can go about making their own alternative sources and forms of knowledge in order to make their own decisions about the radiation and other risks around them.

In places just outside the geographic area deemed uninhabitable due to radiation contamination, for instance, anthropologist Tom Gill (2013) has described local officials and village cooperatives self-monitoring with Geiger counters. As Gill observed, some who are tasked by the central government to monitor and report radioactivity levels measured with Geiger counters have also raised questions about the inconsistencies in measurement methodologies and the fluctuations in what the state has determined are acceptable limits of radiation exposure. The flexible nature of what seem as if they should be hard scientific statistics have provoked a deep sense of unease and, taken together, has created a new scale of distrusting publics than those seen following the Hanshin earthquake.

The View from Kobe

And what is the view from Kobe? I met up with Takahashi and Ogawa again in the summer after the March 2011 disaster. They were on their way to

South America and had decided to make a quick trip to the U.S. We went sightseeing together in Napa, Ogawa exclaiming over a delicious cocktail we had on the Napa Valley Wine Train. They seemed tired but happy to be traveling after such a busy six months trying to coordinate new projects between Kobe and Tohoku. Both expressed feeling a sense of kinship with Tohoku disaster victims. While they said there were regional differences in terms of language and culture (Tohoku people are famously reserved, Ogawa told me), there was a feeling of solidarity among folks in Kobe. There was also sadness by those in Kobe who knew that the Tohoku survivors had a long road in front of them.

Similarly, just as my interlocutors in Kobe repeatedly stressed their fears about fading memories about the Hanshin Earthquake, Tohoku catastrophe survivors have recently expressed anxiety that the nation is already forgetting them. According to a February 2014 *Asahi Shinbun* poll, 76% of survivors felt that the catastrophe was being forgotten. And just as some Kobe survivors expressed frustration that the nation's attention turned to the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack in Tokyo while they were still dealing with the day-to-day difficulties of reconstruction, Tohoku residents impacted by the quake have also conveyed their sense that construction plans for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will cause delays for reconstruction in their own region.

But my Kobe friends and contacts also stressed that in many ways the two disasters were incomparable. The facts can be easily teased out: Kobe was

an urban earthquake, while the Tohoku quake occurred in a rural region. There was the fact of the tsunami. And worst of all was the continuing disaster played out at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. As one friend told me, “At least people in Kobe could more or less go back to their homes. But these people might never be able to return.”

I have not been able to see these differences played out in person after my fieldwork, but the way Takahashi, Ogawa, and other interlocutors have described them, it has not been easy to apply lessons learned from Kobe to the triple disaster of 3.11. The culture, the language, the geography, the nature of the catastrophe — all of it, they say, is so different. And these differences, it turns out, matter greatly.

A view from anthropology

Cultural anthropologists seem particularly well-placed to attend to such differences. Unlike disciplines such as sociology and cultural geography, until relatively recently, cultural anthropology has had comparatively limited sustained interactions with the broader field of disaster management research. The situation is now changing rapidly. It is not an exaggeration to say that after the March 2011 catastrophe, nearly every anthropologist of Japan I know is now working on or planning a disaster-related project. This shows, I think, how disaster so thoroughly affects every aspect of social life. Social, economic, and political tensions that anthropologists of Japan have long investigated – in Tohoku this relates particularly to urban-rural divides,

an aging population, marginal employment, and traditional labor industries – have all been tremendously impacted by the 3.11 disaster. I hope, then, that this dissertation is just one example of many future studies that will offer an anthropological sensibility to disaster preparedness and management.

I return now to Suzuki, the Kobe University archivist who surmised that so many survivors of the Hanshin quake were engaged in amateur archival activities because "the after is long." This is the ontological question that pervades all of the information-building activities I witnessed in Kobe, and also frames the looming questions of what the future holds for a post-Tohoku disaster Japan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allison, Anne. 1994. *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2013. *Precarious Japan*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2012. "Ordinary Refugees: Social Precarity and Soul in 21st Century Japan." *Anthropological Quarterly* 85 (2): 345–70.
- Amino, Yoshihiko. 2012. *Rethinking Japanese History*. Ann Arbor, Mich: Center for Japanese Studies, the University of Michigan.
- Arai, Andrea. 2006. "The 'Wild Child' of 1990s Japan." In *Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, 447 p. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Aso, Noriko. 2013. *Public Properties: Museums in Imperial Japan*. Durham: Duke University.
- Avenell, Simon Andrew. 2010. *Making Japanese Citizens: Civil Society and the Mythology of the Shimin in Postwar Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bachnik, Jane, and Charles J. Quinn. 1994. *Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Barry, Andrew. 2013. *Material Politics: Disputes Along the Pipeline*. RGS-IBS Book Series. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage Publications.
- Befu, Harumi. 2001. *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of "Nihonjinron"*. Portland, Or.: Trans Pacific Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1986. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books.
- . 2005. *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Berlant, Lauren G. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Bestor, Theodore C. 1989. *Neighborhood Tokyo*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Bestor, Theodore C., Patricia G. Steinhoff, and Victoria Lyon-Bestor. 2003. *Doing Fieldwork in Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Bestor, Victoria Lyon. 2002. "Toward a Cultural Biography of Civil Society in Japan." In *Family and Social Policy in Japan: Anthropological Approaches*, edited by Roger Goodman, 29–53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowker, Geoffrey C. 2005. *Memory Practices in the Sciences*. Inside Technology. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. 1999. *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*. Inside Technology. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Brenneis, Donald. N.d. "Reading, Writing, Recognition." Unpublished manuscript.
- . 2004. "Reforming Promise." In *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, 41–70. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Brown, Wendy. 2001. *Politics Out of History*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Caldwell, Melissa L. 2004. *Not by Bread Alone: Social Support in the New Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Candea, Matei. 2010. *Corsican Fragments: Difference, Knowledge, and Fieldwork*. New Anthropologies of Europe. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Christy, Alan S. 2012. *A Discipline on Foot: Inventing Japanese Native Ethnography, 1910-1945*. Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield.
- Clancey, Gregory K. 2006. *Earthquake Nation: The Cultural Politics of Japanese Seismicity, 1868-1930*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Company. 2012. "Final Report of the Investigation Committee on the Accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Stations of Tokyo Electric Power Company". Tokyo.
<http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/icanps/eng/final-report.html>.

- Deguchi, and Honma, eds. 1996. *Borantia Kakumei: Daishinsai de No Keiken o Shimin Katsudo e (Volunteer Revolution: Toward Citizen Participation on the Experience of the Great Disaster)*. Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Shinposha.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1996. *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Doak, Kevin Michael. 2007. *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan: Placing the People*. Leiden: Brill.
- Dower, John W. 1999. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. NY: Norton.
- Eliot, T. S. 2014. *The Rock: A Pageant Play*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Erikson, Kai. 1994. *A New Species of Trouble: Explorations in Disaster, Trauma, and Community*. Vol. 1st. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Espeland, Wendy, and Mitchell L Stevens. 1998. "Commensuration as a Social Process." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (3): 313–43.
- Ewald, Francois. 1991. "Insurance and Risk." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, x, 307 p. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fackler, Martin. 2012. "In Tokyo, Thousands Protest the Restarting of a Nuclear Power Plant." *The New York Times*, June 29, sec. World / Asia Pacific. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/30/world/asia/thousands-in-tokyo-protest-the-restarting-of-a-nuclear-plant.html>.
- Faubion, James D., and George E. Marcus, eds. 2009. *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be: Learning Anthropology's Method in a Time of Transition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Fehérváry, Krisztina. 2013. *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Field, Norma. 1997. *From My Grandmother's Bedside: Sketches of Postwar Tokyo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Figal, Gerald. 1996. "How to Jibunshi: Making and Marketing Self-Histories of Shōwa Among the Masses in Postwar Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55 (4): 902–33. doi:10.2307/2646528.

- Fortun, Kim. 2001. *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2004. "Environmental Information Systems as Appropriate Technology." *Design Issues* 20 (3): 54–65.
- Fortun, Kim, and Mike Fortun. 2005. "Scientific Imaginaries and Ethical Plateaus in Contemporary U.S. Toxicology." *American Anthropologist* 107 (1): 43–54.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1992. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: a Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 109–42. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Garon, Sheldon M. 1997. *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 2003. "From Meiji to Heisei: The State and Civil Society in Japan." In *The State of Civil Society in Japan*, edited by Frank J. Schwartz and Susan J. Pharr. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gerteis, Christopher, and Timothy George. 2014. "Beyond the Bubble, Beyond Fukushima: Reconsidering the History of Postwar Japan." *The Asia Pacific Journal* 12 (8.3). <http://japanfocus.org/-Christopher-Gerteis/4080>.
- Gill, Tom. 2013. "This Spoiled Soil: Place, People and Community in an Irradiated Village in Fukushima Prefecture." In *Japan Copes with Calamity*, 201–234. Gill, Tom, Brigitte Steger, and David Slater, eds. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Gluck, Carol. 1985. *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*. Studies of the East Asian Institute, Columbia University. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Gluck, Carol. 2009. "Sekinin/Responsibility in Modern Japan." In *Words in Motion: Toward a Global Lexicon*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1981. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Gordon, Andrew. 1992. *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson, eds. 1997. *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

- Hacking, Ian. 2006. *The Emergence of Probability : a Philosophical Study of Early Ideas About Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference*. Vol. 2nd. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hamabata, Matthews M. 1994. "The Battle to Belong: Self-Sacrifice and Self-Fulfillment in the Japanese Family Enterprise." In *Situated Meaning*, 192–208. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hamada, Koichi. 1996. "Japan 1968: A Reflection Point During the Era of the Economic Miracle." Discussion Paper. New Haven: Economic Growth Center, Yale University.
- Hannerz, Ulf. 2003. "Being There... and There... and There! Reflections on Multi-Site." *Ethnography* 4 (2): 201–16.
- Harper, Richard. 1998. *Inside the IMF: An Ethnography of Documents, Technology, and Organisational Action*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Hasegawa, Koichi. 2004. *Constructing Civil Society in Japan: Voices of Environmental Movements*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.
- Hatamura, Yotaro. 2005. *Shippaigaku no Susume (An Invitation to Failure Science)*. Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Hein, Laura Elizabeth. 1990. *Fueling Growth: The Energy Revolution and Economic Policy in Postwar Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Herzfeld, Michael. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2004. *The Body Impolitic: Artisans and Artifice in the Global Hierarchy of Value*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hewitt, Kenneth. 1983. "The Idea of Calamity in a Technocratic Age." In *Interpretations of Calamity, From the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, 3–32. Boston: Allen and Unwin.
- . 1995. "Sustainable Disasters: Perspectives and Powers in the Discourse of Calamity." In *Power of Development*, 115–28. New York: Routledge.
- . 1997. *Regions of Risk: a Geographical Introduction to Disasters*. Harlow: Longman.
- Hirata, Keiko. 2002. *Civil Society in Japan: The Growing Role of NGOs in Tokyo's Aid and Development Policy*. Vol. 1st. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

- Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. Cultures of History. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hoffman, Susanna, and Anthony Oliver-Smith. 2002. *Catastrophe and Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Hook, Glenn D. 2005. *Contested Governance in Japan: Sites and Issues*. Routledge.
- Hook, Glenn D., and Hiroko Takeda. 2007. "'Self-responsibility' and the Nature of the Postwar Japanese State: Risk through the Looking Glass." *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 33 (1): 93–123.
- Horwich, G. 2000. "Economic Lessons of the Kobe Earthquake." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 48 (3): 521–42.
- Ichikawa, Kon. 2002. *Tokyo Olympiad (Tokyo Orinpikku)*. Videorecording. Criterion Collection.
- Ishii, Shigeru. 2004. "Taiken to Keiken." <http://moneykit.net/from/msg/msg040329.html>. Accessed February 4, 2013.
- Ivy, Marilyn. 1995. *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jasanoff, Sheila. 2005. *Designs on Nature: Science and Democracy in Europe and the United States*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jasanoff, Sheila, and Andrew Lakoff ed. 2010. "Beyond Calculation: A Democratic Response to Risk." In *Disaster and the Politics of Intervention*. Columbia University Press.
- Juraku, Kohta. 2013. "'Made in Japan' Fukushima Nuclear Accident: A Critical Review for Accident Investigation Activities in Japan." In *An STS Forum on Fukushima*. <http://fukushimaforum.wordpress.com/workshops/sts-forum-on-the-2011-fukushima-east-japan-disaster/manuscripts/session-1/made-in-japan-fukushima-nuclear-accident-a-critical-review-for-accident-investigation-activities-in-japan/>.
- Kaneko, Ikuyo. 1992. *Borantia: Mo Hitotsu no Joho Shakai (Volunteers: Another Information Society)*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Kassabian, Anahid. 2013. *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Kim, Boumsoung. 2007. *Meiji Taishō No Nihon No Jishingaku: Rōkaru Saiensu o Koete (Beyond Local Science: The Evolution of Japanese Seismology During the Meiji and the Taisho Eras)*. Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai.
- Kimura, Shuhei. 2005. "Saigai No Jinruigakuteki Kenkyu Ni Mukete (Toward an Anthropological Study of Disaster)" *Bunkajinruigaku* 70 (3): 399–409.
- Kinoshita, Toshinobu. 2009. "Seikō taiken to shippai keiken." <http://www.fpkotsu.com/essay/e39.html>. Accessed February 2, 2013.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 2003. "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11." *TDR: The Drama Review* 47 (1): 11–48.
- Kitahara, Itoko. 2006. *Nihon Saigaishi*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.
- Kleinman, Arthur. 2006. *What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life Amidst Uncertainty and Danger*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kondo, Dorinne K. 1990. *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kunreuther, Laura. 2014. *Voicing Subjects: Public Intimacy and Mediation in Kathmandu*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kurokawa, Kiyoshi. 2012. "The National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission Report". Tokyo: The National Diet of Japan.
- Kurotani, Sawa. 2005. *Home Away from Home: Japanese Corporate Wives in the United States*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kyoto Tsushin. 1995. "Kyoudou News Service", July 13.
- Lakoff, Andrew. 2007. "Preparing for the Next Emergency." *Public Culture* 19 (2): 247–71.
- . , ed. 2010. *Disaster and the Politics of Intervention*. The Columbia University Press and Social Science Research Council Series on the Privatization of Risk. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lave, Jean. 1991. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Learning in Doing. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press.

- LeBlanc, Robin M. 1999. *Bicycle Citizens: The Political World of the Japanese Housewife*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marcus, George. 1995. "Ethnography In/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95–117.
- Marks, Laura U. 2002. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mathews, Andrew S. 2008. "State Making, Knowledge, and Ignorance: Translation and Concealment in Mexican Forestry Institutions." *American Anthropologist* 110 (4): 484–94.
- McCormack, Gavan. 1996. *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence. Japan in the Modern World*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe.
- McDonald, Mark. 2012. "In Japan, Lonely Deaths in Society's Margins. March 25. *The New York Times*. http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/in-japan-lonely-deaths-in-societys-margins/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0.
- Mileti, Dennis S. 1999. *Disasters by Design: A Reassessment of Natural Hazards in the United States*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Miller, Laura. 2006. *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2004. *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- . 2006. "Economy of Dreams: Hope in Global Capitalism and Its Critiques." *Cultural Anthropology* 21 (2): 147–72.
- . 2013. *Arbitraging Japan: Dreams of Capitalism at the End of Finance*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Miyazaki, Hirokazu, and Annelise Riles. 2005. "Failure as an Endpoint." In *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, 320–32. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Miyoshi, Masao. 2010. *Trespasses: Selected Writings. Post-contemporary Interventions*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Morris, Ivan. 1975. *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

- Murakami, Haruki. 2002. *After the Quake: Stories*. Translated by Jay Rubin. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- . 2001. *Underground*. Translated by Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel. New York: Vintage International.
- . "As an Unrealistic Dreamer." Speech, Barcelona, Spain, June 10, 2011. *Senri no michi*. Accessed March 9, 2013. <http://www.senrinomichi.com/?p=2541>
- Nakamura, Karen. 2008. *Deaf in Japan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Nakano, Lynne Y. 2005. *Community Volunteers in Japan: Everyday Stories of Social Change*.
- . 2000. "Volunteering as a Lifestyle Choice: Negotiating Self-Identities in Japan." *Ethnology* 39 (2): 93–107. doi:10.2307/3773837.
- Nosaka, Akiyuki. 1988. *Hotaru no Haka (Grave of the Fireflies)*. Videorecording. New York: Central Park Video.
- Nozawa, Shunsuke. 2012. "Discourses of the Coming: Ignorance, Forgetting, and Prolepsis in Japanese Self-Historiography." In *The Anthropology of Ignorance*, edited by Casey High, Ann Kelly, and Jonathan Mair, 55–86. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- . 2013. "Characterization." *Semiotic Review* 3 (Open Issue 2013): www.semioticreview.com.
<http://www.semioticreview.com/index.php/open-issues/issue-open-2013/21-characterization>
- O'Malley, Pat. 2002. "Imagining Insurance: Risk, Thrift, and Life Insurance in Britain." In *Embracing Risk: The Changing Culture of Insurance and Responsibility*, 97–115. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2003. "Moral Uncertainties: Contract Law and Distinctions Between Speculation, Gambling, and Insurance." In *Risk and Morality*, vi, 461 p. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony, and Susannah M. Hoffman, eds. 1999. *The Angry Earth: Disaster in Anthropological Perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- Paley, Julia. 2001. *Marketing Democracy: Power and Social Movements in Post-Dictatorship Chile*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Peirce, Charles S. 1991. *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Pekkanen, Robert. 2006. *Japan's Dual Civil Society: Members Without Advocates*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Petroski, Henry. 1992. *To Engineer Is Human: The Role of Failure in Successful Design*. Vol. 1st Vintage Books. New York: Vintage Books.
- Petryna, Adriana. 2002. *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pincus, Leslie. 1996. *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shūzō and the Rise of National Aesthetics*. Twentieth-century Japan 5. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Power, Michael. 1999. *The Audit Society: Rituals of Verification*. Vol. 2nd. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2007. *Organized Uncertainty: Designing a World of Risk Management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Ramaswamy, Sumathi. 2004. *The Lost Land of Lemuria : Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Riles, Annelise. 2000. *The Network Inside Out*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Rohlen, Thomas P. 1974. *For Harmony and Strength: Japanese White-Collar Organization in Anthropological Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Roitman, Janet L. 2014. *Anti-crisis*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Rose, Nikolas. 2002. "At Risk of Madness." In *Embracing Risk: The Changing Culture of Insurance and Responsibility*, 209–37. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sasaki-Uemura, Wesley Makoto. 2001. *Organizing the Spontaneous: Citizens Protest in Postwar Japan*. University of Hawaii Press.
- . 2002. "Competing Publics: Citizens' Groups, Mass Media, and the State in the 1960s." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 10 (1): 79–110.

- Sato, Kenji. 2007. "Kanto Daishinsaigo Ni Okeru Shakai No Henyo." *Rekishi Saigai to Toshi: Kyoto, Tokyo Wo Chushin Ni* 2007: 81–89.
- Shevchenko, Olga. 2009. *Crisis and the Everyday in Postsocialist Moscow*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Shibusawa, Keizo. 1992. "Shippaishi Wo Kakenumonoka." In *Kenpo Toboroku*. Tokyo: Heibonsha.
- Slater, David. Moralities of Volunteer Aid: The Permutations of Gifts and their Reciprocals. " In *Japan Copes with Calamity*, 267-292. Gill, Tom, Brigitte Steger, and David Slater, eds. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Smits, Gregory. 2006. "Shaking up Japan: Edo Society and the 1855 Catfish Picture Prints." *Journal of Social History* 39 (4): 1045–1078.
- Star, Susan Leigh, and Karen Ruhleder. 1994. "Steps Towards an Ecology of Infrastructure: Complex Problems in Design and Access for Large-scale Collaborative Systems." In *ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work*, 253–64. Chapel Hill, NC: ACM. file:///PDF/p253-star.pdf.
- Stevens, Carolyn S. 1997a. *On the Margins of Japanese Society : Volunteers and the Welfare of the Urban Underclass*. The Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series. London, England ; New York, N.Y.: Routledge.
- . 1997b. *On the Margins of Japanese Society: Volunteers and the Welfare of the Urban Underclass*. The Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Strathern, Marilyn, ed. 2000. *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics, and the Academy*. European Association of Social Anthropologists. London New York: Routledge.
- . 2013. *Learning to See in Melanesia: Lectures Given in the Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge University, 1993-2008*. Vol. 2. Hau Masterclass Series. Manchester: HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory. <http://www.haujournal.org/index.php/masterclass/article/view/319/354>.
- Tanaka, Stefan. 2004. *New Times in Modern Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. 1966. *Democracy in America*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Tsukahara, Togo. "Saigai Shihon Shugi No Hatsudou: Nido Hakai Sareta Kobe Kara Nani o Manabu No Ka? (Variation on Disaster Capitalism: What Can We Learn from the Second Destruction of Kobe?)." *Gendai Shisou* 39 (7): 202–11.
- Tsutsui, William M. 1996. "W. Edwards Deming and the Origins of Quality Control in Japan." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 22 (2): 295–325.
- Ueno, Chizuko, and Beverley Yamamoto. 2004. *Nationalism and Gender*. Japanese Society Series. Melbourne: Trans Pacific.
- Venturi, Robert. 1977. *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Warner, Michael. 2002. *Publics and Counterpublics*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Weidman, Amanda J. 2006. *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern the Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Weisenfeld, Gennifer. 2012. *Imaging Disaster : Tokyo and the Visual Culture of Japan's Great Earthquake of 1923*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yamamoto, Tadashi. 1995. *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community: Nongovernmental Underpinnings of the Emerging Asia Pacific Regional Community*. Singapore: Co-published by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) [and] JCIE in cooperation with the Asia Pacific Philanthropy Consortium (APPC).
- . 1998. *The Nonprofit Sector in Japan*. Manchester, UK ; New York: Manchester University Press :
- Yamauchi, Naoto. 2003. *The Economics of the Japanese Nonprofit Sector*. Kyoto: Shoukadoh.
- Yamori, Katsuya. 2005. *Seikatsu Bôσαι No Susume: Bôσαι Shinrigaku Kenkyû Nôto*. Tokyo: Nakanishiya Shuppan.
- Yano, Christine, Patricia G. Steinhoff, Victoria Lyon-Bestor, and Theodore C. Bestor. 2003. "Unraveling the Web of Song." In *Doing Fieldwork in Japan*, 277–93. University of Hawaii Press.
- Yoda, Tomiko. 2006. "A Roadmap to Recessionary Japan." In *Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, 447 p. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Yoda, Tomiko, and Harry D. Harootunian. 2006. *Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Fujitani, Takashi, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds. 2001. *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press.
- Yoshimoto, Kazuhiro. 2002. *Shoubougunin Ga Mita Hanshin Awaji Daishinsai (The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake As Seen by a Firefighter)*. Kobe: Self-published.
- Zaloom, Caitlin. 2006. *Out of the Pits: Traders and Technology from Chicago to London*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zigon, Jarrett. 2011. *HIV Is God's Blessing: Rehabilitating Morality in Neoliberal Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.