

Risk Culture, Spectres of Multinational Destruction, and Processes of Emergency in Tokyo Ueno Station

Ruby Niemann
University of Adelaide

Abstract: *This article explores the 2020 translation of Yu Miri's 2014 Japanese-language novel Tokyo Ueno Station (translated into English by Morgan Giles) as an example of crisis literature that operates on the level of an ethico-aesthetic emergency text in both fast- and slow-time registers to represent the post-global experience of ongoing catastrophe. I examine the crisis represented by Tokyo Ueno Station not as an abrupt disjunction but rather as processual ruination. Yu's novel indicates the irresolvability of the twenty-first century both in and as crisis. I aim to understand the scalar shifting between the local, the national, and the new cartography of belonging and exclusion created by the multinational corporation. In doing so, I suggest that Yu's peri-post-crisis, post-Fukushima Japan can be read as part of the processual wreckage of the triple disasters of imperialist rule, American influence, and neoliberal capitalist social disintegration. The concatenations of ghost, nation, globe, and capital mark Tokyo Ueno Station as a posttraumatic crisis text – a fragmented emergency-in-process whereby the brief, climactic devastation of 3/11 illustrates that misery on a personal and societal level is not a single moment of cataclysm but is rather an interweaving of risk, failure, and neoliberal cruelty.*

Keywords: Risk; Japanese literature; Fukushima; Nuclear criticism; Crisis

Introduction

Yu Miri's 2014 novel *Tokyo Ueno Station* (translated into English by Morgan Giles in 2020) was written in response to the aftermath of the 3/11 'triple disaster' that began with the Tōhoku earthquake. This was the day in 2011 when a 9.0-91 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Japan and triggered a catastrophic tsunami. The tsunami destroyed hundreds of homes, displaced hundreds of thousands, and killed at least 20,000 people. Alongside this, the quake caused the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, leaving the land immediately around the plant uninhabitable and leading to a steady stream of irradiated water leaching into the Sea of Japan. The plot of the novel follows

labourer Mori Kazu. Kazu is the oldest of eight children, born into a desperately poor family right before the start of World War II in the economically depressed Fukushima Prefecture. He spends his childhood as a subsistence farmer and labourer on various fishing boats, before arriving in Tokyo (at Ueno Station) in 1963 to work constructing sports facilities for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Kazu spends most of his life away from his wife and young children, constructing sports facilities around Japan and sending money back home. He makes enough to send his son, Koichi, to medical school, but Koichi unexpectedly dies at age 21, leaving Kazu and his family bereft. After retirement Kazu moves back home with his wife until, after seven years, she also dies abruptly. Kazu's granddaughter moves in with him to take care of him, but a sense of guilt and obligation drives him to leave and return to Tokyo Ueno Station, where he lives as a member of Tokyo's homeless community in the Ueno Imperial Gift Park until he commits suicide by throwing himself under a train in 2008. This is not the end of Kazu, however. He haunts the park, a reflection of "the traditional Japanese belief that suicides continue to haunt places long after their death" (Rupprecht 2016, 118). He is voiceless and powerless but still able to observe and remember, becoming briefly and roughly dislocated from Tokyo and thrust back into Fukushima as he watches the tsunami caused by the Tōhoku earthquake destroy the village of his childhood and drown his granddaughter in her car.

Part of the representational crisis in *Tokyo Ueno Station* is illustrated by Kazu's haunting of his own life. Ghosts are not a new feature of Japanese literature or culture more broadly – in their 1994 exploration of ghosts in Japan, Michiko Iwasaka and Barre Toelken describe the way that "it is not enough to simply acknowledge that the Japanese may believe in ghosts; ghosts are thought to express dilemmas which require culturally acceptable solutions" (16). This is disarmingly similar to Jacques Derrida's injunction in *Specters of Marx* that "[t]here is then *some spirit*. Spirits. And *one must* reckon with them" (xx). The ghosts of a society imply a responsibility; they demand a response. The ghost in contemporary literature – and contemporary Japanese literature in particular – imply some kind of refusal to reckon or an inability to find acceptable solutions. They are figures of crisis, refusing to let the living off the hook. Yu's novel grapples with tradition in an era haunted by the constant presence of past, present, and future catastrophes – a risk society, to reference Ulrich Beck (1992). Ghosts are the shadowy literalisation of both accountability and modern alienation. Like Kazu, ghosts "occupy the paradigmatic 'not-spaces' of supermodernity defined by Marc Augé: the airports, hospitals, and refugee camps in which anonymous humans lead transitory existences only to get trapped in place" (Rupprecht 2016, 113). Kazu exists as a transitory figure – migrant worker, inhabiting anonymous hotel spaces, living amongst the ephemeral detritus of the Ueno Park homeless community, finally dying and becoming trapped in the paradoxically transitory sphere of Tokyo Ueno Station.

The ghost, both in Western hauntology and Japanese thought, provides a gap in the cyclical degradation implied by a risk society. In the process of returning the ghost also offers the potential for change – something new, a way out. In *Tokyo Ueno Station*, Kazu's haunting is a demand that we pay attention and is, at the same time, an opportunity for “a reconceptualization of life beyond the confines of the merely biological” (Hynes 2013, 1929). Yu's haunting gestures towards what Guattari describes as a:

new aesthetic paradigm [that] has ethico-political implications because to speak of creation is to speak of the responsibility of the creative instance with respect to the thing created, inflection of the state of things, bifurcation beyond pre-established schemas, once again taking into account the fate of alterity in its extreme modalities (1995, 107).

This ‘new paradigm’ is the *ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, and what it offers is a way out of the cyclical entrapment of supermodernity that is represented by hauntings. In this paper I read Yu's novel through the lens of emergency, perpetual crisis, and post-traumatic literature in times of multinational destruction. Using theories of hauntology and spectres in literature, recent work on risk, complicity, and processual ruination, as well as theories of irresolvability in twenty-first century thought, this paper explores the ways in which Yu's work presents the ongoing crisis of late capitalism through the experiences of its most marginal subjects. I argue that *Tokyo Ueno Station* can be seen as representing a technique of writing crisis into literature. This mode of ‘crisis literature’ operates on the level of an ethico-aesthetic emergency text in both fast- and slow-time registers (the economic and the geologic for instance) to represent the post-global experience of ongoing catastrophe.

Conceptualising disaster as discrete traumatic events that occur within the boundaries of nation-states feels today so obsolete as to be almost quaint. There is no longer a crisis that restricts itself to one location or one community of survivors and victims. Smoke from the 2020 Australian bushfires circles the globe, destabilising weather patterns and causing respiratory distress. Survivors of the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal are linked to factory workers in West Virginia through their shared biological fallibility at the hands of a company that now calls itself Dow Chemical (Wenzel 2019, 207). The global liquidity of international trade, multinational corporations, and uncontrollable, often-invisible chemical and biological threats create “elastic maps of risk and complicity” that “chart distance and proximity in terms of the multinational corporation, rather than the nation-state”, and in doing so create (or at least intensify) the conditions of global interrelation that result in the Anthropocene (Wenzel 2019, 206). Within and across national borders, the often-migratory and invisible new indexes of chemical and biological risk (underwritten by carbon capitalism) create new intimacies and alienations. In *Tokyo Ueno Station* Yu traces

her protagonist's alienation from his fellow citizens, and the fragile alliances between those who have also been dispossessed. Yu's novel indicates how new affiliations, communities, and complicities arise between otherwise unconnected groups. Disasters such as the catastrophic Tōhoku earthquake of March 11, 2011, demand alternative ways of characterising responses to crises that are larger than those of the self, invoking processual, multinational, collective understandings of literature as a crisis response.

Yu's novel takes place across a shifting temporality that encompasses both the life of protagonist Mori Kazu (a labourer turned member of Japan's unhoused community) and some of the more violent and destructive events in Japan's history. The book partially traces Japan's shift from imperial rule to wartime terror and then on to the 'slow violence' (as described by Rob Nixon in his monograph of the same name) of modern capitalism. All of this, though – from the Satsuma Rebellion (Yu 2020, 86) to the firebombing of Tokyo (Yu 2020, 45) to the death of Kazu's son (Yu 2020, 49) and, eventually, Kazu's own death (Yu 2020, 175) – turn on the pivotal moment of destruction represented by the 3/11 'triple disaster'. A confluence of collaborations between empires, nations, and national and multinational corporations (such as the Tokyo Electric Power Company [TEPCO] and General Electric [GE]) is complicit in both Kazu's personal disempowerment and the crisis that befalls his home prefecture of Fukushima. It is this slow leak of radiation – both into the sea and the soil surrounding the nuclear plant – that best exemplifies the constant yet ephemeral emergency of the current age, an era marked by forms of harm that are "no longer tied to their place of origin" and that "endanger *all* forms of life on this planet" (Beck 1992, 22).

Crisis literature differs from trauma fiction precisely on this matter of scale. *Trauma* has an individualistic connotation. To struggle with trauma is to experience a struggle to cohesively represent the self. To be traumatised indicates the potential for the post-traumatic – an after the trauma. *Crisis* is what we are living under all the time. Crisis literature traces the scalar shifting between the local, the national, and the new cartography of belonging and exclusion created by the multinational corporations that are illustrative of the Japanese economic miracle (and, indeed, have been sharply illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic). Yu's novel takes place *around* the 3/11 triple disaster but rarely actually lands upon it, instead tracing Kazu's life and afterlife alongside stories of other disasters happening to other people. In the novel, as in the twenty-first century, crisis is not a single moment of cataclysm but rather an interweaving of risk, failure, and neoliberal cruelty. Emergency is not a single event in *Tokyo Ueno Station*. It is woven throughout the novel as a constant sense of continuous disaster. The trauma of the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami, and the nuclear disaster that they caused, is so raw and so horrifying that it can only be touched on in passing, making only brief references to the disaster until it becomes the climactic event of the novel. It is for this reason that I describe *Tokyo Ueno Station* as a

posttraumatic crisis text. The fragmented nature of Yu's novel represents a crisis of the novel form, a fragmented emergency-in-process that links the 3/11 disaster to the bombing of Tokyo, to the Tokyo Olympics, and to the wider crises experienced throughout but the world.

Irresolvability, Vulnerability, and Neoliberal Violence

Tokyo Ueno Station begins with Kazu opining that he “used to think life was like a book: you turn the first page, and there's the next, and as you go on turning page after page, eventually you reach the last one” and realise that “life is nothing like a story in a book. There may be words, and the pages may be numbered, but there is no plot. There may be an ending, but there is no end” (Yu 2020, 1). This observation is mirrored formally throughout the novel in what is, I argue, a formal exemplar and literary exploration of posttraumatic crisis. Yu's atemporality decentralises the concept of linear time as a shared, coherent experience. Instead, she introduces a fractured understanding of time and history (both that of an individual human, such as Kazu, and that of a nation and people, such as Japan) as a series of crises that occur continuously and simultaneously. These crisis responses overlap with each other as the grief caused by one emergency continues, even as the next disaster looms. In this way, Yu develops an aesthetics of emergency literature, in which the experience of trauma and grief (both on the personal and on the historic scale) create haunted temporalities of ever-occurring catastrophe. The events are increasingly disconnected from any sense of purpose, creating an asynchronous aesthetic that, like the Theatre of the Absurd, “strives to express its sense of senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought” (Esslin 1961, xix-xx). Like Antonin Artaud's ‘Theatre of Cruelty’, Yu paradoxically displays the senseless suffering of her protagonist to draw together her audience and “promote the larger wholeness and health, a feeling of community, in the group” (Bermel 1997, 21). Yu's narrative of suffering creates a discursive relationship between those who suffer under the heel of colonial repression, carbon capitalism, and industrial malfeasance, producing an ethico-aesthetic relationship between Kazu's suffering and the potential flight paths out of this emotional landscape of everyday crisis.

Yu's novel is one of fractures and slippages. The narrative is frequently interrupted by the message that plays just before Kazu kills himself (“The train now approaching platform two is for Ikebukuro and Shinjuku. For your safety please stand behind the yellow line” [Yu 2020, 4]). Kazu shifts from recollections of his time before becoming homeless, during his period of rough sleeping, and his observations of people moving through the park after his death. This disorienting structure introduces into Yu's narrative a sense of *irresolvability*: the state “of a conflict mapped out by other peoples' brains, other larval mentalities”

and “which arises when, as [Christa] Wolf says, *we cannot avoid making a decision but...none of our choices is the right one*” (Fuller and Goriunova 2019, 52, citing Wolf 2013, 290). This reflects, through the form and structure of the novel, the helpless experience of both Kazu’s life and of the broader cataclysm. Kazu is locked in a state of permanently suspended haunting, caught forever in the beautified mass grave that is Ueno Park, unable both before and after death to make the ‘right’ decision. All of his choices are already-degraded and irresolvably difficult. Kazu is a member of an underclass created by neoliberal economic advancement, the rise of the multinational corporation, and an increasingly fragmentary, atomised social fabric. His choices have already been made for him, like “the Seiko wristwatch his wife gave him for his sixtieth birthday” which is “the only marker of identity he possesses” and is also “mass-manufactured and exchangeable” (Iwata-Weickgenannt, 2019 189). Kazu’s choices seem independent, but are influenced by forces outside of himself, which instead makes them exchangeable. The result of irresolvability is a:

hypertext that transforms an existent hypotext into something related but at the same time radically new” that represents “a critical rewriting of the dominant narrative of Japan’s postwar economic ‘miracle’ from the perspective of those whose existence has been marginalized, if not completely erased from collective memory. (Iwata-Weickgenannt 2019, 181)

These marginalized subjects, crucially, not only support the economic ‘miracle’ itself. They are also responsible for building the shining façade that Japan used to initially uphold their self-perception as a contemporary powerhouse on the global stage. Kazu engages directly with building this façade, and with continuing to construct and maintain the bourgeois fantasy of the Japanese leisure classes. His work “constructing athletics facilities – the track and baseball fields and the tennis and volleyball courts to be used in the Tokyo Olympics” (Yu 2020, 24) ties him directly to both the Japanese bourgeoisie and to the post-war project of creating and upholding Japan’s national and international self-image as a modern, globally connected technotopia. These games were “interpreted as motivated by the desire to rehabilitate Japan’s reputation in the eyes of the world, and to diffuse the memories of military aggression during WWII by promoting a new image of Japan as peaceful internationalist” as well as being “an indispensable part of Japan’s modernization narrative that to this day sustains its image as world-leading technological pioneer” (Iwata-Weickgenannt 2019, 185). Later, on the day he dies, Kazu and his fellow unhoused persons have been ordered by the Ueno Park management to pack up their tents and belongings, tag them, and remove themselves from the park as part of a clean-up initiative in preparation for an Imperial visit to the museum within the park. On a broader scale, “[t]he intent was to force out the five hundred homeless living in Ueno

Park in order to win [Japan's] bid for the [2020] Olympics" (an event that was ultimately postponed due to COVID-19) (Yu 2020, 153). As the Olympics are an Imperial and/or nationalistic institution themselves, we see here the ways in which the goals of empire and nation are built on the subjugation and displacement of the most vulnerable members of society – the unhoused, the subsistence workers, and the working class.¹ These groups make up what Guy Standing has called 'the precariat', a class that "cannot be professionalised because they cannot specialise and they cannot construct a steady improvement in depth of competence or experience" (2011, 23). Kazu is a skilled labourer, but his skills are entirely beholden to an expansionist state that continues building leisure amenities. He has no way of owning his own labour, or the products of it. The reader can see in this text the link Yu draws between Kazu's invisibility (and that of those who share his class) and his indispensability to the creation of Japan's national self-image. In doing this, Yu also indicates the ways that Kazu's ties to Japan mirror those of the emperor. Yu deliberately has the important moments of Kazu's life matching the (now former) emperor – they were born in the same year, their sons were born on the same day. More than this, Kazu receives news of his son's death while "digging out the future site of Sukagawa City Hall's tennis court with a pickaxe" (Yu 2020, 49). At the time (the early 1980s) this would have had "strong associations with the imperial family" for the people of Japan as "it was on a tennis court that the...emperor met his bourgeois future wife" (Iwata-Weickgennant 2019, 187). For those familiar with this background, Kazu's backbreaking manual labour actively supports and indeed facilitates the life of the former emperor and, moreover, ensures the continuation of the imperial family. Yu highlights that the contemporary modern democracy of Japan is founded on Kazu's body, and on the bodies of many like him – the manual labourers and precarious workers who literally and figuratively build and maintain Japan's existence as a global power in the twenty-first century.

The emperor is the *objet petit a*, "the object-cause of desire" (Žižek 2010, 68), of Kazu's precarious labouring classes and vice versa. Kazu's relationship with the emperor is representative of the "ultimate 'cause' of power" which "is the *objet a*, the object-cause of desire, the surplus-enjoyment by means of which power 'bribes' those it holds in its sway" (Žižek 2010, 400). By this mechanism the "*objet a* is given form in the (unconscious) fantasies of the subjects of power" (Žižek 2010, 400). This can be seen in *Tokyo Ueno Station* through the way that Kazu ties his own life to the life of the emperor, up until the moment that he realises the fundamental disjunction between the two men. When Kazu sees the emperor smile a smile "that had never known sin or shame", the outcome of "[a] life that had never known struggle, envy, or aimlessness, one that had lived the same seventy-three as [Kazu] had", Kazu loses both his faith in the *objet a* represented by the emperor and, consequently, in his own life (Yu 2020, 168; 169). Immediately following this one-sided interaction Kazu commits suicide, evidence of the "obscure 'feedback mechanisms' – between the subjects of power

and its holders – [that] regulate the subjects’ subordination, such that if they are disturbed the power structure may lose its libidinal grip and dissolve” (Žižek 2010, 400). Without faith in the imperial structure of power, Kazu can no longer live within the unjust system that has so brutally exploited him in the name of the emperor.

Ultimately, Kazu sacrifices his life to the railway that describes and constructs the discursive spaces that make up the city of Tokyo, given that “rail travel commonly structures the life of city-dwellers and their spatial understanding of the city” (Mooney 2018, 206). The symbolism of the railway in *Tokyo Ueno Station* (as indicated by its English translation title) is also linked to the nationalist project of the Olympics. Like Tokyo’s Haneda airport, the famous ‘bullet train’ known as the Tōkaidō Shinkansen was inaugurated just before the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, ushering in Japan’s age of technological and economic modernity on the international stage (Abel 2019, 542). At the time the fastest train in the world, the bullet train served multiple cultural, aesthetic, and political functions. It assured Japan’s position as a pioneer of urban civil engineering and transportation and made Japan smaller in the minds of its own citizens by making the once-distant prefectures newly close and accessible. It reorganised Tokyo into “the new vision of a layered urban space that could incorporate new transportation infrastructure to facilitate mobility within and beyond the city” (Abel 2019, 536). Representations and visions of Tokyo began to organise themselves around these multi-layered transport hubs, serving different cultural and social functions. To Kazu, the hub of Ueno Station and its neighbouring park put him into contact with members of Tokyo society from a variety of social strata – salarymen, upper middle-class women, students, and other homeless persons – becoming a metaphorical representation of the layered class society that lives on top of and amongst each other in the physically layered urban space of Tokyo. The contentious urban organisation indicated by Tokyo’s railway infrastructure obliquely references the constant crisis of national capitalism. It is not only that it is the train that ferries Kazu slowly but surely to his death, but the very fact of these tracks calls to mind the “feeling of alienation that accompanies the industrial machine domination of the human” that inflected much of the early writing on the bullet train and which “undercut celebratory images of harmonious progress” (Abel 2019, 548). The railways that motivate, mobilise, and demarcate the space of *Tokyo Ueno Station* are an ambiguous symbol. They are both an image of the triumph of nationally supported capitalism/engineering over Japan’s very landscape and a symbol of human disaffection and alienation. That the novel ends with visceral images of what can happen when one neglects to factor in Japan’s natural landscape is a hint as to which side Yu may favour.

When Kazu throws himself under the train from Ueno to Ikebukuro (both stations on the Yamanote commuter loop that rings and describes central Tokyo) he becomes a ghost in Ueno Park, instead of being given entry into Nirvana.

After spending three years haunting the park, he becomes untethered from the Tokyo landmark. In these final pages, which take place during the time immediately preceding the 3/11 tsunami, he sees locations from his childhood, “[r]ice fields...watered, freshly planted...the Jōban Line...going from Haranomachi to Kashima...the Niida River...” (Yu 2020, 176). It is during this out of body experience that he returns first to Migitahama, a beach he “had known since childhood”, before walking to Kitamigita, the village in which he “was born and raised” (Yu 2020, 176-177). Untethered from the material realities of his body, his spirit briefly becomes a semi-omniscient lens through which to view the traumatic, destructive event of the 3/11 disaster. This is illustrative of the ways that “[t]he phenomenon of simultaneously being *physically present in one time but affectively connected to another time* [which] can cause the cognitive and contextual disorientation of haunting” (Foster 2012, 16). In this sense, Kazu was *always* both haunted and haunting – a spectre of the post-war Japanese underclass who were served by neither the Imperial regime nor the post-war economic miracle, but nevertheless are affectively connected to and implicated by both. His fatal interaction with the train – his suicide – is a tragic metaphor for “the sentiments of the people who felt dispossessed by Japan’s modernity”, represented here (as it has been since the Meiji period) by the train (Foster 2012, 13).

Haunting and Memory as Ethico-Aesthetic Imperatives

Much of Kazu’s ghostly day is spent watching people near “the Statue of Times Forgotten [時忘れじの塔, Toki Wasureji no To, lit. Time Unforgotten Tower]. This is the memorial to the victims of the firebombing of Tokyo”, during which American B-29s “dropped seventeen hundred incendiary bombs on the most densely populated, working-class part of the city” (Yu 2020, 45). This led to the deaths of more than a hundred thousand people, making it the single deadliest air-raid of World War Two. According to the novel, Ueno Park is actually a mass grave several times over, including 7,800 victims of the Bombing of Tokyo who “were brought to Ueno Park and buried here” (Yu 2020, 46). The almost-unmarked mass grave of the working-class firebombing victims is contrasted against the Suribachiyama, “thought to be a funeral mound...which resembles an overturned mortar” (Yu 2020, 98). Burial mounds such as this are presumed to be tombs of forgotten high-ranking officials. In the case of the Suribachiyama, an unknown aristocrat is memorialised in the centre of Tokyo to this day, while mere metres away the bodies of hundreds of unremembered members of the working class lie buried and largely without memorialisation. It is no wonder, then, that Ueno Park is haunted. This haunting, exemplified through Kazu’s ghost, represents the absent present of those denied by capitalist modernity, whose experience of crisis (which lurks around corners for all of us) makes them unacknowledgable within a system that can neither tolerate the concept of

victims of risk, nor survive without them. To speak of ghosts, and conjure the spectre of the unwanted other, is “to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us [...] in the name of *justice*” (Derrida 1993, xviii). Kazu watches those events that shape Japan after his death: more Olympics, the Tōhōku Earthquake, the Fukushima Daiichi meltdown, and the human fallout of increasing capitalist deregulation that he himself was at the forefront of. He becomes the “spectral *someone other* [who] *looks at us*” so that “we feel ourselves being looked at by it, outside of any synchrony, even before and beyond any look on our part, according to an absolute anteriority” (Derrida 1993, 6) and which, in looking, holds us to account, forcing us to reckon with them.

Kazu’s haunting of Ueno Imperial Gift Park marks an “encounter with the specter [which] marks the point at which multiple temporalities meet and cross” (Shaw 2018, 23). This is stylistically and formally shown by Yu’s overlapping pages of Kazu’s life, as well as the historical anecdotes woven throughout. The very existence of Kazu’s ghost “signals towards a legacy as well as to a promise of something to come, drawing attention to the structuring role of absence” (Shaw 2018, 23). Kazu ensures the legacy stolen from him by the abrupt death of his son, and later the violent drowning of his granddaughter, by becoming his own unseen memorial in Ueno Park. This is the only memorial Kazu is afforded. The unremembered poor live (and die) cheek-by-jowl with Japanese aristocracy throughout Yu’s novel. As has already been indicated, Kazu and the now-former Emperor Akihito are born in the same year, and their sons are born on the same day – February 23rd, 1960 (Yu 2020, 36). Unlike Akihito’s son Naruhito, who would eventually accede to the Chrysanthemum Throne of Japan in 2019 following the abdication of his father, Kazu’s son Kōichi dies in 1981 at the age of 21. The triumphs of Akihito’s life are mirrored by the quiet but continuous devastation of Kazu’s. This mirroring does not indicate a traditionally understood dichotomy or separation between the rich and the poor (although this is explored) but, rather, the ways in which the devastation of those victimised by ‘progress’ both live alongside those who benefit and are indeed partly *responsible* for the successes of those lucky enough to be born with easy access to wealth and security.

Kazu’s haunting is a scalar telescoping. Matthew Fuller and Olga Goriunova, working from Felix Guattari and Mikhail Bakhtin, describe this telescoping as an “ethico-aesthetic paradigm” (1995, 8), which is:

[o]ne of the ways in which ethico-aesthetics is of value is the way it provides for a means of thinking about events, things, processes, and dynamics as they occur across more than one scale...[e]thico-aesthetics...is a transversal scale that provides a means for thinking about scales in an appropriately polyphonic manner, and one that is required by its own consistency to be alert to variation. (2019, xxv)

The scalar disjunction found in *Tokyo Ueno Station* articulates this polyphonic approach to the scales that ethico-aesthetics provides. The temporality of Yu's novel functions across multiple registers of fast- and slow-time, speeding across decades of Japanese history before crawling to a halt as Kazu watches two middle class women walk through an art exhibition. This scalar whiplash creates a sense of all-at-once-ness that mirrors the contemporary sensation of constant crisis, whereby previous tragedies (some very old) leak into the present in unexpectedly catastrophic or traumatic ways. *Tokyo Ueno Station's* temporality operates on the level of an ethico-aesthetic emergency text, in so far as Mikhail Bakhtin and Felix Guattari describe ethico-aesthetics as “a conjugation of aesthetics and questions of powers and the interarticulations of beings, ecologies, and forms of life, in which sensation and perception, following moves toward embodied and ecological cognition, circulate” (Fuller and Goriunova 2019, xii). The bricolage-style narrative Yu constructs draws together Japanese social and military history, disparate religious interactions, French paintings of roses, the brief social lives of Tokyo's middle class, the small hurts and large injustices perpetrated against the houseless, nuclear fallout and environmental disasters, which are seemingly disconnected, but all come together as they pass through and around Kazu's sphere of vision. Throughout all of this, Kazu is hurtled throughout time, from the sense memory of his son's death and the death of his wife, to his own suicide, soundtracked by the consistent interjection of the incoming train announcement. Yu describes Kazu's orientation towards temporality as “nothing as sweet as nostalgia [懐かしさ or *natsukashii*] or a longing for bygone days [郷愁 or *Kyoushū*], just a constant absence from the present, an anger toward the future” (2020, 7), contrasting two different experiences of a kind of temporal longing.² Svetlana Boym, in *The Future of Nostalgia*, describes nostalgia as “a historical emotion” (2001, 7). Modern nostalgia sits contra to the very historical moment to which its longing is supposedly oriented. It “is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return”, a longing (*algia*, in the original Greek) “for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the Edenic unity of time and space before entry into history” (Boym, 2001 8).

Kazu's cultural and linguistic understanding of nostalgia, in the original Japanese, has an unequivocally positive association, a fond remembrance of a time now gone. Conceptually nostalgia is far more complex. As Kazu “retreated into the future, the only thing [he] could ever see was the past” (Yu 2020, 45). Yet he characterises this not as a longing but as a *displacement*: “a constant absence from the present” (Yu 2020, 17). He has become deterritorialized (in the Deleuzo-Guattarian sense) by the continued flows of capitalist-imperialist appropriation – literalized, on a macro-level, by Kazu's continued distance from his home in Tōhōku in the service of capitalist (re)construction of the Japanese landscape, as well as by his part-time eviction from Ueno Park for the Imperial visit that precedes his death. The nostalgia that Kazu positions himself against is a corollary of the atemporal experience he himself describes. Modern nostalgia

is longing for an absent (non-existent) past, while Kazu himself feels eternally absent from the present (a shifting moment that, it could be argued, has no true existential quality). Both cases do not indicate an atypical relationship to time and history but, rather, a way of understanding these things as *always already* complicated by their own invocation. Kazu's haunting, like his bitter, apparently non-nostalgic looking-backwards is not an injunction or the new appearance of a crisis, but instead functions to draw attention to "the ever-present role of the past in both the structure of haunting and the future of society" (Shaw 2018, 25). Although only referenced obliquely through an overheard radio program, Kazu's haunting shadows the nuclear spectre that has haunted Japan since 1945, returning after the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster with all the uncanny temporality of a revenant.

While the events at Fukushima were caused by a natural disaster, the 'triple disaster' (as 3/11 is known) could not have become a triple disaster without the aftereffects of American nuclear imperialism as visited upon Japan's poorest peoples. As explained by Jessica Hurley, while "the brutal historical resonance between the violent inauguration of the atomic age at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and its uncanny return to Japan at Fukushima Daiichi has been widely noted" thinking of "this resonance as a coincidence obscures the causal link between the two events, contributing to the regime of imperceptibility that surrounds the American nuclear complex" (2020, 204). The American-led push to nuclearize Japan was part of Dwight D. Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace program, an international PR campaign to rehabilitate the public image of the same nuclear processes that killed anywhere between 129,000 and 226,000 Japanese civilians less than two decades earlier.

The Fukushima disaster was not the first earthquake to raise the spectre of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Almost fifty years after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the catastrophic Kobe earthquake of 1995 "reintroduced long-dormant images of wartime Japan" which "sent tremors through historical and mnemonic archives" in a way that "rendered the atomic arena phantasmic and avisual" to haunt the Japanese present (Lippit, 2005 102). The avisual present of continual ruination in post-war Japan created and propagated the conditions of people like Kazu, who notes that "[t]o be homeless is to be ignored when people walk past while still being in full view of everyone" (Yu 2020, 147). This is an "[i]nvisibility [that] functions not as the negation of visibility but as a form of visibility given to be seen, but unseen" (Lippit 2005, 84). Kazu and his fellow unhoused are "[v]isual but invisible" (Lippit 2005, 84), until Kazu loses even this visuality. His lack of living body breaks the visual chain completely, so that he "can't watch people anymore" and yet feels like he is "watching intently" (Yu 2020, 43). Like the spectre, there is a sense in which the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster "*begins by coming back*" (Derrida 1994, 11). The haunting refusal to directly address Tōhoku earthquake and the nuclear disaster it led to throughout most of the novel join with Kazu's material and metaphysical

haunting of Ueno Imperial Gift Park throughout *Tokyo Ueno Station* to critique and concretise the disastrous recursive temporality that underlies Japan's economic 'miracle', its reliance on self-serving American guilt and the exploitation of the labouring class from under-served regions such as Fukushima prefecture.

Ruination

The ongoing interactions between historical, personal, and future acts of displacement and 'slow violence' in *Tokyo Ueno Station* are representative of the ways in which Ann Laura Stoler reads "'ruination' as an active, ongoing process that allocates imperial debris differentially" and further reads "*ruin* as a violent verb that unites apparently disparate moments, places, and objects" (2013, 7). This is most clearly explicated in the intersection between Kazu's suicide in Ueno station and the catastrophic devastation being caused by Fukushima, over 200 kilometres away.

Kazu's microcosm of ruination is seen through his engagement with discarded items and people who have been marginalised (or discarded) by the economic system they live within. He succinctly sums up the processual nature of ruination by describing the common experiences of homelessness he encounters. His thesis on becoming homeless is thus: [i]f you fall into a pit, you can climb out, but once you slip from a sheer cliff, you cannot step firmly into a new life again. The only thing that can stop you from falling is the moment of your death except, for Kazu, even the moment of his death does not detach him from his own ruination. (Yu 2020, 84).

Kazu's life and works – even after death – amount to nothing but a constant processual experience of ruination and the debris of late-stage capitalist production. He describes the economic activities in which he participates in the final stage of his life (Yu 2020, 84). These include taking "manga and weekly magazines from the recycling bins at the station" to sell to second-hand bookshops for "a few dozen yen each" and "picking up discarded cans from the roadside, from the bushes in the park, or from bins" (Yu 2020, 84; 85). This economy of detritus is mirrored in Kazu's own living quarters, which, to his dismay, when packed up looks "like nothing but a pile of trash" as "[t]he materials that made up [his] hut – the tarp, the cardboard – were all things that someone else had once thrown away" (Yu 2020, 155). While it is simple to read this equation between recyclable materials and homeless people as a reductive statement framing the homeless community as 'discarded' people, the final images of the tsunami that:

swept over the pines, raising clouds of dust as it rolled up boats, smashed into trees, washed away fields, tore through houses, crushed gardens, swallowed up cars, felled gravestones, ripped apart roofs and walls of homes, glass from windows, fuel from boats, gasoline from cars, tetrapods, vending

machines, futons, tatami, stove-tops, desks, chairs, horses, cows, chickens, dogs, cats, men, women, the elderly, children. (Yu 2020, 179)

indicates the potential for a deeper reading. It is not that Kazu's engagement with ruination is other-than-standard or that it exists outside of the mainstream operations of the culture in which he lives. This ruination – this becoming-detritus – is the haunting other side of the modern consumer economy. Given a significant enough crisis, any house ends up looking “like nothing but a pile of trash” (Yu 2020, 155). The process of ruination is not an unanticipated cataclysm but is instead the constant state of matter. To live amongst continual crisis is to live amongst increasingly visible piles of trash; to watch the contours of your own life become nothing but discarded objects amongst piles of other objects.

Kazu becomes Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, his face “turned towards the past” seeing “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage” (1968, 257). Like this angel, Kazu “would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed” but a “storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward” (Benjamin 1968, 257-258). Kazu becomes both victim of and witness to the storm that “we call progress” (Benjamin 1968, 257-258). He is the careful yet unconscious archivist of the detritus of a successful economic capitalist system. He is part of a class that is both responsible for the famous Japanese economic miracle of the latter half of the twentieth century and its least visible yet most pervasive victim. Kazu calls to mind Walter Benjamin's “call to see the monuments of capitalist production and consumption *also* as piles of waste, productive of profit and of suffering” (Chari 2013, 135). The way that Kazu is used and discarded by the machine of Japanese capitalism is in fact an essential factor in the ‘successes’ of that very same economic ‘miracle’. Ruination is not an unintended side-effect: it is both integral to the system of late capitalism and is also its inevitable outcome.

Conclusion

Yu's novel uses Kazu as a cipher for the class he represents: it cannot be said that his experience is ‘individual’. In the original Japanese, “the narrative mode [switches] from omniscient narration to first-person narration (the protagonist refers to himself as *jibun*) and back” (Iwata-Weickgennant 2019 193). Due to the differences in grammatical structure between Japanese and English, this fluid movement is difficult to grasp but, knowing that it exists in the original text, it can be inferred that Kazu's individual perspective represents a class of people – Japan's working poor. An ethico-aesthetic reading of *Tokyo Ueno Station* “provides for a means of thinking about events, things, processes, and dynamics as they occur across more than one scale” (Fuller and Goriunova, 2019 xxv), and indeed, across the subjective-objective or the individual/collective boundary. An ethico-aesthetic reading of this novel recognises that trauma (the trauma of 3/11, of the

bombing of Tokyo, of the constant neoliberal humiliations of life under capitalism in Japan and around the globe) is *both* collective *and* individual and, therefore, Kazu's experience is both singular and representative. Kazu is a synecdoche for Fukushima Prefecture and the Tōhoku region, which was "known for its stagnant growth, depopulation, and historic poverty" (Birmingham and McNeill 2012, 28). To join the wider economic juggernaut of post-War Japan and support their wealthier and more economically successful neighbours in Tokyo, Fukushima exchanged safety for jobs in the form of the Fukushima Daiichi power plant. From the day it became operational until the day it became an environmental toxic wasteland, this nuclear power plant did not provide a single watt of energy to the people of Tōhoku. Kazu is a cipher for his prefecture, for his class, and for the underclass of those who continue to help build and yet are ignored by the Japanese nation state (and by so many other nation-states the world over) in favour of multinational corporate interests. And yet, Kazu is ultimately and devastatingly isolated. This community for which he has inadvertently become a voice, a viewfinder, offers no solace and little support, and yet it is a community that we are all either already in or at risk of joining – these risks are always coming home. The irony of reading *Tokyo Ueno Station* as a collectivist posttraumatic text is that the root of the trauma within the text itself is the individualist thrust of juggernaut capitalism that, if not *creating* Kazu's isolation conditions, nevertheless underwrites and reinforces them. Kazu is given constant (often unwanted or unsought after) insight into the lives of those who pass through the park while he exists, ghostly and unnoticed both before and after his death, at the margins of these people's lives.

Notes

¹ See John Hargreaves, "Olympism and Nationalism: Some Preliminary Consideration", *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1992, p. 119-135.

² Thank you to translator Morgan Giles, who provided me with these translations and some contextual information behind them via email.

Works Cited

- Abel, Jessamyn R. 2019. "The Power of a Line: How the Bullet Train Transformed Urban Space." *asia critique* 27(3): 531-555.
- Beck, Ulrich. 1992. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. Trans. Mark Ritter. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1968. *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books.
- Bermel, Albert. 1997. *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty*. London: Bloomsbury.

- Birmingham, Lucy and David McNeill. 2012. *Strong in the Rain: Surviving Japan's Earthquake, Tsunami, and Fukushima Nuclear Disaster*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Boym, Svetlana. 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Chari, Sharad. 2013. "Detritus in Durban: Polluted Environs and the Biopolitics of Refusal." In *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, edited by Laura Ann Stoler, 131-161. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. 1983. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Milton Park: Routledge.
- Esslin, Martin. 1961. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. New York: Vintage.
- Foster, Michael Dylan. 2012. "Haunting Modernity: *Tanuki*, Trains, and Transformation in Japan." *Asian Ethnology* 71(1): 3-29.
- Fuller, Matthew and Olga Guriunova. 2019. *Bleak Joys: Aesthetics of Ecology & Impossibility*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Guattari, Felix. 1995. *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*. Trans. Julian Pefanis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hurley, Jessica. 2020. *Infrastructures of Apocalypse: American Literature and the Nuclear Complex*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hynes, Maria. 2013. "The Ethico-Aesthetics of life: Guattari and the Problem of Bioethics." *Environment and Planning A* 45(8): 1929-1943.
- Iwasaka, Michiko and Barre Toelken. 1994. *Ghosts and the Japanese: Cultural Experience in Japanese Death Legends*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Lippit, Akira. 2005. *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Iwata-Weickgenannt, Kristina. 2019. "The Roads to Disaster, or Rewriting History from the Margins – Yu Miri's *JR Ueno Station Park Exit*." *Contemporary Japan* 31(2): 180-196.
- Mooney, Suzanne. 2018. "Constructed Underground: Exploring Non-visible Space Beneath the Elevated Tracks of the Yamanote Line." *Japan Forum* 30(2): 205-223.
- Rupprecht, Caroline. 2016. "Haunted Spaces: History and Architecture in Yoko Tawada." *South Central Review* 33(3): 111-126.
- Shaw, Katy. 2018. *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Standing, Guy. 2011. *The Precariat: The Dangerous New Class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Stoler, Laura Ann. 2013. "Introduction: 'The Rot Remains': From Ruins to Ruination." In *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, edited by Laura Ann Stoler, 1-35. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Wenzel, Jennifer. 2019. *The Disposition of Nature*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Yu, Miri. 2020. *Tokyo Ueno Station*. Trans. Morgan Giles. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2010. *Living in the End Times*. London: Verso Books.

Ruby Niemann recently received her doctorate in English Literature from the University of Adelaide with a dissertation on Anthropocene theory in the recent works of Margaret Atwood. Most recently her work appeared in *Adapting Margaret Atwood: The Handmaid's Tale and Beyond*, edited by Shannon Wells-Lassagne and Fiona McMahon. Her essay on viral and nuclear adaptation was recently awarded the Contemporary Women's Writing Essay prize.