

## Local Theater Responding to a Global Issue: 3.11 Seen from Japan's Periphery

Barbara GEILHORN

Scrutinizing local theater productions from Aomori, this article looks into the role of the arts as a critical voice after the 2011 triple disaster. The Aomori perspective is of special interest in this context. While the city was hardly afflicted by the calamity, Aomori is part of Japan's northern periphery and home to nuclear facilities, thereby sharing central problems with the disaster zones such as economic hardship, depopulation, and the threat of nuclear contamination. I analyze two plays by Hatasawa Seigo, a local playwright, director, and high school teacher. The first, *Moshiita: Moshi kōkō yakyū no joshi manējā ga Aomori no "itako" o yondara* (Moshiita: What if the Manager of a High School Baseball Team Called in an Aomori *itako* Shaman, 2011), was written for and performed by the high school drama club under Hatasawa's supervision and won the National High School Drama Competition Prize 2012. Originally planned for performances in consolatory visits to the afflicted areas, it was eventually staged nationwide. The second, *Saraba! Genshiryoku robo Mutsu: Ai · senshihen* (Farewell to Nuclear Robot Mutsu: Soldiers of Love, 2014) is a newly arranged version of a play written for Hatasawa's troupe Watanabe Genshirō Shōten (Nabegen) in 2012. The satirical piece is rare in that it focuses on the global issue of nuclear waste disposal. Analyzing two plays by this local director, who is gaining recognition and reputation on a national level, this article aims to scrutinize how these performances relate to site-specific memories and stories and construct narratives that go against the dominant Tokyo perspective.

**Keywords:** contemporary theater, regional theater, school theater, Hatasawa Seigo, emotional healing (*iyashi*), processing trauma, sociopolitical critique, nuclear criticism, nuclear waste disposal, ecocriticism

### Introduction

The Fukushima disaster triggered deep shock waves that coursed through the Japanese social and cultural sphere. In addition to the tremendous trauma and physical damages, some key problems of contemporary Japan came to the fore. Artists of various fields felt a need to react to the traumatic events through their work. With the ability to tell peoples' stories and create a public sphere that evokes temporary communities, performing

arts are highly effective in helping people come to terms with individual and collective suffering and, at the same time, have the potential to trigger critical engagement. How artists address these issues and which aspects they choose to tackle depends heavily on the artist's positionality, to name but one crucial factor. Productions originating in places removed from the disaster zones, such as Tokyo, tend to address issues related to 3/11 from a national perspective. For example, Takayama Akira's 高山明 *Refarendamu purojekuto* レファレンダム プロジェクト (Referendum Project, 2011) and Okada Toshiki's *Genzaichi* 現在地 (Current Location, 2012) are highly political interventions in this respect. Takayama (b. 1969) is known for creating theater that does not appear to be theater. His approach is often compared to the work of Terayama Shūji 寺山修司 (1935–1983), the infamous avant-garde Japanese playwright, filmmaker and poet, who took theater to the streets in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>1</sup> *Refarendamu purojekuto* consisted of a truck that was sent to locations all over Japan. Rather than directly addressing the political or straightforwardly voting for or against the use of nuclear power, the project attempted to collect a variety of post-Fukushima voices, including those of high school students from Tokyo and Fukushima, invited guest speakers, and audience members.<sup>2</sup> *Genzaichi* by Okada Toshiki 岡田利規 (b. 1973) dwells on the dispute of *fūhyō higai* 風評被害 (harmful rumors) and reveals the deep fault lines running through post-disaster Japan. Okada is one of the most interesting of the younger generation playwrights and directors in Japan and has a decisive impact on the image of contemporary Japanese theater abroad. The play translates his concept of “recessive reality,” a kind of fiction that threatens reality by proposing an alternative.<sup>3</sup> Although both Takayama and Okada refer to the calamity in a rather subtle and indirect fashion, this can be considered a rather effective approach in post-disaster Japan where direct criticism runs the risk of being rejected as *fukinshin* 不謹慎 (indiscretion).

Furthermore, young theater people from metropolitan regions, such as Nakatsuru Akihito 中津留章仁 (b. 1974), an actor, playwright, director, and founder of the TRASHMASTERS theater company, traveled to the disaster zones to serve as volunteers and/or do research for the purpose of subsequently producing works that aim at directly transmitting knowledge about the status quo in Tōhoku to their audiences. His play *Haisui no kotō* 背水の孤島 (Backwater Island, 2011), for example, combines human drama with social critique and was inspired by the author's volunteer activities in Ishinomaki, a town particularly affected by the calamity. The title (literally “A remote island that has its back up against the wall”) points at the state of Japan in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, performances by local playwrights, such as Ōnobe Pelican's 大信ベリカン *Kiruannya to Yūko san* キル兄にゃとU子さん (Kiruannya and Uko, 2011), often raise questions of immediate relevance to people living in the disaster area and attempt to provide a space for processing the trauma triggered by the catastrophe. Ōnobe (b. 1975) is playwright and director of the Manrui Toriking Ichiza 満塁鳥王一座 troupe in Fukushima City. His documentary play *Kiruannya to Yūko san* engages in the cultural work of transforming individual suffering into collective memory. Ōnobe has constructed

---

1 Ridgely 2010.

2 Iwaki 2017.

3 Geilhorn 2017.

4 Performing Arts Network 2012b.

a narrative that goes against images of “Fukushima” as a mere disaster zone without neglecting contentious issues of the nuclear catastrophe or uncritically supporting slogans of quick recovery.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, the viewpoint of Aomori-based artists occupying a position lingering somewhere between the local and the national perspective is of special interest. While the city was hardly afflicted by the calamity, Aomori is part of Japan’s northern periphery and home to nuclear facilities, thereby sharing central problems with the disaster zones, including economic hardship, depopulation, and the threat of nuclear contamination.<sup>6</sup> The power complex in Rokkasho 六ヶ所, which is notorious for a never-ending series of accidents, was flagged to be the first facility in Japan geared for processing uranium.<sup>7</sup> However, for various reasons, including the stricter safety standards established by the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) after the nuclear meltdown in March 2011, the date of its entry into operation has been postponed—for the twenty-third time—to 2018.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the various pending issues concerning nuclear power in northern Japan make contemplation and debate highly relevant and topical.

Similar to other nations that obtain a large share of energy from nuclear power, Japan has traditionally built its nuclear plants in remote, less developed areas that depend on the jobs and subsidies related to the facilities and where civil society is considered less likely to mobilize resistance.<sup>9</sup> While the far north has long been designated as an “inner colony” of the Japanese nation state, exploited to provide industrial centers with food and cheap labor, in recent decades it has also become a supply base for the increasing amounts of energy needed for the country’s economic growth.<sup>10</sup> What the philosopher Takahashi Tetsuya has called *gisei no shisutemu* 犠牲のシステム (sacrificial system) is a collusion between companies and Japanese policymakers to assign the tremendous risks of nuclear energy to peripheral regions such as northern Japan, whose safety and future are put at risk for the benefit of the nation and continued corporate profit.<sup>11</sup>

My article, which is part of a bigger project on theatrical responses to the 11 March disasters,<sup>12</sup> analyzes two plays by Hatasawa Seigo 畑澤聖悟 (b. 1964).<sup>13</sup> The playwright, director, and high school teacher was born in Akita Prefecture. After moving to Aomori

---

5 Geilhorn 2018.

6 Aomori Prefecture has one active nuclear power plant in Higashi ōdōri 東大通り and four more reactors under construction or in the planning stage. At the time of the 11 March disasters, Higashi ōdōri 1 was shut down due to regular safety inspections. Now the restart of the idle reactor will depend on the assessment of active fault lines found to be running under the plant (*The Japan Times*, 28 November 2015). The work at the Ōma 大間 nuclear plant, the prefecture’s new site for nuclear reactors, resumed in October 2012 after the project was suspended in the aftermath of the calamity (*The Japan Times*, 12 March 2013).

7 The storage pools of the Rokkasho Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Facility are already near full capacity with spent fuel rods from reactors around the nation. Companies might be forced to shut down reactors if the Rokkasho plant can no longer accept additional fuel (*Asahi Shinbun*, 31 October 2014). Furthermore, the stockpiles of plutonium could be used to produce nuclear weapons, which makes the reprocessing of spent fuel a highly contested issue that has severe repercussions with regard to Japan’s relations with neighboring countries as well as with the United States.

8 *The Japan Times*, 5 January 2016.

9 Aldrich 2012.

10 Hopson 2013.

11 Takahashi 2012.

12 I am much obliged to the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) for providing me with the funding to conduct research in Japan and to write this article.

13 For further information, see Onoe 2014a, Performing Arts Network 2012a, or the website of his troupe.

City, he founded his troupe Watanabe Genshirō Shōten 渡辺源四郎商店 (Nabegen なべげん for short) in 2005. Hatasawa also writes plays for other troupes and is the author of award-winning radio dramas. The two productions I will examine here gained local and national attention, leading to their invitation to perform at the important Festival/Tokyo 2014 (F/T 2014). The first, *Moshiita: Moshi kōkō yakyū no joshi manējā ga Aomori no "itako" o yondara* もしイタ: もし高校野球の女子マネージャーが青森の「イタコ」を呼んだら (Moshiita: What if the Manager of a High School Baseball Team Called in an Aomori *itako* Shaman?, 2011) was written for and performed by the Aomori Chūō Kōkō Engekibu 青森中央高校演劇部 (Aomori Prefecture Central High School Drama Club) under Hatasawa's supervision and won the *Dai 58 kai zenkoku kōtō gakkō engeki taikai* 第58回全国高等学校演劇大会 (National High School Drama Competition prize, 2012).<sup>14</sup> Originally, the play was to be performed during consolatory visits to the afflicted areas, but the play was ultimately staged nationwide. The second, *Saraba! Genshiryoku robo Mutsu: Ai · senshihen* さらば! 原子力ロボむつ: 愛・戦士編 (Farewell to Nuclear Robot Mutsu: Soldiers of Love, 2014), is a newly arranged version of a play written for Hatasawa's troupe *Nabegen* in 2012.<sup>15</sup> The satirical piece addresses the problem of nuclear waste disposal. By analyzing two plays by a local director gaining recognition at a national level, my article aims to examine how these performances relate to site-specific memories and stories and construct narratives that go against the dominant Tokyo perspective.

### 1. *Moshiita: What if the Manager of a High School Baseball Team Called in an Aomori itako Shaman?*

*Moshiita*, a play for high school theater, originated from Hatasawa's shock and consternation in the face of the disaster and his thoughts about what he, as a citizen of northern Japan hardly affected by the calamity, could do for the people living in the disaster zone. The play won extraordinary acclaim: it was very well-attended in afflicted areas and was soon frequently performed nationwide.<sup>16</sup> Although *Moshiita* was initially intended to be staged for the immediate audiences in the disaster zone and for a limited time only, Hatasawa now regards the play as an instrument in helping to keep alive the memory of the catastrophe and communicating the feelings of those affected to people far away from the disaster zone.<sup>17</sup> To this aim, along with the performances at Festival/Tokyo 2014, he also held a workshop for Tokyo high school students in August of the same year. In my opinion, *Moshiita* has the potential to offer students from Aomori and beyond the opportunity to learn much more than performance skills. In the ideal scenario, the performance triggers the students' awareness and they would come to realize the existence and importance of values that transcend the extreme consumerism that frames their everyday life.<sup>18</sup>

14 Hatasawa 2014a and Watanabe Genshirō Shōten 2014.

15 Watanabe Genshirō Shōten 2014; Hatasawa 2014c.

16 Hatasawa 2014b, p. 125. Between September 2011 and November 2014, *Moshiita* was staged fifty six times (Kudō 2014, p. 6). According to Hatasawa (Onoue 2014a, p. 4), the critical attitude in some areas of the disaster zone where the play was being performed changed with the play's increasing recognition.

17 Onoue 2014a, p. 4.

18 Kudō (2014, p. 6) provides some reactions of high school students participating in the performances in the stricken areas shortly after the disaster hit.



Figure 1. *Moshiita*. All photos by Kazuyuki Matsumoto. Festival/Tokyo 2014.

*Moshiita*, which premiered in 2011, is a story of growth and maturation. The play centers on the Aomori Saigawa High School baseball team, whose members have lost their motivation after being repeatedly defeated in high school tournaments, and Kazusa, who has just been transferred to their school from a village heavily damaged by the Great East Japan earthquake and ensuing tsunami. Kazusa was a passionate baseball player on his former high school team, but being the only team member to survive the catastrophe, he feels conflicted about continuing to play baseball. Shiori nonetheless succeeds in convincing the traumatized Kazusa to join the Aomori team. She also takes care to hire a much-needed coach capable of leading the team on the road to success: her grandmother Takahashi, an *itako* イタコ or female shaman for which northern Japan is famous. Under Takahashi's guidance, the team undergoes a month of strenuous training to acquire the ability of *hotoke oroshi* 仏降ろし (spirit possession) (figure 1). Possessed by the spirit of Sanemura Eiji, a legendary Japanese pitcher from the 1930s, Kazusa leads his team to win one match after the other until he loses his magical powers and returns to his former self in the final game.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the play's focus is not on winning. Rather, the central scene shows Kazusa surrounded by the spirits of his former team members playing baseball together for the last time.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of staging, the play is designed to be adaptable to different performance spaces: sports halls and community centers close to temporary shelters and housing sites in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Performing outside of conventional theaters, the students had to prepare everything by themselves, from setting the stage to arranging the chairs in the auditorium. Moreover, the student drama club did the advertising and on occasion even provided shuttle services for audience members. In many cases, students had to learn to adapt and react appropriately to new and unpredictable situations. Although

19 Sanemura Eiji was a member of Japan's first professional baseball league. He died as a soldier in 1944, at the age of twenty-seven (Kreindler n.d.).

20 For a detailed synopsis, see Performing Arts Network 2012a.



Figure 2. *Moshiita*. Festival/Tokyo 2014.

the city of Aomori provided some financial support, the costs were partly covered by the students themselves.<sup>21</sup>

In *Moshiita*, Hatasawa refrains from using any sort of stage sets, props, lighting, or sound effects. Students wear simple tracksuits as they would for physical education. A feature of the play is that all of the participating high school students are permanently on stage, with every student acting in various roles, including portraying stage design items or props such as trees, birds, or a chiming longcase clock. This adds to the dynamic and fast tempo of the play that has already been created by baseball practice scenes and game scenarios featuring numerous team members and cheerleaders, shouting, rooting for their team, and performing well-known baseball chants and cheers (figure 2).

Although *Moshiita* aims at providing solace to people living in affected areas by presenting the story of a winning team and displaying the energy and vigor of the young students, it should not be dismissed as a trite story of hope to trigger feelings of *iyashi* 癒し (emotional healing). By showing the protagonist overcoming his sense of guilt towards his dead baseball teammates and his efforts to go on living when so many people around him have died, the play addresses a crucial issue in the experience of trauma victims. *Moshiita* harkens back to works responding to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; in particular, it is reminiscent of Inoue Hisashi's (1934–2010) *Chichi to kuraseba* 父と暮らせば (*The Face of Jizō*).<sup>22</sup> The play depicts the anguish of a woman suffering from her sense of guilt after she had to leave her father trapped under the debris of their house in order to save her own life. It is only through conversations with her late father's spirit that she is finally open to find happiness in her own life. *Moshiita* is one of several plays written in the aftermath of the 11 March disaster that address the relationship between the living and

21 Hatasawa (2014b, p. 124) writes about problems in securing funding. For further details, see Kudō 2014, p. 6.

22 While the official English title is somewhat beside the point, the literal translation, "If [I still] lived with father," succinctly sums up the content of the play. *Chichi to kuraseba*, published in 1950 and first staged in 1994, was put on stage again after the Fukushima disaster. See Performing Arts Network 2007 for a synopsis of the play. Hatasawa is a great admirer of Inoue's oeuvre.



Figure 3. *Moshiita*. Festival/Tokyo 2014.

the dead.<sup>23</sup> However, Hatasawa's play is unique in that it stages their reunion. Arguing for survivors' obligation to go on living and carry on for the sake of those who are no longer alive, *Moshiita* hints at a path to overcome feelings of shame and opens up a road back to life.

The play is highly charged, with a local atmosphere evoking feelings of belonging on both sides of the stage: an *itako* shaman specific to the Aomori area serves as the means to convey the message of the play. The plot is set in Aomori City and the *itako* adds color by speaking in a strong local dialect. Moreover, by making an old woman the lynchpin of the play, *Moshiita* brings generations together in pursuing a common goal and appeals to the emotions of the elderly who comprise a large percentage of residents and audience members in disaster-stricken areas. The *itako* character also provides a good source of humor when skillfully performed by a young student (figure 3).

In a nutshell, Hatasawa created a space to realize small escapes from the harsh and bitter everyday reality in the disaster zone from the specific Aomori perspective and also provokes feelings of solidarity between people of two neighboring provinces excluded from economic development, but susceptible to suffering from the risks of natural disasters and nuclear power. However, *Moshiita* focuses on the implication of the earthquake and tsunami, omitting problems related to the use of nuclear energy and the threats of radioactive contamination, thereby considerably reducing the complexity of the 11 March calamity. This notwithstanding, Hatasawa should not be dismissed as an uncritical or apolitical playwright. The long-term consequences of the nuclear meltdowns are still extremely hard to assess, which makes the nuclear dimension of the disaster even more emotionally challenging than the effects of the earthquake and tsunami. Thus, Hatasawa's omission of these issues in *Moshiita* should be seen as an endeavor to provide solace to

23 For example, Okada Toshiki's *Jimen to yuka* 地面と床 (Ground and Floor, 2013; see Eckersall 2015) or Matsuda Masataka's *Antigone e no tabi no kiroku to sono jōen* (Record of a Journey to Antigone, 2012; see Poulton 2017), to name but a few.

audiences in stricken areas in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe. In contrast, harsh criticism of the foolhardiness that comes with the use of an energy source that is unmanageable and has consequences for generations to come when things do go wrong is the focus of the next play I will analyze.

## 2. *Saraba!* Farewell to Nuclear Robot Mutsu: Soldiers of Love

The Fukushima nuclear disaster shattered the myth pedaled by pro-nuclear governments and energy providers alike that Japanese reactors were safe. At the same time, it triggered general doubts in the Japanese public about the reliability of science and technology. Although the anti-nuclear movement in Japan can be traced back to the early postwar years, the long-term risks and problems caused by radioactive waste disposal were not addressed until the 1990s.<sup>24</sup> And it was only after the triple disaster that the broader public became aware of these issues. In this sociopolitical context, Hatasawa Seigo's *Saraba!* was a very timely intervention. The dark science fiction comedy with fairytale-like characteristics ridicules the human delusion of being able to manage a technology that will jeopardize life on earth for many thousands of years.

The play is the revised 2014 version of *Tobe! Genshiryoku robo Mutsu* 翔べ! 原子力ロボ むつ (Fly! Nuclear Robot Mutsu),<sup>25</sup> which premiered in Aomori in April 2012 and was then performed in Tokyo the following month.<sup>26</sup> Producing revised versions of earlier plays and adapting them for school theater productions are major characteristics of Hatasawa's work. This is due to his obligations as a high school teacher and the limited time he can dedicate to theater. Yet at the same time, this approach has the potential to further develop and broaden the perspectives of a given play, as will be shown in the following.

While Hatasawa has long been interested in the issue of nuclear power and the relationship between perpetrators and victims,<sup>27</sup> the subject matter was directly inspired by the Fukushima catastrophe. *Saraba!*—like *Moshiita*—is written from an Aomori perspective and aims at making audiences reconsider the risks of nuclear energy. In the new version, Hatasawa expands the theme of intergenerational justice and sharpens the conflict between Tokyo and the Japanese periphery. The former was definitely influenced by the playwright's work with the Aomori High School Drama Club.

Before analyzing the contents of the play in more detail, I would like to consider briefly the role of genre. *Saraba!* is unique in the way it deals with the delicate topic of reprocessing nuclear fuel and radioactive waste disposal, as I will argue later. However, similar to other artists before and after the triple disaster, Hatasawa utilizes science fiction to express his criticism of nuclear power.<sup>28</sup> Generally speaking, by reflecting on the potential and consequences of science and technology for future life on earth in an entertaining fashion,

---

24 Sugai 2009.

25 Watanabe Genshirō Shōten 2012. *Tobe! Genshiryoku robo Mutsu* was nominated for the renowned 57th Kishida Kunio Drama Award (*Kishida Kunio gikyokushō*) in 2013.

26 Suzuki 2012.

27 Hatasawa's *Inosento pipuru* イノセント・ピープル (Innocent People, premiered 2008, staged by Tokyo-based troupe Subaru) raises questions about the responsibility of the American scientists who constructed the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki without neglecting Japan's responsibility for the war. The play was later revised for the Aomori Prefecture Central High School Drama Club (Kudō 2014, p. 5).

28 Suter (2014) provides an analysis of selected works of post 3/11 science fiction literature and manga.





Figure 4. *Saraba!* Festival/Tokyo 2014.

science fiction can be considered a highly effective platform for social critique.<sup>29</sup> In the early aftermath of the 11 March disaster, Okada Toshiki's play *Genzaichi*, for example, relates to the genre's basic ability to challenge reality to consider alternatives to the status quo of Japanese society. Hatasawa Seigo uses the fantastic and comic potential of the genre to point at the absurdities of blind faith in science and technology.

*Saraba!* is set one thousand years into the future (3014) in the Kingdom of Apples, where agriculture and fishery are no longer possible. The story unfolds around Yōsuke, a mayor from one thousand years before (that is, the present day), who succeeded in convincing his people to support the innovative “Marvelously Unbelievable Total Separation Unit” (MUTSU), a robot that will reprocess nuclear waste and foster development in their rural area, hard hit by recession and depopulation. Yōsuke has agreed to be cryogenically frozen and then thawed in a millennium to watch over the future of what has been propagated as an absolutely safe technology. However, since the means to bring him back to life still have to be invented, Yōsuke can be read as a personification of the unconditional and unquestioning faith in the unlimited progress of science in general and in the safety of technology in particular. His presence hints at two central and recurrent topics of the play: the *anzen shinwa* 安全神話 (safety myth), crucial for the acceptance of nuclear power in a country that was the target of the first atomic bombs used by mankind, and the reckless attitude to defer the solution of serious problems related to this technology to later generations, hoping for a significant advancement of human capabilities.

During Yōsuke's one thousand years of sleep, the Kingdom of Apples has become exceedingly wealthy by accepting and storing spent fuel rods from all over the world. In addition, Mutsu has been instrumental in attacking and destroying Tokyo, and former citizens, seeking refuge in the Kingdom of Apples, have been enslaved. Rebelling against their exploitation, the refugee slaves reveal the dangers of the Mutsu technology. However, their rebellion fails and Yōsuke is cryogenically frozen again (figure 4). Another one

<sup>29</sup> Arai 2011.



Figure 5. *Saraba!* Festival/Tokyo 2014.

thousand years later, mankind has developed a new and even more dangerous technology to cope with the problems of Mutsu, but the hazard of radioactivity remains. Finally thawed after fifty thousand years, Yōsuke is the only human being on earth. He finds the Mutsu technology defunct, but the area still polluted by radiation.<sup>30</sup>

*Saraba!* is a highly dynamic, musical-like play with quick scenery changes facilitated by lighting. The plot is constructed as a centrifugal loop: the cycles of Yōsuke's travels through time get faster and faster, accelerating the tempo towards the climax of the play. Time and again, Yōsuke experiences *déjà vu*: Hatasawa's dystopia depicts humankind as unable to learn from past errors, repeating the same mistakes over and over again. The bleak contents are set in stark contrast to the carefree and whimsical mode of performance, the better to emphasize the insanity of the storyline. There are roughly forty performers singing and acting. *Saraba!* alludes to the film *Star Wars* (figure 5) and includes various songs that are well-known to the vast majority of the audience, among them the *Tetsuwan atomu* 鉄腕アトム (*Astro Boy*, literally Iron Arm Atom) theme song. In Japan, this famous manga character, created in 1951 by Tezuka Osamu (1928–1989), has to this day shaped the image of robots as friends of humankind. Promoted by a series of animated films and merchandising, *Astro Boy* soon evolved into a symbol for human-friendly technology in general, and the peaceful use of nuclear power in particular.<sup>31</sup> The *Astro Boy* song is played at the beginning and end of the play. Initially, it sets the play's amusing and credulous tone and alludes to its fantastic topic. At the end, the song conveys biting humor and expresses complete delusion when hummed by the lonely Yōsuke. Modern man's illusions about the manageability of nuclear power and his unconditional faith in the endless progress of humankind are revealed as wishful thinking.

30 What appears to be an inconceivably long period of time turns out to be rather tightly calculated, considering plutonium's half life of 24,400 years. An area polluted by plutonium would actually stay contaminated for about 250,000 years (Caldicott 2014, pp. 9–10).

31 Wagner 2011, p. 7.



Figure 6. *Soraba!* Festival/Tokyo 2014.

In terms of staging, Hatasawa was obviously influenced by the high school theater version he created of the original play. Costumes, stage sets and props, as well as sound effects are kept to a minimum. High school students perform group scenes or step in as the huge robot Mutsu alongside the Nabegen troupe actors. They add to the freshness and entertainment value of the performance, but are also part of the unpretentious attitude of the play, which presents a fantastical story featuring cute robots, queens, and kings (figure 6). However, the obvious parallels to reality can hardly be missed: although the story is set in the fictitious Kingdom of Apples, this is a barely hidden reference to Aomori Prefecture, whose main agricultural product is apples. Aomori residents will also be reminded of the hazardous Rokkasho reprocessing plant and Mimura Shingo 三村申吾, the prefecture's pro-nuclear governor, who easily won the election for his third term only a few months after the Fukushima meltdown.<sup>32</sup>

The robot's name Mutsu also sparks associations with the historical province Mutsu 陸奥, that once included the prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate, and Aomori, and roughly corresponds to the area most afflicted by the 11 March earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster. In addition, Mutsu also is an apple variety named after the province. Moreover, Mutsu City on the Shimokita Peninsula, the northern tip of Aomori Province on Japan's main island of Honshū, lent its name to another disaster in the country's nuclear energy policy. Mutsu, a nuclear-powered ship, was built in 1969 to explore the prospects of using nuclear energy as fuel in trading vessels. During a 1974 test run, the engine's radioactive fuel leaked into the sea, leading local fishermen, concerned with the contamination of their fishing grounds, to block the ship's return to the harbor. Although the government finally reached an agreement, the ship could not be repaired. It was not until 1990 that Mutsu finally became seaworthy, only to be decommissioned two years later without ever having carried cargo.<sup>33</sup> Thus, with Mutsu, Hatasawa created a multilayered

<sup>32</sup> Hayashi 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Zöllner 2011, p. 87.

symbol for the province's risk of future calamities. Although Aomori was hardly affected by previous nuclear disasters, they have unmistakably revealed the hazardous nature of nuclear power and the inaptitude of humankind to provide safety and security.

*Saraba!* shows the absurdities arising from a naïve faith in technology. People's delusion that humankind can control a high-risk technology is held up to ridicule. However, what seems completely ludicrous and insane on stage comes appallingly close to reality. Hatasawa critiques the implementation of nuclear power in one of Japan's major agricultural areas, which puts at risk the very livelihood of farmers and fishermen in the unforeseeable future. The imposition of a potentially harmful technology on later generations is a recurring issue in the play. Furthermore, the conflict between the northern periphery and the capital is a crucial subject. Hatasawa reveals this uneven symbiosis by turning the quasi-colonial relationship upside down. Although the play is written from the Aomori perspective, the prefecture is presented as a part of Tōhoku, sharing comparable risks with the areas devastated by the natural and manmade disasters. For the Tokyo performance, Hatasawa exacerbated the conflict between Tōhoku and Tokyo to include a scene in which the fictitious kingdom splits off from Japan, declares war on Tokyo, and plans to use the area as a permanent disposal site for spent fuel rods. In an interview with the *Asahi shinbun*, Hatasawa talked about his feelings that Japan's northern periphery has long been discriminated against and his intention to develop and extend this aspect of the play.<sup>34</sup>

Despite all the criticism of the central government's exploitation of Tōhoku, *Saraba!* does not neglect the involvement of the local stakeholders. Yōsuke is presented as a ruthless tactician, switching between political sides and misleading citizens, repeatedly confirming the safety of the new technology by using the central computer to keep a check on people. The Kingdom of Apples' chancellor and minister of science can be perceived as allegories of *genshiryoku mura* 原子力村 (the nuclear village), which has controlled Japan's energy sector for decades. This intricate economic-political network of corruption linking nuclear advocates from the power companies, the financial sector, the bureaucracy, politicians, scientists, and, importantly, the mass media, was a main factor in the culture of complacency and lax safety standards that led to the 11 March catastrophe.<sup>35</sup>

To surmise, *Saraba!* pursues a twofold objective: first, to make audiences, particularly those living in an area with many nuclear facilities, reflect on the risks of nuclear energy, and second, to alert Tokyo audiences to the fact that the vast amount of energy needed for the capital's affluent lifestyle is produced at the cost of the livelihood of those living in rural areas.

### 3. Conclusion

The plays I have discussed here pursue seemingly opposing objectives—providing emotional healing on the one hand and pursuing sociopolitical critique on the other—from a distinctively site-specific perspective. While *Moshiita* utilizes the figure of an *itako* shaman characteristic of the Aomori region to provide solace to audiences living in the disaster zone, *Saraba!* addresses some crucial problems the prefecture shares with areas afflicted by the 11 March calamity. Both plays thus evoke feelings of solidarity between the people

---

34 Suzuki 2012.

35 Kingston 2012.

of two prefectures belonging to the same larger region of Tōhoku and sharing a similar fate. Among the many plays that have expressed a concern for Japan's nuclear future in the aftermath of the catastrophe, *Saraba!* is rare in that it focuses on the issue of nuclear waste disposal, and also hints at the close interconnectedness of the peaceful use of nuclear power and the production of nuclear weapons. By relating to site-specific memories and pushing the plot to extremes, Hatasawa succeeds in constructing a narrative that reveals the wide gap between the capital and Japan's periphery and goes against the dominant Tokyo perspective.

In this way, Hatasawa's approach is reminiscent of the work of artists from the stricken areas, such as Wagō Ryōichi 和合亮一 (b. 1968), or the cultural initiative Project Fukushima!<sup>36</sup> Both aim at countering the stigmatization, which reinforces the already existing marginalization of the aging, rural prefecture of Fukushima. Wagō Ryōichi's disaster poetry, which gained immense prominence in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe, is a highly sophisticated exposure of the increasing gap between the Japanese nation and its government while at the same time insisting on Fukushima as an integral part of Japan, as Iwata-Weickgenannt has shown.<sup>37</sup> However, *Saraba!* is more radical in staging Tōhoku's split-off from the country and makes its point in a rather direct way. Nevertheless, Hatasawa and Wagō share in common a concern about Tōhoku's fate as an "inner colony," place a similar emphasis on the nuclear catastrophe as more than a local problem, and realize the urgent need to keep the issue alive in public discourse.

Generally speaking, in the cultural life of Japan, which is strongly focused on the capital, voices from other areas are rarely heard. It is only in the aftermath of the Fukushima disasters that theater (among other art forms) from Tōhoku has drawn attention in the big city centers. Now, five years after 3/11, the earlier boom of productions relating to the issue is already fading away. Yet, keeping the public memory of the disaster alive is becoming an ever more important issue in both Tōhoku and Tokyo theater alike. This is even more the case in light of recent developments in Japanese policy to push ahead with the restarts of idle reactors, ignoring the serious concerns of major portions of the population. *Saraba!* in particular is thus a very timely intervention. The play addresses contentious issues that are rarely mentioned in public discourse. Although it might be perceived as rather naïve and simplistic by audiences used to avant-garde and socio-critical performances, it is exactly its entertaining mode and community theater-like quality that has the potential to attract a broad local audience and convey the anti-nuclear message in a country where direct criticism easily runs the risk of being rejected as too political.

## REFERENCES

Aldrich 2012

Daniel Aldrich. "Networks of Power: Institutions and Local Residents in Post-Tōhoku Japan." In *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan: Response and Recovery after Japan's 3/11*, ed. Jeff Kingston. Routledge, 2012, pp. 127–39.

---

<sup>36</sup> Project Fukushima! website: <http://www.pj-fukushima.jp/jp/>

<sup>37</sup> Iwata-Weickgenannt 2015.

Arai 2011

Arai Motoko 新井素子. “Higashi Nihon daishinsai ni tsuite” 東日本大震災について. In *3.11 no mirai: Nihon, SF, sōzōryoku* 3・11の未来: 日本・SF・創造力, eds. Kasai Kiyoshi 笠井潔 and Tatsumi Takayuki 巽孝之. Sakuhinsha, 2011, pp. 249–61.

*Asahi shinbun* 2014

*Asahi shinbun*. “Completion of nuclear fuel processing plant postponed for 21st time.” 31 October 2014. [http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind\\_news/social\\_affairs/AJ201410310140](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201410310140).

Caldicott 2014

Helen Caldicott, ed. *Crisis Without End*. The New Press, 2014.

Eckersall 2015

Peter Eckersall. “Performance, Mourning and the Long View of Nuclear Space.” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 13:6:2 (2015). <http://apjif.org/2015/13/6/Peter-Eckersall/4278.html>.

Geilhorn 2017

Barbara Geilhorn. “Challenging Reality with Fiction: Imagining Alternative Readings of Japanese Society in Post-Fukushima Theatre.” In *“Fukushima” and the Arts: Negotiating Disaster*, eds. Barbara Geilhorn and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt. Routledge, 2017, pp. 162–76.

Geilhorn 2018

Barbara Geilhorn. “Trauma and Memory in Post-Fukushima Theater: Ōnobu Pelican’s *Kiruannya to Uko-san*.” In *Rethinking Nature: Facing the Crisis in Contemporary Japan*, eds. Marcella Mariotti, Bonaventura Ruperti, and Silvia Vesco. Edizioni Ca’ Foscari, 2018 (forth coming).

Hatasawa 2014a

Hatasawa Seigo 畑澤聖悟. “Moshiita: Moshi kōkō yakyū no joshi manējā ga Aomori no ‘Itako’ o yondara” もしイタ: もし高校野球の女子マネージャーが青森の「イタコ」を呼んだら. In *Kyakuhonshū 3/11: Higashi Nihon Daishinsai/Genpatsu jiko o mitsumeru* 脚本集3・11: 東日本大震災・原発事故を見つめる, ed. Nihon engeki kyōiku renmei 日本演劇教育連盟. Bansei Shobō, 2014, pp. 87–123.

Hatasawa 2014b

Hatasawa Seigo. “*Moshiita sakusha no kotoba: Aomori chūō kōkō engekibu Moshiita hisaichi ōenkōen ni tsuite*” 『もしイタ』作者の言葉: 青森中央高校演劇部『もしイタ』被災地応援公演について. In *Kyakuhonshū 3/11: Higashi Nihon Daishinsai/Genpatsu jiko o mitsumeru*, ed. Nihon engeki kyōiku renmei. Bansei Shobō, 2014, pp. 124–25.

Hatasawa 2014c

Hatasawa Seigo. *Festival/Tokyo 14. Watanabe Genshirō shōten. Saraba! Genshiryoku robo Mutsu: Ai · senshihen* フェスティバル/トウキョウ14 渡辺源四郎商店『さらば! 原子力ロボむつ: 愛・戦士編』. Nabegen Wāku Gōdōkaisha, 2014. (libretto)

Hayashi 2011

Yuka Hayashi. “Pro-Nuclear Candidate Wins Japan Poll.” *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 June 2011. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304474804576367224150507408>.

Hopson 2013

Nathan Hopson. "Systems of Irresponsibility and Japan's Internal Colony." *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 11:52:2 (2013). <http://apjif.org/2013/11/52/Nathan-Hopson/4053/article.html>.

Inoue 1950

Inoue Hisashi 井上ひさし. *Chichi to kuraseba* 父と暮らせば. Chūō Kōronsha, 1950.

Iwaki 2017

Kyōko Iwaki. "The Politics of the Senses: Takayama Akira's Atomized Theatre after Fukushima." In *"Fukushima" and the Arts: Negotiating Disaster*, eds. Barbara Geilhorn and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt. Routledge, 2017, pp. 199–220.

Iwata-Weickgenannt 2015

Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt. "Precarity Beyond 3/11 or 'Living Fukushima': Power, Politics, and Space in Wagō Ryōichi's Poetry of Disaster." In *Visions of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture and Literature*, eds. Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt and Roman Rosenbaum. Routledge, 2015, pp. 187–211.

Kingston 2012

Jeff Kingston. "Japan's Nuclear Village." *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 10:37:1 (2012). <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Jeff-Kingston/3822/article.html>.

Kreindler n.d.

Graig Kreindler. *Schoolboy No More*. <http://graiGREINDLER.com/?p=1272>.

Kudō 2014

Kudō Chinatsu 工藤千夏. "Aomori Chūō kōkō engekibu to komon Hatasawa Seigo" 青森中央高校演劇部と顧問畑澤聖悟. In *Saraba! Genshiryoku robo Mutsu: Ai · senshi hen* さらば! 原子力ロボむつ: 愛 · 戦士編, *Moshiita: Moshi kōkō yakyū no joshi manējā ga Aomori no "itako" o yondara* もしイタ: もし高校野球の女子マネージャーが青森の「イタコ」を呼んだら. Festival/Tokyo, 2014, pp. 5–6.

Nabegen n.d.

*Nabegen* なべげん (渡辺源四郎商店). <http://www.nabegen.com/>.

Onoue 2014a

Onoue Sora 尾上そら. "Intabyū Hatasawa Seigo Chiiki kara no manazashi, kōkōsei to tomo ni sodatsu sakuhin" インタビュー畑澤聖悟 地域からのまなざし、高校生とともに育つ作品. In *Saraba! Genshiryoku robo Mutsu: Ai · senshihen, Moshiita: Moshi kōkō yakyū no joshi manējā ga Aomori no "itako" o yondara*. Festival/Tokyo, 2014, pp. 2–4.

Onoue 2014b

Onoue Sora. "Kudaranai kizon no kachikan o engeki no chikara de kutsugaeshitai: Watanabe Genshirō shōten Hatasawa Seigo" くだらない既存の価値観を演劇の力で覆したい: 渡辺源四郎商店畑澤聖悟. *Shiatā gaido* シアターガイド 11 (2014), pp. 134–35.

Performing Arts Network 2007

Performing Arts Network (The Japan Foundation). *Japanese Drama Database*. "Chichi to kuraseba" (Face of Jizo). Inoue Hisashi. [http://www.performingarts.jp/e/data\\_drama/theater/d-00133.html](http://www.performingarts.jp/e/data_drama/theater/d-00133.html).

Performing Arts Network 2012a

Performing Arts Network (The Japan Foundation). Play of the Month. *Moshiita: Moshi kōkō yakyū no joshi manējā ga Aomori no 'itako' o yondara* もしイタ: もし高校野球の女子マネージャーが青森の「イタコ」を呼んだら. Seigo Hatasawa (9 March 2012). <http://performingarts.jp/E/play/1202/1.html>.

Performing Arts Network 2012b

Performing Arts Network (The Japan Foundation). Play of the Month. *Haisui no Koto (Remote Backwater Island)* 背水の孤島. Akihito Nakatsuru (12 November 2012). <http://www.performingarts.jp/E/play/1210/1.html>.

Poulton 2017

Cody Poulton. "Antigone in Japan: Some Responses to 3/11 at Festival/Tokyo 12." In *"Fukushima" and the Arts: Negotiating Disaster*, eds. Barbara Geilhorn and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt. Routledge, 2017, pp. 127–43.

Ridgely 2010

Steven C. Ridgely. *Japanese Counterculture: The Antiestablishment Art of Terayama Shūji*. University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Sugai 2009

Sugai Masuro. "Anti-nuclear Movement, Japan." In *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present*, ed. Immanuel Ness. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 191–93.

Suter 2014

Rebecca Suter. "The March 2011 Tohoku Disaster in Japanese Science Fiction." In *Asia-Pacific Disaster Management: Comparative and Socio-legal Perspectives*, eds. Simon Butt, Hitoshi Nasu, and Luke Nottage. Springer, 2014, pp. 153–64.

Suzuki 2012

Suzuki Yuriko. "Dark comedy on nuclear power opens in Tokyo." *Asahi Shinbun*, 3 May 2012. [http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind\\_news/social\\_affairs/AJ201205030016](http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201205030016).

Takahashi 2012

Takahashi Tetsuya 高橋哲哉. *Gisei no shisutemu: Fukushima, Okinawa 犠牲のシステム: 福島・沖縄*. Shūeisha, 2012.

*The Japan Times* 2013

*The Japan Times*. "Work resumes on Aomori's new Oma nuclear plant." 12 March 2013. [http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/12/national/work-resumes-on-aomoris-new-oma-nuclear-plant/#.VqRCl\\_Fudjs](http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/03/12/national/work-resumes-on-aomoris-new-oma-nuclear-plant/#.VqRCl_Fudjs).

*The Japan Times* 2015

*The Japan Times*. "Agency confirms active faults running near Higashidori nuclear plant in Aomori." 28 November 2015. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/11/28/national/science-health/agency-confirms-active-faults-running-near-higashidori-nuclear-plant-aomori/#.VqRGTPFudjs>.

*The Japan Times* 2016

*The Japan Times*. "Japan's ¥2.9 trillion nuclear recycling quest coming up on three decades." 5 January 2016. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/01/05/national/science-health/japans-%C2%A52-9-trillion-nuclear-recycling-quest-coming-three-decades/#.VqWIAFPuf6A>.



Wagner 2011

Cosima Wagner. "Der Astro-Boy-Diskurs: Von einer populärkulturellen Technikvision zum Roboterleitbild." *Minikomi* 80 (2011) Schwerpunkt "Technikkultur," pp. 5–12.

Watanabe Genshirō Shōten 2012

Watanabe Genshirō Shōten 渡辺源四郎商店. *Tobe! Genshiryoku robo Mutsu* 翔べ! 原子力ロボむつ. DVD.

Watanabe Genshirō Shōten 2014

Watanabe Genshirō Shōten. *Saraba! Genshiryoku robo Mutsu: Ai · senshihen* さらば! 原子力ロボむつ: 愛・戦士編. DVD.

Zöllner 2011.

Reinhard Zöllner. *Japan. Fukushima. Und wir: Zelebranten der nuklearen Erdbebenkatastrophe*. Iudicium, 2011.