The Beginning of the Never-ending Struggle

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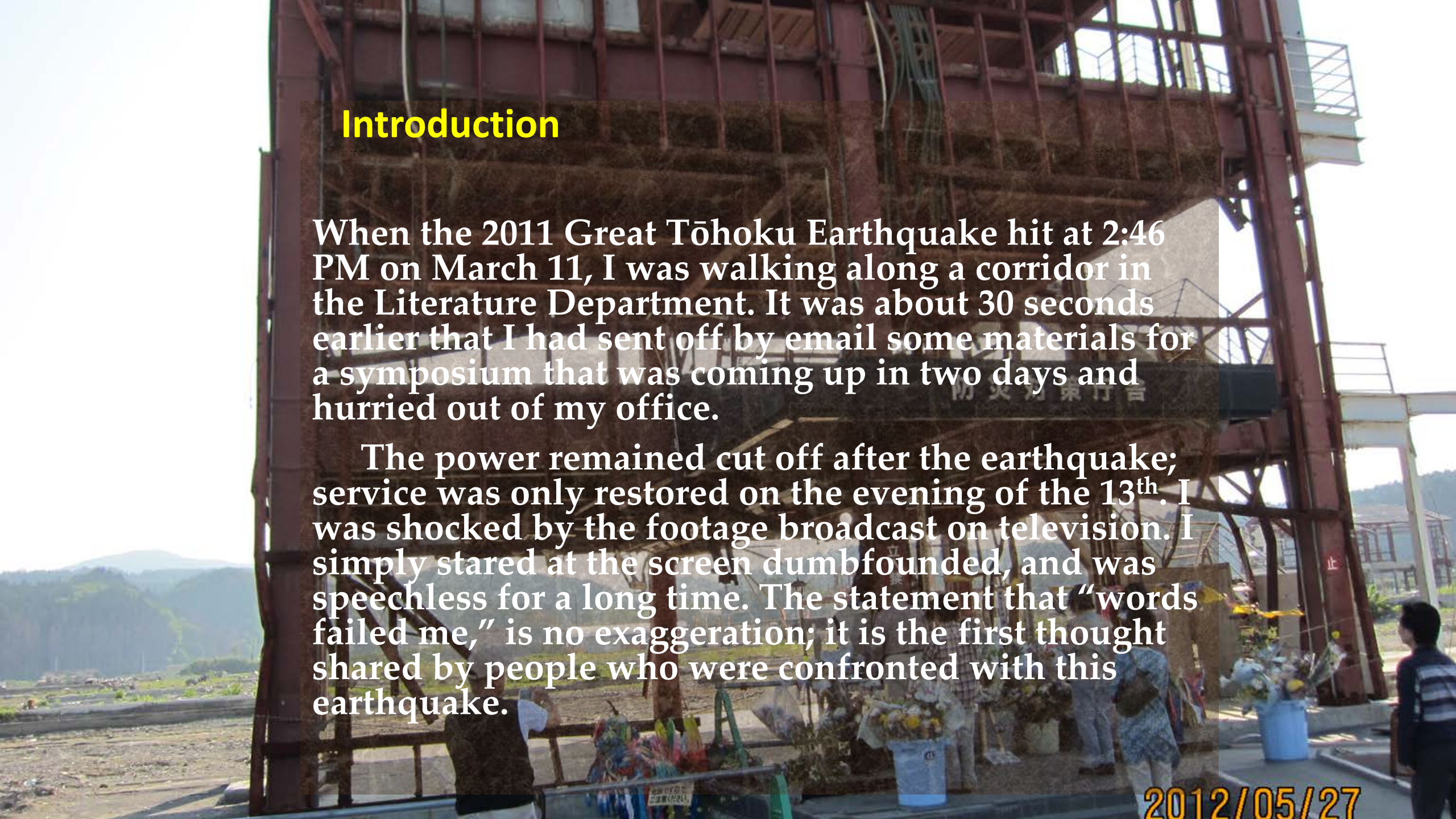
3.11 Great Tohoku Earthquake

Tunami+
the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant

1 Reconstraction of the Life Line and etc.
2 Rehabilitation from Ka no yō ni (As Though It Were).

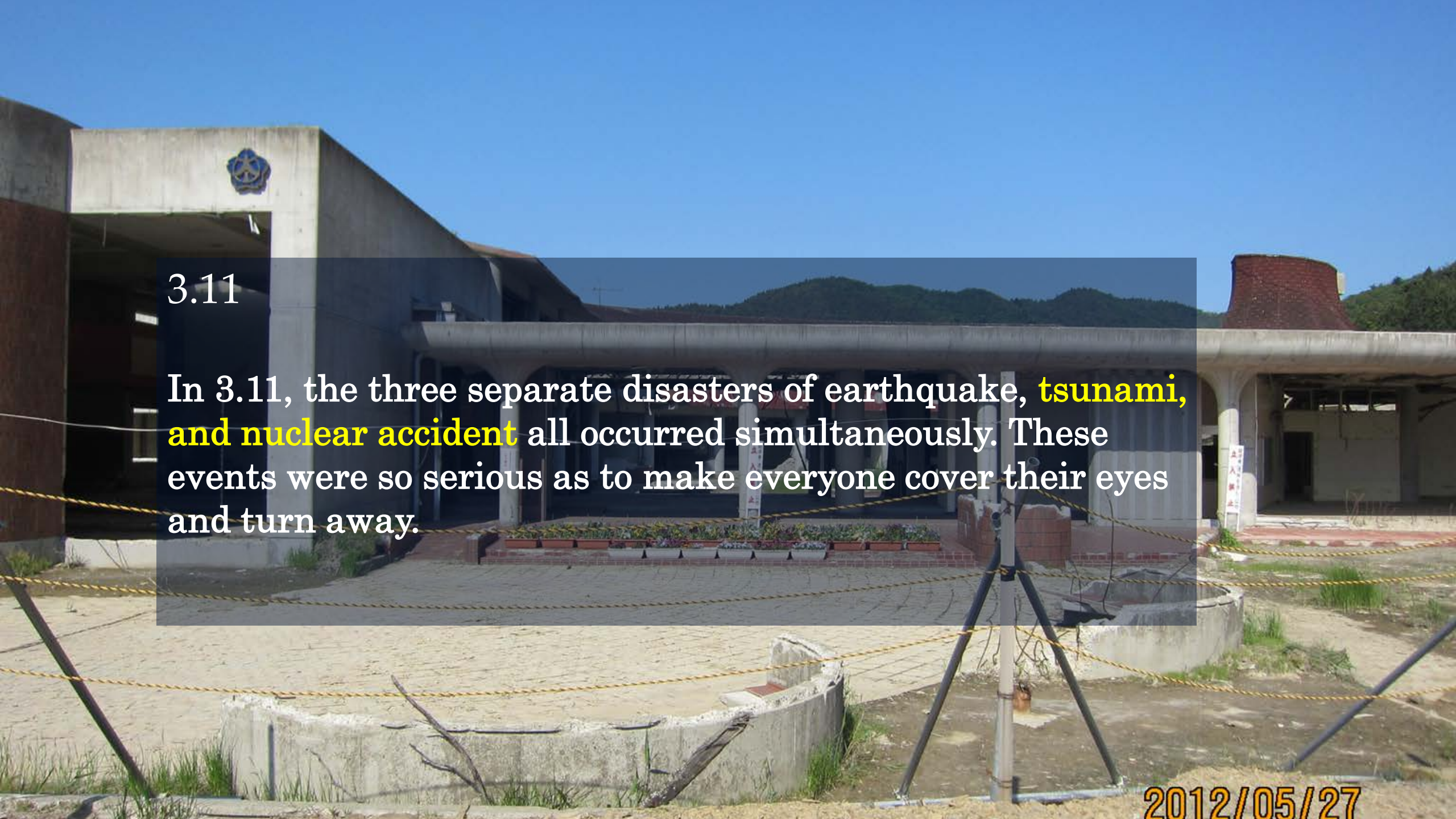
Responsibility to repay the victims and the solidality with people of the future



Introduction

When the 2011 Great Tōhoku Earthquake hit at 2:46 PM on March 11, I was walking along a corridor in the Literature Department. It was about 30 seconds earlier that I had sent off by email some materials for a symposium that was coming up in two days and hurried out of my office.

The power remained cut off after the earthquake; service was only restored on the evening of the 13th. I was shocked by the footage broadcast on television. I simply stared at the screen dumbfounded, and was speechless for a long time. The statement that "words failed me," is no exaggeration; it is the first thought shared by people who were confronted with this earthquake.



3.11

In 3.11, the three separate disasters of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident all occurred simultaneously. These events were so serious as to make everyone cover their eyes and turn away.

Hiroki Azuma, who is producing radical new theoretical work in contemporary thought and social thought, writes in 『思想地図 β』 (*A Map of Thought β*) that people have become fundamentally and permanently disconnected in the wake of the tragedy caused by the earthquake. Some people were saved and some were swallowed up by the tsunami. Similarly, some people suffered severe effects from radiation from the nuclear disaster, while in others the effects were minimal. The gap between these groups of people is not a story of being saved or losing one's life; it is nothing more than completely random chance. Simply by the fact of this chance, there is no kind of connection at all. Awareness of this reality undermines the consciousness of "collective solidarity." However, by telling the story of disasters, donating money without thought of the amount, or groping for some way in which we ourselves can help, people place their hopes in the sprouting of new buds of "solidarity."

Certainly, the sense of injustice that inhibits this "solidarity" is severe, but I believe that this distinction can only be composed as fiction. Nonetheless, wherever this sense of injustice may come from, it must be possible to overcome it.

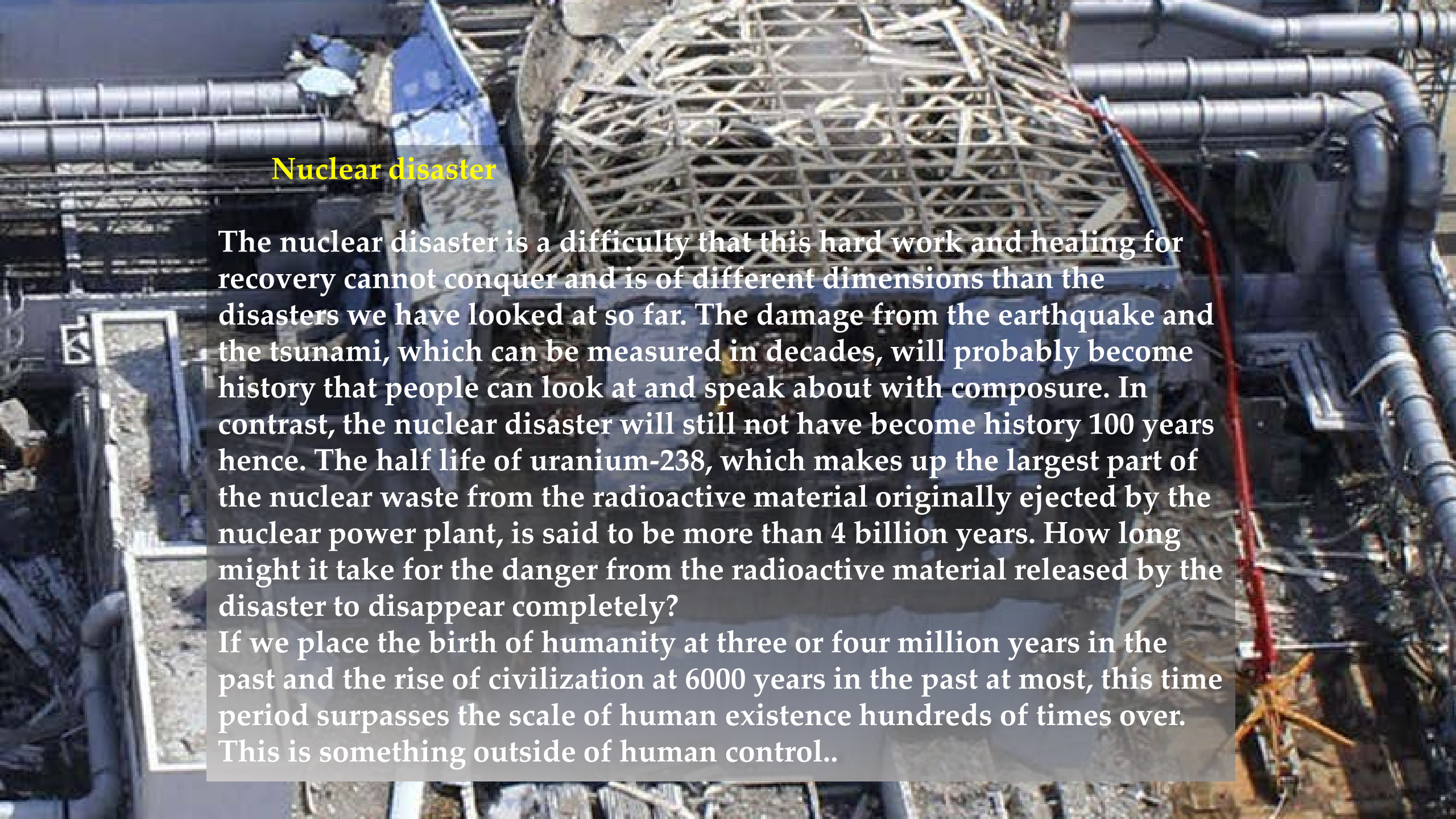
However, if we insist that the solution to this problem is to be left up to individuals, it is an irresponsible expansion of the prevalent idea of "self-responsibility." This may sound something like a leap in logic, but, in order to overcome this problem and aim at a new horizon, it is necessary to think only of human lives; freeing the mind from the political thinking represented by the Marxism that has planted such deep roots in modern society is unavoidable.

For this reason, it also seems impossible to ignore the role of religion. If we see time as flowing in a single line from the past to the future, outside of leaving A and B to the random chance of either luck or misfortune, it feels as though we are at our wit's end. Why was I here instead of there at the time? No matter how much we try to rationalize it, there remains a part that we cannot comprehend. I felt this acutely while reading Haruki Murakami 's *Underground* (Kōdansha, 1999), which was written from the accounts given by the victims of Aum Shinrikyō's sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway. There is no doubt that many bereaved families have torn their hair out at the cruelty of the fate that struck their loved ones who were sucked up in the incident as though drawn to it, asking questions like "Why did he break from his usual routine on that particular day and ride the subway at that time?" or "Why did she sit in that car?"

While people live in diachronic time, they also live in the embrace of synchronic time. Sometimes, when looking back on their lives, they curse the misfortunes that cannot be undone. I have the bitter experience of seeing my young brother die before my eyes and I can feel the limits of conceptualizing time in terms of past, present, and future in memorializing the dead. Thinking of the three worlds of "the world before birth, the present world, and the next world" together makes one want to think of the well-being of people. For people with only diluted happiness in this world, the idea that there is neither world-before-being nor an afterlife would make it impossible to be at peace. As people in this situation, our belief in a world beyond human comprehension probably makes it possible for us to be kind to others.

In the case of Japan, the character of this supernatural religion does not mean leaving this world behind for some distant place. The deceased watch over us from the shadows of grasses, their souls sleeping in low hills nearby. Daily bread alone does not satisfy the lives of people. The dichotomy of “the sacred and the profane,” in which ordinary memories pile up with festivals and rituals, give vitality to daily life. From the perspective of “the profane,” “the sacred” is worthless, even something negative; but festivals, which change the ordinary into the extraordinary, are needed in daily life. Looked at in one way, these are incompatible: a system made from noise, so to speak. During restoration, it appears that arguments of building for strength against earthquakes or in spaces unreachable by future tsunami take top priority, but in truth the question of how the situation that tradition has created is to be incorporated in the recovery efforts is at least as important a problem to be grappled with.

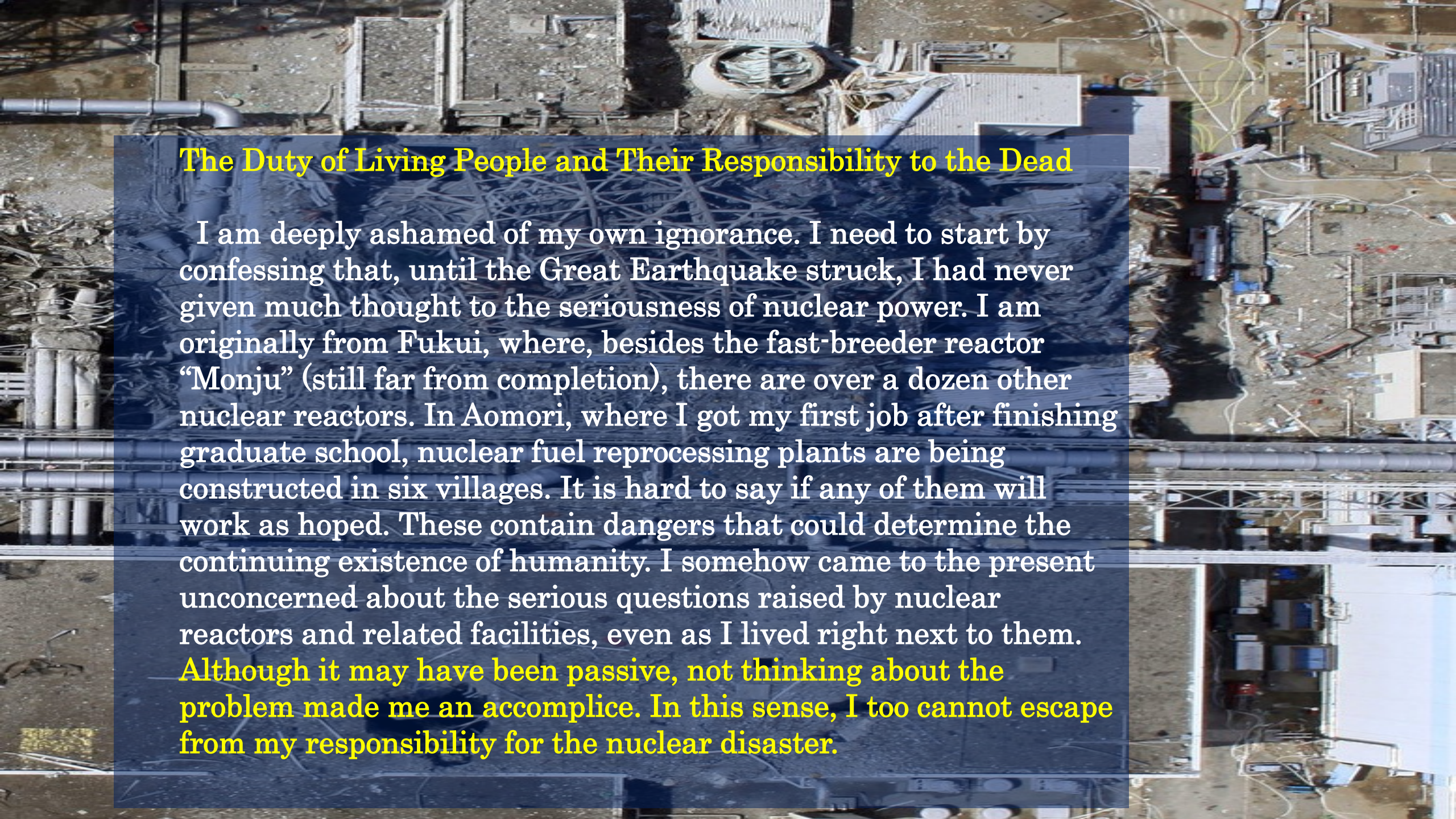
It is not possible for people to live without hope, no matter how small. When Pandora’s box was opened, all kinds of calamities came forth; however, the one thing remaining was “hope.” People have marched to the present holding this ancient “hope” as a votive candle.



Nuclear disaster

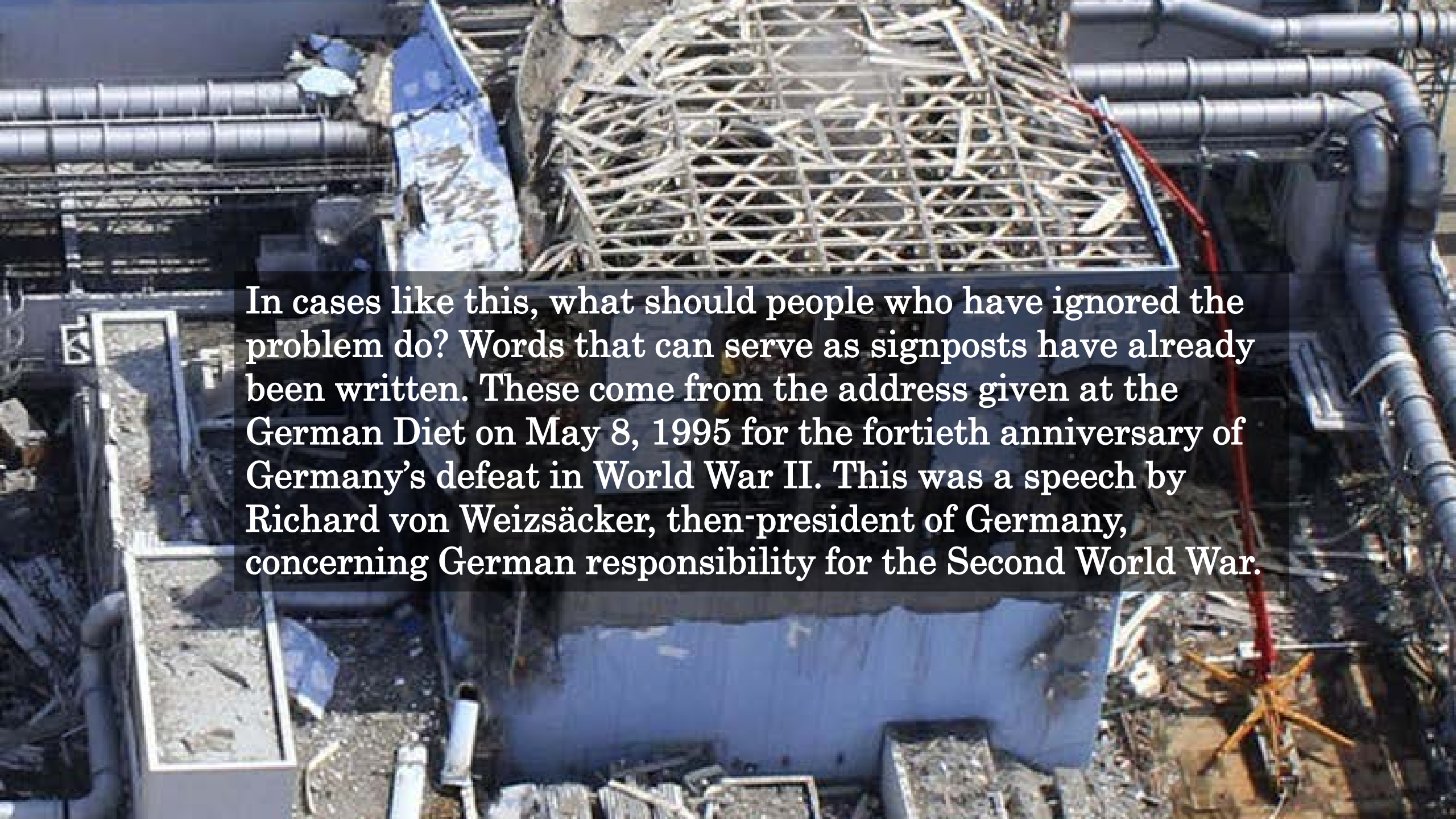
The nuclear disaster is a difficulty that this hard work and healing for recovery cannot conquer and is of different dimensions than the disasters we have looked at so far. The damage from the earthquake and the tsunami, which can be measured in decades, will probably become history that people can look at and speak about with composure. In contrast, the nuclear disaster will still not have become history 100 years hence. The half life of uranium-238, which makes up the largest part of the nuclear waste from the radioactive material originally ejected by the nuclear power plant, is said to be more than 4 billion years. How long might it take for the danger from the radioactive material released by the disaster to disappear completely?

If we place the birth of humanity at three or four million years in the past and the rise of civilization at 6000 years in the past at most, this time period surpasses the scale of human existence hundreds of times over. This is something outside of human control..

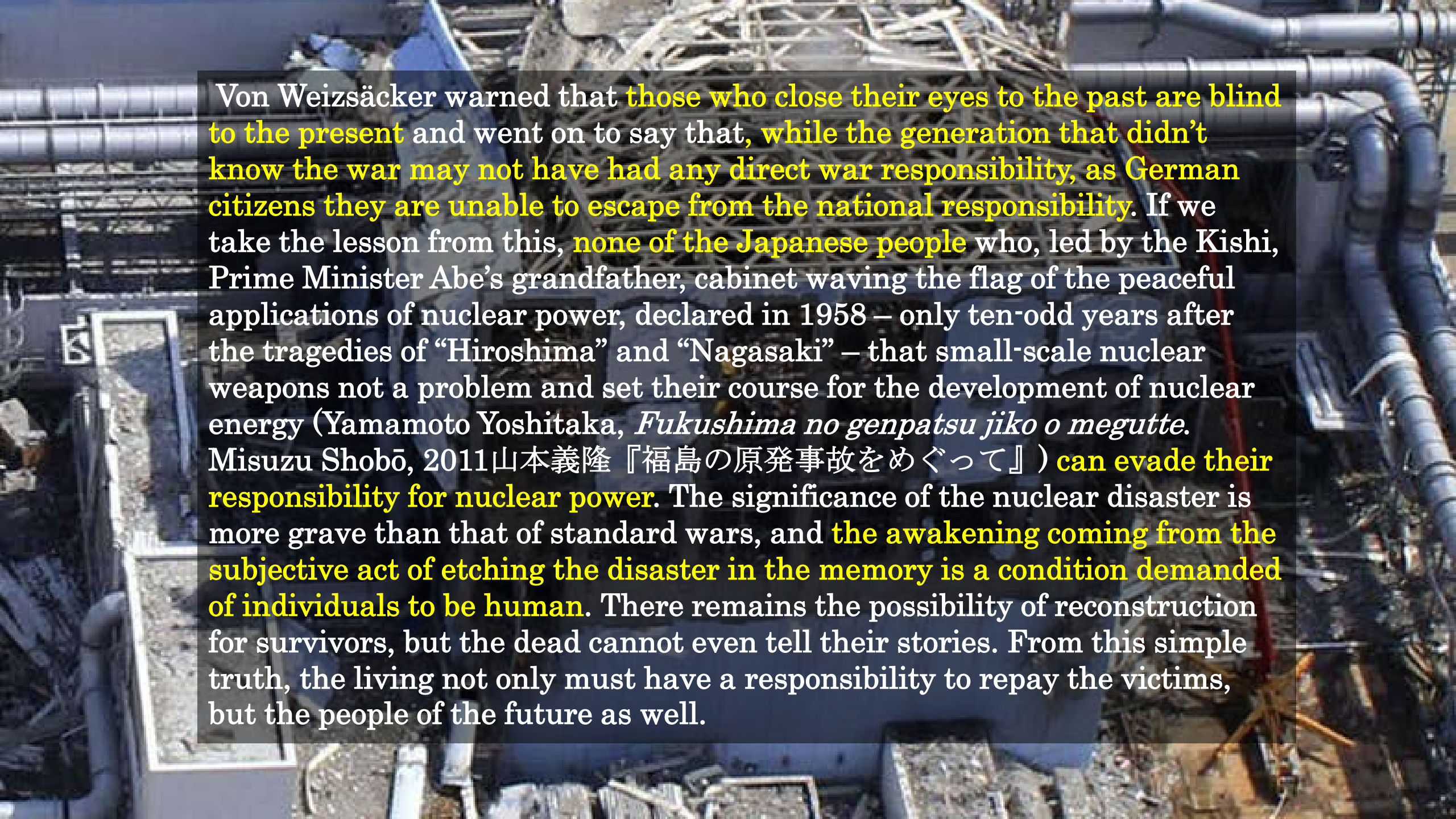


The Duty of Living People and Their Responsibility to the Dead

I am deeply ashamed of my own ignorance. I need to start by confessing that, until the Great Earthquake struck, I had never given much thought to the seriousness of nuclear power. I am originally from Fukui, where, besides the fast-breeder reactor "Monju" (still far from completion), there are over a dozen other nuclear reactors. In Aomori, where I got my first job after finishing graduate school, nuclear fuel reprocessing plants are being constructed in six villages. It is hard to say if any of them will work as hoped. These contain dangers that could determine the continuing existence of humanity. I somehow came to the present unconcerned about the serious questions raised by nuclear reactors and related facilities, even as I lived right next to them. Although it may have been passive, not thinking about the problem made me an accomplice. In this sense, I too cannot escape from my responsibility for the nuclear disaster.



In cases like this, what should people who have ignored the problem do? Words that can serve as signposts have already been written. These come from the address given at the German Diet on May 8, 1995 for the fortieth anniversary of Germany's defeat in World War II. This was a speech by Richard von Weizsäcker, then-president of Germany, concerning German responsibility for the Second World War.



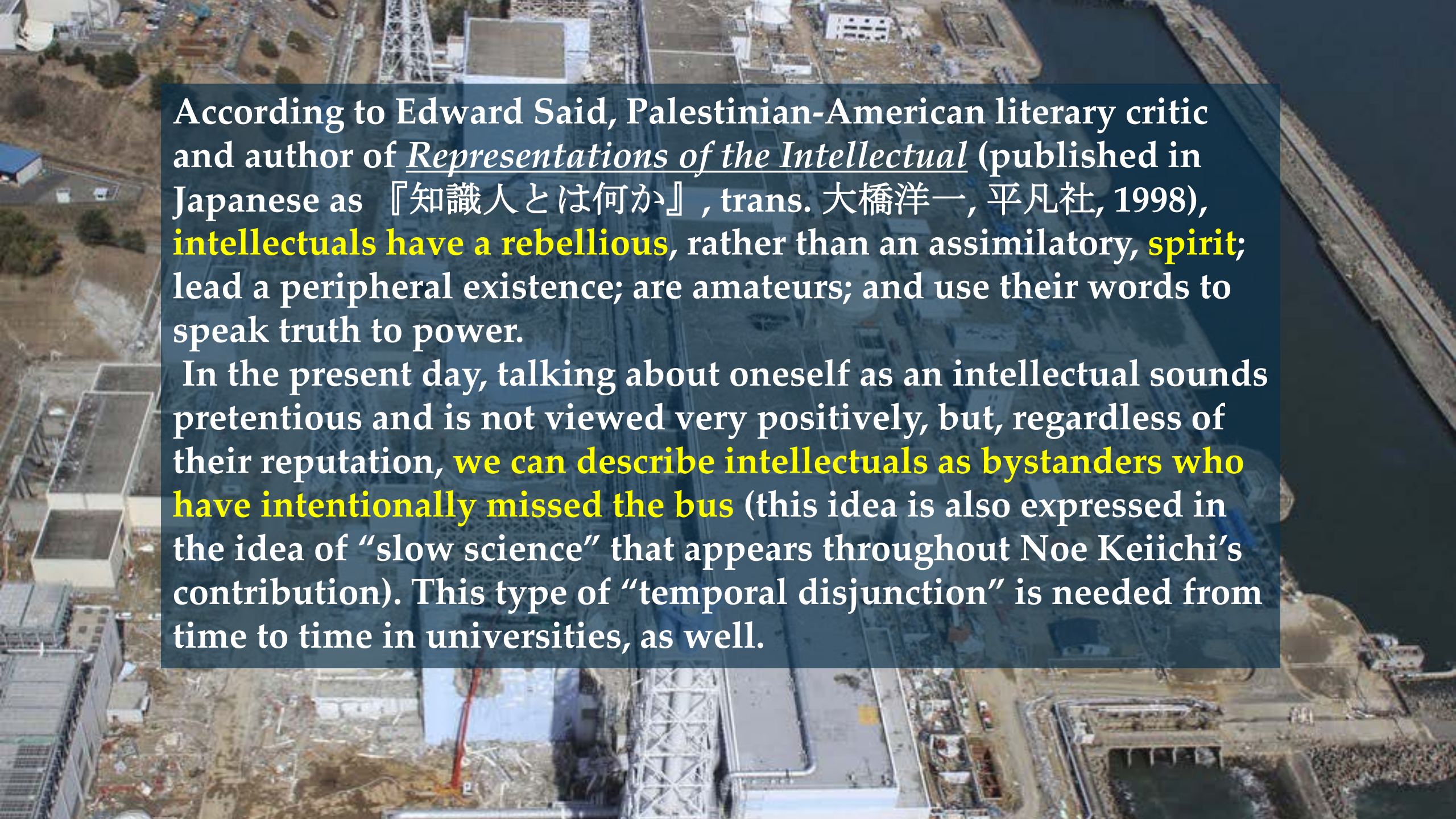
Von Weizsäcker warned that those who close their eyes to the past are blind to the present and went on to say that, while the generation that didn't know the war may not have had any direct war responsibility, as German citizens they are unable to escape from the national responsibility. If we take the lesson from this, none of the Japanese people who, led by the Kishi, Prime Minister Abe's grandfather, cabinet waving the flag of the peaceful applications of nuclear power, declared in 1958 – only ten-odd years after the tragedies of "Hiroshima" and "Nagasaki" – that small-scale nuclear weapons not a problem and set their course for the development of nuclear energy (Yamamoto Yoshitaka, *Fukushima no genpatsu jiko o megutte*. Misuzu Shobō, 2011山本義隆『福島の原発事故をめぐって』) can evade their responsibility for nuclear power. The significance of the nuclear disaster is more grave than that of standard wars, and the awakening coming from the subjective act of etching the disaster in the memory is a condition demanded of individuals to be human. There remains the possibility of reconstruction for survivors, but the dead cannot even tell their stories. From this simple truth, the living not only must have a responsibility to repay the victims, but the people of the future as well.

Conclusion

Ōgai Mori, the Meiji-era literary master, wrote in his final years a short piece with a somewhat mysterious mood entitled *Ka no yō ni* (*As Though It Were*). The main character is the son of a certain viscount. He progresses from Gakushūin University to the faculty of history at a liberal arts college and studies history, but, when it comes to writing papers, he can't do it at all. Complicated questions waited for those who would consider the issues surrounding myth and history, and he senses the difficulties of carrying through with writing in a way that would not give rise to disputes. These difficulties do not fade, even after the man graduates and later returns to Japan after going to Germany on exchange. It is not possible for him to avoid digging into matters concerning the Imperial household, and, naturally, he cannot put brush to paper. This world moves forward by means of all people, who create truths of things known to be lies and investigate them no further, believing that it is simply the way of the world and harboring no doubts. For example, things like duty and morals or the everlasting soul cannot be placed before one's eyes. They do not actually exist, but people behave as if they might. This is the meaning of "*ka no yō ni*." For the main character of the story, this truth is deeply troubling.

Ōgai wrote this novel in response to the High Treason Incident of 1910, but the phrase "*ka no yō ni*" resonates with statements heard often today that something was "within expectations" or "outside expectations," spoken as though what is being said is of great importance, when in reality nothing is being said at all. The "myth of complete safety" as applied to nuclear power is probably the most extreme example of this. Not even experts keep a watch on actual conditions, assuming that a disaster could not possibly happen and knowingly confusing "myth" with dispassionate "reality." The general public is also subject to this judgement. When there are others who entertain doubts toward their "faith," they allow a logic that dictates frowning upon these people or ostracizing them. Japan in the present day has not changed at all in the century since Ka no yō ni.

In contrast to this hiding of the truth and living in absolute devotion to social etiquette – that is to say the attitude of "*ka no yō ni*" – Ōgai's approach was the polar opposite. He brought to light the hidden nature of the actual world. In this sense, there lived in Ōgai a "spirit contrary to the times." There is a tendency to take his approach as one of pessimistic self-solace, but I want to reevaluate it as a way of being for a person who, going against the current, becomes disillusioned but keeps on living.



According to Edward Said, Palestinian-American literary critic and author of *Representations of the Intellectual* (published in Japanese as 『知識人とは何か』, trans. 大橋洋一, 平凡社, 1998), intellectuals have a rebellious, rather than an assimilatory, spirit; lead a peripheral existence; are amateurs; and use their words to speak truth to power.

In the present day, talking about oneself as an intellectual sounds pretentious and is not viewed very positively, but, regardless of their reputation, we can describe intellectuals as bystanders who have intentionally missed the bus (this idea is also expressed in the idea of "slow science" that appears throughout Noe Keiichi's contribution). This type of "temporal disjunction" is needed from time to time in universities, as well.

Thank you very much
for listening my speech.