Since the triple tragedy of March 11, 2011, we have seen a number of changes in what we sometimes refer to as "civil society" in Japan, many of them linked to innovative uses of social media. In particular, we have seen the emergence of new types of linkages and grassroots strategies generated through disaster response, including: real time flows of information over digital networks; the mobilization of various non-governmental actors and agencies in the immediate relief effort; emergence of a tweaked "volunteer" as a new cultural citizen; different patterns of contact, cooperation, and competition among previously unrelated groups and individuals in the rebuilding effort. These networks and practices, born out of disaster and crisis, today constitute dispersed political opposition movements that have generated some of the largest protests since the 1970’s AMPO demonstrations. Based on volunteer relief work and disaster-focused ethnographic research in Tohoku (http://tohokukaranokoe.org/), and now a systematic interview project with political activists in Fukushima and Tokyo, this talk will begin to document the role of social media in the range, depth, and limitations of these shifts with reference to their possible longer-term effect on the shifting shape of civil society in post 3.11 Japan.

David H. Slater is the Director of the Institute of Comparative Culture and Professor of Cultural Anthropology and Japanese Studies at Sophia University, Tokyo. He works on youth culture, social class and labor, and more recently, on disaster, digital and social movements. Publications related to this talk include his co-edited Japan Copes with Calamity (Peter Lang, 2013) and co-authored "Micro-Politics of Radiation: Young Mothers Looking for a Voice in Post–3.11 Fukushima" (Critical Asian Studies, 2014).

Co-sponsored by Center for Japanese Studies