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無人地帯 NO MAN'S ZONE

a t o s h i f u j i w a r a f i l m

The Fukushima Nuclear Crisis... the landscapes that will be lost... the people who used to live there..

with the voice of arsinée khanjian/cinematography takenobu kato/editing isabelle ingold/sound masaru usui/music barre phillips/producers valérie-anne christen & denis friedman
original music performed by barre phillips and émilie lesbros (e.m.k.a.) - produced by jean rochard - éditions musicales nato - www.natomusic.fr

A CONVERSATION WITH TOSHI FUJIWARA ABOUT NO MAN'S ZONE

INTERVIEWER: CHRIS FUJIWARA

Chris Fujiwara: Was there a particular moment that made you determined to make this film?

Toshi Fujiwara: Not just one thing. When I was watching the news about Fukushima or reading the newspaper, I had a very strange feeling that the people who were directly concerned were somehow very neglected. The first thing that came to my mind when the evacuation was announced was, what about the survivors? I knew there must be survivors who must have been under the debris of the houses of the towns that were destroyed by the tsunami. Nobody was talking about them. I came to realize that if I didn't make this film, maybe nobody would try to represent those victims in a public, open medium.

CF: Did you have in mind a particular structure at first?

TF: No. Because honestly I'd never been there, I didn't know the place, so I just had to follow the map, or the navigation system of the car. Which was difficult because a lot of streets were destroyed by the earthquake, so we couldn't go on the route that the navigator was indicating. And we knew that we didn't have too much time to shoot there. So before finding a structure, the first thing we did was just shoot whatever we found.

CF: Were you able to set up any interviews beforehand?

TF: No. That was also deliberate. If you are a filmmaker from Tokyo who wants to make a film about the nuclear plants, and you try to contact people, the results would necessarily be people who are connected with certain movements, leaders of antinuclear movements, or political figures or representatives of the communities, municipal congress members.

That would be the people you would meet. But I didn't want to meet those people. I just wanted to meet normal people.

CF: How did you distinguish yourselves and your project in the perceptions of the people you met from just any media outlet sending their journalists up there?

TF: First of all, any major media companies, because there was a government order not to go in there, they wouldn't go in. There were freelance journalists, a lot of filmmakers. I don't know what happened to what they filmed. We were a relatively small crew, three people, and we didn't pretend to be very professional. A lot of people who went there went being very protected, quote-unquote, with protective gear and that sort of thing, but I knew that you couldn't stop radiation with that anyway, so we just went there as normal as possible.

CF: What did you tell people about what you were doing?

TF: I just said, "We are making a movie, would you like to talk to us?" The entrance to the 20-kilometer zone was controlled by the police. The young officer asked us, "What are you going to do in here?" I said, "We're going to make a film." He actually asked, "What type of film are you going to make?" We explained what we wanted to do. "It's a pity that what's inside the 20-km limit is not going to be seen anymore – we knew already about the cherry blossoms, at springtime it's very beautiful – since starting from this year, nobody's going to see this. I think it's worthwhile to film this, to record it." And the young officer said, "OK, but unfortunately, everything is your own responsibility. We cannot help you in case of an accident. So just be careful, and good luck, ganbatte kudasai [do your best]."

CF: In the opening shot of the film, the pan across the wreckage, were you consciously trying to criticize the standard media image?

TF: One thing that differentiated us from the standard media footage, and especially from other filmmakers and media journalists, is that they always used a handheld camera. I knew that we had to bring a tripod. That way the camera would be more concentrated on the landscape, because that's one thing that was totally missing, a sense of landscape. But that shot was very difficult. The cameraman wanted to use an 85mm lens. I asked him to do it with a 210mm lens, which is extreme telephoto. I think it was very difficult for him. It was not just the technical thing that bothered him, but he actually felt it was indecent to do it, to get that close. He was afraid that when you get that close, you might see dead bodies. He said afterwards

that he felt morally challenged in doing that shot. But he realized that he should do it, because that's what the film needed.

CF: Later in the film there is a handheld shot, and we hear the voice-over talking of the cameraman's reluctance to do it, because there might be dead bodies...

TF: Or simply the fact that now what you see is just ruins, but it's part of their house, and in Japan usually when you go into a house you take off your shoes. It's the basic code of politeness in Japan. For him it was almost like going into somebody's house, abandoned, with his shoes on.

CF: So the basis for reluctance on his part was both physical and spiritual.

TF: And that's the very reason why I asked him to do it. Because if he has that reluctance, even if the physical act would be the same, the spiritual act or the psychological act would be different, and therefore the shot would be different from a shot by someone who would never think about that and would just take a shot of the ruins. I think it was that kind of emotional feeling that was missing totally from the media representation of the disaster.

CF: For me the central encounter in the film is with the old couple whose house is not totally damaged. This scene seems central to your concerns in the film.

TF: Yes, it's a 10-minute sequence in just one shot, and when it was done, I knew we had a film. In their conversation, they condensed all the important issues that we are really dealing with in this movie. More and more, they revealed the complex nature of the difficulties they were facing, which are certainly not simply about their home destroyed by the tsunami, or the possibility of a radioactive disaster. It's about the slow decomposition of a local community which has been taking place over the years, all the values that used to be important, the sense of community, the respect for history and communal as well as family heritage, all disappearing. And they are remarkable for always remaining calm, ironic, humorous, while daring to be extremely critical about the present situation, pointing out the contradictions. But with all their calmness, intelligence and poignancy, at the same time it is clear they are out of place, out of time. They don't belong anymore in this modern world.

CF: They epitomize the problem of the film in that they themselves are

neither present nor absent, they can no longer live there but they also can't leave. They too are a certain kind of ghosts, like the people in white suits you show roaming around the ruins, and who ask you not to film them.

TF: They're there but they're not there. They could not do what they thought they were supposed to do, to save lives. Even if they're physically there they're not spiritually there.

CF: The film seems to suggest that a ghostly mode of existence may be the only justifiable one after this disaster, except that no position is justifiable, which is the reason why there are ghosts anyway.

TF: In a way, I wanted to make this a ghost film without becoming a horror film; the ghosts of what was there, what was lost, what was disappearing over the years or decades and finally erased by these disasters haunt the landscapes and its people. The dead, the past are not here to avenge, so it's not going to be a horror film – instead we may say we have the revenge of the nuclear – but you can almost say that the dead are watching us quietly. That's why there are so many relics of the ancient animist beliefs all over the film – the gods who are everywhere, every single thing being god, also the spirit of the dead turning into gods – hence the historical houses of the families that lasted for generations, the graveyards, and the communities closely related to these concepts of ancient Japanese deities. Whether we can see or feel them, or not, depends on our own subjective perspectives.

CF: I might sum up the film by saying that it's about the fact that there is no justifiable position to take with regard to this disaster. The disaster has the power to unsettle us from our usual position, and one of the functions of your film seems to be to sustain that unsettling power, to make it intolerable again to be in the presence of it.

TF: I hope that it can function like that for many years to come, regardless of what is going to happen. What is happening in Fukushima shouldn't be seen just as a tragedy happening in the faraway land of Japan. It also has to question the European audience and the American audience, not only about whether we are going to continue to use nuclear power, but also to ask questions about the meaning of our civilization and the way we conceive of the world.

Full interview on www.docandfilm.com

NO MAN'S ZONE

a Toshi Fujiwara film

The 40 year old nuclear power station on the coast of Fukushima went into crisis after being struck by the tsunami on March 11th 2011. Within 24 hours, evacuation order was proclaimed to the surrounding 20 Km area. The new documentary by Toshi Fujiwara is a journey within this No Man's Zone and the surrounding regions around it where people continue to live, as well as a journey into time and history when the film encounters with the people who have or will be evacuated, those who have no choice but to continue to live nearby.

WITH THE VOICE OF **ARSINÉE KHANJIAN** CINEMATOGRAPHY **TAKANOBU KATO** EDITING **ISABELLE INGOLD**
SOUND **MASARU USUI** ORIGINAL MUSIC COMPOSED BY **BARRE PHILLIPS** PRODUCTION MANAGER **CATHERINE CONSTANT-GRISOLET** PRODUCERS **VALÉRIE-ANNE CHRISTEN AND DENIS FRIEDMAN**

TOSHI FUJIWARA SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2006 **WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN** (improvised fiction)

2007 **CINEMA IS ABOUT DOCUMENTING LIVES: THE WORKS AND TIMES OF NORIAKI TSUCHIMOTO** (documentary)

2008 **FENCE - PART ONE LOST PARADISE / PART TWO FRAGMENTED STRATUM** (documentary)

2009-2012 **FOR A LITTLE BIT OF LOVE JUST FOR THIS LITTLE INSTANCE** (work in progress, improvised fiction)

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