

Nuclear Nation

The Fukushima Refugees Story | A Film By Atsushi Funahashi

Documentary / 96 mins / Japanese with English Subtitles

Digital (HD Cam & BluRay) / 2013



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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Synopsis:

March 11, 2011: a catastrophic earthquake and tsunami hit Japan, crippling the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, releasing radiation, and turning the residents of Futaba into “nuclear refugees.” The devastation experienced by the town -- dead livestock left to rot, crops abandoned, homes and businesses destroyed -- is infinitely worse than anything reported by the newspapers. A year later, 500 of the original 1400 evacuees are still living in a school, eating box lunches, unable to return to contaminated homes. The irony of this disaster occurring in a nation that experienced two nuclear bombs is not lost on the victims who poignantly question their responsibility for striking a Faustian bargain with nuclear power, the plant having originally brought prosperity to their small town. NUCLEAR NATION examines a tragedy in miniature, but also suggests that it could one day be replicated on a grand scale – perhaps in your own backyard.

Director’s Biography:

Atsushi Funahashi- Director, Writer, and Producer

Atsushi Funahashi was born in Osaka, Japan, and graduated from Tokyo University with a B.A. in cinema studies. He moved to New York in 1997 and studied film directing at the School of Visual Arts. His debut feature *echoes* (2001) was well received by critics and film festivals, winning three jury and audience awards at Annonay International Film Festival in France. The film has been theatrically distributed in the USA and Japan. His second film, *Big River* (2006), starring Jo Odagiri, was selected for the Berlinale Co-Production Market and PPP (Pusan Promotion Plan) at its project stage. Produced by Office Kitano, the film was shown at various film festivals (including Berlin, Pusan, Karlovy Vary, Sao Paolo, and Shanghai) and was released worldwide by Celluloid Dreams Director's Label. Funahashi has also directed several HDTV documentaries on social issues and New York ethnic culture for NHK, Japan’s public broadcasting network. One of these documentaries, "For the Joyful Moment of Life" (2005), won a Telly Award. Funahashi moved back to Tokyo in 2007 and has started directing films in Japan.

Director's Statement:

We are all in the dark.

Post-March 11 Japan has been mired in frustration stemming from this information vacuum.

What's going on at that nuclear plant? What's happening inside the reactors? Where was all the radiation dispersed? Have we been exposed? If yes, what's going to happen to us?

The Japanese government's response to the crisis mirrored that of the Tokyo Electric Power Company. Both avoided revealing the truth. Both constantly denied that leaked radiation would pose an immediate threat to human health. And because of this, both the government and Tepco has lost its credibility – not just in Japan, but around the world.

Japan had been promoting nuclear power to its people for over 40 years, giving it a major role in the nation's energy policy. And on March 11, the system backfired. The government imposed an evacuation zone around Fukushima Daiichi. Even the mass media kowtowed to this new rule, making it difficult to get a look inside ground zero.

Meanwhile, the cloud of uncertainty continues to grow. The entire country has been grappling with misinformation since the crisis began. And it's the displaced residents who've been short-changed, left to fend for themselves as nuclear refugees.

What about our homes? What about our jobs?

It's impossible to know when the answers to these basic questions will come, and it was critically important for me to document this waiting game. These refugees have had their lives put on hold and they must not be forgotten. It was this strong urge that propelled me to pick up a camera and go.

I started shooting NUCLEAR NATION at the end of March, when all media reports emphasized the scale of the earthquake and tsunami damage. This film, however, depicts the lives of nuclear refugees biding their time in a shelter or temporary housing. These refugees have lost their land, their homes and places of business, their jobs... And they must now do without things that cannot be replaced - their community, their homeland, and its local history.

It's we in Tokyo who consume the power generated in Fukushima. We are directly responsible. And we need to do something about it.

Producer's Statement:

Yoshiko Hashimoto

2011's March 11 disaster left over 20,000 dead or missing in northeastern Japan. And it created a worst-case scenario accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station. The day after the massive earthquake and tsunami, a hydrogen explosion happened at the number 1 reactor. An evacuation order was called immediately after the blast, forcing townspeople to flee their homes with only the shirts on their backs. A large population of nuclear refugees found themselves with nowhere to go.

The town of Futaba is located 3km from the power plant. On March 19, the town hall facilities which were temporarily located elsewhere in Fukushima were moved 250km away, to Saitama prefecture. Some 1,400 people made the move to a shelter together. At the end of March, they were moved again, to an abandoned high school in Saitama, which is where a large part of this film is shot. Ever since, Futaba's townspeople have been living in classrooms, and their children have been commuting to nearby schools. Their hometown was legally designated an exclusion zone by the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures and going back is now against the law.

Ever since this catastrophe, people have been asking "What is it that I can do?". Atsushi Funahashi as a director, and I as a producer mobilized 3 weeks after March 11, and began recording the lives of Futaba residents in this abandoned school. We shared in the absurdity of their situation and felt their anger as our own during filming.

Nuclear plants started cropping up across the country in the 1960s despite the nation's small size. Currently, Japan has the 3rd highest number of reactors (54) after the US and France. Most of them are concentrated along the coast in Fukui, Fukushima and Niigata prefectures. The plants weren't built near large metropolises like Tokyo but in villages that are less well-off, producing power for a region with which they have little in common. But the myth that atomic energy is safe no matter what, and the subsidies that went with it, were thrown at local governments like candy. And more and more reactors kept getting the green light, in the name of jobs and development. We in the big cities were, for the most part, oblivious to this.

For villagers who commuted to larger towns for work, the plants were a magical source of income close to home. They touted the symbiotic prosperity brought by a life with nuclear power. Looking closely at Futaba means relentlessly questioning Japan's industrial structure and its perverse energy policy.

It's been almost a year now, and there are still over 60,000 people taking refuge outside Fukushima prefecture. And along with the Futaba town hall facilities, more than 600 people are still living at the abandoned Saitama high school today. This January, the government requested that towns like Futaba serve as a dumping ground for radioactive waste. After being chased out of his hometown by the nuclear accident and now pressured to approve of the disposal, the Mayor of Futaba lashes out at Prime Minister Noda -

“Are you thinking of us as citizens? Are we still protected by the law?”

Biding their time at the abandoned school, the refugees dream of when they can go home to Futaba. Will it be 5 years from now? 20? 30? No one knows.

But Atsushi and I will continue to roll camera until that time comes.

Film Festival Appearances:



Full Credits:

Director: Atsushi Funahashi

Directors of Photography: Atsushi Funahashi & Yutaka Yamazaki

Additional Photography by: Masaki Tamura & Yousuke Sato

Technical Supervisor: Yutaka Yamazaki

Sound Mixer: Tomoji Kuwaki

Music: Haruyuki Suzuki

Performed by: Dagan Kinowaki (flute), Sachiko Ogura (piano)

Closing Theme Composed and Performed by: Ryuichi Sakamoto

Poster Design: Eric Van Den Brulle

English Subtitling: Ivy Yukiko Ishihara Oldford

Assistant Directors: Yukihiro Ushida & Yoshihiro Oshiro

Assistant Producer: Akiko Tabakotani

Colorist: Nashiro Urabe

Post Production Assistant: Rintaro Oriyama

Post Production Studio: Active Cine Club Co. Ltd.

Sound Studio: Wink2

Archival Footage provided by: Fukushima Central Television Co. Ltd, Town Hall
Office of Futaba, Tokyo Electric Power
Company, IKI Publishers, Akihiro Ogata