

# arte

## DISTRIBUTION

presents:

### THE ATOM, THE STORY OF A COVER-UP



**A 52' documentary directed by Kenichi Watanabe  
Produced by Christine Watanabe, KAMI PRODUCTIONS**

## **SYNOPSIS**

On March 11th, 2011, the American nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, the Ronald Reagan, veered off its course to sail to Japan and help the victims of the tidal wave. Without realizing it, the ship sailed through the radioactive cloud from Fukushima. All its sailors were contaminated. This tragic incident ironically recalled another when in 1954 Japanese fishermen were irradiated from the American nuclear tests off of Bikini Atoll.

Scientists succeeded in harnessing nuclear energy early in the 20th century. And although the civil and military nuclear industry rejoiced at this tremendous energy source, it also carefully hid, covered up and minimized the risks and lied about the link between exposure to its rays and their impact on the human body.

This extensive historical investigation tracks the history of this lie by gathering the accounts of those contaminated, in particular from the American sailors of the Ronald Reagan, children from Fukushima and the Japanese Bikini Atoll fishermen. The legal cases brought by these victims expose the nuclear industry's arrogance and denial.

**PROVISIONAL DELIVERY: MARCH 2020**

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

As soon as I heard about the contamination of the American sailors by the Fukushima cloud, my mind immediately recalled the image of the Japanese fishermen who were contaminated by the 1954 Bikini Atoll nuclear tests. The victims were contaminated at sea in total ignorance of what was happening to them. The consequences were the same in both cases, i.e. the pathological impact of radioactivity on the human body.

The similarity of these two events also reminded me of March 17th, 2011, when, in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, the American embassy in Tokyo recommended that its citizens evacuate an 80-kilometer radius around Fukushima, while the Japanese government only called for a 30-kilometer radius. Why such a discrepancy in recommendations for the same crisis? What meaning was given to the notion of risk? What does radioactive contamination mean?

History's ironic coincidence between the American sailors and the Japanese fishermen resides in a paradox, i.e. the fact that the Americans had introduced a civil nuclear capacity to a country that had undergone two atomic bombs. How could Japan, already victimized by the atom, commit to developing nuclear energy? Had everyone forgotten the people who'd been poisoned and even today continue to suffer the physical effects of the attacks? The contamination and its subsequent diseases were blacked out, denied or ignored. It was in Hiroshima and Nagasaki that the source of such blindness to the impact of the bomb is found and that the nuclear system and myth about nuclear security were born.

This film is a vast, historical investigation into the phenomenon of nuclear contamination. From the Curies to Fukushima, this documentary intends to make sense of the accounts by victims and unveil the lies purveyed by the world of the atom.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The 20th century was marked by an important scientific discovery, i.e. the atom and its radioactivity. But blinded by their success, scientists concealed the dangers and risks attached to the atom. This documentary listens to the victims who learned that they were contaminated and the subsequent battles they fought to have their diseases acknowledged.

We listen to the American sailors who were the first, massively contaminated victims of the Fukushima disaster. They give a detailed account of what happened on the ship between March 11th and 12th, 2011. These first crucial 48 hours from the onset of the disaster will be reconstructed from the sailors' narratives through drone footage that will film the nuclear plant from the ship's location at sea. Declassified reports will describe the disaster from the point of view of the nuclear authorities of both the American and Japanese governments. These authorities doubt and wonder about the crisis management by the plant's contractor, Tepco.

The film will be built around the soldiers' testimonies and those of the Japanese families whose children are now suffering from thyroid cancer. Both the parents and American sailors are involved in the legal battle against the plant's operators, Tepco. Anger intersects and converges. It is understandable that the quest for dignity and the fight against the cover-up of information are the same and echo one another from both sides of the Pacific.

The link between the United States and Japan faced with the atom is an ironic paradox. After the war the United States did all it could for Japan, which had suffered from two atomic bombs, to acquire this fabulous energy source. Then, decades later, the nuclear accident at Fukushima contaminated American sailors. Space and time dilate to

give perspective to a century in history that saw the advent of the atom and its radioactivity. The words of the American sailors and the Japanese public make the past resonate. Other victims emerge, like the fishermen and the veterans of atomic tests, the survivors of Hiroshima and young American workers in radium factories. The periods may be different, but the common thread uniting them is always the same, i.e. secrecy, whether military or industrial, obscured the risks of exposing humans to radioactivity. The film will not be told chronologically but rather through the sounding board of the events that echo each other.

We will use archive footage to show the discovery of radioactivity by Pierre and Marie Curie. In the United States footage of developing the bomb will relate the atomic adventure. We will seek out archive footage of those people contaminated and the soldiers used as guinea-pigs. In Japan, the first country victimized by nuclear explosions, our research into archives will deal with the victims of Hiroshima, the fishermen of Bikini Atoll and the children of Fukushima.

Radioactivity is invisible, odorless and colorless. We have to understand how it affects living beings. Simple graphics will be used to show the mechanism of nuclear contamination on and in the human body. This will not be a complicated scientific approach but one that uses inventive, dynamic pencil strokes so as to make the concepts accessible to everyone. Plain black and white animation will answer the basic questions: How is the body contaminated? Why do cancers develop? How can one protect oneself?

The commentary will be fairly concise, detailed and lucid and will give meaning to events the magnitude of which has not yet been fully appreciated. It will support victims' personal accounts and always maintain an historical perspective. The role of the narrative will be to recontextualize these poorly known facts and give them a new historical dimension.

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