Before and After 3/11
Shiro Yabu
(translated by Umi Hagitani)

*The Japanese original of the present article has been published in at Plus

What is the Nuclear State?
There were not many people who foresaw the March 11th nuclear reactor accident in Fukushima. Most of us were at a loss, not knowing how to react, how to respond, when it broke out. At least I was at a loss. I had never imagined that the buildings encasing reactors could have exploded. Honestly, I expected that the accident would be much smaller, like the one at Kashiwazaki Kariwa reactor during the Niigata Earthquake in 2007. I did think that it could release radioactive materials, but only temporarily, and that radioactive iodine could reach Tokyo, but much less. So when I evacuated with my daughter to my hometown in Aichi Prefecture in the early morning of March 12th, I thought that our refuge would be only for the time being.

But the disaster turned out to be much more enormous and much more long-lasting, surpassing my imagination.

After the accident, however, the course of event that followed developed in a way we had expected: we had known it. TEPCO had no ability whatsoever to control the disastrous situation, and the government covered up every critical information -- thus they have been wastefully worsening the casualties and damages. I do not think that many people were surprised by this. If you had some experience out in the society and some comprehension of Japan's nuclear policy, it would not be that hard to expect more or less the coming response of the government. And its measures were the worst, unfortunately as we had long known.

During the month of March, we stayed with my parents’ house in Aichi Prefecture. By April, we rented an apartment, and brought all utilities from Tokyo. I transferred my daughter’s school registration from Tokyo to Aichi. I did so because I expected what would happen in the contaminated areas in the North East and Kanto. I was sure that my forebodings would come true. People who moved out of Kanto were not few. She and he, everybody had a firm conviction -- although we had no knowledge on nuclear energy, we all knew the nature of the nuclear policy. We already knew, from the beginning, what our government would neglect, and how inhumanely all medical, welfare, and educational institutions would treat us.

I want to clarify what we experienced during March 2011. Already in the early March, the government was aware of the massive release of radioactive materials in a wide area. While they should have immediately announced the necessity of indoor evacuation and provided us with potassium iodide (KI) and clean water in the entire Kanto area, their main concern was regulating and oppressing information exchanges among the people on Twitter and emails. In this instance alone, the characteristic of the nuclear policy by the nuclear state is quite obvious. More significant here is the fact that while enraged by the response of the government, we were
observing it with a sense of déjà-vu: "I knew it -- our government was like that!" This is far worse than “distrust of the government” as such. What we came to conceive is neither distrust nor misunderstanding, but a common recognition of the nuclear state.

Perhaps for a long time we have known of, though vaguely, what the nuclear state is. Now the vague knowledge is turning to a clear conviction. Many individuals, groupuscules, and civil organizations are criticizing the Japanese government, and creating their own initiatives. Thanks to this conviction being widely shared can they bring a firm grasp of the situation and powerfully direct the public opinion, despite the fact that most of us have been amateurs who knew next to nothing about nuclear energy or radiation. It is by the experience during that March that we are able to grasp a clear picture of the nuclear state and its vital spot.

Since that day, our attention has been reoriented. We have come to question: "how the state that embraces nuclear power controls the society" rather than just: “how nuclear power is controlled.” The concept of control vis-à-vis nuclear power has been split and re-inscribed.

**Nuclear Capitalism**
When I wrote a book entitled: *Atomic Cities* (Tokyo: Ibunsha, 2010) prior to March 11th, my main problematic concern was the impact of nuclear technology over contemporary society. In order to roughly periodize the post 1945 era, I associate it with "nuclear capitalism."

Nuclear technology brought us as significant and dynamic a change into the history of capitalism as did sailing technology and steam locomotive to the previous ages. Big sailing boats realized the age of great navigation, and in consequence gave birth to merchant capitalism. It was a spatial revolution, which created a basis for global capitalism. Then steam locomotive brought big factories, and then developed industrial capitalism. It was a revolution of energy, which realized the so-called age of steel. Then what did atomic bombs put to actual use in 1945 bring us? For now, I would vaguely term the resulting paradigm "nuclear capitalism.” Then a question arises: “what kind of characteristics is given to capitalism in this new context.” Urbanization, financialization, informatization (de-industrialization), and reinforcement of police state are the peculiar characteristics of the first world capitalist nation states that we are facing now. Is it possible to synthesize these within the concept of nuclear state? This was the crux of my approach.

This periodization ultimately results in the problematic consciousness of the contemporary state. The epitomic polity that geared the age of great navigation was colonialism. The main player in the age of steel was imperialism. Then, what is the dominant polity that leads the age of nuclear power? What comes next to imperialism? Is it super-imperialism or the “empire”? I wrote *Atomic Cities* as a foundation for these inquiries.

When I wrote the book, my premise was the existing “peaceful,” “safe” and “clean” cities, the attributes that I thought were the main characteristics of the nuclear capitalism.

Peacefulness, because we have been blessed with peace. After 1945, battlefields have moved mainly to the Third World. While wars were taking place in Korean Peninsula and Vietnam,
Japan was enjoying a peace covered under the nuclear umbrella of the U.S.

Safety, because violence is ostensibly wiped out. Every street corner has a surveillance camera. A drunken man raises his voice a little, and here comes a cop. Violence is relocated to confined and invisible spaces; now cities are safe at least on surface. They are clean. No factory, no soot, no sweat, no dust, no cigarette butt or spit on the street.

In addition nuclear energy is a clean energy because it does not create carbon dioxide, and certainly safe – this was the notion based upon pre-3/11 atomic cities, an utopia that humanity finally achieved. At the same time, however, it was a dystopia. In other words, we had long been living a dystopia, before having experienced the catastrophic accident of 3/11.

**Radioactive Materials and Protection from Them**

Peacefulness, safety, and cleanliness -- these utopian characteristics of atomic cities are yet maintained after the 3/11 incident.

The amount of radioactive materials that have been released from Fukushima Daiichi reactor exceeds high above that of Little Boy, the A-bomb used in Hiroshima. 500 Bq/kg -- the current provisional standard for food set by the Japanese government -- is the number for bottom line standard that people in starvation in case of a full-scale nuclear war are allowed to eat. This means that we are forced to live this disaster beyond the nuclear warfare *calmly* and *peacefully*. What truly shocked me right after 311 was less government's responses to the incidents than those citizens who *solemnly* accepted them. It is surprising that the members of the Citizen's Nuclear Information Center, known for its adamant criticism against nuclear policies, remained in Tokyo while radioactive materials were pouring all over the metropolis in March.

Another example is the Japan Congress against A-and H-Bombs, whose slogan is: "humans and atom cannot coexist," actually held a national convention in highly contaminated Fukushima. I see a deeper problem in the fact that these civic anti-nuclear organizations did not evacuate themselves from their Tokyo headquarters, nor did they call for people's evacuation. It is not only the government that is scared of people's panic as a threat for peace, so too are the citizens themselves. Sensible citizens and critical intellectuals both demand the people in fear of radioactivity to remain calm.

Meanwhile, we are gradually losing sight of the actual status of contamination. At the moment, we are measuring cesium in soil and food, though without knowing how long our method remains valid. Sooner or later, cesium at least in agricultural products will be undetectable. By employing certain method, the amount of cesium can be reduced, as some farmers have already begun to practice.

Let me explain this mechanism. In the first place, the reason why cesium is absorbed into plants is: when plants absorb potassium from soil, they also intake cesium because both materials behave similarly. Then how can we stop the absorption of cesium? One method is to blend exceeding amount of potassium in soil. In other words, by controlling the ratio of the two materials in soil, the amount of cesium intake can be reduced.
But this method has two fatal flaws.

From the vantage point of protecting the producers, this method is just a deferment of the solution to the problem. While the products with reduced cesium can be distributed to the market, it does not reduce the absolute quantity of cesium in soil, so the farmers will be continuously inhaling radioactive dust in their lungs. Upon scrutiny of soil, options such as giving up farming, relocation of farmland, or decontamination of land should be considered, and compensation for damages needs to be filed for these. But due to the fact that the products can be shipped as commodities for now, the measures for solution are put off.

The second problem exists in how to protect consumers from contaminated products. Cesium is just one of the nuclides being released and spreading from Fukushima. The only reason that we are testing cesium in particular is because it is the indicator for the level of radioactive contamination by all other nuclides. It is impossible to detect such nuclides as strontium and tritium with the kind of measuring instruments that we ordinary people can obtain. So we have to focus on cesium. That is to say that if cesium is laundered, we can no longer know the presence of other nuclides. The same can be said of tap water. If water purification plants adopted some ways to absorb cesium, we could have tap water without cesium, but this would cover-up other nuclides. Since 3/11, we have heard stories that tap water in Tokyo Metropolitan area has come to contain more dirt, or has become more chloric --I wonder if cesium has been removed or modified by certain means. Thus contamination in food and water is covered up, and they look clean and safe on the surface.

War and Peace
The Japanese Archipelago will be an intersection of war and peace for the next several years. First there will be an actual state of war wherein we will have to endure poor diet, scarcity of supplies, life in refuge, acceptance of evacuees, and finally unwitting radioactive labors. The spectacle that promotes "peace" will attack us as well. At least on the surface, dominant in public will be a general feeling that as Fukushima Daiichi incident comes to an end, most of the problems have been solved. On the other hand, simulation of war or war games will appear in order to psychologically rationalize the gap of situational recognition: war or peace.

I strongly criticize war games. For example, visiting contaminated Fukushima for volunteering or sending people for disaster relief volunteers is a sheer absurdity. Campaigns to "eat and support Fukushima" are ridiculous. So is what Dr. Hiroaki Koide advocates: "senior citizens should eat contaminated food in order to take responsibility (of the disaster)". These are but a few examples of what I call war games.

I would like to point out the problems of Dr. Koide's proposal, since this embodies a wider tendency beyond his personal position.

There are three points at issue.
First his proposal individualizes the issue. What he is saying is simply that consumers should buy contaminated food products if each is given choice: to buy or not. He dismisses the whole picture of radioactive contamination itself. There are a starting point and an end point in any system of distribution. In case of food products, a producer is the starting point, and treatment of sewage and garbage is the end point. Being in-between, consumption makes possible agricultural and fishing industries at the starting point, and demands the disposal of sewage and garbage at the end point. Buying irradiated food products makes producers exposed to radiation more than consumers, and continue their radioactive labors. Those who eat irradiated food will dispose excessive radioactive wastes, and eject radioactive excrement, imposing them to local public facilities. People who work at incinerators or sewage disposal plants will be unwittingly made to bear radioactive labor, in places faraway from Fukushima. It is not that all these labors are carried on by senior citizens who are to take responsibility; all workers at these facilities, including innumerable youth, are to be imposed radioactive labor, for dealing with what Dr. Koide et al are to self-determinedly undertake.

Secondly Dr. Koide's proposal does not take into consideration the long-term effect of radioactive pollution. Consider half-life of cesium 137 is thirty years, and that of Cesium 134 is two years, which means that it will take thirty years for these half-lives in sum to be reduced to a quarter, and sixty years to be one eighth. Still this is the calculation of only cesium. The problem will not be solved in a decade or two. I cannot help mocking Dr. Koide et al who feel responsibility for the accident: "how many years are you planning to live and take responsibility?" Our strategies against contamination (as well as struggles around pollution) require a scope of a hundred years at least. We must figure out what will be possible after all those who are "responsible" disappear, and what needs to be done at this moment for that.

Thirdly Dr. Koide et al keep certain reservations vis-à-vis the nuclear policy itself. It can be seen as a political submissiveness. Public in general consider Dr. Koide's proposal as a counter action to "egoistic consumerism." Above problems granted, however, their proposal that "seniors eat contaminated food and take responsibilities for the accident" is nothing but an egoistic self-preservation. Take a close look at their "Collective Declaration." It suggests that only by buying contaminated food can one take full responsibility for the accident. Can there be such a convenient way of solving the problem? Can there be such a convenient consciousness of responsibility? I cannot believe that. There are things we should do more actively and confrontationally.

In conclusion, Dr. Koide et al’s subjective declaration tolerates and even follows the "eat and support" propaganda orchestrated by the government. While it seems to criticize the nuclear state, it is actually an avoidance of confrontation with it. Mothers from the North East and Kanto regions are desperately fighting for survival: by seeking to evacuate with their children, monitoring radioactivity in parks and schools, watching school meals, demanding inquiries to local incinerators, and measuring contamination in food and soil independently. Right next to this on-going state of war, Dr. Koide et al carelessly claims: “we should eat.” I do not believe that they intend to fight in full confrontation with these problems. They are just exhibiting a critical gesture and playing their war game.
Questions of Neoliberalism

Wars in nuclear era are a concealed war, taking invisible forms of low intensity warfare. Today innumerable types of conspiracy theory are circulated, only because contemporary wars are based upon invisibility. They appear as an information warfare, campaigns to create impression and organizing apathy toward existing violence.

In his “Comments on the Society of the Spectacle,” the situationist theorist, Guy Debord points out such situation. Contemporary capitalism, namely, what Debord calls "the spectacle society" is firstly a world filled with lies and secrets. This was the notion that I conceived when I wrote Atomic Cities. I sought to connect concrete tendencies with this notion: cities shining by nuclear energy, cities under a total police control, tourist/commercial cities approaching more and more a sheer spectacle, cities wherein violence is made invisible, cities under de-industrialization, cities wherein labor is dying, etc.

In order to argue these historical characteristics, grounding problematic is that of neoliberal policies that have been repeatedly problematized. Where did the neoliberal autocracy derive from? Why is “crisis” always invoked? Why is it over-emphasized? Why do banks and financial system swell each and every time a crisis is weathered? These are the issues of the state as well as of economics, the domain of scholarship responsible for having privatized national finance to make it into a tool for further financialization. What makes possible the expropriation of wealth (primitive accumulation), the bare act of a theft at a fire?

It was perhaps the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre who pointed out the threat of neoliberalism in the first place. He grasped signs of coming neoliberalism in new urban policies after the World War II. The Situationists and Debord followed Lefebvre to succeed his problematic consciousness. On my part, I followed an inverse path, from the critique of the present neoliberal policies to Lefevbre’s account of the urban sociology of the 1940s. In this process, another argument I could not ignore was that of Robert Jungk's The Nuclear State. The importance of the book has been almost forgotten up until recently.

In passing, as I believe, French contemporary thought, the so-called Post-structuralism in particular, had a tacit yet close connection with the issues around nuclear power. The time during the 1970s to the 1980s when this line of thought was shaped was the time of the cold war, and hence under the threat of nuclear warfare. We should recall that in such context the works of Deleuze and Guattari were read, and the concepts such as “state apparatus” and the “society of control” were posed and scrutinized. We can even place Jean Baudrillard's Simulacra and Simulation in this context.

In any event, my conceptualization of Atomic Cities was not an outcome of any attempt for presenting a novel stance, but of straightforward readings and interpretations of the line of thought.

Habitus without Habitus

The war of the nuclear state employs lies and secrets, as has been revealed in the responses of the Japanese government after 3/11. And from now on, under the state of actual nuclear war, uses of lies and secrets will be repeated. When these are unveiled, then, manipulation of impression will be instigated by various campaigns.
One example of many on-going campaigns is as such: a department store hosts an event to sell food products from Fukushima, where actually many people come and buy them. Seeing the scene, most of the people come to have an impression that the products from Fukushima are accepted by many citizens and safe. This is a total hallucination. I would not say that everyone at the event is a shill, but organizers and hosts of the event plan this ahead, to make sure that certain number of people gather and certain amount of products are sold there. In reality, that certain number of people gather there and that Fukushima products are accepted by citizens are totally separate things, but thanks to the effect of the hallucinogenic trick, an impression can be created that the public widely welcomes Fukushima foods. This is almost like hypnosis, but such event is organized on daily basis. I imagine that there exists a kind of "professional Japanese" who are willing to participate in such operation. There are certain numbers of citizens who make their livings by state projects: cops, teachers, soldiers, doctors, nurses, etc. Accordingly, there are kin or spouses who are mobilized in this kind of event. When you see crowds who come to buy Fukushima products on TV, you may step back and think that these people are the professional Japanese who are attached to and function for the nation-state.

In the situation filled with lies, secrets, and psychological manipulation, the problems we face infuse those of sociology.

We often confront suspicious problematizations such as "nuclear energy and economy" these days, but now we can comfortably argue back: "Whose economy is it?" Parents who have equipped themselves with high intelligence to fight their struggle can firmly objectify the existence of the nuclear state and its spectacle. They punctually articulate the war whose main strategic target is people’s interest and apathy, the struggle whose battleground is becoming more sociological than not. When I say intelligence here, this is not a matter of high education, but of habitus (behaviors that they obtained) of Tokyo urbanites. In fact the fatal blow to the Japanese government was, more than anything, its own operations that enraged the urban dwellers having to live under the pouring radioactive materials. The habitus of Tokyo urbanites is what I call "habitus without habitus," namely, their flexibility, opportunism and pragmatism that are not bound by and transverse the division of labor and the gender division of labor.

They no longer take seriously any national address or command spread by TV and newspapers. They no longer have any faith in the authority of specialists. They no longer have any fear in gendered moral bashing. This power is thanks to habitus and intelligence that cities taught their dwellers and the dwellers themselves achieved. These people are the true avant-garde who will play a leading role in the warfare to come. They are the shes and hes who are solemnly measuring radiation and bringing charges against the truth of the damages imposed upon them; they are uniting together with the refugees from the north and at the same time becoming refugees themselves.