

An Interview with Ian Thomas Ash, director of the film, *A2-B-C*

The Fukushima disaster will undoubtedly continue to affect the lives of people living in the area for many generations to come. Based on your experiences documenting this disaster, can you briefly explain what you see as a few of the most significant long-term effects and what impact you think they will have on the local population over time?

You've asked an interesting question. Many of the short-term effects on the population are easy to see: stress and depression being two of the biggest. But what may be some of the long-term effects? It's hard to say. So many people have lost their faith in their government completely. They feel utterly abandoned and unrepresented. Some people even feel conned into remaining in the area, thus exposing their children to dangerous levels of radiation, in an effort to reduce the number of people that would qualify for compensation. How are these people going to move forward as members of this society? Will they merely become apathetic, resulting, for example, in decreased participation in voting, or will they become politically active and start a revolution? Stay tuned...

It's clear from the stories in the film that the Japanese government and at least some of the medical facilities were invested in trying to deny or hide the health effects of radiation after the disaster. As more parents have sought second opinions and evidence mounts that the radiation has affected children's health in a variety of ways, how have the government and medical facilities responded to the families that are speaking out and/or the growing evidence that documents health effects?

The response has been: "What health effects? To date, there are no peer-reviewed studies that prove any direct causal relationship between radiation exposure and the symptoms that the children are experiencing."

I must note that it will be years before such studies are published and by then it may be too late to protect many of these children. Wouldn't it be better to do too much to protect the children, than not to do enough and regret it later?

What effects do you think the radiation may have on people's lives and health outside of the immediate area surrounding the nuclear plant?

The health effects that we are seeing are already numerous and vary for each individual person. Perhaps the most wide-spread and immediate effects have been brought on by inordinate amounts of stress: lowered immune system, causing greater susceptibility to other illnesses, as well as increases in depression, alcohol abuse, domestic violence and suicide. The government would have you believe that these are not related to radiation exposure, but these people would not be suffering these mental and physical health problems were they not living in the wake of a nuclear meltdown.

As the director, what do you hope that viewers, particularly college students, will take away from their viewing of A2-B-C?

This is not a story about “those people in a faraway land.” Do you think the US government would never allow something like this to happen? Look at Hurricane Katrina: the majority of people who died were economically disadvantaged, just like the people of rural Fukushima. And years after Katrina, there are STILL displaced people needing assistance.

As citizens of a country, I believe we are being called to deeply examine how our governments are run and what role we play in the democratic process. It is all too easy to blame “them” (the politicians), but if we are not taking an active role in how our governments are run, and instead choose to ignore what is happening around us, then it becomes harder to not accept some of the blame ourselves.

For example, I am embarrassed to admit that prior to this accident it never occurred to me where the power I was using came from. Sometimes it is easier in life to just simply not know; not know where our food comes from or where our clothes are made. But now we have been given an opportunity to open our eyes. The key is going to be to never shut them again. Living with this new awareness will not be easy, but I can assure you, the alternative would be less so.

What are some meaningful ways that the students at Lane or members of the surrounding communities in Oregon might help spread awareness about what is happening in and around Fukushima?

After watching the film, if you are left with more questions than answers, if you are shocked, upset, or confused, if you are disturbed by the lack of resolution and it moves you to want to do something, then the prayers of the mothers will have been answered. They are simply begging not to not be forgotten.

Asking the mothers, “What can we do for you?” is acknowledging their very existence, something the Japanese government has yet to do.

We may not always know what it is we can do, but simply wanting to do something is the first step.

The Lane Honors Program will host a screening of this film and Q&A session with the director via Skype at the Lane Art Gallery on Wednesday, November 13, beginning at 6 p.m. Afterwards, attendees will be able to record personal video messages to the families featured in the film. This event is free and open to the public.