

## "The Symposium and Beyond" by Norma Field

The symposium on "The Atomic Age from Hiroshima to the Present" took place as scheduled at the Assembly Hall of the International House on Saturday, May 21. The day began at 8:45, and it was 5:45 when the videotaping stopped. There were probably 150 people in the Assembly Hall at peak, but since the audience seemed to shift in the course of the day, there were actually more people who attended some part of the proceedings. Even at the very end of the day, there were as many as 70 people for the roundtable.

Thanks to this audience presence, we were able to sell \$1000's worth of "We Are All Downwinders" T-shirts for the Japan Relief & Rebuild Committee, a student organization at the University of Chicago dedicated to helping students of Iwate University whose education has been disrupted by the March 11 disasters. We organizers would like to thank *everyone* who attended the symposium.

As co-organizer from the host institution, I can't thank my fellow organizers, Yuki Miyamoto (DePaul University) and Tomomi Yamaguchi (Montana State University) enough. Together with Sarah Arehart of the Center for East Asian Studies and Masaki Matsumoto in the MA program in Social Sciences (both U of Chicago), we made most decisions of procedure and substance collectively as we struggled to acknowledge the ongoing crisis in Fukushima.

Heartfelt thanks are also due to our participants: to filmmakers MT Silvia and Hitomi Kamanaka for having made their films and lived the lives that led them to make these films; to Kennette Benedict, Dave Kraft, Joe Masco, Sid Nagel, and Bob Rosner for serving as panelists who shared the entire day with us. In addition to the filmmakers, we were physicists (two), anthropologists (two), an antinuclear activist (one), a religious studies scholar (one), a political scientist (one), and a Japanese literature scholar (one). To understand and evaluate the role of nuclear power (as weapons and as energy source) in the world requires many kinds of knowledge: how can any one discipline be adequate to deciding the fate, potentially, of the species? It was fitting, therefore, that panelists did not confine themselves to their expertise as narrowly construed but also spoke from the knowledge and judgment developed across their lived experience. (When the tape of the discussions is ready, the link will be posted on this site.)

We're sorry there wasn't more time for discussion among the panelists and with the audience. We thank the panelists for speaking so substantively in their brief allotted time, and the audience for submitting questions. Clearly, we had only touched the tip of the proverbial (however melting) iceberg.

The crisis is not going away.

Everything we can summon of our incomplete knowledge and resolve to be responsible human beings is put to the test as it continues. Not only do we learn such facts as the Nuclear Waste Management Organization of Japan's finding (announced May 24) that soil contamination in some parts of Fukushima equals the levels found in the Chernobyl exclusion zone or that meltdown took place in reactors numbers 2 and 3 early on as well as in reactor number 1 according to Tepco's characteristically delayed announcement (the Prime Minister himself declaring ignorance), but we need to grasp the impact of a range of familial and other affective and communal ties being sundered, whether materially, because some members choose and are able to leave, or psychologically, because agreement cannot be reached on such a fateful decision and/or the wherewithal is lacking; of children trapped indoors as summer approaches on the one hand, or teachers having to act according to officially allowable exposure levels in the face of parental distrust, on the other; of worry about water for infant formulas or about the safety of breast milk, which has been found to be contaminated even in Tokyo; or about what to do with the wet raincoat and umbrella brought back from an errand. If topsoil is removed from schoolyards, where can it go?

Repeated official assurances about "no immediate impact on human health" cannot expunge anxiety from the minds of the many who know that the lag between exposure and the appearance of illness can be extended over months and years. Nor can such repeated reassurance protect residents, including children, from hostile suspicion and outright rejection when they move to other communities.

In a different vein, how does the loss in sales of agricultural produce and fish for the domestic and export market, or the disappearance of tourism speak to the claim of the low cost of nuclear energy? Should we bracket these questions because this is a crisis with low probability? If so, in whose name?

And so we hope that you will continue to think and further inform yourselves about what is going on in Japan and in your own locales, since this is not just another problem unfolding on the other side of the world. We hope you will initiate discussions with friends and neighbors. We hope to continue to maintain the "atomicage" blog with news in English and Japanese, so please check in. "I thought we had more time," was Director Kamanaka's refrain during her visit to Chicago. How do we take on the challenge of that endless regret?

Please feel welcome to post your comments on the symposium as well as on subsequent developments. This can be done by clicking on the "no responses yet" line after an entry. Comments from my class, "Hiroshima, Nagasaki,

and Beyond" can be found at <http://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/atomicage/2011/05/24/hiroshimanagasaki-class-discussion/>