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The forced removal of the anti-nuclear camps in Tôkyô

Musings on the covert operation

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Source: IWJ http://iwj.co.jp/wj/open/archives/326651 (The tents before their forced removal, August 6th 2016)

Commemorating the first anniversary of the day on which north east Japan was struck by a threefold disaster, "The Wall Street Journal" released an online article on the 10 March 2012 entitled "March 11, One Year On: Occupy METI". At the beginning, the journalist Obe Mitsuru describes a scene, in which a "shaky tent", decorated with colorful placards and banners demanding Japan's withdrawal from the nuclear energy program, stands on the corner in front of the comparatively mighty Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) in Kasumigaseki, the administrative district in Tôkyô. Obe segues into the main part of his article with the heading "Welcome to 'Occupy METI', Japan's take on Occupy Wall Street" (OWS). http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2012/03/10/march-11-one-year-on-occupy-meti/

Since then two other tents have joined the first and are proving to be in no way "shaky". The consideration that 'Occupy METI' was inspired by OWS, however, can be deliberated more precisely, in that the title, which appeared sometime later on, is very much linked to the events in New York in Autumn 2011. The occupation of the space in front of the METI, which has very close ties to the nuclear industry, was already underway on 11 September, a few days before that of the OWS on 17 September. Various other protests were also taking place on 11 September, which marks the sixth month anniversary of "3.11.": A human chain successfully encircled the METI; a *Genpatsu Yamero* Protest ("Stop the Nukes") and a subsequent demonstration, in which around 20,000 people took part was organized in the sub-center Shinjuku; and four youths began a hunger strike in front of the METI under the slogan "Think about the future". They came

especially from Kaminoseki (Yamaguchi prefecture), where opponents of nuclear power have managed to prevent the construction of a nuclear power plant, which should have been built across from the Island Iwaishima, next to one of the Japan's most beautiful inland seas (*Setonaikai*), at the start of the 1980s. As the building of the nuclear power plant began at the start of 2011, the earthquake and nuclear meltdown of *Fukushima Daiichi* shook the land and forced the construction plans to be put on hold once again. The energy plan of the current national-conservative LDP Government under Abe Shinzô, which lists nuclear power as a fundamental energy source for the future (20-21% by 2030), indicates that the planning for the power plant is still on the cards.

Fuchigami Tarô 渕上太郎 (*1942) remembers (cf. Oguma 2013: pp.79-82) how the idea suddenly came to him and a few other links in the human chain, not to go their separate ways after the demonstration, but to stay together and create a necessary environment with which they could encourage continuity in the anti-nuclear movement. So on the evening of the same day, on the aforementioned corner, a large tent measuring six *tsubo* (an ample 18m²) was pitched beside the four young people, with whom they effectively have a familial bond. The youths persevered a total of ten days until 19. September, while the considerably older "Campers" – including former Activists (like Fuchigami), who protested against the security treaty with the USA and whose experience of radical and social protest extends back into the 1960s and 1970s, decided to stay after consultations and negotiations with METI-officials, and after applying for permission to use the official grounds. "In this way, the campsite in front of the METI in Kasumigaseki, right in the middle of the capital city, where all the ministries and authorities stand back to back, was transformed into a declaration will of the opponents of nuclear power: against

TEPCO, the perpetrator of the damage at *Fukushima Daiichi*, and against METI as a representative of the state." (80) A good overall view of the area, in which the *Tento Hiroba* is situated – a busy crossroads, first and foremost frequented by businessmen and officials – is given in the short video clip entitled "voicesofprotest", accessible on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcMag_O45Tc. The official name of the campsite is *Datsu/Han-genpatsu keisanshô-mae tento hiroba* (in short: *Tento Hiroba*): "Campsite in front of the METI against nuclear power/for the withdrawal from the nuclear program".

Had it not been for the covert operation of the police and state authorities in the early hours of 21 August 2016, who cleared the camp in less than two hours and brought the world's longest "Occupy" movement to an end, the preparations for the approaching fifth anniversary would not have been halted. It was the 1807th day since the start of the occupation – a day, as one of my students remembers, on which a few of the activists were staying in Fukushima in order to attend the different events that were being held there – which in turn meant that the instigators of the covert operation were aware of the next steps of the campers (who were most likely observed around the clock). It was also the closing day of the Olympics in Rio, which had already attracted the attention of the population and the media, on which the cameras were ready to cover the closing ceremony a few hours later. Here the newly elected governess of Tôkyô, Koike Yuriko, received the Olympic flag for the forthcoming games in 2020. The Prime minister Shinzo Abe also made an appearance dressed as "Superma-Rio", starting from the administrative district Kasumigaseki and via sub-central Shibuya, he travelled through the center of earth to the Maracana Stadium. He held a red ball in his hands, which, after an impressive laser and dance show, he passed along to the Japanese

Olympic athletes, so that they could all shout together: “See you in Tôkyô!”. This valediction also appeared spelled out in the middle of the playing field, above which an illuminated silhouette of the megalopolis and the “holy” World Heritage Site Fuji-san (Mount Fuji) was displayed in the background (unfortunately this video is no longer accessible due to copyright protection).

But before the valediction from the virtual Tôkyô could reach the screens of Japanese viewers, the first protests against the very real disassembling of the camps were underway in the real Tôkyô – organized similarly through advanced technology and the new media - although kept within reasonable limits due to the number of participants.

“A feeling of disappointment, of loss combined with silent anger. The thought of having lost something irreplaceable, and a sadness that takes a long time to fade, that can’t be consoled, and that I want to hold onto. I look upon the seemingly cold and hopeless walls of power and don’t want to forget the sight. This image will stay deep in my memory, which is perhaps the best thing one could hope for as one of the organizers of the tent-demonstration”. These are the first reflections of the publicist and former student activist (in the 60s and 70s) Miami Osamu 三上治 (*1941), which he wrote in the “Tent Diary” (*Tento nikki*, cf. http://tentohiroba.tumblr.com/) on the first and second day proceeding the 1807-day occupation. Yes – for activists like Mikami, who were there from the start, this is the new way of counting the days since the demonstration – and it is their view that I want to outline with this text. The days were counted after 11/09/2011 to measure the length of time the camp was in operation (and days were also used as the unit to record how long Japan was free of nuclear power), and now “days after” has been adopted as the subsequent way of counting. In no way are the messages, that have been written in

the diary, simply reflections on the actions taken or the events of the past five years, but instead call for further action to directly follow on to their present achievements. In this way, these events that have been reported "five days after" (26/08/2016), or in other words, this has happened on the campground, which now consists of a barrier on which green leaves have been painted, since day 1807 (or after one day): Sit-ins; (stood up) discussions; speeches from the tent activists themselves (one of whom came upon the original idea, that because the tents have been removed but not the power plants, the only thing left to do is for the people themselves to become tents and not move); and also contributions from people who have, in one way or another, supported "Occupy METI". The farmer Yoshizawa Masami 吉沢正巳 (*1954), who owns the "Fukushima Farm of Hope" (*Kibô no bokujô Fukushima*) located some fourteen kilometers from the ravaged "No-go-zone" of *Fukushima Daiichi*, and who has refused, against the government's decree after 3/11 (along the lines of "put a lid on it"), to slaughter his roughly 300 contaminated cattle, has also travelled there (cf. also Richter 2013: 407-411). For detailed coverage of these events - in the form of a live video recording - presented by the independent and alternative live stream medium "Independent Web Journal" (IWJ) by Iwakami Yasumi 岩上安身 (*1959) and his team, who were at the scene from around 9am on 21 August, see here http://iwj.co.jp/wj/open/archives/326652 ; http://iwj.co.jp/wj/open/archives/326859. One of the IWJ recordings (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQ_ISk8jWr8), which is accessible on YouTube, shows Yoshizawa sitting atop his "Nostalgic cow" (bôkyô no ushi) – a wire sculpture that he received as a gift from the artist Tomotari Mikako (*1965) in 2012, which now accompanies him at the anti-nuclear protests in Tôkyô and always stops by at "Occupy METI".



Source: http://torikyou2013.blog.fc2.com/img/CE4RYrIUsAEffHW.jpg/

Surrounded by numerous police officers, Yoshizawa tries to calm the increasingly heated atmosphere before he gets pulled down from his "Nostalgic cow". Later, in an interview with a colleague from the IWJ, he confirms his participation (on 21/8) at the coming "Goodby nukes! – 9.11. Anger Festival" (*Datsu genpatsu 9.11. ikari no festibaru*) on 11 September, and explains that he has already brought his cow with him for this cause, which he will transform into a *Mikoshi* – a portable shrine – and with which he will parade the streets. In the background a squeaky saxophone is heard, on which the punk rocker and well-known DJ Kamuro Tetsu (alias Kaenbin (=Molotov) Tetsu, who also had the idea for the tents (http://fukusimatotomoni.blog.fc2.com/), plays "We shall overcome".

These few insights show the following:

The protests will continue in the same defining way that they took place before. The anger (*ikari*), which has already been mentioned a few times, was and is expressed in combination with a pinch of humor; it was, and is, discussed, contested and turned into music. Over the course of the five years, the participants have cooked and eaten together, and also danced, cried, and mourned for the activists who have passed away. On the 500th day after the establishment of the campground, Mikami Osamu described life in the tents in his report "Almost two years: the campground on the corner of METI (3)" (*Keisanshô no ikkaku ni datsu-genpatsu tento sonzokushiteiru* (3)) in the following way:

"*Many people come here to meet and converse. Meetings are held regularly, and traditional dances like the 'Kansho Odori' are performed. But unpleasant things also happen. Sometimes the monotony of everyday life is in the forefront, and then something happens to mess everything up. Here, on this campground, emerged something quite indescribable … maybe it doesn't correspond with that which we had hoped for, but I see it that way anyway.*" (http://www.alter-magazine.jp/)

The unpleasant things surely include taunting from the extreme right-wing nationalists and groups advocating the use of nuclear power, who turn up every now and again in their black cars, which are equipped with megaphones to shout out threats (the most recent of which was on 14/8, reported by the IWJ, cf. here http://iwj.co.jp/wj/open/archives/325531), the result of which would occasionally become violent if the police didn't come between the two fronts. Unpleasant is also the legal action taken by the state authorities against two of the "occupiers" – Fuchigami and Masakiyo Taichi 正清太 (*1938) – for the first time at the end of

March 2013. The signs, which read: “State-owned land. No trespassing” (*Kokuyûchi – kankeisha igai tachiiri kinshi*), are still there in front of the barrier. Since the activists have decided to ignore the prohibition and are effectively unauthorized (which indicates that their application to use the grounds has been denied), they have to answer to the Tôkyô high court for the illegal occupation of state-owned land – They must clear the grounds and pay a fine of up to 33 Million Yen (around 318,000 US dollars; 21.917 Yen per day = 320 US dollars). Needless to say, the activists contest these allegations with the support of many lawyers and cite their reasons for doing so to justify their actions. At the end of the day, what does “unauthorized” even mean? Through their actions the activists want to draw attention to the irresponsible reaction of not only the owner Fukushima Daiichi power plant, TEPCO, but also of the state and METI after the melt down. *Tento Hiroba* has become a place, where everyone can meet, who wants to affect a withdrawal from the nuclear program; a place, where the thoughts and emotions of the people come together after having been forced away and dispersed by the disaster; a place, that has become a “second home” for an evacuee forced to leave Fukushima and relocate to Tôkyô – all of the information and materials about the current case and the resistance against it can be read on the homepage http://tentohiroba-saiban.info/ .

The “Campground” or “Occupy METI” has certainly become a central hub for the anti-nuclear protests since 11 September, which, from as early as April of the same year, continues to increase in size. They make an appearance in the documentary film “Tell the Prime Minister” by the Japanese sociologist Oguma Eiji 小熊英二 (*1962), who has now become an activist himself, which was shown in a number of German and European cities at the start of 2016 (cf. also “The people who stop the nukes. From 3/11 to

the Prime Minister's residence" by Oguma Eiji, which contains the aforementioned report from Fuchigami). He was able to express his opinion on the current mood of dissent with the help of three factors:

1. The presence and various activities of the "occupants" themselves, who ensured that the tents were always occupied, day or night, in hot or cold, even during typhoons and earthquakes: first, tent one, since the end of 2012; tent two, the "No Nukes Women's Tent: In support of Fukushima"; and tent three, which was added in 2013.

2. The many national and international visitors to the tents, whose importance cannot be stressed enough. They arrive with different motivations and provide varied ideas, activities and the necessary (financial, logistic, victual) support that allowed the activists to hold out for so long in the first place. The liveliest visits were (and will most likely continue to be) on the Fridays, on which many participants, before or after the so-called "Friday protests in front of the Prime Minister's residence" (*Kinyôbi kantei-mae kôgi*), headed for the tents nearby. This demonstration first took place on 29 March 2012, and since Friday 6 April was organized every week, always between 6pm and 8pm – the homepage of the organization *Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes* lists the number of participants (http://coalitionagainstnukes.jp/?p=6199). The artistic component of the campground is also a contributor to its appeal. With this in mind, the women of tent 2 transformed their lodging into an "Anti-nuclear Tent Museum" (*Han-genpatsu bijutsukan*) at the start of December 2015, only to take this a step further a few days later, on 19 December, and organize an Anti-nuclear (power plant and bomb) woodcarving workshop, led by "A3BCollective/ Anti-

War, Anti-Nuclear and Art of Block-print Collective", Illcommonz, Misato Yugi and other artists. The pieces of art that were produced there, and the artefacts that were on display in the museum, were all confiscated on 21/8 and handed over to an interim storage facility. According to the Facebook page of the Museum on 27/8 (10:35 https://www.facebook.com/antinuketent2015/), if the items are not picked up within one month, they will be auctioned.

3. Alongside these two "physical" forms of protest, the media presence of *Tento Hiroba* plays a central role. The internet (online) diary has already been mentioned, but the TV broadcaster *Aozora* ("blue sky"), which is predominantly shaped by the journalist Matsumoto Chie 松本ちえ, should also be included. As the name implies, the programs were broadcast over "the open air"-waves – for the first time on 14 September 2012 – almost every day at 4pm for several months. This allowed the interested parties inside and outside Japan to stay informed about the ongoing anti-nuclear protests and to hear the background story, all live from the campground – depending on who was reporting in front of the camera. The spontaneous protests, that took place directly following the clearing of the campground on 21/8, show the importance of social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and Mixi for everyday communication and the survival of the contested grounds in the administrative district.

To summarize for now,

it is perhaps unnecessary to point out that a complete analysis of the *Tento Hiroba*, the years of protest, the complexity of meaning, the aforementioned media sources included (of which the diary

most likely poses the biggest challenge), is long overdue. An analysis, which should also adequately discuss the activities of the "women's tent", is not only worthwhile, but necessary. Just under 50 years ago (1967) the book "Right to the city" by Henri Lefebvres was published, which, since then, has become a classic text. It was at this time that people like Mikami, Fuchigami, and Masakami, equipped with helmets and clubs, took not only to the streets, but also barricaded themselves in the universities to protect themselves from the riot police; thereby aligning themselves with various radical organizations to enter into the proletarian and anti-capitalist conflict. These experiences, which are discussed amongst themselves and with visitors, are also pondered in the *Tento Hiroba* diary. Shiomi Takaya 塩見孝也 (*1941), the former leader of the Communist Bund – Red Army Faction (*Kyôsanshugi-sha dômei – Sekigun-ha*), also visited the tents several times. On the occasion of one his visits, as he was being interviewed by a man from a private broadcaster about his "dream of a world revolution", the Green Party politician Bärbel Höhn joined him on video as she questioned him on his past and contact to former RAF members. This is worth mentioning because the YouTube video was the impetus for this text: even Frau Höhn wants to learn from him about the importance of this place and its educational value for opponents of nuclear power. In this context, especially considering her appearance, it was permitted to discuss political problems surrounding the anti-nuclear movement, which is normally banned so not to scare anyone off (but what crosses the line when considering the anti-nuclear movement?!). *Tento Hiroba* is a forum, a place where democracy is protected and the voice "of the people" takes precedence. Fuchigami adds that defending Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution is one of the main aims, which reads: "The people must continuously aim to uphold the rights and freedoms promised in the constitution. Any misuse of these rights and

freedoms should be avoided and every decision made should be for the good of the nation." Fuchigama continues: "To set up the tents and to express the will to protest – that is our way of continuously maintaining the rights and freedoms of the people" (81). Constructing a place, where the various demands of the opponents of nuclear power can always be heard, is a good method to lay claim to the city and to a good life. Along the lines of Kamuro Testu: may there be many tents in the future.

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