

Interview number 31

After Hiroshima
Interview transcript

Interviewee: Bo Jacobs, Associate Professor at the Hiroshima Project (B)

Interviewee: Sam Martin (S)

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S: So to s-start this is erm Sam Martin on the 16th July. Er I am interviewing er could you say your name, please?

B: Er Bo Jacobs, Robert Jacobs, er Bo Jacobs er ...

S: Cool, thank you. Erm so Bo could you just me give me a kinda overview of your research to start off with? If that is possible.

B: Sure. Erm my earlier research had to do with nuclear representation and so by that I mean er how er specifically in America. How Americans learnt to think about what nuclear weapons are, what happens when a nuclear weapon explodes, what radiation is, what nuclear war would be like, how to survive a nuclear war and so what I what I was interested in my earlier research was not exactly what these things are, I mean I am interested in what they really are but I am interested in the-the ways people learn to talk about them, the stories people learn to tell about them so for example er and also this the this research was limited to the atmospheric testing era.

So from 1945 to 1963 when nuclear weapons were being tested in the atmosphere because for me the culture changed dramatically when the weapons were not being tested in the atmosphere. Er partly because th-the immediacy of people encountering radioactive fallout altered at that time and during the period where people were encountering fallout on a much more frequent basis because of atmospheric testing it-it drove culture a certain way.

So I'm interested in the way the government explained these things to people and then also how people responded to that discourse and altered that discourse erm so for example there was there was a lot of material in the United States about how to survive a nuclear attack and most of it was fictional even though it was official discourse. I mean it was you know if you put a hat on and things like that and you know people understood that this was ridiculous. They didn't know why it was ridiculous but they just knew that it was bullshit and that they were being lied to and so there came to be a lot of counter narratives and push back in popular culture.

And so for example and there and there and the ways in which nuclear iconography sorta all took on this sorta patina of magic and er and supernatural nature and so for example in a 1950s sci-fi movie, at the beginning of the movie all you have to do is have someone with a Geiger counter and have it go click, click, click, click you can do anything now because people knew that if radiation was detected all the rules were suspended. Ya know laws of nature er laws of the food chain. The things we assume are intact suddenly they're malleable and anything could happen now. You don't have to explain why.

Radiation being invoked was a magic, was just a magic er denotation and fro-and so in that early work, for me, the thing that is most fascinating, the thing that was at the core of it, for me, there was this discourse that came right after the nuclear attacks at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 1945 and 1946 and a lot of it in 1945 coming from a wide variety of American social leaders; scientists, military leaders, politicians, religious leaders, there was oddly oddly erm focused on one single kind of narrative and what that narrative was-was erm ... because of the nature of these weapons we have to learn how to overcome violence and war. If we have another world war with these weapons it will be the end of the world. So because of the nature of these weapons we need to either learn how to stop having these horrible wars or it'll be the end of the world and both of those things are really, really dramatic things to imagine is ahead that humans will somehow figure out how to overcome violence, how to overcome war and conflict or that the world will end and so right at the beginning what people were told was that these - in essence for me the way I distil it down is that people were told that these weapons are a signifier of an impending social transformation. Either it's gonna be bring an age of peace and prosperity or it's gonna bring the end of the world and both of those are dramatic notions. So there is this there has always been this sense with nuclear weapons that they somehow mark a break in time and now we call it 'the beginning of the anthropocene' so that that discourse

continues. Erm they mark a break from the normalcy which the present and the future are directly connected to the past. They imply that the future would be a break from the past in some dramatic way and so that has always given nuclear weapons this sorta magical aura. Er and it gets used in a lot of ways. So that's the work that I did – my early work but the last five or six years I've been working er in in a much different way er in doing er really applied field research. I've been working with a colleague from Australia, erm Mick Roderick and we've been working on this project called The Global Hibakusha project and essentially what we are examining is the social and the cultural aspects of radiation exposures. We've been working in nuclear test site communities, nuclear production communities, nuclear accident sites, uranium mining communities. We've been looking at the ways radiation exposures effect communities and families and even individual identity. Exclusively looking at non-epidemiological erm al-almost that we've looked at has called er study er in in scholarship we look at epidemic – epidemiology when it comes to radiation. So there's all these other really, really profound ways that alters communities so an easy way to lay that out is that in ten years or twenty years from now when people talk about Fukushima the way that they'll talk about it is that they will say 'there were x number of thyroid cancer cases in children, there were x number of leukaemia cases' and the numbers will be about confirmed disease presentation.

There are hundreds of thousands of people whose lives have been completely ... just upended by the Fukushima disaster. In all kinds of ways, communities that have been abandoned er people who no longer live ya know in the same communities as their parents, and sib and ya know all as well as er all kinds of other changes that come. None of those ever accounted for.

Er in these places where there is big radiation exposures, so we've been working in a lot of communities around the world to try to look at the non-disease aspects of how radiation has affected these communities.

S: Hmm, so you're talking to people then and ...?

B: Er a lot of world history

S: World history, yeah, right yeah and ...

B: On the ground you know er on the ground with people erm you know with people who live in those places and er and then I would add to that that erm part-part of how part of what er research how it got altered by entering into this work. We're well aware that, first of all we're well aware of the colonial nature of nuclear history er and you guys never tested weapons in the U.K. ya know and France never tested weapons in France. There's-there's always a colonial even for countries that that test domestically, for example in Soviet Union.

It's in Kazakhstan where to Beria and the people who made the decision to put the test site there, the Kazakh people don't have a culture there is nothing to destroy. So there's always a little bit of – ya know nuclear test sites are placed in marginal communities where people don't have political power and we were aware from the start, especially in the test site places like in the marsh, in the Pacific, or in Kazakhstan, in Algeria and places like this that people like ourselves are part of a last wave of colonialism. E scholars and journalists we come into these communities and we harvest stories we extract stories, we take them back to our university jobs and we er and we publish books and we establish er solid careers for ourselves and nothing changes for the people back whose stories these were. Erm they don't know what happens to them usually, they get interviewed by people, they don't know if it ever gets represented anywhere and not-nothing ever changes for them. So we didn't want to be, we were very conscious from the start that we did not just want to simply erm remove stories from communities.

So one of the things we did at first was we decided that always any, any picture we take, any any interview we have is always the intellectual property person of who who it was from. So we can never reproduce it without their permission, and also without providing a copy of it but we also started to ask in especially in remote communities, what it was that we could do that might be er helpful to the community and what and what we heard invariable was that there was difficulty in getting young people in the communities to engage with this history, that they tend to think about it as their grandparent's history and we began to that-that along with another thing which was really a key moment for us. We were giving a lecture in the College of the Marshall Islands er a like a small two year college in Marshall Islands. And the teacher told everybody there that they had to write a two-three page response paper so all of them took out a phone and filmed us talking. So we are looking at this room full of thirty kids holding up

cellphones filming us and ... all of these things sort of coalesced for us and we started to decide that one of the things we would do, we would start er to create programmes to link young people from these communities together using internet technology and we started to have Skype dialogues between, first one was between students in the Marshall Islands and students in Hiroshima and er places like the Marshall Islands are very remote, I mean people-teens young people there don't meet people from other places at all and eventually it evolved into having workshops where we trained er third generation Hibakusha to conduct oral history interviews. [10.11]

So we had our first workshop in the Marshall Islands last year on the 60th anniversary of the Bravo test which was the-the most brutal nuclear event in their history. It's actually a national holiday every year, nuclear victims and survivors remembrance day and we had third generation Hibakusha, so these are people whose grandparents experience either nuclear attack or nuclear testing, from Hiroshima, from Kazakhstan, and from the Marshall Islands, we brought them all to the Marshall Islands and we trained them for three days on how to conduct oral history interviews. Erm we didn't train them in history or anything like that at all, it was all practical. So how to conduct oral history interviews, how to obtain informed consent, how to structure an interview, how to record an interview, how to edit film, how to deposit it digitally, finished in er oral history interview and-and so all of them returned to their communities and to varying degrees they've been at work gathering oral history testimonies in their communities -

S: Wow

B: - and there's two goals for us in this; one is that we're facilitating the maintenance of history within the community. Instead of that being white people like me coming in with a microphone erm there's a different kind of oral history that's given to a young person in the community when the interview is being conducted in the indigenous language erm and also that the these young people are going through networks that are previously unexplored because they are going through grandparents and neighbours and not the kind of networks that are presented when somebody like myself goes to er French Polynesia or-or the Marshall Islands or Kazakhstan, there's kind of a mechanism there to bring forward people for me to interview. It's the same people; they give the same story it's-it's a produced culture and it makes sense, it's the way that things work so these people - these young people side step that because they're operating within the community.

And the other piece is that we want them to all come together and meet these people from other nuclear affected communities. Er they stay in touch through Skype and through Facebook and through things like that and our goal was that in some of these remote communities there may be a young generation that emerges and has resources and contacts in other similar communities around the globe.

S: Yeah

B: So-so we started to do this scholarly work of looking at these non- epidemiological aspects of radiation exposure and as a corollary, partly through the experience of going to these places, we also began to organise these workshops. We'll have the second workshop in Hiroshima in September that will include some members of er the Malata community which is an aboriginal community in Maralinga, Australia where some of the first British tests were.

So this is a community of 250 people, there will be 2 young people that come here to Hiroshima to er for this training, to take part in a workshop here.

S: Wow, cool

B: So we've been starting to do these workshops annually.

S: Cool

B: So these, so this, this is where what my works been.

S: Brilliant and the-have you been speaking to the young people about what they've learnt from doing the interviews or the affect it had on them at all, to make a study of that?

B: Yeah, absolutely. Although that's-that's sort of episodic later because they are off in these communities and we receive some interviews from them. Some of them are active and some of them are not so active. Just a group of young people but erm but we're not yet, it's all it's all just new enough, we're not really following through yet just sort of looking. But some-several of them will participate as trainers in the second workshop. Several of the students from the first workshop er either via Skype or, for the ones who are in Hiroshima, they will be physically – they'll be physically present for the second workshop.

S: Hmm and the-do you know what their understanding or interest is in the issue is originally before this process?

B: Erm they for most of them it was not so articulated err in in Hiroshima the students were-were peace study students but it peace ... Hiroshima has a very ... articulated and intact nuclear history and remembrance culture.

S: Right

B: Erm and so they were aware of that, but some of them had never spoken to their grandparents about what their grandparents experiences were before the workshop. Erm so they so they-they were aware of it. In the Marshall Islands and in Kazakhstan they were all aware of the history of their communities but none of them in no none of the people who take part in it had ever asked their grandparents to tell them what they what had happened to them. Erm but most of these families there were family members lost to radiation induced illnesses um and so er so they really in a sense for all of them ya know it wasn't a driving concern for them before they got involved in this workshop and then it sort of expanded their minds and they became more educated and learned more about their own community so that they could present it to the young people from the other communities.

S: Wow and when you say articulated and intact do you mean very kind of shared like set-set of ideas about what happened?

B: Yes and what's more students study it from the time they are young, here they go visit sites in Hiroshima, they hear Hibakusha testimony erm this city stops on August 6th, ya know the city's very built it ya know the city is full of tourists that come here because of the nuclear because of the bombing erm and its hard as a kid in Hiroshima not to grow up with like Hiroshima being with Hiroshima's history sort of being shoved down your throat.

Erm but in Kazakhstan in Semipalatinsk and in the Marshall Islands that wasn't the case. Ya know I mean this it's-it's those are places where first of all there's far weaker educational structures erm there's still on-going colonial relationships with the countries that that inflicted this nuclear damage on them and it's a more complicated thing. Here in Hiroshima it's the centre of tourism, it's the centre of community identities so and its and its erm you know wealthy, it's a wealthy country so students learn a lot, in the schools there's a lot of established school programs, school visits to er the peace park and to hear Hibakusha talk every year and things like that.

S: Yeah, yeah, okay. I mean moving slightly back to your first set of work then ... like what kind of peace movement was there post-Hiroshima in America and what kind of, on the ground people how what people's attitudes to the bomb related to that?

B: It was there was much more than you would imagine.

S: Yeah

B: Er there was really there was really fairly strong opposition, in a lot of er and a lot of discussion on it in especially in religious community. There was a lot of articles published in er Christian, Catholic and various er er denominations of Protestant and also Jewish magazines talking about the ethics of nuclear weapons and erm er and so there wa- there-wa and there was immediate anxiety in America about the future being one in which these weapons were likely to be used against America, against Americans. Erm and so there was er so there was a ya know for people at that time in 1945 they'd been through in their own lifetimes World War I and World War II between the Great Depression so the notion that somehow we wouldn't have another war, big global war seemed er it seemed very realistic to imagine there would be another one. Erm their lives had been one in which they had just seen humans make mis- leaders, political leaders, military leaders make mistake after mistake after mistake. So to now have this

capacity to have you know what-what was thought to be almost a genocidal almost an omnicidal weapon er possessed by flawed human beings it seemed like we really need to figure out how not to kill ourselves. There was a lot of talk about how to avoid destroying ourselves now that we had this technology. [18.32]

S: Yeah

B: I'm sure part of that also was awareness of the Holocaust and just the fact that ya know this that sort of feeling that was a part of what intellectuals thought at the time that this was sort of the end of the enlightenment project. That all of this progress and technology had led us to this mechanised, these two different mechanised forms of killing ... And so there was a lot of – but it was a philosophical kind of thing beca-for-in America because America was the only country with nuclear weapons. So it was an abstract but-but people er there was a lot of celebration of er there was a lot of celebration of ya know the of the achievement of the weapon and of the er of the victory in the war. But there was also tremendous anxiety that this was that that this was a dark foreboding for the future, for humans.

S: And when you say anxiety do you think in the kind of express sense like or it was more submerged it came out in sort of the cultural artefacts you've looked at. How would you say?

B: It was very expressed.

S: Very expressed, yeah

B: And um and in in the 1950's in the it all changed in America when the Soviet Union got the bomb at the end of 1949. And then it-it was much less philosophical, there was a lot of anxiety about survival and then you see it expressed in all kinds in it became harder to talk overtly about these issues because of the Red Scare and fear of Communism er and so then you see it bubbling up in popular culture a lot but in that period from 45 to 49 there was much more – it was debated on debates on the radio, people talking about how er how to stop warfare, how to you know figure out what makes humans violent, and you know it was a much more philosophical kind of discourse until there was an enemy with a bomb.

S: Yeah and was there any how about any kind-kind of organised political protest movement that was present in America?

B: Erm it was it was – not really. Erm the the sort of ways that-the ways that it was there was there was what was called the scientist movement which is that a lot of the scientists who were involved in the Manhattan project became er activists in educating the public about the nature of these weapons and er and so there was a lot of er publications, public lectures er radio programs where Manhattan project scientists and other scientists were trying to teach people about the threat of nuclear weapons, the potential of nuclear weapons, a lot of it was aimed at affecting government policy.

Er it was during this time right after the war that the U.S. government was deciding who would be in control of the nuclear weapon infrastructure – would it be the military or would it be the civilian government and the scientists went on this huge er public relations campaign essentially to try to convince people to push the government to place the man-the former Manhattan project infrastructure, the nuclear weapon infrastructure under civilian control and not military control. And that is what happened but of course that civilian control became part of the military.

S: Yeah, yeah [laughs]

B: Though it was technically independent.

S: Yeah, and how -

B: This was the kind of protest there was, was like how should how should this and also fair amount of though not a lot, but there was a fair amount of vocal and it was certainly present in the media of discussion about world government erm there was a huge er movie and booklet that was published erm by the scientists and on the front

were – there were articles by several Nobel prize winner scientists, several prominent Manhattan project scientists, some very, very prominent people and the title of it was “One World or None”. And it was advocating for-for world government, it was advocating for er international control over nuclear resources and fissile material erm and so that’s the form that it took in the immediate period after the war.

S: How interesting. And how long in-since the nuclear testing in the U.S. how did people-what did people think about that? And what was the ...

B: Well there wasn’t testing inside the U.S. until after the Soviets got the bomb it was in the Marshall Islands in 46.

S: Right okay, yeah

B: So it was sort of out of sight, out of mind and it was kind of a spectacle. That it was just going on out where nobody was -

S: Right [laughs]

B: So that was er actually the Crossroads Test in 1946 in the Marshall Islands which were broadcast live on radio er it was considered unimpressive.

S: Wow [laughs]

B: In the press because everybody was so amazed by the atomic bomb and they were all fairly back from it so it was just a bomb and a mushroom cloud. People were like ‘that’s it?’

S: [laughs]

B: - so it was a little underwhelming but then in-after the Soviet Union got weapons then the U.S. started a test site in Nevada and the first tests were broadcast live on television ... So you could sit in your living room at home and turn on the TV and watch an atomic test live.

S: [laughs] What-what were those broadcasts like? I mean how were they presented?

B: Oh it wa-was they were a little chaotic just because it was hard – it was a remote place to broadcast from and it was the early days of television.

S: Yeah

B: But it was, but it normalised the experience. You know it was just more spectacle on television ... in some ways and America, ya know there were, in Las Vegas there were bomb watching parties, they would come out from the casinos and watch the nuclear tests and stuff like that.

S: [laughs]

B: It was all kind of er ... sci-fi space age hipster until they started finding fallout all around

S: Right

B: - and that started in, that started to really happen in around 1954, 1955 and what’s more one of the things that was a seminal event was the Bravo test in the Marshall Islands um this was in, this was er the largest nuclear test the U.S. ever conducted, first test of a deliverable thermal nuclear weapon of a hydrogen bomb and this is the word that put – this is the event that put the word ‘fallout’ into usage. It is very difficult to find the word fallout in print before 1954, before the Bravo test and the U.S. had largely been able to contain information about the dangers of radioactive fallout but the fallout caused by the Bravo test was so big that it was uncontainable and what happened was ... there, I mean there was an immense fallout cloud from this test and er hundreds and hundreds of people who

lived on [unclear] atolls had to be evacuated and they all, all of them suffered from radiation sickness. But the thing that really blew it up in terms of the public awareness was – there was a Japanese fishing boat er called ‘The Lucky Dragon’ er the English name of it, and it was far outside the exclusion zone, it was about 80 miles or 90 miles away from the Bravo test – [25.53]

S: *Hmm*

B: - and 3 hours after the test ash began to fall on this boat, it fell about 3 inches thick and it-it coated everything and everybody. By the time this boat – it was a tuna boat, that’s where all the tuna comes from that’s out there still, and by the time the er the boat got back to Japan, when-when it got back to port the entire crew was hospitalised with radiation sickness –

S: *Wow*

B: - and six months later one of the crew members died.

S: *Wow*

B: So one of the things that-that people understood and the U.S. government couldn’t control the perception of was that you could be 90 miles away from an H-bomb and die from an H-bomb because of fallout.

S: *Hmm*

B: That-that made people understand the nature of the threat of radioactive fallout when they had never ever understood it before.

S: *Wow and how was that reported? The-the ...*

B: It was reported sensationally ...

S: *Okay*

B: Newspapers all around the world ...

S: *Right*

B: It was when the boat got back to harbour the U.S. thought that they had-they had even though it was the-the event of the test from the U.S. military’s point of view was absolute chaos. There was huge radiation levels everywhere. They were packing up their boats and troops, they were evacuating people I mean they were in total panic mode themselves because of the nature of the-the radioactive threat. But they were able to contain news reports about it and even contain news reports about all the Marshallese that got sick and were affected by it until that boat got to port in Japan and it broke the whole thing open and it was front page news all around the world.

S: *Wow and how did the er well people react to that, to the actual to the reporting?*

B: Well the-one of the main ways you can see this is in popular culture, I mean people became anxious about – people – for example the U.S. government told Americans to build fallout shelters and bomb shelters. Nobody did. Nobody thought they would work so you can see there was this lack of – people though very fatalistically about nuclear weapons but the key way to see this is that there began to be this series of science fiction movies dated from 1954 from that test and in Japan there’s ‘*Godzilla*’. The opening scene of ‘*Godzilla*’ is fishermen in a boat, its and it was absolutely a version of ‘The Lucky Dragon’, fishermen in a boat and then suddenly they’re like ‘arrgh’ and there’s this bright, and they’re all like catch-catches fire so in Japan everybody understood what that was.

Um in America you have the first of the giant bug movies which was called ‘*Them*’ and in this movie you have ants at the Trinity Site, which by the way it’s the anniversary of today, the 70th anniversary of the first nuclear explosion um

in New Mexico er in this movie ants from the first nuclear explosion, the Trinity explosion, in 1945 have mutated because of exposure to radiation and they're as big as buses and they attack people and erm they're then was this long series of movies over the next 6-7 years in which we have either primordial monsters that are sort of dinosaur monsters that typically are ancient monsters that were sleeping under the ocean or under the North Pole and they were awoken by nuclear tests and they come out and they return and attack cities and then you have giant bug movies. In the giant bug movies there's giant mantises, there's giant spiders, giant – tonnes of creatures er all of these creatures are made radioactive by nuclear tests and because of exposure to radiation they mutate and typically they grow gigantic or some people grow gigantic like *'The Attack of the 50 Foot Woman'* er or people shrink like *'The Incredible Shrinking Man'* so radiation does all these magical things.

But the key thing, the key thing here is that none of these science fiction representations of anxiety over nuclear weapons are in any way ever the result of a nuclear war. All of them are the result of nuclear testing so you can see here all of this anxiety about the radioactive fallout being spread by nuclear testing that it's creating a dystopia and in none of these pieces is there a nuclear war. [30.22]

S: [Snorts] Wow. Do - do these movies directly... so they go from, basically, '54 to the early '60s, that's why it's... the most prevalent...

B: Absolutely, a little into the sixties but basically '54 to... and... and then you get this other thing which is fascinating to me too, which is that at the end fifties you start to get the cycle of movies. One of the things about these movie - these are B-movies so they're made for teenagers. Umm, you know, there are A-movies and B-movies. You know, A-movies had big budgets, big stars and the censorship; B-movies didn't have censorship because they were cheap movies made for teenagers and so nobody thought they mattered. So all these subversive messages make it into the B-movies.

And in the end of the fifties, you have this whole series of movies start where essentially the theme of the movies is that teenagers become aware of a monster and... they try to convince the adults that there's a danger, that there's a threat to the community, and the adults don't take them seriously. And the... the prime energy of the movie is about the conflict between the teenagers and their parents, and how the teenagers understand the reality of the threat and the adults don't understand the reality of the threat. And that becomes the tension in the movie, the sort of classic one of that is *'The Blob'* which I think is '58. And so, you being to... so you being to have this - this... er... these movies which not just are saying not only is nuclear testing dangerous but that -

Er... so that this notion that young people get it, and adults and this er...er...this is a larger cultural trope because in America you have these kids being taught to 'duck and cover'... they're...they're... they're taught how to survive nuclear weapons without adults and, invariably, people who've written memoirs about the fifties or childhood in the fifties, the... almost singularly they talk about when they were on the ground, under their desk, you know... ducking and covering, the thought that they had in their heads was, "the adults are insane.....the adults are crazy, that they think this is gonna help".

(32:30) S: [Snorts] Wow.

B: And so you see it reflected in these later movies where it's...it's the teenagers who get that there's a threat and the adults are just passively going about their normal business as people are being killed and as the town is becoming more and more in danger.

S: So, do you see that the antecedent of counter-culture and that essentially... the sixties...

B: Absolutely...

S: ...and seventies, that's...

BJ: In the...the...in the US, there was the SDS, the Students for a Democratic Society...and... they were sort of the... er... a lot of them were veterans of the civil rights movement. This was the largest group organizing protest in the 1960s against the Vietnam War.

And in their founding document - 1962, I think it was or '63, called the Court Hearnon [?] Statement - the very beginning of it, they say, it was because of our experience of being afraid of nuclear weapons as children and realizing that we might be that last generation of people on earth, that we realized it was up to us to fight against war and to fight against...umm...militarism. So you can hear, you can see the direct statement of a connection...

S: Explicitly, yeah.

BJ: ...right at the beginning of the counter-culture.

S: Yeah... and although, like... isn't it that in... er... Vietnam became the key point of protest. To what extent was banning nuclear weapons part of that mix? Was it a kind of... Sorry. Bo...

B: Not at all.

S: It wasn't was...

B: ...and this, for me, is part- is what happens is when the testing goes underground,...

S: Hmm.

B: ...is that they go out of consciousness and there isn't fallout being spread all over.

S: Yeah.

(33:56) B: So... you know... it alters the culture... umm... but a lot of the focus of those... oh - a big focus of those Vietnam protests was militarism and there were a lot of protests on specific campuses against the involvement of the campus in nuclear weapon research or the presence on campus of professors that did nuclear weapon research but they weren't strategists.

So as soon as all this, essentially, if it's in my back yard, I've got more of a problem with it: is this what you're saying? That, you know...testing...you know, the draft and so on, I suppose...the...er... really, for... all that stuff starts with the civil rights protests...in the fifties. That's sort of where that format of public protest and even campus protests begins, and lot of the activists in the 1960s had been involved in the civil rights protests in the late fifties...early sixties and so, it all emerges out of that...umm... but there's... there's definitely a lot of discourse about militarism and nuclear weapons laboratories and nuclear weapon production facilities... umm... as a part of the US war machine...but the protests are about stopping the war in Vietnam, that the goal...that's the tangible goal.

S: Umm...I just - back to '45, back to the actual...the...first bombs, umm... so reacts...'cause we looked at a kind of newspaper article headline in Britain the day after and it's like, half of it is the bomb and half of it's... great sunny day out. Here in Margate, on the sea, there's this bizarre... er...yeah... juxtaposition, so I wonder if there's anything similar example in the US? How it was reported...and...

35:42

BJ: No, it was... er... in the US, it umm... probably because, you know, there was all... aft-after the end of the war in Europe, you know, all through the summer, there were brutal, brutal conflicts in the Pacific war where... thousands of Pacific troops are dying weekly. So, as a result, when the bomb, er... when the attack came to Hiroshima, it was full page; full page headlines. It was, you know the only story.

Er... very dramatically and it was our bomb and...er.... and so it-it... it was.... it was not...nothing else was interesting at all; that was it. And it was days and days of huge, ongoing reports of ...er... a lot of which was feed through journalists working with the Manhattan Project, telling the history of the Manhattan Project and the great scientists and the great achievements and so, now, the secret is out so it was just fascinating to people for...er... for, you know, a good week or two.

(36:46) S: So it was triumphalist, really, was it?

B: Completely triumphalist...

S: OK.

B: ...absolutely.

S: And was any kind of... yeah, go on...

B: And it establishes the American narrative, which is that the nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is a story about American prowess: great scientists, engineering capabilities, building home industries, cities that manufacture plutonium. And there's no Japanese people. It's just like, 'wow, look at this great stuff we did and we kept its secret and we... we won the war and, that's the way the story stayed. You know there's... the only place that Japanese are in this story is as numbers, you know: 70,000 dead...aaa...but there's no person in- there's no person, there's no Japanese person there, there's nobody named, and that's the way the story sta- largely remains in the US.

S: And this...umm...what was I going to say? I mean, do you... so... and so, what are the other kind of... you talked about films, like cultural artifacts of the nuclear age that you've looked at, if you can talk to...

B: Oh, there's tons. There was a lot of country music...

S: Oh, really? Ok.

B: ...and a lot of it was... had religious themes... like when Jesus comes like an atom bomb...

S: [Laughing] Right.

B: ...everybody's talking about the atom bomb but nobody's talking about the aminorical [?] comments, so there was a lot of country music,...er... or, you know, let's- let's kill Joe Stalin with a bomb, and stuff like that...umm... So there's tons and tons of products. My...my buddy in Australia has this massive collection that- of what he calls, 'atomic-alia'... and it's just cultural branding with nuclear symbolism. So you have atomic razor blades, atomic... you know, deoderant soap... er... nuc- you know... at-atomic becomes a word that- that equals like super-power.

S: Yeah.

B: So, it's just ubiquitous; it becomes everywhere in American culture. The atomic symbol...

S: Yeah.

B: ...umm...the word, 'atomic', it's just taken up by all kinds of companies as a way to brand themselves as modern, and high-tech, you know even if it's...you now, sewing needles.

S: [Snorting laugh] When was- when was the country music around? Was that the fifties? Or was it, kind of...

B: Oh, some of it was in '45 and then in late forties but a fair amount in the fifties.

S: Was that anti-nuclear? Was that...quite pro-

B: It was all over the place... some- some of it was, and some- some of it was... er... I mean, some of the Christian stuff was like, "the real super-power is God"... and, er... and other ones were like, 'Yeah, we've got this bomb and we're going to crush everybody... we're- Americana triumphalist kind of stuff.

(39:43) S: Oh, wow. And what, I mean...and Japan: have you done much work on Japan - place, Hiroshima and how people dealt with it, psychologically... umm... the attacks?

BJ: Well, there was occupation here, so there was a complete...umm...er...control of information. There was no information about radiation, no information about atomic bombs... it was not allowed to be published in the papers, no images allowed to be published, so there was a vacuum of information...umm... and... in- and then there was a couple of ways in which... there were a lot of ways in which people in Japan felt that the reason they lost the war was they were, technologically behind the US and so Japan needs to become a technological powerhouse... er... So there was a sense that, we need to get- we need to get atomic stuff and we need to get... a friend of mine did this fascinating study about robots in popular culture in Japan before the war and after the war...and how before the war, robots are tools of foreign powers that are malicious and dangerous, and after the war, robots become...er... symbols of the Japanese nation that... er... that help Japanese people succeed, and there's this re-orientation towards technology, umm...

S: Right, yeah... duty, yeah...

B: ...and...umm... and also, umm... you know... here on the ground, people who... people who are hibakusha were badly discriminated against and... there was lots of anxiety about radiation, lots of anxiety about people who were exposed to... people hid that they were Hibakusha for years and years and years. So there... it's... a... but there was also an embrace of the United States, you know that... er... umm... Although, so... I know much less about Japan than I than I do about the West.

S: Yeah. Erm... and... I mean... as an aside to it, I was just wondering, like, just how you got interested in all this... work - what made you start studying nuclear stuff?

B: Well, for me, it...it...it really... er... when I was young, when I was eight years old in third grade, I was...er...at school, we had a...some sort of lesson that was- I don't think it was exactly the duck and cover lesson because I don't think they were teaching it in the early sixties ...but... but it was essentially the duck and cover thing, how- what to do when a nuclear bomb goes off. And the idea of duck and cover - I don't know if you've ever seen it, it's sort of a campy civil defense film, it was made in '52, the idea of duck and cover was that if...if children were with adults then the adults would help them take shelter or whatever. But, if there's a surprise attack and the children are by themselves, they need to know what to do to survive. So, we need to train them how to survive a nuclear attack. And so, I received some of that training when I was in third grade and part of the core of that... the core thing is that you need- you have to be hyper-vigilant to know when there's a nuclear attack and the way that you know is by the flash you have to always be ready, when there's that flash, to know what to do and this was in the mid-sixties so, by then, you know, the weapons were really big and it was kind of...you know, I remember there were- people would say, 'if there was going to be a nuclear attack, would you head towards ground zero or away from it was probably better to just go towards it than to survive. So it was that kind of- that kind of sentiment in the air. So I...it didn't seem to me to be...anyways, I went home that day from school, I sat down on the front steps of my house and I sat there, waiting for the flash. You know, being vigilant and, just like, anticipating this flash and waiting for this flash and I had this sense of my house and the other houses on my block and the school across the street, all just dissolving and in some ways I think it was, you know, at eight years old, it was the first time that I became aware of my own mortality; that's really what it probably was but it was totally connected to a nuclear weapon detonating and it totally terrified me and so, my means of coping with that was to go get books about nuclear weapons and read about them and...and I'm still doing it.

S: Oh wow...and umm... do you think...because this does seem very much that post-sixty three, there was a real...psyche- people just stopped worry as much about this, essentially?

(44:27) B: Abso-

S: Because in Britain, it was exactly the same and...

B: Right.

S: ...it seemed quite remarkable it's po- do you think there were other factors or...

B: Well, the Vietnam War became, you know... it... here in America- well, not here- in America, it preoccupied people and so, it was...it was the real threat at hand and...umm...and so...er...it-it-it really is the case, I believe, that when there stopped being reproduced images of mushroom clouds on the horizon...er... that it just sort of seemed like they went away even though we know they didn't go away and people were anxious about nuclear war with the Soviets but it became an abstraction rather than something that was visually represented in their daily world.

S: Yeah. So-so that's the media stopped producing the images because the media moved, do you mean?

B: Well, the images were of things from years ago... not from today in Nevada, or today in the Marshall lines...

S: OK, OK...yeah, I see. And did...I mean...in...was there a revival in the '80s, as there was in Britain...

B: There totally was.

S: Yeah.

B: Er...a huge revival and that had to do with...er...umm...the nuclear posture of the United States...er...with Reagan becoming very bellicose about the Soviet Union stationing...you know, er...stationing nuclear missiles in Europe, in Germany...umm...and the opposition in Germany, and the notion in the '80s, there was just an...a much larger awareness of the nuclear posture of the United States and the Soviet Union and the nature of the threat. And so there was, you know, huge protests, there were huge movements in the 1980s.

Er... there was a sub-..er... a total life-breathed back into it and a lot of it came from the sabre-rattling- nuclear sabre-rattling- of...er....of Ronald Reagan.

S: What-what sort of movements were... what were they like?

B: Well, there was the freeze movement..umm...and the... er...the nuclear freeze movement. The idea was to freeze the weapons at the level that they're at now and not build more weapons. And there was the, at the time, there was the largest protest ever in the United States happened in New York City, a nuclear-freeze...er... protest in 1982...82? I think it was '82 or '83. And there was this...also, along with that, in reaction to this public movement, and there- there was the rise of the Green Parties in Europe, there was the...umm...you know, there was the..er... all of the discourse in West Germany about nuclear war, the notion in Germany that the nuclear- if there was a nuclear war then all of Germany would be destroyed instantly.

Erm...so there...so there was opposition to stationing the weapons there, and there was opposition to NATO's nuclear stance and er...and...after that- not before that, after that- there was generated all of these films...that represented nuclear war directly. Umm... there was 'Threads'... umm... there was 'The Day After' in the United States, umm... there were all of these representations of the massive nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union...and that...that reached a lot o people who were not politically motivated or were engaged and represented it again in culture, this time with A-movies, reaching huge audiences and directly being about nuclear warfare.

(47:51) S: Ah, for example? Like...

B: Well, 'The Day After', which was broadcast-

S: Oh, [inaudible crosstalk]

B: -in the United States and which was... you know, there was long- there was long discussion...televised discussion of experts after the movie, and there was big- even school- a friend of mine told me his school was cancelled the next day because they thought the kids would be so anxious. It was a massive event here in the United States...er...and then you have the... er... 'The Wind Blows it Away'?... or whatever...[inaudible]

S: 'When the...When the Wind Blows'?

B: 'When the Wind Blows'-

S: Yeah, yeah [inaudible crosstalk]

B: -and you just...at that time, it is also being represented in punk music...constantly and there...it's the early days of computer gaming which also focused a lot on nuclear warfare, and so it was just returning to culture, er...partly as a tangible means of expressing apocalyptic thought.

Er...and...and in the 1980s, the apocalyptic thought coalesced around nuclear issues again...er...and I'm not exactly sure, I can't say what sparked it beyond Reagan threatening nuclear war and making aggressive, pos- making aggressive postures of putting missiles closer to Russia, trying...er...you know, really being somewhat provocative.

(49:06) S: Yeah, in Britain, it got sparked by them putting nuclear war...arms in Britain, aimed at Russia... so, it just went...CND just skyrocketed again...and it had been dormant for fifteen years. Incredible.

B: It was the aggressive stance of NATO... that forward positioning of missiles... which was very antagonistic, and the rhetoric coming from Reagan and I'm sure to some degree, from Thatcher, as well...umm...and so it just seemed like it was...and you have- I would add that that, on a structural level, you'd have all of these people who'd had long experience in protest movements and in the counter-culture...and in the '80s, it just...it's like, the political heart went out of that and there was this massively corporate culture going on in the '80s so there were a lot of people who were disaffected and they were able to, sort of, er...connect with that radical heart of themselves that was resisting this hugely, global- emerging global corporate...er... hegemony...umm...through these protest movements.

S: [Inaudible] Do you know anything- I mean, nuclear-freeze, for example, do you know what that was like on the ground, how that manifested itself...was that, kind of quite typical process that we might understand it?

B: Oh, I went to some of those protest.

S: Oh...oh, right. What was it like, them?

B: Oh, there was huge protests, really huge protests and really...umm...you know, Reagan...Reagan, in the U.S., was the beginning of the...of the huge assertion of the conservative right...er...and the conservative Christian right and so...there was...it sparked a lot of reaction...er...the protests were really large and really multifaceted, there were all kinds of groups represented. There were religious groups, you know, peace- religious peace groups, there were...you know, radical...er...anti-militarist groups, there were...er...all kinds of different protests groups that functionally came together under the umbrella of the nuclear freeze movement. There was also partly engaging the emerging environmental movements as well...aaa...and...and so, it wa- it sort of functioned as an umbrella movement for all of these different causes to come together and feel a larger community it seemed to me part of what it was. That because there was a sense that in the '80s of people...people on the left having been fractured, and defeated and so it was a way to assert community even though everyone had specialized causes that they were focused on... it brought all those causes together in some ways.

S: So that was in New York, say...would you say?

B: It was in New York was the gigantic...er...the huge, gigantic protest.

S: And where did you...did you converge on a particular point? Did you walk through?

B: Er...in New York?

S: Yeah.

B: It was in...er...I think it went into Central Park- it was just a huge...in Manhattan, a huge protest that ended in Central Park, and then there was a concert and then there were a few... there were a few earliest concerts for cause- with all the different artists and stuff like that.

S: Where there many celebrities involved...in that?

B: Oh, there were tons of celebrities involved.

S: [Laughs]

B: Yeah.

S: [laughs] Do you remember who? A few names...

B: Umm...no, you know something, I really don't 'cause I don't study that...

S: Fair enough.

B: ...er...but there was...there were a lot of movie stars, and there were a lot of rock stars, definitely in the UK and in America but...er...you know, just sort of...I mean, Martin Sheen has always been a real- really involved in nuclear protests in the United States and...er...and still is and Darryl Hannah is another movie star I remember that was out there, and Michael Douglas was one of them and just a lot of...there was a lot of famous involved at that time.

S: This is- this is interesting to compare the 'cause we're looking at Aldermaston in the fifties in England, and there were celebrities there as well and they were a big part of this, kind of like ongoing theme of these things. Hmm, I mean, one...I mean, I've nearly done an hour here so I won't talk up too much of your time but I want...do you know much about the global reaction Hiroshima, like, a...various other countries and how that differs at all, that kind of broad statement?

B: It remains...it remains an issue, it was...totally celebrated throughout Asia. Umm...and it still is. Er...it's still considered a great thing in all the places that were controlled by the Japanese Empire...er...it's...er...it's...er...it- there are still editorials in every year in newspapers in Korea and in China, talking about that it was a great thing.

S: Really? Wow.

B: Yeah. In south east Asia, in Singapore and all kinds of places, in the Philippines, they totally applauded it...

S: Wow.

B: ...er...any place where the Japanese had been occupiers, it was seen as...it was seen as, er...that they got what they deserved. And it's still seen in that way.

S: [Snort] It seems that way. Umm...

B: In- in Europe, it was more complicated; a lot of how...a lot of how it was seen in Europe depended on...umm...in communist countries, it was seen as terrible because it was seen as capitalism, it was seen as the imperialist capitalists and it was represented that way for years in...er...communist countries. That this shows the way the Americans are- this- this shows...er...the dehumanizing of...of the Americans. Umm...Whereas in western Europe, it was more that, while the Japanese had it coming, and it was regrettable but it wasn't a war crime. Umm...So...er...but...so, at that time- at the time that it happened...umm... there was...it was mostly celebrated triumphantly.

S: Yeah. Wow. By the- by- by the fifties, the Communist Party was supporting nuclear arms - in Britain, anyway - and they refused to join CND at first because of that. But then they did later on, for...umm... Well, even in communist countries, you know, that were part of the Soviet block, the idea was that the Soviet Union built nuclear weapons for

defensive purposes but what the Soviet Union did was, it was quicker to provide nuclear power. So they were looking at this as a community sustaining technology, and that they only had the weapons to keep the imperialists from attacking. And so there was...aah...any remembrance of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Soviet block was all about anti-Americanism. Er...and the same way it's true in China were it was a complicated thing because they hated Japan but they wanted to see the attack on Japan as an imperialist attack and nuclear weapon was the ultimate capitalist product. Hmm. And...in Japan now is...er...is there a kind of nuclear post-Fukushima kind of feeling - anti-nuclear energy, is that kind of...?

B: There really is. It's a really complicated moment politically in Japan, actually even literally, as we speak, the last day or two, the Diet, the...er...the legislature here has passed reinterpretation of the Constitution that, for the first time, allows Japan to take part in aggressive wars outside of Japan. So Japan is currently scrapping its Peace Constitution - it's not scrapping the Constitution, it's reinterpreting it...and Japan is repositioning itself as no longer constrained by things, so there's a lot of anxiety here about Japan sliding towards fascism. Some of the ways that these laws have been changed have been extra-constitutional - they're just reinterpreting existing laws rather than actually passing laws and getting any votes so there's a lot of anxiety about it. There's also a tremendous anxiety about nuclear things because of Fukushima all over the country. Opposition to nuclear power is somewhere over seventy per cent. The government...no nuclear power plants are operating in Japan. The government is now trying to restart the nuclear plants but they're trying to restart them one by one because they've realized if they try to start them as...as a fleet, that the opposition would be...would be throughout the entire country. So what they're trying to do is to start them one at a time as far away from Tokyo as possible. But they...but none of them have been turned back on yet. And so, yo- and I maintain that, the reason that the nuclear power plants are off is because it's not politically viable to turn them back on. If they...if the government could just turn them all back on today, they'd all be back on but they're pretty sure that it's not politically viable to do that.

(58:17)S: Wow. We'll see what happens. OK, wow.

B: Here in Japan, we keep having earthquakes, there's volcanos, you know, rumbling, and everybody realizes more and more: this is not the kind of place where you can have that kind of technology - it's just...kind of...inherently...er...catastrophic.

S: Do you see any...er...nascent sort of revival of this in culture? These...these sort of feelings at the moment?

B: Er...sorry? What was that?

S: Do you see any kind of revival of the kind of nuclear paranoia and fear in culture at the moment?

B: Absolutely. And protest movements, there are protest movements going on in Japan like there haven't been since the sixties.

S: Really? Wow. That's interesting.

B: There's massive protest in front of the Diet last night when they passed that bill. There's protests every Friday night in front of the Prime Minister's residence and that doesn't happen in Japan because of nuclear power so, there...there is definitely...one of the things I'd say was happening in Japan was that in...in your country and in my country, we went culturally through this thing in the sixties and seventies where we really lost faith in institutions - large institutions - and that didn't happen here. It's happening now. Here.

S: Yeah.

B: It ha...it's happening because of Fukushima so, there's a lot of ripple from Fukushima that is even unrelated to nuclear things just...people don't believe the government any more, they don't believe the newspapers any more and they think corporations are corrupt. When I first got here ten years ago, people thought large corporations were large because they did things well. Now they...now people think it's because they manipulate markets and eliminate competition, the things that we all learnt to think...

S: [Laughing] Yeah, sixties, yeah.

B: ...a couple of decades ago. [Laughs]

S: Wow. Alright, now...well, I've taken an hour but, that really brilliant. Thank you very much.

B: My pleasure, it's great to meet you - good to chat.

S: Yeah...I'll just stop it there.

ENDED at 1:00.02