

# Situations of Kekko

Conversation Konsthall C 2014.11.25

1 - Malin Pettersson Öberg	<i>Wrapped Words: Listening to Japan</i>	p. 1 - 2
2 - Hiroko Tsuchimoto	<i>Situations of Kekko</i>	p. 3
3 - Katarina Dahlbeck	<i>Young mothers in post-Fukushima Japan: Uniting while dealing with everyday life</i>	p. 4 - 6
4 - Yuko Maki	<i>Personal testimony from the day of the Tohoku earthquake, in Tokyo</i>	p. 6 - 7
5 - Petra Holmberg	<i>The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities &amp; the attraction between Sweden / Japan</i>	p. 8 - 10
6 - Kira Carpelan	<i>Impressions from an exchange to Japan</i>	p. 10
7 - General conversation		p. 11 - 14

## 1 - Malin Pettersson Öberg *Wrapped Words: Listening to Japan*

I will begin by telling you a little about this evening; about mine and Hiroko's collaboration and the radio program, before I will pass the word to Hiroko. We equally have three guests who will tell us more about their experiences of Fukushima and exchanges between Japan and Sweden. However, first I will quickly introduce how this evening and radio program came about.

It's a really big circle – it's nice to see that so many people could be here tonight. I just wanted to say thank you for coming of course, and thank you Konsthall C for inviting me to do this program and for letting me be here tonight and do this with Hiroko. Because for me this project and work with Japan started with that me and Hiroko met at Mejan in 2011. We started a collaboration where we applied for money to go to Japan, for a research trip and in the end, it turned out, also an exhibition in Sapporo.

We formulated our project quite simply about Sweden and Japan – the differences and similarities that you can find, in the cultures but also concerning identity. We were interested in what happens when we change cultures and countries, to look at globalization and the effects of that on our identity. Different forms of translations, and how it affects our work as artists as well; how you can see appropriation and borrowing of different phenomena: images, pictures, also within artistic practices.

Before the exhibition, I started working with a theme or piece called *Japan – A Borrowed Scenery*, where I was dealing a lot with this idea of appropriation. It was a printed work, which I showed in the exhibition, that also dealt with my ideas about Japan before my first visit there. So, it had to do with the ideas we have and I could find them in older guidebooks about Japan produced in the West, these ideas corresponding with my own preconceptions lets say, about Japan.

And I continued working with a project called *Borrowed Sceneries. Enquiries of Identity and Appropriation*. which was the project for which I went to Japan in the winter or spring to do these interviews that I based the radio program on. But this is a bigger theme around Sweden and Japan and exchanges - what I just talked about. Then, Konsthall C asked me to do this radio program, looking more at Fukushima, as that was an important subject we talked about during these interviews, and as that has affected Japan and Japanese identity quite a lot over the last three years. As I am interested in changes over time; in history but also the now, it becomes kind of important to take this into account.

The theme of Fukushima is of course very sensitive and complex. I want to highlight that I have been looking at this as an artist, and that I'm not an expert on Fukushima or nuclear or anything like that. But it felt important to talk about it while being in Japan, in these conversations, who also had other topics. To try to just listen and speak to people about this.

We listened to this excerpt of 27 minutes, and we could only hear two people's statements. The entire radio program is two hours long and it contains twelve different interviews or statements. So the rhythm and pace in this excerpt is also due to that we get a small part of something much longer. And of course there comes up a lot of other opinions on Fukushima and its effects on Japanese identity and people's lives. I thought I would quickly mention a few of those opinions or effects, which people communicated to me in the interviews, to add up some things from the entire radio program.

For instance, people talked a lot about this division of people into two groups – the "yes" to nuclear and "no" to nuclear power. It really divided Japan, it divided the people. It became this big rupture, which for many people was a very sad experience, because it divided friends, families and couples. But it also had positive effects, the opposite effects sometimes; people got married and got children, became more conscious of their lifestyles. So it has many different effects, of course. Also the difficulty or lack of information from the authorities in Japan, was a very big reason to anxiety and uncertainty among the people in Japan.

I just wanted to quickly mention a few more things, then I will hand over to Hiroko, and the invited guests. I wanted to mention what Takehiro is saying in this interview that we listened too: Fukushima as a huge unconscious suicide going on, relating also to the suicide rate in Japan. There is this concept of *Karoshi* – death by over-work – that some Japanese people are working so much, and a lot of people are actually dying from lack of sleep. These questions are also interesting to talk about in relation to the question of Fukushima.

I also, for instance, met with a former professor in architecture, she is now 85 years old and has been teaching in the Tokyo Women's University. She was talking about the connections to World War II, about the traumatic trace of the nuclear bombs of course, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. How that also effects how people relate to Fukushima now, today - a lot. This we can hopefully talk more about.

Many people talked about the economy and the market as very important reasons to why so many people are still pro nuclear in Japan. That economy and the economic growth is still something the country want to achieve, it is looked upon as very important. And then, nuclear is considered to be very important for the economy. This we can also discuss more.

Finally, I wanted to mention the title of the radio program– *Wrapped Words: Listening to Japan*. One of the interviewees, Miyuki Inoue, an artist who studied at Mejan here in Stockholm for one year, was talking about the wrapping culture in Japan. We were talking about the wrapping of gifts and fruits, that often things are wrapped one and one. And she said "Maybe words are wrapped too".

We started talking about language and the difficulties of communication in Japan. Because that comes up very often in these interviews: that this is a difficult subject to talk about, but also, the educational system in Japan is contributing to a difficulty of taking initiatives or being active as children or students; to discuss or think critically. That the teachers are sometimes more giving orders to the students than encouraging them to take initiatives - it doesn't create an open, critical climate, quite the opposite. This it would be interesting to hear more about, I'm not sure. And also, perhaps the positive effects of Fukushima, of course.

So for me it was more about going there, and experiencing or trying to get into – perhaps more on an emotional level than on an intellectual level – what people are experiencing and going through. I will soon hand over to Hiroko, but first I wanted to say something about the invited guests. Maybe we need a small break soon, also – then just let me know. But basically with this evening, we wanted to create a platform for talking about this and showing our work connected to this, and we hope it will finish with an open conversation where many of you can participate, because we know that many of you have connections and experiences related to Japan, Sweden, and even some of you, to Fukushima.

We have invited Katarina Dahlbeck, who is sitting over there. You have a Bachelor's degree in Japanese from the University of Stockholm and have been writing an essay called "Young mothers in post-Fukushima Japan - Uniting while dealing with everyday life", that you will tell us a little bit about. Then we will pass on to Yuko Maki, a Japanese architect working at an office in Stockholm called Elding Oscarson. And you were in Fukushima – sorry, in Tokyo (laughter) – when the earthquake happened, and you will tell a little bit about your experience of that.

Then we thought we could have some questions and answers after that, a discussion about that topic. And then we have Petra Holmberg here from Östasiatiska och Etnografiska museet, who is a curator there, responsible for the Japanese department or collections, who will talk a bit about the mutual interest and influences between Japan and Sweden, aesthetically.

So, that is our idea of input from guests. But then the rest of you – Kira Carpelan, you have been studying in Japan and written some texts, Azusa Itagaki, a Japanese artist based in Sweden, we have many examples of people who are related to Japan in different ways, here... Tetsushi Koyanagi, a filmmaker... We just want it to be as open and accessible as possible. I hope I didn't talk too long, it's a bit difficult to control – ok, now I give the word to you, Hiroko.

## **2 - Hiroko Tsuchimoto *Situations of Kekko***

Thank you for coming, I am a bit nervous and very impressed that so many people came here today. Hello, my name is Hiroko Tsuchimoto, I am originally from Japan, from Sapporo in the north of Japan. I moved here to Sweden in 2008 to study. In my art I am mainly working with culture and identity, and often do interactive performance.

I would like to talk a bit about today's performance – yeah, you got to pick a note when you arrived. First about the title: "Situations of Kekko", which is used both for my performance and the event. "Kekko" – Japanese people know I think - that "kekko" is used among Japanese people and depending on the context, sometimes it means Yes, sometimes No. The reason to why I chose this title for my performance, is related to the situation after Fukushima. I myself, and many other people, have confronted the difficulty to say Yes or No – for instance to the question of using nuclear power, or to eat vegetables grown in Fukushima.

Many people have asked me if it is okay to go to Fukushima, or eat vegetables from Fukushima. My answer is honestly, I don't know. Because I'm not a scientist, I'm not a doctor, I'm not a journalist. Although I could read many articles about radiation in Fukushima, it is very difficult for me to analyse scientific information and know what are the reliable sources. Even, I wonder how many people understand the situation correctly. Some said that the radio active concentration in Fukushima is four times higher than the one in Chernobyl. However, the Japanese prime minister insists that the Japanese government guarantee the safety of the radio active contamination from the nuclear power plant in Fukushima. One science researcher has said that it is safe to eat vegetables grown in Fukushima. One doctor said that the incidence rate of childhood thyroid cancer is the same or higher than the one in Chernobyl.

In addition, we have a complicated history concerning nuclear power in Japan. Some people said that the reason why Japan wanted to have a nuclear power plant, was because of national defense. After the war, Japan hasn't possessed any kind of weapons, including nuclear weapons. It is said that having a nuclear power plant is the only way to research and develop nuclear power in Japan. As you know, geographically, Japan is an island situated in a very tricky area. Some people say that without nuclear power plants, it means we become naked. I don't know the truth, it is just this information I read in the internet. Other complicated stories are those about ideology, power structures between big cities and small towns, relationships with the American CIA, the Japanese mafia, and so on.

If I can tell a personal story, my grandfather both on my mother's and father's side, worked at the companies which are connected with nuclear industry. Many people in their generation worked so hard with post-war reconstruction, to get the same standard of Western countries. They contributed to Japanese high economic growth, from the middle of the fifties to the beginning of the seventies. And many people were positive to developing nuclear power plants at that time. My grandfathers were one of them.

They seriously thought that nuclear power would be good for the Japanese future. When the earthquake hit of the Tohoku area in 2011, my grandfather on my father's side had dementia, and it seems that he didn't recognize any news on the TV. My grandfather on my mother's side is still fine, but he just explained me about his thoughts about nuclear power very ambiguously. Instead, he tells me about how tough it was in Japan when he was young. I get more and more confused when I get more information. What is the scientific basis? What is the authenticity of information? What is our past, what is our future?

Today's performance is mainly focusing on how people choose – how they are forced to choose. How people make decisions, and judge this situation. Actually, my performance is still going on – I will do one more action at the end of this event, so you will see more. Sorry, I have to see the paper... It is very complicated to talk about this topic, so I wanted to say excuse me.

Malin: Thank you so much Hiroko. So, do we need a five minute break, or can we go on to the next speaker? You have to help me.

### **3 - Katarina Dahlbeck**

#### ***Young mothers in post-Fukushima Japan - Uniting while dealing with everyday life***

Hello, my name is Katarina. First I will introduce myself and my relationship to Japan a little bit, and then I will talk about my thesis that I wrote for Stockholm University, as you have heard is called "Young mothers in post-Fukushima Japan – Uniting while dealing with everyday life".

My first encounter with Japan was in 2003, when I made my first trip over there. I spent about three months. Actually, I had no idea about thinking about Japan before, no idea about the culture and image of Japan. So I was pretty much overwhelmed by the intensity of the culture, and I didn't speak the language at all. I remember calling my parents, saying that "You don't have to worry, I am definitely not going to move here". (Laughter.)

But as you know, life has a tendency to turn out very differently to what you have planned. So, of course, I ended up moving to Japan in 2006 and I stayed there for about five years. But I was coming and going a bit between Sweden and Japan. And I didn't move to Tokyo, instead I moved to a small farming village in the southern alps of Nagano, which is about five hours drive from Tokyo. And I totally fell in love with the old, traditional culture, the mountain culture especially and the language. Also I found many many beautiful friends and people.

On the actual day of 3.11, of Fukushima, I was in Sweden. I was actually on that day going to Stockholm to buy my return ticket to Japan. But well, things happened, and that day became my turning point for why I started to move back to Sweden. However, starting to live in Sweden again I missed Japan a lot, and I kind of lost sense of my identity. So I began to study Japanese at the university, and I was thinking of taking a course or two. But I ended up taking the whole program, given a degree that I completed this spring, in 2014. And in order to graduate I needed to write my thesis, and I wanted to write about something important.

My thoughts naturally went to something like "life after Fukushima". Because I had listened to many of my friends in Japan, and because I was living in the country side of Japan I had a different kind of life than most people. I had a lot of "grass root's people" friends, who had a huge network, and I got to listen to a lot of their information about what was going on in Japan. I heard that there were a lot of demonstrations going on, a lot of networks happening; mothers' networks... People started taking action in some way. But if I looked in the traditional media, I could never find this information. So I kind of sensed a huge gap between grass root's people and between the media, and what was shown to the public.

So I decided to find out for myself. I decided that I wanted to listen to the stories of young mothers, who in some way had taken action after Fukushima. I was lucky to get some financial support from the Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa Foundation and I took off to Japan for a three week long research. I split the time half/half between Tokyo and Nagano. Briefly, I conducted seven in depth-interviews with Japanese mothers, had a long interview with a male artist and I went to some small informal meetings and sharings,

and some large peace organization. I met researchers at a German institute and the Hosei University and also I observed two anti-nuclear demonstrations. Speaking of those demonstrations; maybe it is not known to all of you, but every Friday night it is still going on. Between 6 pm and 8 pm, outside of the National Parliament in Tokyo, people from all backgrounds gather and they demonstrate against nuclear. But even people living in Tokyo - some people don't even know about this, that it is going on still, today. And it has been going for about three and a half year.

In one of those demonstrations, I met this young artist who became one of the key figures for me. He travels to Fukushima every week, to find mothers and children to interview. Then he listens to their stories and he documents everything, and he makes these experiences into art. He makes huge paintings, that he brings in to the center of Tokyo, to Shibuya or Shinjuku or anywhere, where he puts them on the street. And then business people or whoever walks by will come up and ask him about the paintings. In each painting you can find different figures, they are the stories that he heard, so when someone ask a question about who is this? he can tell the whole story about who they are and what happened after Fukushima. I can send these booklets with his art around, one is in English and one in Swedish.

This artist also introduced me to two mothers that evacuated voluntarily from Fukushima to Tokyo, and both of these mothers started different networks for supporting and uniting mothers who had evacuated. And they also try to collect money for people that have evacuated. I can just mention that around 160 000 people were forced to evacuate, but there is a huge amount of people who have evacuated from Fukushima or nearby prefectures, or even from Tokyo and other prefectures, in fear of radiation.

So, those two mothers I was interviewing, and one mother who was originally living in Tokyo. She wanted to evacuate from Tokyo to somewhere else, but she had her husband and he had his job etcetera, so they decided to stay in Tokyo. Then I went to Nagano and interviewed four mothers there. Two of them were staying in the village, and they had taken some action after Fukushima by sending vegetables, collecting names on petitions. One mother had evacuated from Yokohama to this village in the mountains, because she was afraid so she took her kids and husband and came. One mother had returned to the village while she was in Niya Giken, north of Fukushima, her husband was up there and she felt afraid concerning their babies. So she returned to Nagano where her parents live.

She is one example of those - now there is an expression in Japan called "hanare banare", which means like scattered couples. There are a lot of cases where the woman, the mother, and the children evacuate and the father remains in Fukushima. These mothers were all very willing to talk, and we talked a lot about this phenomenon of "hanare banare" and we talked about something called "furusato" - a sense of hometown. That these men had a strong sense of "furusato" in Fukushima, so they could not leave their village. Maybe they had been using the ground for generations doing farming and maybe the wife had moved there from elsewhere, so it was easier for her to move out.

We were also discussing a lot about food safety. The mothers had all taken huge action when it comes to food. Nobody wants to buy food from Fukushima or nearby prefectures, so they order food from South Japan. They search the internet to find the right shop where they can find food from South Japan, and sometimes the food has run out because a lot of people are choosing their food now. And also many people from Tokyo order all the water from South Japan, they don't drink the tap water anymore. They don't put the clothes outside to dry anymore. Of course, also the places to visit have changed a lot. The women in Nagano they don't want to let their children go to Tokyo anymore, and the women in Tokyo don't want to let their children play outside... it has limited their way of living in many ways.

We discussed about the sense of responsibility - whose responsibility is it to protect the children, and to inform the children about what is going on? Sorry, about the food I forgot to say that they all stopped to drink milk and buy seafood and fish. They are checking the food in schools where the kids eat, and a lot of times the food comes from Fukushima. So the mothers make o bento - lunch boxes - but this also creates a big sense of separation. Some children suddenly bring their obento to school, and some other children eat the food at school.

Even within the couples, this sense of separation can happen. Maybe one side is really concerned and worried, and the other is not. So there is a lot of things going on in the couples, between husband and wife, between friends and within the society. In Japan, child wearing is very much concerned with the

mothers and womanhood. The woman is basically the caretaker of the family, while the man is the provider. He has to sustain the family with the income.

So I would say that Fukushima has put a lot of responsibility on the woman now, who are concerned. Because now they have to choose differently, when it comes to food and all that. But also it creates a lot of pressure on the husband's side, especially in couples where the wife has evacuated. Because then he has to provide for two households – he has to pay for two rents, two families basically, and for travels back and forth. So in that sense, maybe you can say that the gender roles deepened a little bit due to this.

But I still feel, and would really like to stress, that at the same time many women has come together, many women has united and started these networks. On the surface it says "We want to protect the children", and I think that is the main goal. But in the long run I also think it creates a sense of strength and unity among women, and I think their voices will be heard more in general. I think it will open up for other discussions, such as you mentioned Malin, lifestyle and environmental issues. I feel very deeply with all the people who suffered the consequences of this nuclear disaster and also for our whole planet. However, I really want to feel that there is a little light in all of these accidents, so I'm just going to read the last thing I wrote in my essay in order to highlight that:

"I believe that a society, with all its limiting structures and inequalities – it goes for any country – can change, when people begin to reflect on a deeper level. When people sincerely reflect on issues such as how to protect the environment, the children and our human race, action will slowly begin to take place. I think that is what is happening in Japan right now. The big new changes might not happen today or tomorrow, but at least a seed has been planted and the process has started, and this time, not from an academic level but from a grass root level."

So yeah, if anyone is interested I have a copy of the essay. And if you have any questions feel free to ask me. I'm sorry I talked a little bit fast but I wanted to make it short – I have so much material, like twelve hours of interviews, and I tried to shorten it to ten minutes. But I have so much more to say, so...

Malin: Thank you so much Katarina. If someone has questions or comments, please feel free to take them. Otherwise we pass on to you, Yuko.

Hiroko: It is interesting – I mean, I am Japanese and I sometimes go to Japan, but I never heard these local people's voice. None of my friends ever lived in that area, so for me it's still kind of exotic to hear these stories.

Katarina: Yeah, that was how I felt. I was walking in Tokyo and everything was just going on as usual, but I had all these impressions and stories from people and... Actually only two of them were living in Fukushima, and all the other lived in different places, but still their stories really really touched me. I was kind of feeling confused because when I was walking around I didn't notice anything in the general society.

Hiroko: Because you, Yuko, were in Tokyo when the earthquake struck in Japan? You live here in Stockholm, but you just happened to be there?

#### **4 - Yuko Maki *Personal testimony from the day of the Tohoku earthquake, in Tokyo***

Yes, my name is Yuko Maki, I am an architect based in Stockholm. When the earthquake happened in 2011, I had VISA problems and I had to be in Japan unexpectedly. It was kind of an unexpected holiday – I was not working, just waiting for this VISA issue to be solved.

On that day – the 11 of March - I was just about to come out of the train in Shinagawa, Tokyo. And when I came up to the station I just heard a really really loud sound from the ceiling. At that time, I thought that maybe the building... Before I realized that it was an earthquake, I thought that this big roof would just fall down. I thought or felt that "Oh, maybe I will die right now". But actually it was not a building problem, it was earthquake. And then I saw some people running, to get out of the station, so I just followed them. The

staircase or its steps were moving: it looked like they were melting. But somehow I could just jump off from them.

When I came out of the station, already so many people were standing on the street. A police man was talking to them, telling them to calm down and that it is going to be fine. There were no panic – everyone was just calm – I guess one girl just fell down, but some people were helping her to stand up. At that time all the transportation stopped. The trains stopped. And I thought – I didn't know how to do.. I was on my way to a museum, so I went there, because I really didn't know what to do, and I had been planning to go to the museum... (laughing). When I reached the gallery, the person who was working there told me "They really don't know what is going to happen in the next minutes, but all the responsibility is on you. If you want to see the exhibition (laughters). But if the next earthquake happens, you have to go out from the building and you have to be in this garden."

And then while we were talking, the next earthquake happened so we just went out. I decided to go home, somehow. When I came back to Shinagawa station there were some buses going and I got in the queue. When I came to this bus stop, already some people were standing there, and while I was standing there so many people arrived and the queue became like one kilometer long. But luckily I could get the third bus. I wanted to go to the Shinjuku area, and normally with the train it takes about fifteen minutes. But now it took like five hours just to get to Shinjuku.

It was a really strange moment on this bus... It was full of people of course, but everyone were kind of silent. I could feel that they were all trying to keep really calm, to not panic. But I think everyone was so stressed, and I was really scared that someone would start yelling. And normally, on this route between Shinagawa and Shinjuku, there are many stops, but as everyone were staying on the bus, nobody could get on. And at every stop, the driver opened the door and told people that he couldn't accept any passengers and that they would have to give up. One guy was yelling that he had been waiting for many hours, and really had to go home. Of course the driver could not do anything. That was a bit... the most stressful moment, while I was on this bus.

After five hours we could reach the Shinjuku station. And I was the last one to get off the bus. When I saw the driver, he was really really stressed... he was like "Wah...". Then I thought that he had been responsible for all the lives in this bus. Still the earthquake was going on, and no one knew what would happen the next minute, but somehow he could manage to finish his task in that moment. And I was also really scared because of the situation, and I didn't know how to get home from Shinjuku, and that was all I could think about. I didn't say thank you to the driver, and that is something I really regret. Afterwards, when I realized I said nothing, but somehow he actually saved my life. That is something I still remember.

Somehow, I could reach to my sister's place on that day. I was staying at my grandmother's place, but that day I couldn't get back there, so I stayed at my sister's place in Tokyo. The next day I went back to my grandmother's place. The first thing she said was "I'm so happy that you survived this situation". She is not Christian, but her husband had been (he had already passed away at that time). My grandmother said that "God saved" me. At the time, I really couldn't accept those words. I felt that I survived only because I was lucky, or because I was in Tokyo. If God could save people in occasions like that - what happened to other people who were really suffering by this earthquake? I was a bit confused.

After that I was just staying at my grandmother's place and tried to keep silent. I was not working, just waiting for the visa thing. I still remember that at that time, I kind of... felt guilty that I was there. That I felt really useless – to be. I think at that moment, many people felt guilty to be safe while many other people really suffered that situation. It was a difficult time. But anyway, after one month I could come back to Stockholm. And compared to that intense moment, here, it was more relaxed. It was really separated from Japan. I felt I started a different life here, but at the same time I was all the time thinking of Japan and the earthquake and Fukushima... Somehow it has been three years, and in my daily life now (compared to then) I don't think so much about these things.

Hiroko: And you were just in Tokyo, until yesterday?

Yuko: Yeah, I was in Japan for my business, for just one week. I didn't have any chance to talk about this topic, now it is just normal – people don't think so much about this topic anymore. It is a different world compared to three years ago.

Malin: Thank you so much, Yuko, for sharing your story. And I think that maybe if you have questions and reflections on this theme around Fukushima and to the two who have been speaking, you can take them now. And maybe we need a small break, to reorganize before Petra will speak? I'm thinking that we are all sitting in this big circle, and maybe some people need to leave or go home. It is also of course okay... Just because we see each other, it is not forbidden to leave (laughters).

## **5 - Petra Holmberg**

### ***The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities and the attraction between Sweden / Japan***

My name is Petra, I'm very happy to be here - if you can say "happy" in this context. It is a very valuable event that you have created, Malin and Hiroko. I met you about two years ago, at the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities (Östasiatiska museet). I was very fascinated and interested in your work. I am happy that you remembered me and invited me for this evening.

At the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, around the time of the Fukushima disaster, we were preparing very hectically to open our permanent Japanese exhibition at the museum. I work as a curator there, and I also work at Etnografiska museet - the Museum of Ethnography, which belongs to the same organization as the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities: The National Museums of World Culture. These preparations for the exhibition, that is still running... have you visited us by the way, sometime? Some of you have, that's nice. You are very welcome.

We had prepared it for a long time and when the disaster happened, it felt very traumatic of course. We were deeply touched, and we followed the news several times per hour. We didn't know how we should do with these preparations – we were about to open the exhibition two weeks later, and we couldn't change the whole plan for the exhibition. But of course we changed our plan for the opening. We had planned a big "Japan party" that we of course could not carry out. Instead we had a more "sad" opening, let's say, which felt better. The weekend after there was an event at the museum to collect money to send to Japan, so somehow people wanted to express their affection for Japan. This was very obvious at the museum – it was both very sad, but also emotional in a good way for us, I think.

The exhibition is focusing on our collections and the Edo period, which is 17th to 19th centuries, so it is not so connected to the contemporary times. I wish it would be more – but we don't have much in the collections related to today. So this evening is very valuable for me: to hear you, Katarina and Yuko, speaking and sharing your stories, and also maybe the audience's opinions and stories. I can say something about my personal relationship to Japan, and then I will try to say something more formal about this connection between Sweden and Japan. It is a big topic as well, as we all know, so what I say is just my personal point of view.

When I do lectures at universities or other venues, I like to use a quote by the author Oscar Wilde. He said: "The whole of Japan is a pure invention". I think that that is of course not about the country or geography, or the experience of the Japanese people, but about our preconceptions and ideas about Japan. We all have our ideas about Japan – also Japanese people do. We could also say "The whole of Sweden is a pure invention" of course. What is identity? What is appropriation? What is happening between to cultures?

For me, I have a very deep passion for Japanese culture, since I was about thirteen years old. My parents went to Japan and I was not allowed to follow them at the time, in 1981. Some time after, I was very curious about Japan and I saw these slide-shows of images that my mother took in Japan. I had these experiences in my suburb, looking at the slides of Japanese gardens... I think some of you have similar experiences. I was deeply attached to Japanese art and culture – to the visual culture of Japan. In my early teens, I was drawn to Zen Buddhism and I did many Japanese activities like Origami, trying to do Bonsai... It was my way of doing something Japanese.



This is still an interest I have. To get to know how people are doing Japanese things? Not only Japanese people, but here in Sweden - what is people's interpretation of Japanese culture? It could be Haiku, or Manga... anything. How are things done here, which have other roots? I try to have a critical perspective also, because I think it is essential to have that in every situation. It is my standpoint when experiencing reality. So it is like love and hate for me, my experience of Japanese culture. I haven't been living there for many years, like Katarina has, so that is a great experience that she has.

For me Japan is very much about this invention - it is like an idea, still. It is not that I don't want to experience Japan in reality - for me Japanese culture has meant so much in order to open my mind, to create an entrance into something that is not "reality". It is like an aesthetical art field, so to speak. That is where Japan has meant so much for me: not as an escape, but as a way to get a glimpse of something "else". I have experienced this, in poetry; from the Heian period, the classical period, but also in later times.

The objects that I work with almost daily are like a window to something else - they are very important for me. Maybe you don't get what I am saying, but the Japanese objects are something very affectionate. I am astonished, fascinated, curious... I can also feel irritated sometimes when I'm in Japan, I must admit. Because I'm not a very calm and controlled person, actually (laughters). I can get irritated... But I'm really fascinated by Japan and I will always be.

I think there is a special sensibility that we are drawn to, when it comes to Japanese culture, and how the Japanese culture or people have related to reality. In your program, Malin, someone said "the importance of this moment". And that is very essential for me when it comes to Japanese culture. You can see that trace from the 7th century, the 8th or 9th century, in the poetry. You can see this already then. It has not been like that all the time, in a continuous curve, but there is this importance of the moment. "Now is really amazing", as someone said.

Malin: It was Takehiro Tsuchimoto who said that.

Petra: Yes. I think that is why I am drawn to Japan. It has to do with something you can't really speak about - what I mean with art, in this case - something that is beyond words.

But if I should try to give a short trace of the history and contact between Sweden and Japan, I would say that the first contact was in the 17th Century. Sweden was not the first country to happen to stumble upon Japan, it was Portuguese people landing in Kagoshima in 1543 approximately. But in the middle of the 17th Century, Swedish people were going to Japan. One of them was a disciple of Carl von Linné, Carl Peter Thunberg. He was a doctor and botanist who spent more than a year in Japan. I don't know how many of you have heard of him or read him, but he is extremely important for this connection between Sweden and Japan. We are happy to have one hundred objects that he collected or were given in Japan, at the Museum of Ethnography. Some of them you can actually see there. It is everyday objects and art objects - a mixture, not a very systematic collection.

But later, in the end of the 1900th Century, I guess all of you know about the interest for Japanese design and crafts and prints, in Paris and London and so on. This "Japonisme" movement was like a craze - it was said by some person that there was really an obsession for Japanese things. Even "women and idiots" were collecting Japanese things (laughters), the Goncourt brothers said, who were essential for this trade in Paris and Europe. He wasn't very happy when he said this, but he meant that everyone were obsessed.

In the 20th Century you can see, also in Sweden, a continuous interest for Japanese design. Also for the modernism in Japan - which was of course connected to the Western modernism - and the craftsmanship in Japan was really strong and interesting for Swedish people. You could go to the department store "NK" (The Nordic Company) in Stockholm in the fifties and buy contemporary Japanese, unique objects, for example by the ceramist Shoji Hamada. We have these objects exhibited at the museum now. You could just go there and buy something unique - it must have been a huge moment. And I guess that this is not the case anymore at NK - now there are mostly mass produced objects.

I can also mention that in 1935 there was established a tea house at the Museum of Ethnography, probably the first real Japanese tea house in Europe, and it was destroyed in the sixties by fire. But in 1990 there was a new tea house, maybe you have visited it - Zui-Ki-Tei - "Home of the Auspicious Light". It will

celebrate 25 years next year, you are welcome to come visit it. In the 21st century we can see this huge interest for Japanese popular culture, which was not at all the case when I was a teenager. The interest for manga, animé and cos play, and so on. Which is of course also supported by the Japanese government – it is not something that just happened. It started in 2000.

So I think that what I've been saying tonight is not so much connected to Fukushima or the earthquake at all, but I think that we are all drawn to the Japanese sensibility. And this might seem naïve, but what we have been experiencing tonight, at least what I have been experiencing tonight - I can't speak for the rest of us – is that art and creativity can "save the world". That will be my ending words.

Hiroko: Do you know why this tea house was destroyed? It was not of political reasons?

Petra: It was an accidental fire, that is what I know. They cannot say why. It was in 1969, I haven't seen any speculations about why it happened, it could have been a mistake from someone... There are still people hanging around the tea house, sleeping there and so on, so it could have been just a mistake. But now there is a new one, so.

Malin: Thank you so much Petra. Before we go into discussing - we could do it here, and hear more witnesses from Japan, the Fukushima topic could lead over to a more general conversation about Japan and Sweden (that was also our point with this evening) and we can also return to Fukushima and your previous stories - but I wanted to say something that I forgot to say earlier. We have gotten really nice food here tonight, from Yurie who is running Café Kikusen at Östasiatiska museet. So it is a recommendation for all of you, who like these rice balls with salmon and so on, to visit Café Kikusen. Thank you, and thank you everyone who has been speaking. I was thinking about all the rest of you here, who have experiences from Japan. You Kira, who were living there for a while, would you like to tell us something about your experiences?

## **6 - Kira Carpelan *Impressions from an exchange to Japan***

Yes I could. I was there in 2005 and I have not been back since then, so I have no experiences of Fukushima. There was a small earthquake when I was there, not a big one, six or something on the Richter scale. I was thinking of what you were talking about – identity. For me it was overwhelming to come there, as for everyone I suppose. But very much because I think that my identity at the time, especially - I was writing a lot, I was "in" the language. And I didn't speak Japanese or meet so many people speaking English either, so I didn't have much verbal communication. It was a lot non verbal communication, and I couldn't read any signs.

So I was like thrown out of a language context, or a "language way" of orientating myself. And that was really huge. I was sort of forced to reinvent my identity - without language. I remember that I started to experience other things – smells, my size... I became aware of my body, because I was bigger in Japan than I am here in Sweden. When I went to buy clothes they didn't fit. I was also smaller in Japan, because in Tokyo all the houses were so big and infrastructure was a maze – I couldn't find my way... So everything was upside down for a while. I was there for six months.

I tried to find different communities to get into, and one group of people were also aliens – because I felt very much as an alien - they were doing martial arts. I was doing martial arts at the time – not Japanese but Korean martial arts, taekwondo. I thought I can probably find a group of people doing taekwondo – I mean, it was Tokyo, one of the biggest cities in the world. And I did, but it was not as easy as I thought and it took me two hours everytime I went there. So that was one of my "families", and the other one was my friends at schools, and the other Swedish students that I was travelling with.

For me it was a lot about trying to get these pieces together – I was in this state all the time I was there. And it took me years to figure out what I was experiencing when I was in Japan. And it has been ten years. Now I'm beginning to look at the material – the photos, the things I wrote, the films I recorded, trying to understand them... It was weird. I don't know if it was the same for you coming here, from Japan to Sweden? For you Hiroko, for instance, if it is the same shift?

## 7 - General conversation

Malin: Yes, that would be interesting to hear, if anyone have reflections on that. Because that is something I felt very much when I have been in Japan twice: that it is a change of identity. And I also made a work about that, a film called "To Change Name". Which is related to the changes you go through – you actually become a different person in another culture. Because there are still very big differences between the cultures - even though there are also similarities. You actually transform, and become a different person in relation to "the other", due to language and many other things. So it would be interesting to hear what you Japanese think, who came to Sweden from Japan?

Hiroko: I think that around the year 2000 the Scandinavian design became very popular in Japan. Magazines focused on Konstfack for example, at least for me it was very easy to find information. Well, actually it is difficult for me to talk about Sweden now as we are in November and I feel very negative about it (laughters). If you ask me in the summer perhaps I can say more positive things. Maybe it is not the same impression that you get in Japan – we kind of get information about Europe and I can see more similarities. When I'm in other countries, many people look at me in the subway for example, but here in Stockholm especially, nobody stare at me or ask me where I'm from. I think that is a really good thing. Nobody treat me like a foreigner. I would like to ask you, Azusa, what you think about identity or moving here?

Azusa Itagaki: It is interesting what Malin said about language. Because when I arrived here I didn't understand Swedish. I realized that I started developing other abilities. I started hearing more, I started feeling. My whole being was awake. This is the meaning of it. And also, this is the power of nature – because when you spend a lot of time in nature you start feeling more – you open up the senses.

For me, if I go over to the topic of Fukushima and identity, I have learned, by being in nature, that of course we have identity but we are more than that. We are not just a physical body. And for me that is the awakening. For me, to be here and share this moment with you. Because we are not Swedish, Japanese, American, Germans, Africans, we are so much more than that. And if there was *any* meaning that Fukushima or the earthquake has happened, it is not about separating. It is about unity. About a spiritual awakening. And that is why we are here today.

Malin: That is really nice. I completely agree.

Azusa: Yes - thank you for being here. Because there is always a mening, why we are here today. About how I met you, Yurie, how I met you Malin, you, Sébastien, everybody here. Because we are connected. Right? And this positive energy spreads. This is not the space where we think about Fulushima and suffering. This is... I mean, for me art is transformation of energy. So, this positive energy spreads and this is why we are doing art. To transform it into something else and send it forward.

Malin: That is nice and interesting.

Anne Swärd: And that was also expressed in the program, I think, by a lot of the interviewed people. That you would start to question your life, or bad things about how we live... That was hopeful. Although of course it is a long way to go – just raising the question won't change anything, but it is the first step. So we could learn from that, because we live in the same way I guess, as in Japan. Maybe not exactly the same speed as in Japan, but with the same consumption and so on.

Hiroko: We can share a lot of things these days, with internet and globalization... Globalization – of course it is good and bad – but it is good that we can share many ideas.

Petra: When I was in Japan for the first "longer" time, it was in 1997, I was supposed to study objects at the museums and department stores. I was very curious and wanted to learn about Japanese textile for example. I saw magnificent objects, but at the same time I was in an existential crisis. I was in Japan - with all this consumption rate and all these shops everywhere – it was a huge experience, that I had a crisis at the same time as I was in the country that I loved... Consumption in Japan was something that really hit me at the time. It is almost twenty years ago now, but it was already there of course.

Kira: I was wondering if you know... I read somewhere – is it Roland Barthes who is writing about that? – that there were no antiquities in Japan before a certain time. Because you never saved individual objects, but you saved the form, or the design? Do you recognize that?

Petra: Do you mean if he was right? I think you remember it right, but I can't really say if it is true...

Malin: In my interviews I ran into something similar. For instance Tomomi, who is running a Scandinavian design shop in Sapporo, is very interested – she only sells vintage design, only old items... Also her brother is running a vintage design shop. There is a big fascination for historical buildings and objects in Japan. Also because of this "scrap-and-build" culture and the culture of actually rebuilding the temples every twenty years. Instead of keeping something for a long time, there is this tradition of tearing down and building up again. And Tokyo, the architecture of course, today – maybe that is a completely different question, but there is also this scrap and build mentality. That is perhaps something else, but it is interesting with their attraction for Europe and historical buildings and objects. I was struck by that...

Anne Swärd: But isn't that what we associate Japan with, here? Ancient items, ancient traditions?

Malin: But not items so much maybe, more traditions and... ? I don't know, this is a little bit speculation. I'm not an expert in this field. But there is some kind of exchangeability when it comes to – or what do you think about that for instance, Katarina?

Katarina Dahlbeck: As I said, when I went to Japan for the first time I had no picture at all, I just went there. But I have the feeling that over the past ten years we have a lot of impressions from Japan in media – especially the young people, with manga and all that – but I don't about objects. I don't know what people generally carry as a picture of Japan. I cannot really speak for them. And my experiences are so different from other people's also. I don't know what to say really.

Malin: It also relates to the earthquakes and natural disasters. For a long time the Japanese have not been building in wood, as far as I understood. Because wood can burn and so on... so a lot of things were built in concrete and glass lately. That also creates this fascination and need for old things, wooden furniture... Even if there is this in Japan, they also got rid of a lot of this heritage – that is my impression.

Azusa: Yes, I agree.

Sébastien Berthier: Is this heritage less object based, more story based? The way of serving the tea, more than the tea pot itself? More a cultural use and cultural habit.

Petra: I think it is both, because in the tea ceremony there are objects that have been transformed. Taken from one context, like the rural context, to the tea room. Elevated into another space so to speak, but from the outset they were perhaps very simple objects. Then transformed, and given a name. It has to do with concepts and ideas, but also the objects and this name giving ceremony of the objects in the tea ceremony. It is very interesting.

Sébastien: What is that – this name-giving ceremony?

Petra: Ceremony is perhaps not the right word, but there is this thing that you give this pencil a name... And then you separate it from other pencils, that don't have a name. You wrap it up so to speak, with a name. But there is also a system in Japan, from the 1950's, when they wanted to preserve and also develop craft techniques, and nominate people to be a living national treasure. You could be a textile artist or a lacquer artist and you would be given a title. We don't really have this system in Sweden – for a while we had "Utmärkt svensk Form" – like a hallmark of Swedish design - I don't think it is used so much anymore.

Sébastien: But then again it is transient, someone will die... I mean, my question is - we have a very occidental way of dealing with heritage. Like something we store in museums and classify. How much does it apply to Japan? For me it is – I have no idea. Did they have - were there museums in Japan? Is it something... Let's say aesthetics - are there art museums?

Petra: What do you Japanese say?

Malin: It is something that arose at a certain moment in the occidental or Western world - the museums were a way to interpret the world, to look at and organize things... Different kind of museums, ethnographic museums, art museums?

Hiroko: We are very into this preserving, I think... We have educations to preserve things. And a lot of people go to visit these museums - if you go there you often can't enter because it's full. I'm not specialized in museology, but we put energy into educating many specialists. Many people, who can repair the statues, architecture, painting, Japanese painting as a special form...

Petra: It was systematized in the late 19th Century - during the Meiji period. I think that was the start of the Japanese museums. A bit later than in Europe of obvious reasons. But there were of course important collections of objects in Japan long before that, connected to the Japanese aristocracy.

Joakim: But then again, no matter how well we preserve the heritage of Japan, in a thousand years from now maybe the best kept, or remaining area of our era, is Fukushima... that is the scary side of it, I guess.

Malin: What do you mean? I don't follow. They will be more well documented?

Joakim Forsgren: No, because of the radiation - it will be there for a time that we cannot really imagine.

Hiroko: Now, I said to Malin before, some of the Japanese academics wants to make Fukushima into a touristic place. They are researching how Chernobyl became a touristic place and how Auschwitz is visited by tourists... Many people visit them as tourists. How we can make Fukushima into a "positive" place and how we can memorize it... It sounds a bit silly, but people make a lot of museums about war. And we have to memorize Fukushima somehow and archive it, and this process the academics wants to become more clear about. I'm looking at their process, it is interesting to follow. We will see.

Joakim Forsgren: In a thousand years (laughters).

Malin: I think it would be interesting to hear more about what the earlier programs about Fukushima has been about, or what has come through there or have been the focus.

Anna Kindgren: As I think Carina mentioned, we have had this investigation about sustainability. Which is mirroring a project that the housing company here in Hökarängen has been running. Because Hökarängen Is going through a very aggressive gentrification process. They have branded Hökarängen as "Sustainable Hökarängen".

Malin: "Hållbara Hökarängen", by Stockholmshem.

Anna Kindgren: We were questioning or challenging what they were actually going to do - what was their idea. We of course thought that this is just another green-washing project. This has been a two year project. And "Sustainable Hökarängen" is now over, as well, as a project. So Hökarängen is no longer sustainable "business". (Laughters). It just lasts for two years. It is nothing special - this is a word that is used all over the world, for branding, especially city development projects. We had one researcher here, Dalia Muhkta Landgren. She was talking about how this word, "sustainability", is mandatory when it comes to Swedish municipalities who are branding the cities. This also have to do with city branding. We have "Stockholm the Capital of Scandinavia", "New York - The Big Apple" which has become "The Big Cupcake" more or less. Instead of having nations branding themselves it is cities competing with each other, globally but also within countries.

Joakim Forsgren: So what will Fukushima use as a slogan?

Anna Kindgren: (Laughing). I have no idea. But in this context we started investigation radiation as a subject. Then Fukushima eventually came up. But also going back to that Ågestaverket was the first nuclear power plant in Sweden. It is very close to where we are sitting right now. And it is quite amazing that it was built in such a populated area.

Sébastien: Is it in Vinterviken?

Anna Kindgren: No, it is here, in Farsta. We are not specialized in Fukushima, but we have been bringing in people to talk about it. We have had one doctor here, now I don't remember his name but he has been working within the anti-nuclear movement since its beginning. He is almost eighty now. He was talking about radiation damages and injuries. We have been showing a film which was screened in Documenta, "The Radiant" by The Otolith Group. And also Maj Wechseltmann who is a Swedish filmmaker and activist. We have her film here, she actually donated it to Konsthall C, and it is about Fukushima. So we have been running this program for almost two years. It has been like an ongoing, slow undercurrent or discussion, that sort of mixes in with all the different formats we have.

I think it is great to see all of us just sitting here. I mean, we all live in Sweden, but we come from very different places. And radiation is not something that stops at the borders, it spreads. I am old enough to remember Chernobyl, and I remember that I stopped picking mushrooms. And I never went back picking mushrooms (laughs). No, I completely lost the... mushrooms was something really important to my family. A very emotional tradition that we had. And it is just gone, nobody picks anymore. So you change your behaviour, and then you start adapting also your stories. Your ways of explaining why you don't do it anymore.

Malin: Thank you for telling us a bit more - it is so nice and interesting. I know that some people have to go, so I just think that we should continue rounding up in the kitchen if someone wants to stay a bit longer, even though it would have been nice to continue here as well. We said we will finish at nine, and we are already past nine... Just so that the ones who have to leave feel that they can leave. And the rest of us could mingle and finish the beer in the kitchen. I wanted to say thank you to everyone!

Hiroko: I have a final request. As you know, my performance is not finished. Please put the note you got when you arrived here in the box saying "yes" or "no".

Kira: Should we put the notes saying "yes" in the box with the same word?

Hiroko: That YOU will decide.

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