

## FALLOUT in JAPAN

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As producer and co-writer of the feature documentary film, FALLOUT, I was invited by the Center for Pacific and American Studies to present the film at the University of Tokyo last October. Following the screening I was joined on a forum by professors Ms Yuko Kawaguchi from Hosei University and Mr Hidehiro Nakao from Chuo University. Subsequently I was asked to prepare this paper to explain the background, motivation and process for producing FALLOUT.

FALLOUT explores the mythology and reality of author Nevil Shute's post-apocalyptic novel *On The Beach*, and its Hollywood movie adaptation produced and directed by Stanley Kramer. *On The Beach* presents a scenario in which most of the world's population has been annihilated by a nuclear war. A deadly cobalt radioactive cloud has enveloped the earth and is slowly descending on Australia where the last remaining huddle of humanity considers how they will live the final months and days of their lives, and prepare to die. Shute's novel is eerily prophetic and in it he has projected a nuclear war that is set in 1961, four years into the future from the time of *On The Beach*'s publication and release in 1957.

There are two key factors that were to have a significant influence on me in developing the original concept for FALLOUT, and for realising the film's central narrative and its eventual production. The setting in the novel for *On The Beach* is Melbourne, Australia, and it is here that Stanley Kramer filmed his American adaptation on location. I grew up in Melbourne so hearing my parents speak about Kramer's film with its Hollywood stars Ava Gardner and Gregory Peck, combined with the terror I felt when I first read the book at school, infused me from a young age with a special interest in Shute's scenario and visionary warning. Many years later in 1999 I was to live in Yokohama for almost a year and during this time I became deeply curious and interested about Japan's recent history, and I developed a hunger to learn more about the nation's culture and traditions. As a consequence of the release of the book *Hiroshima Nagasaki* in 2011 it became apparent to me this element of Japan's history was fundamental to FALLOUT, and it contributed substantially to the film eventually being made.

Most people in Australia who are familiar with the name Nevil Shute know him only as a novelist, however his life was far more complex and very few people were aware of his other significant achievements. Born in England, Nevil Shute Norway was an aeronautical engineer and adventurer, always obsessed by inventions his accomplishments were many. At night he wrote novels under the pseudonym of "Nevil Shute" rather than his family name Norway to safeguard his reputation. Initially he was involved with the design and development of the highly regarded R100 airship project and accompanied it on its successful inaugural return crossing of the Atlantic in July 1930. Shortly after Shute went on to establish his own engineering company, Air Speed Limited, where he was responsible for the first monoplane

with a retractable undercarriage to be developed in Britain. He managed to design it simply by looking at a photograph of the aircraft from America and devising it from first principles. During World War II Shute was seconded to work on several special projects in the highly secretive British Department of Miscellaneous Weapons Development.

Regardless of his work as an engineer, Shute was inexhaustible as an author writing twenty-four novels in his lifetime. When Shute relocated to Australia in 1949 he was to never work as an engineer again and ultimately continued as a full-time novelist and hobby farmer until he died in 1960. Affected deeply by the needless death of his older brother Fred in the carnage of World War 1, Shute developed a deep compassion for the human condition and this impacted significantly on his creative instincts and inspiration for writing his novels. The characters he created were intentionally 'everyday' so that his audience could easily identify with them. The complexity of Nevil Shute and *On The Beach*, which of all his novels Shute was most passionate, interested me greatly as a filmmaker. I was also impressed how the subject matter of *On The Beach* and its intrinsic questions of morality had had a transformative impact on a number of those who worked on the film, for example Gregory Peck was inspired to go on the speaking circuit opposing nuclear weapons. Similarly his American support actor in *On The Beach* Donna Anderson, who appears in interview in *FALLOUT*, remains a fervent advocate for nuclear disarmament today.

*On The Beach* was written when the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a dangerous game of nuclear brinkmanship creating a very real threat of a nuclear war. It was the midst of the cold war with the Cuban Missile Crisis taking place in 1962. This military standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union over Soviet ballistic missiles deployed in Cuba occurred just one year after the events that were described in Shute's novel. *On The Beach* became a bestseller receiving praise from a wide audience including the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill – when it was released in the US it sold over four million copies and quickly rose to the top of the Best-Selling lists, in fact for a short time it became more popular than *Peyton Place*. It was two years after its publication that the novel was adapted into the major motion picture by Stanley Kramer.

Nevil Shute was once quoted as saying, "When I was a student I was taught that engineering was the art of directing the great sources of power in nature to the use and convenience of man." When Stanley Kramer approached the State Department for use of a submarine in *On The Beach* he was refused because he was depicting a nuclear war where all the inhabitants were killed. The State Department claimed that Kramer was "being ridiculous" and, "...if there were nuclear war, it might result in four hundred or five hundred million casualties, but it wouldn't end the world." This was an alarming retort but not surprising given that the prevailing military theory at the time maintained a nuclear war could be contained and that trade winds would prevent any radiation drifting from the Northern Hemisphere to the South as a consequence of a nuclear conflict.

Very important for the development of *FALLOUT*, in addition to the film's appeal to a universal audience, was the capacity for Shute's subject matter to maintain a prescient and

contemporary resonance. This is especially evident in the strong underlying theme in *On The Beach* with Shute's predilection for the concept of 'man and machine out of control', in particular the role and responsibility of scientists that was informed significantly by his own experiences as an engineer during World War II. Shute's conscience was deeply troubled by the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan, and he was acutely aware of the minds of scientists and engineers who created the weapons of war.

*On The Beach* explores the manner in which the response to the nuclear disaster is dealt with by scientists who persist in carrying out experiments while they should be appalled by the war they helped to create. Shute shaped the character of John Osborne the scientist as a prototype of himself, both share a great passion for technology while understanding its inherent dangers to also be the ruin of humanity. Osborne comments, "The war started when people accepted the idiotic principle that peace could be maintained by arranging to defend themselves with weapons they couldn't possibly use, without committing suicide", and as such he highlights the perils of obedience presiding over morality and common sense. It is further implied in the novel that often people who are in positions with the potential for considerable influence give little regard for the consequences of their actions, and points to those in government who are trained to follow orders and not question them.

*On The Beach* was the first full-length American film to premiere in the Soviet Union where, perhaps surprisingly, it was well received in Moscow although audiences were not endeared by its ending – the finality of human kind. On the contrary in the United States the official response was condescending and the film was branded as science fiction with the Government fearing a public becoming aware of the reality and perilous nature of a potential nuclear war. It was accused of being a fantastic drama portraying near-future events that had little foundation within the military and scientific reality of the late 1950s. Inside the Eisenhower Administration and US policy circles *On The Beach's* production and distribution was confronted by institutional indifference, and at its most insidious it experienced a calculated policy from various levels of US government to destabilise and diminish the impact of the film's reception, both domestically and internationally. This was a well organised and extremely negative campaign implemented by Vice President Richard Nixon who coordinated it from the uppermost level of government involving US Cabinet discussion.

The nature of the nuclear death facing the survivors in *On The Beach*, and its transition to the American cinema version given the Eisenhower Administration's attitude, is important to reflect on. The radiation poisoning that confronts them is both invisible and insidious, and one heightened by Shute for maximum emotional impact. Because the cobalt bomb upon which he has based his scenario was designed to contaminate a large area with enhanced amounts of radioactive fallout, Shute's nuclear war has produced a very slow moving but gigantic radioactive death cloud that descends from the northern hemisphere onto Australia.

Before its ultimate arrival and the full impact of this radioactive death cloud takes effect, a protracted period of several months endures during which time the inhabitants in a slow psychological torture are forced to confront their mortality and consider crucial issues

of morality, in particular those related to euthanasia and how they conduct their personal relationships. This contrasts greatly to the instantaneous and horrific physical injuries, broken bodies, brutal destruction of buildings and homes and the pervasive radioactive poisoning experienced as a consequence of the atomic bombings of Japan. In Shute's novel an increasing number of dead bodies caused by the radiation poisoning are observed in public places, however in Kramer's screen adaptation there are no dead bodies to be seen anywhere, and there is no evidence of the physical damage as described in the novel where for example San Francisco is almost totally destroyed and the Golden Gate Bridge is depicted as crumbling into the bay.

These changes from novel to film were amongst a number that were to eventually distress Shute greatly, turning what had begun as a positive collaboration as he partnered with Kramer on the screenplay into one of abject acrimony. Shute was totally opposed to the relationship between Moira (Ava Gardner) and Captain Towers (Gregory Peck) becoming romantic and sexual. He believed Towers would have remained faithful to his wife back in America although he would have known in reality that she would have been killed by the impact of the nuclear war. He was also dismayed that Kramer refused to cast Australian actors in the key roles, although certainly without Gardner and Peck the film would have been impossible to finance. So affected was Shute by these and other changes he refused to attend the film's world premiere in Melbourne and he died a little more than a month after the film's completion from a lethal stroke in 1960.

It was after Shute's relocation to live in Australia, and before he contemplated *On The Beach*, that the Australian Government agreed to collaborate with the British to conduct the first continental A-bomb tests on mainland Australia. A heightened sense of unease and dread was expressed in mid 1953 by the media - it had speculated on British reports suggesting the first nuclear bomb to be tested would be a cobalt device. While the cobalt tests that were to eventuate were considered a failure and the experiment was not repeated, the long term consequences were severe.

In order for the UK and Australian governments to conduct their nuclear tests the traditional Aboriginal landowners from Maralinga were forced to have their land taken away from them. Many of their people were exposed directly to radiation during the testing and it was neither recorded nor known how many Aboriginal people were actually killed by these nuclear tests. Later in the 1980s both the Aboriginal people from Maralinga and the soldiers who had been ordered to run, walk and crawl across contaminated areas in the days immediately following the detonations were diagnosed with long-term illnesses, in particular cancer and lung disease.

So it is with a sense of chilling irony that recent reports in the international media indicate that Russia is now experimenting with a nuclear torpedo which uses a cobalt bomb warhead designed for: "creating wide areas of radioactive contamination, rendering them unusable for military, economic or other activity for a long time".

Issues involving the management and control of nuclear weapons and energy were

always going to be central themes for FALLOUT. And it is Shute's 'inquiry' of the role and responsibility of scientists, engineers and politicians with regard to the use of nuclear weapons and "the great sources of power in nature" which remains an enduring concern for humanity. However my attempts to promote these aspects of the film to broadcasters and funding agencies fell on deaf ears for most of the extended period of time, almost twenty years, that I spent developing and marketing the project from when it was first conceived in the mid 1990's. It seemed these issues were considered neither relevant nor of contemporary audience interest following the end of the cold war, but that changed when the Fukushima Daiichi disaster occurred in 2011. Ever since the first nuclear tests took place here in the 1950's, Australia has resisted the allure of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy. However Australia is a major source of the world's uranium requirements and with climate change continually at the forefront of public discourse the potential use of nuclear energy is becoming an increasing focus of political debate and conjecture in this country.

The Fukushima disaster presented the impetus for FALLOUT to gather interest and recognition as a viable and relevant documentary project, however it was not sufficient enough to secure the necessary finance to make the film. Fukushima occurred in the same year that Australian author Paul Ham's book *Hiroshima Nagasaki* was published and released internationally. During the time I lived in Yokohama I had begun to hear more about the true and horrific nature of the atomic bombings of Japan. But when I first read *Hiroshima Nagasaki* I was shocked and appalled, almost to the point of disbelief at the extreme and hideous nature of the injuries suffered by the innocent civilians and the experimental nature of the Manhattan Project which was responsible for the development of the atom bombs.

It was almost impossible to contemplate that five cities could be preserved from the terrifying incendiary firebombing of Japan orchestrated by Major General Curtis LeMay, in order to provide the 'pristine' cities necessary for the testing of two different types of atom bombs. I was further disturbed to learn that the American doctors who were despatched to Hiroshima and Nagasaki were more concerned with observing the effects of the slow death resulting from radiation poisoning rather than helping the Japanese doctors who were overwhelmed and unaware of how to deal with the enormity, complexity and their lack of knowledge for the radiation sickness they were confronted by. Furthermore Paul Ham persuasively describes how it was totally unnecessary to drop the atomic bombs on Japan and suggests the ending of the Second World War in the Pacific was manipulated and protracted to allow for the bombs to be tested.

Growing up and being educated in a western culture I knew nothing of the the reality and extremity of the atomic bombings of Japan, I had been led to believe and understand that it was necessary to 'drop the bombs' on Japan in order to end the war. Paul Ham's well researched book informed me otherwise. Returning to Australia after living in Japan I also became aware that following the end of the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles, Japan had been prevented from achieving equal status as a member of the League of Nations and that the Australian Government, which maintained a White Australia Policy at the time, was a major

advocate for pushing this line of thought. In addition to this Japan was increasingly confronted globally during the 1920's by seemingly unjust trade restrictions and limitations on its access to natural resources, which all contributed to my growing belief that Japan had been unfairly misrepresented on several levels within the western education system in which I had been taught.

With what I now understood of the consequences of the Manhattan Project with its absolute and unnecessary horror inflicted on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, combined with the motivation it had on Shute to write *On The Beach*, it was clear the development of the atom bomb and its aftermath should be a key element of FALLOUT. And this I believed imbued the film with a greater integrity and emotional strength. It was at this stage in the film's development that FALLOUT was finally able to secure the financial support of Screen Australia, the Australian Government's prime film agency, which would enable us to eventually complete the film as a feature length project. This finance was received through its Signature Fund, and this allowed for the film to be designed for cinema release and made without the requirement for the upfront financial commitment of a broadcaster or distributor. This was both a fortuitous and positive outcome as it permitted us to produce a film with total creative freedom, and without third party intervention and restrictions.

FALLOUT was completed in 2013 and its world premiere was held in August at the Melbourne International Film Festival. It subsequently screened at several other film festivals and commercial cinemas throughout Australia, in addition to international film festivals the following year in Auckland, Wellington, Paris, Seoul, Berlin, Rio de Janeiro and in Los Angeles at the 'Films that Change the World' film festival. It was subsequently licensed by the Australian public broadcaster SBS and has been broadcast nationally several times.

But it was FALLOUT's screenings throughout Japan that were to have a deep personal satisfaction and for FALLOUT to be invited to screen in Hiroshima in March of last year, in what was to become a Japanese premiere, was especially important for me. The premiere in Hiroshima was hosted by the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation in association with the Australia-Japan Foundation and was presented as a commemorative event as part of the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Japan. Much of the archival film footage of Hiroshima observed in FALLOUT, in particular the evocative footage of street scenes in Hiroshima filmed in 1936 by Genjiro Kawasaki, was sourced from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Further screenings followed in Kyoto, Osaka and Nagoya and to complete its national tour of Japan the film was invited to be presented publicly for the first time in Tokyo with the Center for Pacific and American Studies.

FALLOUT is distributed throughout Japan by the Japanese Distributor, Fieldworks Inc, based in Tokyo. My travel to Japan and stay in Tokyo was supported by the Australia Japan Foundation and the Centre for Pacific and American Studies.