"Hiroshima Sublime": Trauma, Japan, and the US Asia/Pacific Imaginary

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Abstract

As an ethical and aesthetic mandate for the new millenium, the Cold War repression of Hiroshima within the American political imaginary needs to be symbolically confronted and undone at national as well as global levels. As Americans and as Japanese citizens of the liberal global order, we must mutually move beyond the Cold War situation of historical repression that had obtained in 1965, when novelist Kenzaburo Ōe lamented, "To put the matter plainly and bluntly, people everywhere on this earth are trying to forget Hiroshima and the unspeakable tragedy perpetrated there." However traumatic, Americans and their allies must *try to remember this Hiroshima sublime* as a trauma of geopolitical domination and racialized hegemony across the Pacific Ocean. By thinking through and re-imagining the techno-euphoric grandeur of this Hiroshima sublime, as well as representing the ideological complicity of ordinary Americans in their own sublime (raptured by these technological forces of sublimity as manifesting and globally installing Patriot missiles as signs of their global supremacy) and ordinary Japanese (citizens of the Empire of the Sun fascinated by self-sublation into zeros of solar force) in the production of this nuclear sublime, we can begin to mutually recognize that a 'post-nuclear' era offers new possibilities and symbolic ties between America and Japan as Pacific powers. This post-nuclear era emerges out of World War II freighted with terror and wonder as a double possibility: at once urging the globe towards annihilation and yet also towards transactional and dialogical unity at the transnational border of national self-imagining. The phobic masochism of the sublime can no longer operate in a transnational world of global/local linkages, although the technological sublimity of the Persian Gulf War had suggested otherwise, with its "sublime Patriot" missiles and quasi-nuclear landscapes lingering in the world deserts from Iraq and Afganistan to Nevada and North Korea.

Keywords: Hiroshima, nuclear sublime, Kenzaburo Ōe, Akira Kurosawa, Cold War, J. G. Ballard

> On September 16, 1985, when the Commerce Department announced that the United States had become a debtor nation [. . .] the money power shifted from New York to Tokyo, and that was the end of our [American] empire [in the Pacific].
>
> Gore Vidal, "Requiem for the American Empire"

> We must come to see ourselves, Japan, historically as a very organic part of the Pacific. No one has written such a study yet, but I hope that gradually a history of Japan as a Pacific culture will be written.
>
> Kenzaburo Ōe, *Manoa* interview

Atomic force first entered history in the August of 1945 with earth-shattering, unforeseen and, in many respects, uncontrollable consequences we are still coming to terms with in the transnational and post-Soviet globe. It has taken the detonation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by US military forces 50 years for this "traumatic kernel" to sink

in and register, within the geopolitical imaginary. Indeed, the sublime *unthinkability* of this catastrophic event has much to do not only with its unprecedented magnitude and force – the material/ spiritual grandeur that I will here theorize after the language and novels of Kenzaburo Ōe, "the Hiroshima sublime" – but also with its traumatic nature within the collective imaginary of the national subject. What some postmodern critics now theorize (after Derrida et al) as "the nuclear sublime" that was activated at Hiroshima remains one of the unimaginable, trans-material grounds of a global condition that, paradoxically, can and must be re-imagined, represented, and invoked to prevent this trauma of negativity from happening in post-Cold War history.

With the breakdown of so many binary oppositions from orientalist discourse and all but underwriting the Cold War as an ideological standoff of superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, we must now begin to 'work through' the nuclear sublime as symptom of the modernist will to technocratic supremacy in the Pacific. Recalled as a collective labour of mourning, the Hiroshima sublime can be said to emerge positively, thus, as a possible fantasy of postmodern redemption in which world war, the hardware of the nation-state, and the will to industrial supremacy are, in effect, over. The weapons remain, but the postmodern world has been transformed so as to render them inoperative, even obsolete, as icons of geopolitical terror.

As an ethical and aesthetic mandate for the new millenium, I would urge that the Cold War repression of Hiroshima within the American political imaginary must be symbolically confronted and undone.[1] Speaking as an American, implicated in nuclear proliferation and the ongoing secularization of national force into technological icons of supremacy from Star Wars to Patriot missiles, I am urging that we move beyond the Cold War situation of historical repression that still obtained in 1965, when Kenzaburo Ōe had cause to lament, "To put the matter plainly and bluntly, people everywhere on this earth are trying to forget Hiroshima and the unspeakable tragedy perpetrated there" (99).[2] However traumatic, Americans and their allies must *try to remember this Hiroshima sublime* as a trauma of Pacific domination. As Ōe has written in *Hiroshima Notes* (1965) and substantiated with a lifetime of political-cultural activism, "the Hiroshima within me does not come to an end with this publication" (19).[3]

By thinking through and re-imagining the techno-euphoric grandeur of this Hiroshima sublime, as well as representing the ideological complicity of ordinary Americans (raptured, so to speak, by these technological forces of sublimity as manifesting and globally installing a la Patriot missile their own national supremacy) and ordinary Japanese (citizens of the Empire of the Sun fascinated, so to say, by self-sublation into zeros of solar force) in the production of this nuclear sublime, we can mutually recognize that a 'post-nuclear' era offers new possibilities and symbolic ties between America and Japan as Pacific powers. This post-nuclear era emerges out

of World War II freighted with terror and wonder as a double possibility, at once urging the globe towards annihilation and/or towards transactional and dialogical unity at the transnational border of national self-imagining.[4] The phobic masochism of the sublime can no longer operate in a transnational world of global/local linkages, although the technological sublimity of the Persian Gulf War might suggest otherwise, with its "sublime Patriot" missiles and quasi-nuclear landscapes lingering in the desert.

As the subject of such modern nation-state complicity, the Japanese kamikaze pilot in J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* (1984) worships the "sublime body" of Empire: but he refuses to die, to dematerialize, to sublate into earth and sun, he even refuses the boy's symbolic redemption into hero-worship; confronting this dead body of the kamikaze pilot, "his [Jim's] hands and shoulders were trembling, electrified by the discharge that had passed through them, the same energy that powered the sun and the Nagasaki bomb whose explosion he had witnessed" (366). This young Japanese pilot, bravely willing to annihilate himself into the solar and militant enterprises of Empire, "the Empire of the Sun," is the British boy's "imaginary twin," whose body will survive the war, survive death as conquering spirit (363).

For Ballard, interned by the Japanese in Lunghua from 1942 to 1945, the atomic bomb comes deeply – and even like some weird historical redemption – out of the collective imagination of Europe and the unresolved territorial conflicts of Asia. Each newsreel and war movie shown serves as a symbolic rehearsal for warfare, and even with the war ended, this heroic imaginary begins over again, forever unsatisfied and displaced, seeking new historical territory on which to stage the same battles, the same obsessions and hysterical symptoms of "the (impossible-real) Thing" (Žižek 203).[5] The Hiroshima sublime abides as postmodern object in which we can experience the impossibility and failure of Asia/Pacific representation to reach after and convey this unconscious thing, this death-wish that seems to emanate so deeply from the war-project of modernity. The suffering induced by this sublime icon of American supremacy cannot be elided from Pacific memory.

As a focus for symbolic and physical deconstruction, the image of the nuclear bomb at Hiroshima threatens the postmodernist will to symbolization, the will to go on, the will to make meaning of individual life. Represented in post-war texts as more rupture than fact, "Hiroshima" can be read as an image of what James Hillman calls "the-death-of-God-God": an unprecedented act in which the latent nihilism of western technocratic reason is made manifest as world death. Under this sublime of nuclear technology, mountains sigh and disappear into tinker toys, flesh and birds melt, skyscrapers become props for Superman in his comic-book mode as a pop Zarathustra incarnating peace on a grand scale – as in *Superman IV* (the film), for example, disposing of American and Russian nuclear weapons and waste by transporting them to virgin regions of outer space.

Weirded out by the threat of world death, by machinations of the Cold War, the palpable lies and deceptions in the name of political idealism, the abyss of ecological accident, a whole generation of Americans once hungered for self-transcendence, turned to acid, turned to acid-rock, turned to sexual fusion and cultural confusion. Postwar generations became white hipsters on the road from Hiroshima to God-knows-where, some India of the mind. Meaghan Morris has argued of this postmodern situation, seconding the historical frame of technology developed by Fredric Jameson, Ernst Mandel, and others that would link cultural formations of the postmodern to new electronic- and nuclear-powered apparatus that emerged in the 1940s, "the postmodern era could be said to begin in 1945, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It begins not simply on the ground, under the bomb, but in the relationship between that ground, those people, and the pilot who could only ever thereafter confront the 'reality' of the bomb, those deaths, through an image, a film, a story, a representation, a reconstruction, a vestige, a simulation of what had, or might have, happened on the ground" (Morris 19).[6]

This impossible-to-see, trans-textual event of nuclear power at Los Alamos signals the rupture of the postmodern, the traumatic disappearance of the real into the imaginary and symbolic geopolitics of war: "The postmodern begins with an experience in which it is impossible to 'see' unmediated empirical reality and survive; an experience which would-be survivors, potential victims, can only evoke and express with images, metaphors, fictions and rhetoric which they must try to convert into actions to ensure that we may never know that 'reality'" (Morris 19). The nuclear bomb may disappear into semiotic infinitude, as Morris suggests, rendering nature effectively over as symbolic source of psychological solace and moral stabilization. What Masuji Ibuse called the "crazy iris" of ecological deformity proliferates from this nuclear ash. Nature is disrupted by the nuclear sublime.

Through the awestruck perspective of Jim in war-torn Shanghai, Ballard suggests in *Empire of the Sun* that the world war, and the nuclear bomb, like the heroic pilot of Empire, come deeply out of the boy's technology-haunted imagination, fueled by war movies, comic books, *Reader's Digest*, *Life*, newsreels, Basie and the other unconscious adults around him:

> When Basie and the men had gone, vanishing among the ruined warehouses on the quay, Jim studied the magazines on the seat beside him. He was now sure that the Second World War had ended, but had World War III begun? Looking at the photographs of the D-day landings, the crossing of the Rhine and the capture of Berlin, he felt that they were part of a smaller war, a rehearsal for the real conflict that had begun here in the Far East with the dropping of the atom bombs. Jim

> remembered the light that lay over the land, the shadow of another sun. Here, at the mouths of the great rivers of Asia, would be fought the last war to decide the planet's future. (357)

The nuclear bomb at Nagasaki, becomes a fantasmatic spectacle of sun, death, and immortality for Jim, at once ends one war, but re-imagined, seems to foreshadow the brilliancy and location of the next world war.

Before and after the battles and internment around Shanghai, the will to war goes on recharging itself in the Pacific through its very symbolization, as the representation of war necessarily turns heroic, sacrificial, patriotic, ideal. Ballard is exact and uncanny here in recording the elation and terror of Jim, as his fascination with an all-too-innocent American supremacy emerges heroically, and falsely, out of the war's ruins:

> Surrounded by this vision of all the abundance of America falling from the air, Jim laughed happily to himself. He began his second – and almost more important – meal, devouring the six copies of the *Reader's Digest*. He turned the crisp, white pages of the magazine, so unlike the greasy copies he had read to death in Lunghua. They were filled with headlines and catch phrases from a world he had never known, and a host of unimaginable names – Patton, Eisenhower, Himmler, Belse, jeep, GI, AWOL, Utah Beach, von Runstedt, the Bulge and a thousand other details of the European war. Together they described an heroic adventure on another planet, filled with scenes of sacrifice and stoicism, of countless acts of bravery, a universe away from the war that Jim had known at the estuary of the Yangtze, that vast river barely large enough to draw all the dead of China through its mouth. (308-309)

So begins the rehearsal for the next Pacific war, emerging from the ground of heroic fantasy, this time instigated by the American political imaginary:

> Feasting on the magazines, Jim drowsed among the flies and vomit. Trying not to be outdone by the *Reader's Digest*, Jim remembered the white light of the atom bomb at Nagasaki, whose flash he had seen reflected across the China Sea. Its pale halo still lay over the silent fields but seemed barely equal to D-day and Bastogne. Unlike the war in China, everyone in Europe clearly knew which side he was on, a problem Jim had never really solved. Despite all the new names that it had spawned, was the

> war recharging itself here by the great rivers of eastern Asia, to be fought forever in that far more ambiguous language that Jim had begun to learn? (309)

According to the uncanny images Ballard invokes in his narrative, the "Empire of the Sun" had been defeated by the sun itself becoming a nuclear bomb. "When Jim look unconvinced [that the war had ended], the Eurasian explained: 'Kid, they dropped atom bombs. The Americans threw a piece of the sun at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, killed a million people. One great big flash'" (295). Jim can only reiterate an affirmation of solar witnessing that comes as much out of his own war-fascinated imagination as out of Pacific history: "I saw it" (295). Ballard's complex of solar imagery resonates with US ideology of its own moral and technocratic superiority here. "It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its basic power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East," President Harry Truman had urged, with millennial awe, in a radio address explaining the Hiroshima bombing to Americans in 1945 (Quoted in Weart 103).

The *nuclear sublime* erupts out of the mundane and vulgar, as if a transcendental eruption from the unconsciousness of British, Japanese, and American alike, bringing an end to the endlessly cruel, tribal and territorial battles that had battened on the class-warring masses of Shanghai:

> A Japanese soldier patrolled the cinder track nearby. He walked across the grass and stared down at him. Irritated by the noise, he was about to kick him with his ragged boot. But a flash of light filled the [Nantao] stadium, flaring over the stands in the southwest corner of the football field, as if an immense American bomb had exploded somewhere to the northeast of Shanghai. The sentry hesitated, looking over his shoulder as the light behind him grew more intense. It faded within a few seconds, but its pale sheen covered everything within the stadium: the looted furniture in the stands, the cars behind the goal post, the prisoners on the grass. They were sitting on the floor of a furnace heated by a second sun. (Ballard 285-286)

This "second sun" of nuclear power (see Michael Ondaatje's usage in the Indian perspective of Kip in *The English Patient*) comes clearly, for Jim as for Ballard, out of the Japanese imperial imagination that so fascinates and doubles the will to grandeur of this hyper-active child of the waning British empire: "Jim smiled at the Japanese, wishing that he could tell him that the light was a premonition of his death, the sight of his small soul joining the larger soul of the dying world" (286).

This will to sublation of the subject into the Emperor comes out of the Japanese ideology of the modern, as Naoki Sakai has argued and detailed in studies on the Japanese reworking of German epistemology to serve the "Empire of the Sun". In Ballard's uncanny complex of imagery, the nuclear bomb enacts a fascination with solar energy as an imperial symbol of self-divinity. The nuclear bomb sublimates and transfigures as it were the human into the divine in a deadly body-transfiguring way, a scenario foreshadowed by the kamikaze pilot with the zero/sun on the wings of his plane refusing to die in a Shanghai swamp. The British boy is fascinated by the Japanese, even roots for their victory because their martial spirit is so grand and supreme in its discipline and self-overcoming. Within Jim's imagination, as it tries to mirror and double the martial imagination of the kamikaze pilot, the rising sun of Japan comprises an icon of self-abnegating sublimity as much as one of the Emperor's divinity. The Americans, with their gigantic B-29s and infinite tins of SPAM, enter to fulfill the same imaginary role as heroes of the solar sublime.[7]

Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* helps to image forth, with uncanny mass-media accuracy, that this world war comes deeply out of the modernist fascination with technocratic supremacy and the grand overcoming of nature: as Jim early remarks at the outset of the war in Shanghai, "But the bombardment of the *Petrel*, the tank that had crushed the Packard, the huge guns of the *Idzumo*, all belonged to a make-believe realm. He almost expected Yang [his Chinese chauffeur] to saunter into the ward and tell him that they were part of a Technicolor epic being staged at the Shanghai film studios" (46). This technocratic supremacy on an epic scale is part of what fascinates Jim about the Japanese: "Aircraft had always interested Jim, and especially the Japanese bombers that had devastated the Nantao and Hongkew districts of Shanghai in 1937. Street after street of Chinese tenements had been leveled to the dust, and in the Avenue Edward VII a single bomb had killed a thousand people, more than any other bomb in the history of warfare" (19).

Jim's shifting allegiance of hero-worship from the Japanese to the Americans is partly instigated by the iconic sight of the B-29s flying overhead more than by the bumbling, crass, piratical Basey: "The B-29's awed Jim. The huge, streamlined bombers summed up all the power and grace of America [….] What impressed him so much was that these complex machines were flown by men such as Cohen and Tiptee and Dainty. That was America" (236). Mingling the vulgar and the sublime into a technocratic icon, the American B-29s sublate the Japanese Zeros whose will to self-abnegation cannot defeat the will to power of the American weaponry, emerging here on a new scale of grandeur and sublime significance: "Two of its [Superfortress] engines were on fire, but the sight of the immense bomber, with its high, curving tail convinced Jim that the Japanese had lost the war" (236). As citizens enter the postmodern condition, the ground of war can become an image of global

transformation: as Ballard notes in his wry foreword to the novel, "The military airfield at Hugngjao is now the site of the Shanghai International Airport."

By gathering documents supporting the postwar creation of a "white paper" of atomic victims, shame, misery, and radioactive wounding, Kenzaburo Ōe's *Hiroshima Notes* helps to rectify any all-too-American fascination with the sublime power and earth- shattering danger to humanity and the future released at Hiroshima. Documenting atomic suffering, Ōe does acknowledge that "these awesome [nuclear] weapons reign over our age like raving-mad gods," such as when Krushchev boasted to Kennedy and the world that the Soviet Union possessed "a fearful weapon capable of exterminating mankind" (78). Ōe's focus is rather upon witnessing and drawing human parables from the specific and relentless suffering endured by these sublime weapons upon the common people of Hiroshima, known for their taciturn fortitude.

If nuclear power at times of spectacle enraptures as icon of power, 'sublimity' is by no means the whole issue or effect in representing Hiroshima. As Toshihiro Kanai, an editorial writer for *Chugoku Shinbun* of Hiroshima, wonders about the political rhetoric of the anti-nuclear movements emerging in the 1960s, "Is the atomic bomb known better for its immense power or for the human misery it causes?" (Ōe 61). The assumption is that any such fascination with the sublimity ("immense power") of the atomic bomb need not repress the misery inflicted on the people of Japan, whose strength and moral fortitude is called upon to overcome even that disaster. This radioactive suffering must not be forgotten and, in Ōe's existential calculus, can lead beyond catastrophe and tragic absurdity to inform the basis of an anti-nuclear resistance, rooted in "Hiroshima" as fact and image.

Although far more politically rich than John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, Ōe's focus does remain existential throughout, stressing the emergence of individual "courage in the face of desperate anxiety," individual dignity, and the undefeated humanist decency of doctors, journalists, housewives (53). Amid the ruins of liberal modernity, he searches for "an authentic man" like Doctor Shigeto and, everywhere, "the dignity of man." As in *A Personal Matter* (1964), which frames the personal tragedy of Bird's deformed child against a nuclear-protest movement that does not so much diminish as exemplify acts of human resistance, the will to suicidal despair and self-pity must be countered by a will to political action linking the personal to the communal.[8] In *Hiroshima Notes*, the cry of "No More Hiroshimas" links the horror of personal wounds and the taciturn morality of Hiroshima victims to the communal will to hope, resist, and build a global peace. Remembering Hiroshima, and forgetting world war, the need abides "to create a new style of peace movement centered in Hiroshima" (37).

Repression of Hiroshima comes naturally to the national rhetoric of neo-liberal and market-worshipping Americans, however, transcending a history ever their own: as Ōe observes, in 1945 the U. S. Army Surgeons

Investigation Team had claimed that all people expected to die from radioactive effects had already died and that no further physiological effects due to residual radiation would be acknowledged (60). This American statement proved to be obscene, as citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki went on suffering and dying from keloid wounds and tubercular effects in monstrous ways the "white paper" sought to document. Ostracism conspired with shame to make the situation of the sufferers even worse. Occupation restrictions upon Japanese journalism enforced repression, as the wounded were, in effect, urged to keep silent and pass away quietly (66). During the Tokyo Olympics of 1964, when a young man born in Hiroshima on A-bomb day was selected as the last runner to carry the Olympic flame, an American journalist protested that this was an unhappy choice because it reminded Americans of the atomic bomb (99-100). This journalist, as Ōe shrewdly perceives, "preferred to erase all traces of Hiroshima from the American memory" (100). Representative Americans, remaining good Emersonians by being "an endless seeker with no past at [their] back," would rather forget history and remember the technoeuphoric future of friction-free global capitalism, as long as the globe takes shape after their own national dreams.

The people of Hiroshima cannot forget Hiroshima, however, even though "they have had enough of [remembering] Hiroshima" (101). As Ōe sees the problem within a Cold War context of historical repression and the sublime idealization of nuclear force, "In this age of nuclear weapons, when their power gets more attention than the misery they cause, and when human events increasingly revolve around their production and proliferation, what must we Japanese try to remember?" (90). What must Americans do, furthermore, to remember Hiroshima and, thereby, help to usher in a nuclear-free future disenchanted with the project of technological domination? Living in an era of nuclear proliferation, symbolic decreation, and the technocratic deformation of nature, we are all, in some sense, what the Japanese term *hibakusha*, literally, "explosion-effected persons." As a rupturing point in the march of history-as-progress, Hiroshima deforms an American horizon of political agency.[9] Hiroshima puts an end to ego-centered modernist imaginings of the nation. Though we may not have directly suffered the radioactive effects within two thousand meters and fourteen days of the bomb's hypo-center at Hiroshima, Hiroshima haunts, fascinates, and inhabits us as recurring memory, as trauma, instigating a collective labor of mourning, as Marguerite Duras's screenplay *Hiroshima Mon Amour* so effectively captures.

This to some extent explains the mythic framework of geopolitical and subjective mourning as soul-making invoked by Michael Perlman in *Imaginal Memory and the Place of Hiroshima* (1988) to underwrite the claim that "lasting [nuclear] impressions do implicate the (largely unconscious) ways in which we are all survivors of Hiroshima, and hence have to some extent incorporated, identified with, and internalized the sufferings of

actual *hibakusha*" (106). Using representations of Hiroshima as *imagines agentes* of the political unconscious, Perlman labors to house "Hiroshima," as catastrophic place and mythic metaphor, in the postmodern memory working to evaporate history and to forget. It is Perlman's utopic plea, grounded in the unconscious power of archetypal mourning, that "images arising from the place of Hiroshima speak to us: Remember Hiroshima" (vii).

In *Thank God for the Atom Bomb* (1988), building on a polemic he wrote for *The New Republic* in 1981 called "Hiroshima: A Soldier's View," Paul Fussell enacts another mode of 'remembering Hiroshima' altogether: the atomic bomb recalls not an American memory filled with shame, trauma, or guilt but one of pride, honor, the kill-or-be-killed experience of war. The fascinating sublimity of the atomic bomb has proved redemptive within history and need not occasion moral ambiguity, retrospective shock, or liberal shame within formations of postmodern culture: "The degree to which Americans register shock and extraordinary shame about the Hiroshima bomb correlates closely with lack of information about the Pacific war," Fussell suggests (25). American history need not shame or chasten but empower, vindicate, self-forgive. The Hiroshima sublime, likewise, need not induce blockage, negation, terror. Fussell's blood-and-guts title is not at all ironic: Fussell does thank God for putting the atomic bomb in the keeping of exceptional Americans and thereby bringing to an end "the unspeakable savagery of the Pacific war" if not installing America at the historical center of such technocratic power (24).

Americans like John Kenneth Galbraith or Michael Sherry who argue against the bomb and theorize *ex post facto* its image and consequences retrospectively are suffering from "a remoteness from experience" and/or a "rationalistic abstraction from actuality" (19-20). The atomic bomb debate can be "reduced to a collision between experience and theory" (24). Like Whitman, Fussell knows, he suffered and was there, though not actually at Hiroshima (he might then have had another view of the morality of the bomb) but serving as an infantry lieutenant about to invade Honshu. Defending the bomb's dropping if worrying and postponing, later in the essay, the nuclear consequences for ecology at places such as Three Mile Island, Fussell baldly opposes abstract theory as "error occasioned by remoteness from experience" to the material "truth by experience" of dog soldiers like himself and President Truman, for whom the atom bombs dropped upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki spared from infantry invasions of Japan, hence saving countless American lives (29).

In Fussell's moral calculus of American power, the bomb had a redemptive and egalitarian function upon Japan, making this once-ruthless nation for whom "universal national kamikaze was the point" into potentially democratic, constitutional, law-abiding citizens like ourselves: "It is easy to forget, or not to know, what Japan was like before it was first destroyed, and then humiliated, tamed, and constitutionalized by the West" (17; 25). Fussell's syntax is embarrassing yet exact: Japan is "first destroyed" only later to be subjugated and redeemed

by the discourse of the West. The atom bomb had done its sacred American labor of regeneration-through-violence. America remains an exceptional country for whom the greatest violence can still do the most good. In effect, the sublimity of the bomb had redeemed Japan from itself.

Those Americans who cant about the horrors/wonders of the atomic bomb need not longer "dilate on the special wickedness of the A-bomb-droppers" (34). A dehumanizing rhetoric was called for. Justifying the war-time ritual of hanging Japanese skulls on bayonets, Fussell must concede the orientalist premises of his will-to-sublation of Japanese otherness into animal-like opponents of the American sublime: "Among Americans it was widely held that the Japanese were really subhuman, little yellow beasts, and popular imagery depicted them as lice, rats, bats, vipers, dogs, and monkeys" (26). Fussell *knows war by experience*; he fought, bombed, killed, yet has no trouble sleeping at night nor remembering world-war in the Pacific and justifying Hiroshima. Only remote-from-experience postwar theorists such as ourselves can still linger over the horrors, ambiguities, and death-inducing terrors posed by the nuclear sublime.

That the experience of common citizens might lead one automatically to justify the goodness and rightness of the atomic bomb might come as a horrid surprise to Japanese novelists such as Kenzaburo Ōe and Masuji Ibuse, whose *Black Rain* (1969) uses a species of quiet realism and journal-based documentation to try to establish the horrid effects of the bomb on noncombatant citizens. The narrator, Shigematsu, in fact is opposed to any flights of moral or political theorization and keeps the journal he is re-constructing as close to the actual experience of the bomb's dropping and aftermath as he can:

> 'Well,' he said, 'I got through a lot today. I've copied it all out up to the place where the West Parade Ground is jammed with people taking refuge from the mushroom cloud. Even so, I haven't got down on paper one-thousandth part of all the things I actually saw. It's no easy matter to put something down in writing.' His wife counters, 'I expect it's because when you write you're too eager to work in your own theories,' but Shigematsu responds, 'It's nothing to do with theories. From a literary point of view, the way I describe things is the crudest kind of realism. By the way, have these loach been kept in clean water long enough to get rid of the muddy taste?' (Ibuse 59-60)

This activity of cleaning and replenishing the fish and carp ponds of Hiroshima is just one of the little rituals Shigematsu enacts to help nature and humanity recover from the bomb. The journal, too, becomes an act of historical cleansing. Yasuko, his niece, cannot forget the black-acid rain that marred her as a Hiroshima

survivor; others in Japan, refusing to marry her, will remember for her. Nature and ordinary custom, everywhere in Hiroshima, have been irrevocably disturbed: "The bomb seemed to have encouraged the growth of plants and flies as the same time that it put a stop to human life" (Ibuse 190-191). Years later, the Blessing of the Dead Insects by the farmers of Hiroshima takes on an odd, surreal significance recalling all the deformed, maimed, blasted human corpses who had died like insects.

NBC's movie disseminated on 5 August 1990, "Hiroshima: Out of the Ashes," provided at least one American attempt to move towards representing/remembering Hiroshima and thereby activating a collective process of mourning some 45 years after the event. Melodramatic in scale, a politics of identification can take place in which post-war Americans identify not with the technocratic sublimity of the bomb but with its human victims. Arguing that this TV movie offered "an unflinching look at the physical and emotional devastation" that was wrought by the American atomic bombings, the critic Christopher Hull yet had to demur, "There is something disturbing about the fact that it has taken this long for the story about the bomb's victims (more than 100,000 were killed in Hiroshima) to be dramatized on the small screen." As a narrative of this sublime event, the movie drew upon humanistic stereotypes from Hersey's *Hiroshima* (Father Siemes is here the German Jesuit priest spiritually transformed by the bomb to a stance of compassion towards ordinary Japanese), Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* (two boyish American soldiers wander miserably about Hiroshima after being freed by the bomb) as well as from Ibuse's *Black Rain* (the stoic Japanese doctor is Dr. Hara who moves away from being a war advocate towards unflinching labour, and Pat Morita plays a postman who holds on to small Japanese rites amid the devastation) to illustrate, as Hull puts it, "the resilience of the human spirit."

Filtered through this intertextual network, the bomb is remembered by Americans, in other words, to summon their basic humanity which this primal scene of death and destruction seems to contradict. Creature of technocratic sublimity and apocalyptic doom, both myth and monster, the Hiroshima bomb had instigated an ongoing sense of terror for scientist, doctor, soldier, and citizen alike: as Spencer R. Weart has expressed this post-nuclear effect, "The old sense of security was lost; something unimaginable had come into the everyday world to stay" (106).[10]

Akira Kurosawa's visionary movie, *Akira Kurosawa's Dreams* (1990), takes a drastic and original approach to this aesthetic/ethical mandate of remembering Hiroshima and portraying the threat of the nuclear sublime to nature's ecosphere. In the "Mt. Fuji in Red" sequence of this subliminal narrative, five nuclear reactors explode and spontaneously devastate the landscape of contemporary Japan, destroy its cherished icon of natural sublimity, and drive thousands of its citizens to flee into the radioactive sea. A flower-laden Japan is turned into

an arid purgatory of ash, debris, and ruin. In the next sequence, "A Weeping Demon," Kurosawa tries to imagine a post-nuclear Japan, with monster dandelions and cannibalistic demons who wander around the volcanic landscape of blood and ash as in some Buddhistic hell.

Even death seems contaminated, and the afterlife disturbed, by the nuclear horrors twentieth-century humanity has wrought in its technocratic over-reaching. Having evoked this apocalyptic dynamic of the nuclear sublime, Kurosawa can only retreat from this postmodern abyss of radioactive contamination into a pre-modern landscape of rural Japan, evoking a "Village of the Watermills" where old and young cherish the vitality and path of nature and live by customs and rituals that provide a happiness and community long vanished from post-Hiroshima Japan.

The mighty Asian/Pacific consumer culture linking America and Japan can induce post-historical forgetting, normalizing the trauma of the Hiroshima sublime into a vast APEC market for Asian and European investment, beyond ideology as it were: as Ōe claims at the end of *Hiroshima Notes*, "Outside Hiroshima we are able to forget the misery in that city; and forgetting has become easier with the passing years, now twenty [forty five], since the atomic bombing" (140).

Even inside Hiroshima, these transnationalizing days of global postmodernity and the dismantled poetics of region and place, one can forget "Hiroshima," go to Hiroshima Carp games and buy the latest designer fashions from around the earth. Americans and Japanese can ponder the A-bomb Dome that lingers in Hiroshima as the first blasted allegory of postmodern art, formerly the Industrial Promotion Hall of Hiroshima Prefecture, designed by Jan Letzel, a Czech architect, and built in 1915 as one of Hiroshima's first modern buildings. On 11 July 1966, despite escalating real estate costs and an emerging will to forget, the Hiroshima municipal assembly voted in favour of the permanent preservation of the A-bomb Dome, preserving what can here be called the epicenter ("hypo-center") of the postmodern, a blasted icon of modern engineering torn open, deconstructed, deformed beneath the sky for all to ponder and *remember*.

This deformed atomic dome at Hiroshima remains not so much a US Pacific icon dedicated to the sublime power of the bomb; but rather, as Shinoe Shoda claims in a collection of post-Hiroshima poems called "Penitence," "we should retain the dome as a monument dedicated to peace for all mankind" (Ōe, *Hiroshima Notes* 155). Moving beyond the agon of national superiority and nuclear might in the troubled yet promissory waters of the Pacific, let us learn, in "lines of flight" and spiritual quest and risk, to make new forms of peace and synergistic creativity reign across Asia/Pacific.

Notes

1 In "Modern Death and the Nuclear Sublime," Alan Wolfe connects this Japanese fascination with the atomic bomb and a suicidal will to self-sublation into Empire, death, and national rebirth as well as a counter-movement, within emerging narratives of postmodernity, to activate "a specifically Japanese nuclear criticism" no longer fascinated with the technoeuphoria of Western modernity: see *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Dazai Osamu* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 212-223. Also see, Frances Ferguson, "The Nuclear Sublime." *Diacritics*, 14 (1984): 4-10; and, on the American will to the domination of nature and space, Donald Pease, "Sublime Politics," in *The American Sublime*, ed. Mary Arensberg (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

2 A dialogical approach to engaging with "Hiroshima" as constructed from within the self-victimizing Japanese and American national psyches is taken by Peter Schwenger and John Wittier Treat, "America's Hiroshima, Hiroshima's America," *boundary 2*, 21 (1994): 233-253.

3 Describing the by-now-global culture of postmodernity, Andreas Huyssen invokes the need for a social-psychological process of *Vergangenheitsbewaltigung* ("coming to terms with the past") to show how collective mourning was belatedly activated in post-war Germany by works such as the popular American TV series, "Holocaust." Overcoming "a whole network of mechanisms which aimed at repressing, denying, and making unreal (*Entwirklichung*) Germany's Nazi past, "a process of social mourning took place in which a release of the repressed was aroused and Germans were able, finally, to identify with the Jewish victims of their will to nation-state superiority. I do not mean to argue historical identity between the postmodern American and German situations by any means, but do want to suggest that, through "re-imagining Hiroshima," a release of the American repressed could take place and we could better negotiate the trauma's victims less we stayed locked within the technoeuphoria of war. See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), "The Politics of Identification: 'Holocaust' and West German Drama," pp. 94-114.

4 In a jeremiad on the geopolitical situation of postmodern Japan, Ōe argues the closeness of the nuclear bond between the United States and Japan only to lament the prolonged Cold War policy of nuclear-sublime terror ('deterrence') still furthered under Reagan/Nakasone: "I feel the danger of living in a country which, though having experienced the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, is now run by a government that can only support the United States SDI program, thereby helping spread the nuclear-deterrence myth in the Far East." See Ōe, "Japan's Dual Identity: A Writer's Dilemma," in Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, eds., *Postmodernism and Japan* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1989), p. 191. The emergence of an anti-nuclear movement is connected, later in the Ōe essay, with the attempt to imagine some post-modern way beyond nation-state modernization/ technologization: "The [postwar writer's] movement is also one which is making a continuous effort for the eradication of all nuclear weapons. Those writers [like the postmodern Oe himself] gaze squarely at the destructive impasse to which Japan's modernization from the Meiji restoration [in 1868] brought us" (197).

5 On nuclear fantasies still operative in the militarization of the Pacific and the Gulf War, see Rob Wilson, "Postmodern as Post-Nuclear: Landscape as Nuclear Grid," in *Ethics/Aesthetics: Post-Modern Positions*, ed.

Robert Merrill (Washington, D. C.: Maisonneuve, 1988); and Rob Wilson, "Sublime Patriot," *Polygraph* 5 (1992): 67-77. The historically residual association of the sublime with icons of technology are surveyed in David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), especially chapter 9, "Atomic Bomb and Apollo XI: New Forms of the Dynamic Sublime." A rocket launch, for Nye, nowadays captures the American sublimation of technology into icon of national power, especially after Hiroshima had traumatized the national subject: "Here millions crowd together seeking an experience that can powerfully represent national greatness" (254).

6 On the "fantasy-organization of desire" within the postmodern political imaginary of the nation-state sublime, see Slavoj Žižek, "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead," *New Left Review* 183 (1990): 53-56 and "Formal Democracy and Its Discontents," *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 162-169.

7 Prior to the imperial outreach into Asia which led to Japanese confrontation with the USA as Asia/Pacific power, Kojin Karatani links the Japanese discovery of the sublime, as a national aesthetic possibility, to the internal colonization of Hokkaido by the Japanese nation-state: "For the vast wilderness of Hokkaido inspired awe in human beings, unlike the mainland which had been regulated for centuries and enveloped by literary texts." See Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans. by Brett De Bary (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 41.

8 Other fiction by Ōe concerned with the direct (and displaced) trauma of nuclear horror include *The Silent Cry*, trans. John Bester (New York: Kodansha International, 1974) and his anthology, *The Crazy Iris and Other Stories of the Atomic Aftermath* (New York: Grove, 1985).

9 For the nuclear trauma interpreted as a mutual American/ Japanese national fantasy of domination and victimization, see Donald Pease and Rob Wilson, interview with Kenzaburo Ōe, *boundary 2* 20 (1993). For linkages of nuclear trauma and the wars in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, see Donald E. Pease, "Hiroshima, the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial and the Gulf War: Post-National Spectacles," in Donald E. Pease and Amy Kaplan, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 557-580.

10 Also see Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (New York: Random House, 1967).

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