

Hibakusha: Reconstructing Bodies

ARCH 5402 Architecture, Culture, and Society

Tao DuFour

Adriana Contarino

San Yoon, sy723

Tetsuo Kobayashi, tk672

On August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb named ‘Little Boy’ was dropped by the US military on Hiroshima, Japan, followed by another one on August 9 in Nagasaki. The incident changed the course of history understood as a symbolic moment leading to the end of World War II. The bombing inflicted different types of wounds on people, both physically and mentally, generating adaptations and transformations of home, individual bodies, and heredity.

The first type of wound is the most obvious one: physical damages. When the atomic bomb was dropped, the ground temperature reached 3,000-4,000 degrees Celsius in less than a second, taking roughly 80,000 lives. To put this in scale, the temperature of the sun is roughly 5,700 degrees Celsius. Many who were near the epicenter of the nuclear explosion were burned fatally, if not vaporized in an instant. It was told that people covered their eyes with their hands to obstruct the flashing light caused by the bombing, and in that moment they witnessed their own finger bones. Others who were fortunate enough to retain a certain distance from the epicenter survived but suffered from severe injuries inflicted by the blast from the explosion.

“8:15 a.m. was our meeting time. Suddenly, a strong orangey flash, much lighter than summer sunshine, hit with a burst. We were not able to avoid it because we had no shade in the schoolyard. So we were directly burned. Well, I didn’t feel “burned” at that moment because I didn’t feel anything. Then, the blast came. It blew us over. Everything became muddled and chaotic. Darkness surrounded us for a moment. I was thirsty and it was hard to breathe because there was too much dust.”¹

- Sadao Hirano

The second type of wound is rather inconspicuous but vital for understanding and reflecting the nature of nuclear war. *Hibakusha*(被爆者) is a word of Japanese origin describing the people who are exposed to and affected by radioactivity. The word is not only designated to the definition of certain individuals. It broods the broader context of pain elapsing through time. Normally, bombs bring about physical injuries and deaths, but what makes the atomic bomb distinctly different from the ones before is its destructibility and macrobian effects caused by radiation. The number of deaths kept rising even after the day the bomb was dropped. 140,000 had died by the end of the same year, 1945. People who survived were left with disability and trauma. *Hibakusha* are survivors without victory. The devastating memory of the bomb inscribed on their body are not just a physical injury, but a symbol of lost homes, drifting memories, endless suffering, and fearful prospect.

Despite the high level of universal awareness towards the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, people who actually suffered and are still suffering from the incident are disregarded ever since and rarely brought to the table for a discussion. This research focuses on the absence of empathy in the top-down plan and the misuse of technology organized by the ruling power. As a

¹ “Story of Hiroshima: Life of an Atomic Bomb Survivor.” *Association for Asian Studies*, 26 May 2020, <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/story-of-hiroshima-life-of-an-atomic-bomb-survivor/>.

disclaimer, the research has no intention to justify the fatalities in various countries conducted by Japanese domination during World War II, but rather raising a point of discussion about how uncountable bodies of commoners had to be sacrificed by the apathetic governments.

==

Infrastructure

Hiroshima had a population of approximately 255,000, with the city area over 26 square miles. All the memories and infrastructure within the area were erased in an incognizance moment by the one call made by the president of the United States, Harry Truman. The whole city was destroyed, and only very few buildings remained standing. Ironically many of them that withstood the blast were western reinforced concrete buildings as if symbolizing the defeat of Japan. Every corner of the city was left with smears of the explosion. The post-war photographs (Figure 1) show the pattern of shadows imprinted on the ground caused by an intense heatwave from the nuclear explosion.² The magnitude of heat was so great that even asphalt was vaporized but the areas on the ground protected by the shade from the handrails were less affected, capturing the moment of time as a visible scar on the physical environment. This built environment, or an object, becomes more than a physical substance. It possesses a haunting, ephemeral quality that even the people who have not experienced the war can come to understand the cruelty and intensity of the weapons of mass destruction. When people are in contact with these traces, the infrastructure molts the conception of a bridge or steps and becomes a living body. They start to possess senses that make people synchronize with the hurtful memory as if it's their own body. The ephemeral nature of these atrocious traces lets itself decay and disappear over time without proper maintenance, brewing the feeling of melancholy.

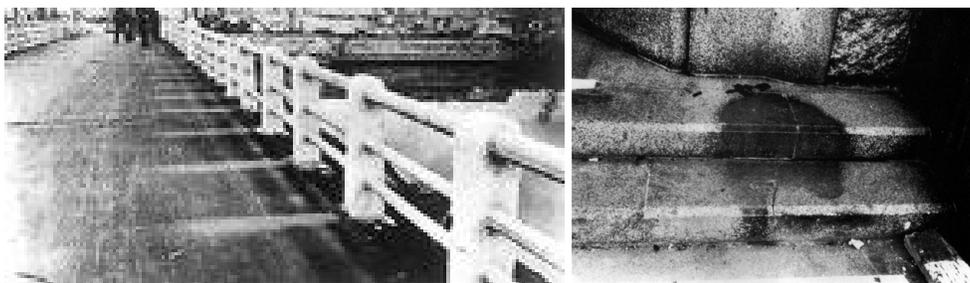


Figure 1. Smears of Atomic Bombing

As these traces of signs disappear, new buildings have been constructed on Hiroshima since the event, overlooking what was before and transforming the cityscape that is unrecognizable by now. With the literal loss of signs, there comes an evanescence of what was signified. In this case, the concepts such as pain, crime, and mistake are adrifted. This is problematic because it

² Serena, Katie. "These Eerie Shadows of Hiroshima Residents Were Burned into the Ground by the Atomic Bomb." *All That's Interesting*, All That's Interesting, 31 July 2020, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/hiroshima-shadows>.

leads to the loss of opportunities for reflections and mournings towards the deceased as well as those who are currently suffering still, eighty years after the war. Although not perfect, the Japanese government kept a few of the buildings as it is to prevent people from forgetting the past. The picture of *Genbaku Dome* (Figure 2) shows two girls looking at the poster on the periphery fences. The poster in the image writes “Peace Forever, Peace Day,” ironically, in English. The building is, quite literally, labeled with a pacifist ideology. The government implemented a new function on this piece of architecture in ruin, *Genbaku Dome*, in order to transform and control the ideologies of the Japanese populations. In other words, architecture was used to govern people.



Figure 2. *Genbaku Dome*

The building became not only a post-war ruin but a symbol of the pursuit of peace. In July 1949, the government enacted the ‘Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law,’ indicating the future of Hiroshima as “the peace memorial city to symbolize the human ideal of the sincere pursuit of genuine and lasting peace.” The land of Hiroshima, previously occupied by the military during the war, was entrusted to the city with financial assistance by the government. In 1955, Tange Kenzo designed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Centre. (Figure 3) In which, Tange incorporated western styles, with many references to Le Corbusier and some small details that are derived from the traditional Japanese architecture. Architecture and the city transformed into infrastructure not of socialism but of the pacifist ideology.

Western-influenced infrastructures swept the ruins of Hiroshima and allured people with a promise of peace, the same city where they abused with immense brawn. The newly built city and the memorial obscure so many delicate senses lying beneath, while depicting physical wounds that are visually effective to the eye of the third person. Such conspicuity and publicity of the visible scars take away attention from the invisible sufferings. In other words, the visibility

of the scars makes us blind to the other types of bruises that are engendered by radiation. It is the *hibakusha*, who in fact is still suffering not solely from a visible pain but further from the lingering of foregone war. The scrutiny of the *hibakusha* leads to the following discussion of the disability and lived body.



Figure 3. Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Disability

The war produced thousands of disabled bodies. Some had been physically disabled by literally losing parts of their limbs or eyesight, followed by brain damage. In some severe cases with long and intense exposure to radiation, a DNA structure is mutated and destroyed which might have negatively affected the chromosome of the next generation. According to the Radiation Effects Research Foundation(RERF), established by the teams of researchers from the United States and Japan during the 1950s, states that 23% of the first generation of radiation exposure has a disability. In the same study, 36% live under minimum wage, and 8.6% passed down disabilities to their new-born while suffering from social inequity.³ The disability of *hibakusha* ranges from severe skin burns, brain damage, birth defects, to a higher chance of leukemia. Even if they do not show a visible disability, simply carrying radiation after exposure makes them socially persona non grata. As a matter of fact, in a more recent study published by the National Research Council and National Academy of Sciences from the US, the team of researchers concluded that the “genetic risks of radiation are less than previously thought.”⁴ The problem really lies in the fact that there is this widespread belief among people that radiation is a symbol of destruction and a cause of disease. By “disease” in this sense is not simply a sickness but a socially constructed one that is not scientifically validated in many cases. This presence beyond the body creates prejudice and discrimination. It then leads to exclusion and unfair treatment in society. Some of the victims are perfectly fine in terms of ability. However, the lingering notion of radiation makes the able-body socially disabled.

³ Radiation Effects Research Foundation(RERF), RERF Report Series (1993-2019)

⁴ National Research Council (US) and National Academy of Sciences (US). *The Children of Atomic Bomb Survivors: A Genetic Study*. Edited by James V. Neel et. al., National Academies Press (US), 1991.

The discourse of disability goes beyond the category of radiation and is induced by race as well. An attempt to value the Japanese word *hibakusha* as its authentic diction in the framework of Western academia is a positive move to shed light on the issues that would otherwise have been ignored in the international setting. However, *hibakusha* is misleading in a way as it seems that the disabled bodies are exclusively Japanese. These bodies are not limited to Japanese nationals. According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, today there are at least 2,140 South-Korean, 928 North Korean, 1,060 American, 24 Canadian, 157 Brazilian, 14 Argentinean, 4 Paraguayan, 6 Bolivian, and 2 Peruvians *hibakusha* outside of Japan. In reality, there are likely more than what is listed considering that there are some unregistered populations. On the day of the bombing, an estimated 263,000 bodies was present in Nagasaki. Of which, there were 10,000 Koreans, 2,500 conscripted Korean workers, 500 conscripted Chinese/Taiwanese workers, and 400 allied prisoners of war in the camp to the north of Nagasaki. During the war, Japan brought approximately 670,000 Korean conscripts to Japan as forced laborers. There were as many as 8,000 Korean when the bomb was dropped in Hiroshima, and roughly 2,000 Korean were deceased in the case of Nagasaki. Nation-states move on after “apologies” and “reparations,” but many innocent bodies from different countries were the victims of the war, many of whom cannot easily move on due to the aforementioned disabilities.

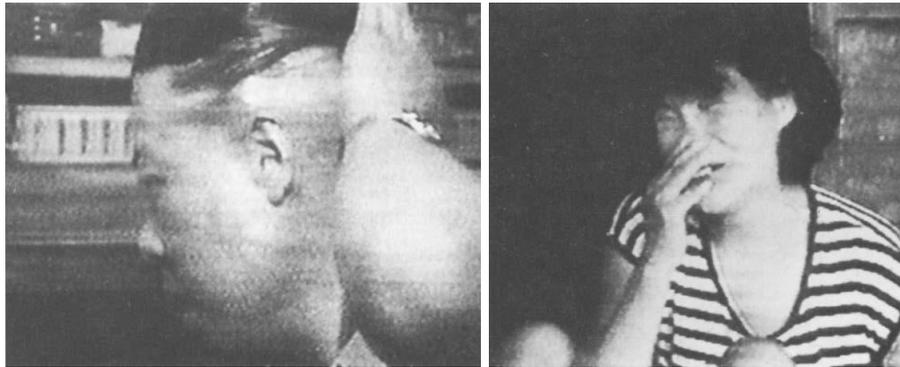


Figure 4. Korean Hibakusha⁵

(Left) Kim Moon-song, 54, was an eight-year-old riding his bicycle in Hiroshima when it was bombed. Part of his scalp where it was shaved and not protected by the hair was completely burned, and his foot was burned to the level where it became severely twisted.

(Right) Lee Jae-im, 52, was at the age of five on the day of the bombing. As an aftereffect, she is suffering from a serious mental, emotional, and neurological disorder. Her level of maturity stayed as a five-year-old, the time when the bombing happened, as a part of her mental retardation.

Approximately 23,000 Korean *hibakusha* returned to their homeland after the war. Many resided in the rural areas, specifically in Hapcheon, Gyeongsang province. Wistfully, the delight

⁵ Korean Broadcasting System Documentary, *Haebang 44 Nyeon, Pipok 44 Nyeon* (Liberation, 44 Years, Atomic Bomb Victims, 44 Years), 1989

of emancipation was never fully experienced for Korean *hibakusha*. The fact that they are wounded by the bombing of Hiroshima, what they carry with them was the artifact that sparked the trauma of colonization for the Korean society. They had to breathe under ostracism of society and the government. For a while, they were defined as ‘tainted.’ They were people who did not belong anywhere. Many Korean *hibakusha* refused to be found, because they were very aware of the social discrimination they had to go through. Because of socially constructed ostracism, some Korean *hibakusha* tried to go to Japan illegally in the 1970s to get proper medical care. But of course, not only were they not given *hibakusha-techo*, a Japanese term for an atomic victim’s registration, they were deported back as an illegal alien.⁶

In 1970, the Japanese government donated 400 million Yen (Approximately USD3.16 million) for medical support for *hibakusha* specifically in Korea and the Welfare Ministry of Korea has been spending 5 billion Won (Approximately USD4.1 million) a year on Korean *hibakusha* living mostly in Hapcheon, South Korea.⁷ However, as pointed out in the discussion of disability, financial assistance does not necessarily fix disabled bodies and the aftermath. After the war, Korean *hibakusha* lost every concept of ‘home’ they had. They were rejected from everywhere they went due to the fact that they were not only *hibakusha* but also Korean nationals who were living in Japan at the time of war. These bodies carried layers of scars that became a target of discrimination.



Figure 5. President Truman Saluting the Hiroshima Bombing

*“A short time ago, an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, and destroyed its usefulness to the enemy. That bomb has more power than 20,000 tons of TNT. ... What has been done is the greatest achievement of organized science in history, and we have won.”*⁸

-President Harry Truman, 1945

If ‘home’ is considered as a place to embrace and be embraced back, these Korean *hibakusha* had lost ‘home’ as they were abused and extorted without much help from the governments of

⁶ Kurt W. Tong, *Korea’s Forgotten Atomic Bomb Victims*, 2019

⁷ Kim, Arin. *Korean Victims of WWII Atomic Bombings Remembered in Ceremony*, The Korea Herald, 2019

⁸ Truman Library, National Archives Catalog Motion Picture Division (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/23630>)

Japan, Korea, and the United States. The idea of home is not just a place where one is born. Just because one determines a certain place to be home does not make the place become ‘home,’ especially if the particular place does not embrace the person back. What happened to Korean *hibakusha* clearly goes against the common notion of ‘home.’ No empathy was given to their pain, forcing them to hide from the public attention by themselves. This inconspicuous nature of *hibakusha* causes a cognitive disorder for the government to malfunction in recognizing its own people’s suffering. The atomic bomb does not pick race or nationality; it kills equally. It, however, inflicts scars unequally. These scars are not just due to the atomic bomb itself but come from conflicting ideologies such as totalitarianism, nationalism, and even democracy. Not to mention Nazism was a spawn from a democratic nation and the atomic bomb was dropped by a democratic country.

Lived Body

Husserl mentioned ‘the body is the locus where physiological is transformed into psychological,’ and Merleau-Ponty said, “I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body.”⁹ *Hibakusha* is a body embedded with historical agony. A body by itself becomes not just a physical bruise but a symbol and a representation of a section in history. By acknowledging the scarred bodies of the survivors of Hiroshima, one can empathize with the seriousness of war and the consequences of technologies on the human body not only in the short term but also in the long term. It is a symbolic moment of demonstration towards the raw nature of technology; machinery worshipped and believed by people towards its ability to improve human lives, in fact, destroyed human lives itself and is still destroying in a somewhat stealth manner. It represents a total loss of home, families, friends, culture, daily lives, and not only memories of the past but also hopes for the future. In 1945, it was said that “no plants would grow in Hiroshima for 75 years.” When looking at ‘lived body’ as a concept of pain and acknowledgment, *hibakusha* is a lived body exceeding the memory of an individual in terms of size and time.

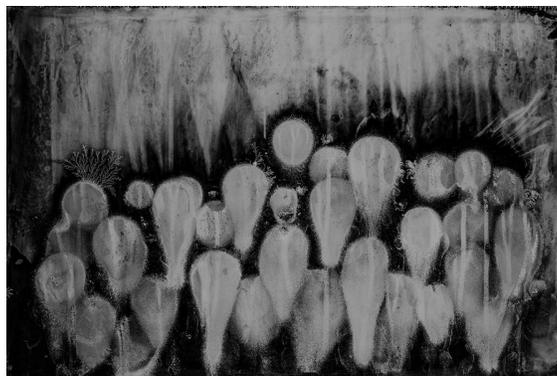


Figure 6. *Hibakusha: A Tribute to the 75th Anniversary of the Atomic Bombings* by Michael Koerner

⁹ Shaun Gallagher, *Lived Body and Environment*, 1986

Radiation exposure is different from a simple disease locked into an individual. It gets embedded in one's DNA, which means a lived experience could be inherited to the next generation. The fate of memory and pain within our body is usually transferred as a nonexistent entity, but now it has a very profound physical existence. In other words, it is not about an individual lived body anymore, but a generation of lived bodies; a chain and inheritance of lived pain of war. What concerns a lot of *hibakusha*, more than their own lived body, is bodies that are going to be lived. Even though they never caused the casualty, *hibakusha* are the ones who have to bear the burden and feel apologetic for even thinking of having a child. *Hibakusha* are war veteran without any record of a murder or wielding a weapon, who has not yet been accepted nor respected enough. Then again, considering what has been discussed until now, is being respected what they really want at this point? This analysis in the perspective of lived-body and disability let us have some insights in approaching the matter concerning *hibakusha*. We should focus on empathy; the act of listening, acknowledging, understanding, and enlightening.

*“There is no such thing, apologize, or anything. I just think, myself, and the rest of the people. How will we be able to restore regular lives from this disaster? There is no such thing as emotional, hate, or anything. It was a wartime. Just trying to survive.”*¹⁰

- Wataru Namba, a Japanese American Hibakusha

Hibakusha's visible wounds will slowly dissolve after generations as the survivors pass away with time, like tears in the rain. It will take far more time to set everything back to normal, if it is even possible. But even a few centuries later, when the trace of atomic bomb radiation is untraceable in the world, it is not the normal state of conditions the victims had dreamt of. It will never be the same. The regular skin that future progenies will have is not the regular skin that the victims of the atomic bomb wished they would have. The DNA they wield will never be the same as what people who were living in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had before the drop. Even if science might conclude that there is no perceptible long-term effect in their DNA, the scars will remain and pass on as long as the nationwide misconception and mistreatment against the *hibakusha* persists. The memory and legacy built throughout generations will always have the ‘taint’ that will never be forgotten. This is the essential reason why the atomic bomb is dangerous, not for the nation, nor for the government that is institutions, but fundamentally for the people who are living everyday lives.

“I constantly feel that I am being choked to death softly. I feel suffocated slowly by the fear that there are still nuclear arms out there. This feeling stays with me always. If we don't speak, the bombing will be forgotten as if it had never happened. That's why we must keep the history and people's testimonies on record. When some people no longer talk about it and just praise nuclear arms as a means of deterrence, we have to speak up and say we cannot accept that. Otherwise we won't be able to pass on our message to our children's generations.”

- Jiro Hamasumi, Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Survivor¹¹

¹⁰ Jared Namba. Sazzy Gourley. *An American Hibakusha*, TIME Magazine, 2020

¹¹ *75 Years On, Japan Bomb Survivors Make Final Pleas for Abolition*, Rappler, 2020

These three theoretical lenses, infrastructure, disability, and the lived body, are helpful for our studies because they allow us to critically see and explore how an individual body, city, and architecture, a country changes, or remains unchanged, overtime after the tragic war. These lenses shed light on the issues that are not frequently discussed. They point out ineffective approaches taken by governments to mediate the issues regarding *hibakusha* and bring out new ways of looking at those scars to approach the issues in an appropriate manner. The war produced visible and invisible scars. This topic regarding war can easily be turned into a biased political discussion that leads to nowhere. However, analyzing the invisible pain in the lens of three aspects let us see the true nature of war without any pointless claims and biased justification. It lets us see from the perspectives of the victims in a fair manner. *Hibakusha* is still suffering not only from physical pain but also from mental agony through discrimination. In many cases, these prejudicial claims against the victims do not hold a scientific validation. It is filled with preconceived ideas that come from being fearful of what is unknown. This research through the theoretical lenses equip us with a critical ‘gaze’ and produce a discourse that had been not recognized and talked about, thereby hopefully empowering the neglected populations.

“...a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart.”

- Foucault

Bibliography

- Foucault, Michel (1998) *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, London, Penguin.
- Kim, Arin. Korean Victims of WWII Atomic Bombings Remembered in Ceremony, *The Korea Herald*, 2019
- Korean Broadcasting System Documentary, *Haebang 44 Nyeon, Pipok 44 Nyeon*(Liberation, 44 Years, Atomic Bomb Victims, 44 Years), 1989
- Kurt W. Tong, *Korea's Forgotten Atomic Bomb Victims*, 2019
- Jared Namba. Sazzy Gourley. *An American Hibakusha*, *TIME Magazine*, 2020
- National Research Council (US) and National Academy of Sciences (US). *The Children of Atomic Bomb Survivors: A Genetic Study*. Edited by James V. Neel et. al., National Academies Press (US), 1991.
- Serena, Katie. "These Eerie Shadows of Hiroshima Residents Were Buried into the Ground by the Atomic Bomb." *All That's Interesting*, *All That's Interesting*, 31 July 2020, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/hiroshima-shadows>.
- Shaun Gallagher, *Lived Body and Environment*, 1986
- "Story of Hiroshima: Life of an Atomic Bomb Survivor." *Association for Asian Studies*, 26 May 2020, <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/aaa/archives/story-of-hiroshima-life-of-an-atomic-bomb-survivor/>.
- Truman Library, National Archives Catalog Motion Picture Division (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/23630>)
- 75 Years On, Japan Bomb Survivors Make Final Pleas for Abolition, *Rappler*, 2020
- *TIME Magazine*, *An American Hibakusha*, 2020
- Radiation Effects Research Foundation(RERF), *RERF Report Series (1993-2019)*