

Memory in T/Rubble: Tackling (Nuclear) Ruins

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Marilena Parlati,
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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 21.1 (2019)**
Special Issue ***Gendered Bodies in Transit: Between Vulnerability and Resistance***. Ed. **Manuela Coppola**
and **Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz**
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol21/iss1/>>

Abstract: The 1945 bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki seem to have recently started to recede back in the memory of Western culture. 9/11 and the age of global warfare which we are in have averted our gazes away from that past, in our tremulous expectations of the next traumatic event. In the twentieth century, poets like Tony Harrison have tackled this delicate topic, while Japanese culture has in many ways been forced and willing to reconsider its own agendas and sense of identity from those 'ground zeroes' onwards. In both *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), one of the most famous and truly global writers of our times, Kazuo Ishiguro, has offered his own complex views on the still vulnerable sites and lives those events 'created.' In these two novels, he attempts to rememorialize the numerous competing and often contrasting memories of the lit(t)eral aftermath of the Bomb: he recuperates and interpellates collective and individual pasts, and manages to construe unstable texts which mimic the urban spaces invaded, reconfigured by and in their human and material rubble, as much as in the irretrievable traces which mark its vanishing. I Harrison and Ishiguro to verify the unreliability of memory, its radically vulnerable state, but also the possibilities of recuperation, recovery and resistance works of imagination may offer.

Marilena PARLATI**Memory in T/Rubble: Tackling (Nuclear) Ruins**

"The epoch of changing epochs no longer exists after 1945." Thus stated Günther Anders, one of the most renowned European philosophers and political activists of the twentieth-century, who strongly and controversially campaigned against nuclear warfare and the end of history it necessarily entails in his view. Quite radically, for Anders, "Now we live in an epoch that simply precedes others... we rather live in a reprieve, in which our existence is nothing but a 'barely-still-existing'.... our epoch is, regardless of whether it ends now or continues, the last, since the danger to which we have exposed ourselves by way of our spectacular product [the Bomb], which has become the final Mark of Cain of our existence, can never disappear, not even with the end itself." (14).

This essay investigates the complex interplay between the events which allegedly led to the end of the Second World War, the bombings of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and their material, cultural, literary, and traumatic aftermaths. Those events may function in the global consciousness as instances of Barthesian punctum, unforgettable images whose very physical mark, as Anders clearly stated, is bound never to disappear, always to shed unbearably venomous traces. This article looks at the history of an evasive amnesia, hidden behind repeated commemoration rites – both Japanese and European, in this case – which have often transformed those charged spaces into remarkably visible international and declaredly universal temples of peace. Behind those rites lies an erasure, quite obvious in US cultural memory, but traceable even in Western European memoryscapes whenever A-Bomb Hiroshima, but also Nagasaki and, to a lesser extent, Tokyo, are at stake. The initial focus will be on post-war plans for a renewed Japan; I will then move on to the different visual and textual arenas opened on Hiroshima by British film-poet Tony Harrison and later turn to Kazuo Ishiguro's early novels and the vague, displaced nostalgic Japan which sifts through his characters' traumatized background.

In the view expressed here, their work interpellates vulnerability via the absolute permanence of nuclear debris and its intoxicating space in the global cultural and topographical imaginary of our extreme contemporary. I will expand on the strategies deployed by these artists and try to elaborate on the logic of the phantasmatic trace, on collective mourning and its impediment, on atomic corpora delicti, and intractable bodies of fact. In this detour the helm is held by Merleau-Ponty's suggestions related to the chiasm, the inter-relationality and vulnerable intimacy of bodies, to include photographic images, film, poetry and novels into an interpellative move which concerns me and by which I want to be troubled.

6 August 8.15. Condensed time. Frozen in heat, in a ghastly inconceivable, because conceived, aporia, dislocated atoms of humans and animals and things were concocted into desperately mutant forms and often only vaguely perceived traces. Human-made disaster, an incommensurable paradox indeed. In the early months after that day, Japanese mourning was still unavailable, mainly due to General MacArthur, and the Allied Forces, who actually censored overtly emotional release (not that the Japanese were famous for their emotional outbursts) in occupied Japan from its unconditional surrender in August-September 1945 to 1951-52. The British Commonwealth Occupation Forces and the Eighth US Military Government issued pamphlets to guide the way of allied soldiers. Their initial path along the streets – if anything of the sort was truly retraceable through the rubble – of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would be fraught with debris, and also with fear, with rumors of Japanese attempts at vengeance. Rumors also spread on the biological danger of merely walking the city, due to radiation waves which would sterilize (both in the sense of eliminating bacteria and of making men reproductively sterile) anybody in the area. The military would often deny the effect of radiation and went to the length of encouraging not only occupation, but tourism to the bombed cities. Dismaying as it seems to us, this booklet was part of an official propaganda discourse which attempted to cleanse Ground Zero no. 1 of potential, prolonged danger and also of its actual, visible or invisible victims. From "a splendid panoramic view [could] be seen... the whole picture of the two-kilometer radius of explosion and fire." (Zwigenberg, "Atomic City" 619). While strolling in the rubble, soldiers were also invited to touch contorted materials, to sense their unworldly smoothness, even to collect material souvenirs (indeed emanating invisible radiance). A huge black market for atomic souvenirs and the capitalization of the bombing were disturbingly accepted by the military authorities. Those very vibrant objects were often sent home, their potential for destruction still unknown or willfully ignored (Bennett 2009).

Photographs and shootings of the area were strictly controlled and practically forbidden. To cultural historian Hiro Saito, a void informs the first decade following the bombing. He argues that the delayed dissemination of images "produced among the viewers the consciousness that the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki belonged to the distant past (having-been-there-and-then), not the present (being-here-and-now)" (365). When, in 1952, photographs and documentary footage were eventually made available, viewers, both Japanese and international, were framed in the position of "spectators of the past, not actors of the present who shared the victim's wound." (Saito 365).

Slowly, that void was being filled, but it was another bomb-related event that actually opened the treasured chambers of collective memorialization in the country. In March 1954, a Japanese fishing boat, the *Fortunate Dragon* (Daigo Fukuryū Maru), was struck by the dusty, flaky, fallout from the explosion of the US hydrogen bomb near Bikini Atoll (Marshall Islands). The following year saw the continuous coverage of the health conditions of the crew (eventually only one member died) and in many senses triggered the explosive, though delayed, registration of Hiroshima in the Japanese collective memory as well as the clash of very intense anti-nuclear weapons campaigns in the country. The 15 megatons H-bomb eventually further transformed the commemoration of Hiroshima, making it the paradoxical local/global (universal, they would have said at the time) city of peace. In a carefully maneuvered cult of new beginnings, Japanese authorities in sore need of funds for reconstruction and backed by an intriguingly present US international propaganda construed a rhetoric of celebration which forcefully, and successfully, eradicated and exorcised the still burning cinders and open wounds of the cities and the *hibakusha* (the exposed). In a letter addressed to the President of a Wisconsin College in those years, then Hiroshima Mayor Hamai Shinzo actually referred to 6 August as the day in which the city was born anew. Since the Japanese Diet had proclaimed it "City of Peace" already in 1949, the new Japanese people felt no grudge, allegedly, and were only too happy to forget the bombs (and Japanese imperial ambitions, maybe) and start their journey towards their newly discovered democratic future in the land of consumption.

Ran Zwigenberg maintains that "Hiroshima was an expression of a modern nightmare, a failure of the enlightenment narrative of science and progress, but Hiroshima was also a *tabula rasa* [literal *ground zero*], an urban space open for a complete reconstruction of the city, and [for] clearing the blinders of convention to enable a bold modernity." (23). Intent on this universal Pacific reinscription, the memorializing process involved the city and its people along an all but seamless path. The process was rife with ambiguities and contradictions, which somehow erased the history of colonialism and racism in the region. In Yoneyama's view, this nuclear universalism conflated bomb and peace into a naturalized narrative serving the needs of global order in the age of the Cold War and arms race.

Among the many controversies which followed this partially amnesic itinerary over whose past ought to be memorialized and how, a very heated debate arose in connection with the inauguration of the May Flower Festival in 1977. This event was designed to open the city to the world, to provide a different focus for its dynamic, vigorous future expansion and decided entrance into Westernized modernity. The event needed different urban spaces to accommodate it, or a different codification which would reinscribe old spatialities with renewed, indeed renovated, meanings. For the supporters of the newly devised festivity, while 6 August "8.6", or *hachi roku*, was an observation of "stillness" (*sei*), the new festival would celebrate "activeness" (*do*)" (Yoneyama 40) and eventually contribute to the peace process and the collective forgetting (or forgiving?) which was advocated for by many. As Yoneyama makes clear, though, since the Bikini affair the 8.6 celebration had never been less than vociferous with protests against nuclear arms race and furthermore, the Japanese attempts at remilitarization that had followed the Korean war had silently been tolerated, if not supported, by the US.

Yet, the most obviously relevant and fraught memoryscape and related memory rite in Hiroshima (and Japan) is the variously called the A-Bomb Dome, Hiroshima Peace Memorial, and Genbaku Dōmu. The essay now turns to this monumental impossibility, and to the utter dislocation of bodies it points to and dispels at the same time.

The ruined yet surviving Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall is the most visible and well-known material remnant of the bomb, or rather of Hiroshima time and space from before the bomb. Its scarred iron structure has become a museumized object, an architectural impossibility, an arcane reminder – and remainder – whose uncomfortable presence has been at the nucleus of any discussion on urban planning and the role of memory rites and sites in the Japanese as well as in more generally global politics of remembrance. Leaving aside the debate on Tange Kenzo's postwar Peace Memorial, the Atom Bomb Dome has taken on stratified layers of cultural meaning, with a growing taint of sacredness attached to it. The official discourse of international peace has designated it as a premium site for collective solidarity in the wake of catastrophe; it deserved being saved from a fated reconstruction

plan, and was indeed saved with the help of mass crowd funding, for it is both a scarred sign of an unrecoverable and unforgivable wound and a collective attempt at alleviating the pain of the living and the dead. Honeyama suggests that "the technology available at the end of the twentieth century has allowed this first ruin ever produced by the strategic use of a nuclear weapon to be preserved for perpetuity." (71).

This drive towards perpetual preservation seriously engages me on the very delicate issues of conservation, preservation, and representation. Yet other objects and archives are available, disembodied archives of remnants, reliquaries of a new and unpredicted sort. Paul Virilio, in one of the influential books that he dedicated to what he deems an intrinsic tie between war and cinema, claims that "Above all the blinding Hiroshima flash... literally photographed the shadow cast by beings and things, so that every surface immediately became war's recording surface, its film." (Virilio 4).

A photograph of dense bodies and things, the merely visual trace of a bios/zoe that is vaporized by atomic megatons. Whether or not they were literally vaporized, or, as others contend, merely incinerated and hurled by the blast, too many humans were lost to radioactivity, and at times twice lost because some of these shadows were removed, confused in the surrounding rubble and cancelled when time for clearing up came. In his book *Atomic Light and Shadow Optics*, Akira Mizuta Lippit expands Virilio's contention and narrates the story of that eventual ex-scription: "Instantly penetrated by the massive force of radiation, the hibakusha (atomic bombing survivors) were seared into the environment with the photographic certainty of having been there," "in the aftermath of the bombings, the remaining bodies absorbed and were absorbed by the invisible radiation" (95). Lippit's contention had been triggered by the stunning remarks W. De Kooning expressed: "Today, some people think that the light of the atom bomb will change the concept of painting once and for all. The eyes that actually saw the light melted out of sheer ecstasy. For one instant, everybody was the same color. It made angels out of everybody." (Lippit 95).

"Under the shadow of annihilation only the trace remains, a phantasm of the archive, haunted by its own writing.... At Hiroshima, then Nagasaki, the human figure served as the site of an impression whose syntax defied the conventional modes of understanding. That is, the atomic inscription remained, and still remains, largely illegible" (Lippit 109). Lippit's argument hurls this essay into a representational impasse. If the shadow, made visible in its skiagraphic version, instances total photography with *pika* (the flash) functioning as ecstatic engine, this catastrophic photography gives room, in Virilio's words, to an "aesthetics of disappearance" that teaches that "the pursuit of form is only a technical pursuit of time." (14).

Parsing through the archive of available forms, lost in the hyper-coded language of the remainder, one traces a poet, whose pursuit of Hiroshima's traces is attuned with Agamben's aporistic language of the witness/of witnessing, that which "survives the possibility, or impossibility, of speaking" (161). And seeing, reporting, representing, one may add. The playwright-poet is a Leeds-born Englishman, Tony Harrison, with working-class origins and a thorough education in the classics. A renowned translator of ancient Greek and early-modern French drama, he started a very successful, at times controversial, politically engaged career, in which he has been intersecting regional slang and the tersest of versification, four-letter words with Aeschylus, even earlier than the broadcast of *V*, set in Leeds Cemetery and addressed to the hooligans who had vandalized his parents' grave. In *A Cold Coming*, Harrison starts a poignant meditation on the issues of photography at war, in which the notorious photographic shot of a charred Iraqi soldier is used to give voice to the enemy cadaver. In preparation for the fiftieth anniversary of the Hiroshima Bomb, he was invited by British Channel 4 to produce a documentary film. This he did, committing himself to the pursuit of that fading, nameless trace and to the registration of a hauntingly absent presence. *The Shadow of Hiroshima* bears its multiple senses with restrained grace: singular and collective, a voice that must be listened to intently insists on hearing voices. In the midst of very banal quotidian activity in the bustling, modernized, Coke-ified Hiroshima of 1995, his own tragic chorus, the "chorus of the cremated" perpetually hums an inaudible tune.

While undeniable marks of Americanization loom large over the city and the film, *Shadow-san* takes the poet-gazer along the most well-trodden paths of Hiroshima war tourism. Harrison's *Shadow* is not the meta-photography we have grown accustomed to. Rather, it is the museumized item, the stone steps which hardly bear the mark of the original skiagraphy, or rather, the necro-poetical glass vault which allegedly protects it/him and ensures its permanence (another visual metaphor at play). In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty expatiates on "The first of all cultural objects, and the one by which all the rest exist, THAT is the body of the other person... Whether it be a question of vestiges or the body of another person, we need to know how an object in space can become the eloquent relic of an existence." (406). *The Shadow of Hiroshima* documents its/his insecure standing,

this foundational nostalgic, constitutive non-being, within the framed discourse of a gently eloquent, maybe once-human relic.

"The force that blew the Dome apart/... makes short work of art." (Harrison 241). Yet, art must be led from baseball stadium to shinto shrine, from NHK to A-Bomb Dome, from elementary school to the Aioi Bridge, from Parlor Atom pinball arcade to Love Hotel and back. Morning comes and spectators wake with the Japanese, and do "radio tai-chi exercises," waiting for the ceremony to begin. Shadow-San weeps over the beautiful girl his careless contemporary, living counterpart has made love with. He has to "go/ back to [his] museum case/with no body and no face, / back to a world where none embrace," he has to return "back to the bank steps where [he]'ll burn." (Harrison 250). Though sparse, these stunning words reverberate, in the film and beyond. But there's more to the film/poem than the thrilling anguish of an original incineration, of a burning time. As the peace ceremony begins, the poet plunges into a vitriolic attack against "Japan before the blast, / the old Japan that took Nanking / under its dark, blood-spattered wing." (Harrison 253). Birds had marked the aural landscape the film/text inaugurates, and birds conclude it in scorching flames, "sterilised, or gassed." In Harrison's view, no "uncarnal quarantine" suffices to eradicate evil, to translate the message of human disaster into global politics of care, to transform the beautified rites of mass reconciliation and memory into more than leftover posters and doves mangled by birds of prey (Harrison 247).

Shadow-san can do nothing but turn his no-back to his/its predicated status: image, shadow, representation or skiagraphy, sacred debris doomed to vanish, and in Vivian Sobchack's view, quoted and supported by Lippit, the photograph appears as an effect of the interstice opened by this immiscible mixture, suspended between two dimensions and arrested in time. A "vacancy," or, rather, a vacancy *mise en abyme* (Lippit 111).

Through different genres, codes, and media, Kazuo Ishiguro, the internationally famous 2017 Nobel Prize Laureate for Literature, also investigates nuclear rubble, the vacancy it testifies to, and the traces it signals and (de)materializes. In his first novels, ostensibly Japanese in their geographical and emotional settings, he treads carefully along the path of what Ann Brewster has called "a poetics of memory." In her view, "a writing motivated by the poetics of memory mimics the 'origin' effect; it is the movement of proleptic and analeptic reversals... The insistence of repetition creates a condition of hauntedness – memory locked together with its supplement, forgetting." (401). In his version of the logic of the supplement, Ishiguro started his career with the imposed hyphenated voice of a British-Japanese, or vice versa, person at the time when the works of another international literary star, Salman Rushdie, were the object of heated debates and controversy. In an interview, Ishiguro manifested his own surprise at the apparent ease of his first steps: "I received a lot of attention, got lots of coverage, and did a lot of interviews... because I had this Japanese face and this Japanese name" (Vorda and Herzinger 135). Japan is indeed fundamental in both *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), and yet memories of the war and the bombs intrude only via processes of partial rememorialization, as vague images and photographs of carefully repressed momentous events. Traces, indeed. Ishiguro clarifies his agenda: "The language I use [in my novels] tends to be the sort that actually suppresses meaning and tries to hide away meaning..." (Shaffer 170).

In his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, the eponymous protagonist painter masters his own narration by hiding and subverting facts, symptomatically dissimulating motives, and positing himself as the central focus of a story that is apparently marked by irrelevance. Set in Tokyo in the immediate aftermath of the war, the novel tackles the topic of rubble and the hurried, if often partial and temporary, reconstruction of the city: "If you were to come out of Mrs. Kawakami's as the darkness was setting in, you might feel compelled to pause a moment and gaze at that wasted expanse before you. You might still be able to make out through the gloom those heaps of broken brick and timber, and perhaps here and there, pieces of piping protruding from the ground like weeds" (Ishiguro 27).

In the ruinous landscape of the city pleasure neighborhood, the aging painter Masuji Ono is stuck in stagnation, initially unable to accommodate the present by retracing both the past and guilt, his own as well as that of a country that had so warm-heartedly advocated an allegedly anticolonial war tinged with jingoistic, militarized, patriarchal propaganda. Ono perceives around him what he sees as an incomprehensible attempt at forgetting the imperial past of Japan, a maneuver he reads as annihilating what to many was an intractable past and thus entering a present made of Westerns, American cartoons, and film superheroes. Harrison employs the word "Coke-ified" to describe this resented process. Ishiguro makes a foray at capturing his own Japan nostalgically when he states, "In many ways I felt I was using [Japanese and world] history as a piece of orchestration to bring out my themes. I'm not sure that I ever distorted anything major, but my first priority was not to portray history accurately. Japan and

militarism, now these are big, important questions, and it always made me uneasy that my books were being used as a sort of historical text" (Krider 130).

Quite symptomatically, in *An Artist of the Floating World*, Ono is an unreliable narrator whose line of historical reconstruction is disturbed by war images and memories as though they were marginal, inconsequential side-effects of an ordinary time in any ordinary location. Günther Anders wrote an intense tract on post-Hiroshima world as phantom, and a phantasmatic trace is indeed indelibly underwritten in Ishiguro's subtly suppressed ordinariness: "One evening not so long ago, I was standing on that little wooden bridge and saw away in the distance two columns of smoke rising from the rubble. Perhaps it was government workers continuing some interminably slow programme; or perhaps children indulging in some delinquent game. But the sight of those columns against the sky put me in a melancholy mood. They were like pyres at some abandoned funeral. A graveyard" (Ishiguro 27).

In the years openly covered by Ono's narration – 1948, 1949, and 1950 – readers move from the material remainder of Tokyo's 1945 repeated bombings, which literally razed it to the ground and transformed it into a mass graveyard, to a conclusive, pensive remark on the splendid audacity – fictive, self-indulging, and possibly hopeful – of Japanese recovery and record industrial growth. The confrontational impasse of gendered and generational conflicting memories of the war and the shame for its responsibility seems to be resolved by Ishiguro when he allows his confused, aging, and aching master-narrator to congratulate his nation, once again, on its prowess: "But to see how our city has been rebuilt, how things have recovered so rapidly over these years, fills me with genuine gladness. Our nation, it seems, whatever mistakes it may have made in the past, has now another chance to make a better go of things. One can only wish these young people well" (206).

This apparently uneventful text ends on such notes of rose-colored – if still somewhat jingoistic and ironic on Ishiguro's part – hope for the future, which hide its problematic relations to origin, identity, and representationalism under the apparently manageable veil of hope. My focus lies specifically on Ishiguro's first novel, which is even more intensely relevant to a discourse on t/rubbling shadows and the material traces of trauma. In one of his works on twentieth-century human disasters, Ian Buruma interrogates the vicinity of the two most disturbing, synechdochical event-spaces of global history, Auschwitz and Hiroshima, sorely standing for/as unforgettable, to many unforgivable, genocide tout court.

Buruma expands on the parallel histories, the personal/collective memories of both painful chronotypes and is strongly fascinated by the different memorializing rites he sees at play in these two master locations. To him, "the entire modern city of Hiroshima is evidence of the bomb. The slick shopping streets, the public parks, the baseball stadium, the high-rise hotels, even the old castle, rebuilt in concrete – none of this was there before August 6, 1945. It is as if the scene of the crime, as it were, had been utterly erased, or rather, buried under a brand-new city, like a modern Troy, or the former Warsaw ghetto" (Buruma np). His archaeological metaphor is strongly reminiscent of Freud's narrative of the work of mourning and melancholia, with this city functioning as dislocated archive, or rather, archive of dislocations and repression. Unsurprisingly, Anders himself has frequently tackled the issue of reconstruction, undermining the very tenet of its possibility. Attuned with Adorno's statement (revisited later) on the impossibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz, while visiting Nagasaki the German philosopher also commented on the intrinsic inadequacy of any attempt at monumental memorialization: "in the face of the enormity of disaster and crime even the gravest of works of art would look frivolous. The end of the adequacy of art... they should have done what was done at Hiroshima, leave the central nucleus of devastation intact... make it taboo, a sacred 'temenos'" (Anders 122, my translation).

Ishiguro's *A Pale View of the Hills* is dually set in Nagasaki and a countryside house in Britain and it, too, features an unreliable first-person narrator, Etsuko. She is a middle-aged Japanese woman who lives in Britain and has recently lost her eldest daughter. A shadow indeed, Keiko is a vague presence – possibly haunting her own family's house – whose suicide remains unexplained, if not via Ishiguro's typical displacing procedures. By her own definition, "Memory, I realize, can be an unreliable thing; often it is heavily coloured by the circumstances in which one remembers, and no doubt this applies to certain of the recollections I have gathered here." (Ishiguro 156).

Etsuko confronts her other daughter, Niki, born from her second husband, an Englishman, and by bits and pieces hints at some events related to Keiko's and her own past lives in Nagasaki. The city fares as protagonist, its hills a trembling optical presence perceived in a touristic photograph recollected by Etsuko and in the phantasmatic presence of Americans and American culture – again – even after the formal occupation of Japan ended.

The worst days were over by then. American soldiers were as numerous as ever – for there was fighting in Korea – but in Nagasaki, after what had gone before, those were days of calm and relief. The world had a

feeling of change about it. My husband and I lived in an area to the east of the city, a short tram journey from the centre of town. A river ran near us ... But then the bomb had fallen and afterwards all that remained were charred ruins. Rebuilding had got under way and in time four concrete buildings had been erected, each containing forty or so separate apartments. Of the four, our block had been built last and it marked the point where the rebuilding programme had come to a halt; between us and the river lay an expanse of wasteground. (Ishiguro, *A Pale View* 11)

Predicated between past ruins and present waste land, Nagasaki stands as suffused ground zero, reconstructed and recoiled from, by a woman-narrator who confesses that her "memory of these events will have grown hazy with time [and] that things did not happen in quite the way they come back... today" (Ishiguro 41). The "shame of being on the wrong side of history" that Amit Chaudhuri relates to these novels (30) is diluted to all protagonists: that "history" is contextually both individual and collective, as are the traumas it registers and deflates. Given the incommensurability of "Nagasaki," as an avoidable yet unavowed second catastrophic criminal event, the nostalgia one traces in the past failures of Ishiguro's protagonists is also the attempt at substituting shadows for unbearable historical truths. In his words, "the whole narrative strategy of the book was about how someone ends up talking about things they cannot face directly through other people's stories. I was trying to explore... how people use the language of self-deception and self-protection." (Mason 337).

Etsuko projects her neglect of Keiko and her sense of guilt for abandoning Japan and her husband onto another fraught mother-daughter relationship she remembers or construes. While pregnant with Keiko, lost in bitter forebodings on her motherhood and in the pangs of an increasingly unhappy marriage, Etsuko encounters Sachiko, a widow in charge of her solitary, neglected daughter, Mariko. After losing her husband and fleeing bombed Tokyo, Sachiko is first hosted by a wealthy uncle and later falls prey, like an updated *Madama Butterfly*, to an alcoholic American soldier, aptly named Frank. Readers discover that Etsuko herself had been taken in as a seriously traumatized Bomb orphan by her future father-in-law, Ogata-san. Leaning on the side of umbratility, Ishiguro never exposes his readers to indisputable, though unthinkable, facts. Rather than intently narrating the punctum event of 9 August, Nagasaki-born Ishiguro works by concealment, devious association and mirror displacement. In the interaction, or rather in the relationality of private and public, victim and perpetrator, he pits against the ground of that annihilated bombscape, Ishiguro seems to be investigating the very boundaries of "shame" and the narratability of (any) past.

Vulnerability is excruciatingly located here at the intersection between apparently stable boundaries and stories: namely, via the obsessive image of a rope, which takes different forms and shapes in the text, the emotional upheaval caused by Keiko's suicide is offered as lateral vision, distanced from the topographical space of Merry England. Rather than the at least temporarily traceable bodily images Harrison interpellates in his film/poem, in Ishiguro's fiction one may detect otherwise phantasmatic and haunting fault lines: "I have found myself continually bringing to mind that picture – of my daughter hanging in her room for days on end. The horror of that image has never diminished, but it has long ceased to be a morbid matter; as with a wound on one's own body, it is possible to develop an intimacy with the most disturbing of things" (Ishiguro, *A Pale View* 54).

The novel records the plural disturbances of this uncanny intimacy with pain, a continuous interference of collective and personal traumas especially marking women's movements across continents and cultures, and in the midst of margins, silences and narrative and emotional gaps. Etsuko is a diasporic individual, intent not so much on resilient survival, but rather on an obdurate negation of her personal/national mourning. A slip in her story of Mariko and Sachiko reveals her own mishandling of her all-Japanese daughter, her awareness that the girl "wouldn't be happy over here [in England]. But I decided to bring her just the same" (Ishiguro 176).

Seen from the distance of England, Etsuko's (and Ishiguro's?) Nagasaki is a memoryscape inscribed with contradiction, equally molded by the catastrophic uniqueness of its atomic destruction and by the slow, often controversial resignification inaugurated by public and private procedures. Not by chance, both Anders and Ishiguro share a similar view of postwar, post-reconstruction Nagasaki. In his perambulations through the bombed cities of Japan, Anders eventually notes that "a monument *has indeed been* erected... In such an exposed and representative place that it has become the 'atomic belvedere' of Nagasaki. It is a horror. No one can assert this 'memorial statue' has any connection with the disaster or with a longing for peace... Set on a hill dominating the city they have placed an enormous colossus." (Anders 123, my translation). In *A Pale View*, Etsuko and her elderly father-in-law see the city "like the tourists do," as Harrison's Shadow-san has seen Hiroshima and his own remains. The novel also investigates the issue of collective mourning and memory rites, and reaches similar conclusions. Ishiguro's narrator also visits the debated memory site and wonders about its visual and artistic value

and its allegorical status. Shaped like a Greek god, the figure seems to be "holding back the forces of evil" (138). Yet, the statue "had a cumbersome appearance" (138) and "looked *almost* comical, resembling a policeman conducting traffic" (138) Truly enough, as I have tried to argue in this essay, no monument can truly and effectively testify to the abysmal fact of catastrophe, no human or artistic witness can be taken at his/her/its face value. What remains is a trace, in the cases encountered in this essay (and many others). The essay concludes with the enraged reminder Anders has so often exposed: "(atomic) rubble is not just our past, not only a future possibility, but an amazing continuous exposure to the hopefully endless vulnerability to "barely-still-existing." (14)

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