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**Hiroshima-Nagasaki remembered through the body: haptic visuality and the skin of the photograph**

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**Abstract**

The continued growth in the interaction of photography with other media, together with a revived interest in analogue technologies in reaction against the growing digitisation of the image, have served to focus interest in the broader sensorial experience of the photograph. Film theory, using a range of ideas drawn from phenomenology and embodiment theory, provides a useful model through which to rethink our understanding of the way in which photographs are experienced at the level of the body. Working critically with a range of such ideas, this paper takes the example of photographs of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, together with subsequent photographic projects based on those events, in order to further contribute to this rethinking of the sensorial experience of the photograph.

**Keywords:** Embodiment, Memory, Documentary, Theory, History

Tactility is a mode of perception and expression wherein all parts of the body commit themselves to ... a relationship with the world that is at once a mutual and intimate relation of contact.

Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye* (2009)

### **Introduction: photography and materiality**

Right across contemporary art photography today we discover a revitalised concern with the *materiality* of the medium. In part this can be explained as a reaction against the recent rapid digitisation of photography and the subsequent resurgence of analogue processes, championed by Tacita Dean and others. Artists such as Walead Beshty, Christian Marclay and Zoe Leonard have returned to early processes that include cyanotypes, daguerreotypes and photograms. Alongside this, photography has also been transformed by what George Baker (2005) has called its 'expanded field' (124), as artists such as Shannon Ebner, Thomas Mailaender, Thomas Hirschhorn and Yokota Daisuke have pushed the medium beyond the flat frame and into the expanded field of sculpture, installation and performance.<sup>1</sup> This shift has in turn engendered much debate on the nature of the medium – its ontology – focusing largely on its core quality of *indexicality*, but which might also prompt us to ask further questions as to how a photograph is actually read and experienced, particularly at the level of the body: what, precisely, is the sensory experience and the bodily hermeneutic of the photograph?<sup>2</sup> At the same time, film theory has developed a major concern with theories of embodiment and with cinema as a tactile, multisensory experience. In this, photography has often been posed as the *opposite* pole of film, where film is on the side of *movement* and an embodied sensory experience, while the photograph is posed as *static* and as a more purely *optical* experience. I want to question this opposition and to argue that in fact, the viewer's engagement with the photograph is rather more complex than this opposition would suggest – that our engagement with photographs is more multi-sensory, more fully embodied, and that the photograph itself is a more materially complex and tactile object than is usually acknowledged.

Taking the case of the photographic documentation and commemorative art projects relating to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I want to explore how precisely those material and sensory qualities of the photograph have been central to the photograph's role in the recovery of memory and how this deployment of the senses informs our understanding of Japanese postwar history. More specifically I want to analyse that work in terms of a *tactile* model of vision, suggesting that photography too might be claimed to possess a form of 'body' in relation to our own, and to consider how such a material conception of the photograph functions in terms of the recovery of traumatic memory. Taking the work of both contemporary witnesses, such as Yamahata Yōsuke, as well as that of artists and photographers returning later to those events – Kawada Kikuji, Ishiuchi Miyako and others – I look to expose and give form to that immanent body of photography and to the haptic, multisensory experiences that it invokes.

## Film theory, embodiment and the senses

I want to first briefly return to the source of those theories of embodiment used in film, and then to consider how they might help us to reconsider the experience of the photograph. Much of this field is indebted to the writings of film theorist Vivian Sobchack, whose 1995 book *The Address of the Eye* is rooted in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a branch of philosophy that seeks, he writes, to provide ‘a direct description of our experience’ of the world, in which everything begins with the *body* (vii). Film is, for Sobchack, not simply a ‘viewed object’, but rather a complex, embodied ‘experience’; it is, she argues, ‘an expression of experience by experience’ (11, 20). What Sobchack formulates as the ‘address of the eye’ requires us to consider ‘the *embodied* nature of vision’ (25), such that vision is conceived not as some detached, purely *optical* phenomenon, but rather as an *embodied*, corporeal experience that actively engages the other bodily senses. Working with Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the ‘flesh of the world’ – his material re-conception of Being that aimed to end the radical divide between subjectivity and objectivity, between consciousness and things, etc. – Sobchack argues that: ‘seeing *encarnates* being and connects it with the visible world in a living engagement’ (51). As Martin Dillon observes of this carnal model: ‘If the body is conceived as flesh, then to take it as exemplary of all sensibles is to conceive of everything sensible as being somehow flesh’ (85). A central plank of this model is Merleau-Ponty’s ‘reversibility thesis’, based upon the model of touch – specifically, the perceptual ambiguity of touching/being touched by one’s own hand – which asserts, for example, that: ‘the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen’ (139). To this we should add Merleau-Ponty’s assertion of synaesthesia, which claims ‘a double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible’, such that we arrive at not only the reversibility of touching/touched and seeing/seen, but also the (relative) interchangeability of the visual with the tangible (134).<sup>3</sup>

As adapted to film theory, in this phenomenological model the photograph often serves as a foil for film’s claims to embodiment, where cinema, Sobchack asserts, ‘transposes’ lived experience (3). By contrast, Sobchack observes that: ‘In the still photograph time and space are abstractions’ and that the photograph is ‘a figure of transcendental time’ (59). Because time is frozen in the photograph, there is no unfolding of the image over time and in space, such that it is ‘never engaged in the activity of *becoming*’ (59). Hence, for Sobchack, the photograph is ‘timeless’, temporally ‘vacant’ and spatially ‘flattened’; it is not, she writes, ‘firmly enworlded’. Nonetheless, while the experience of the photograph *is* clearly very different from that of film, the two media do share many technological, ontological and socio-cultural qualities, and I therefore want to consider the extent to which cinematic theories of embodiment might apply to the photograph.

Film theory tends to emphasise the differences between film and photography in order to define the former’s singularity as an embodied medium – hence an emphasis upon movement and time, both of which are absent from the photograph. But in an analysis of the work of August Sander out of which his conception of photography’s ‘expanded field’ would later emerge, Baker (1996) has argued that modernist photography – at least at the level of *meaning* – was ‘torn between narrativity and stasis,’ where by ‘narrativity’ he intends ‘those

techniques that sustain a readable discourse, involving duration, movement, and inevitably ... plurality' (73-5). And Sobchack herself acknowledges that photography can 'thicken' its experience 'by resort to a *succession* of images, thus adding narrative and temporality' (59-60). Whereas the photograph itself may depict only a single frozen moment, our actual *experience* of that image unfolds over time according to the complexity and narrative potential of the image, while any tendency to form *series* of images inevitably brings the photograph closer to the ontology of cinema.

Fig. 1 *Repulsion* (Dir. Roman Polanski), 1965.

What is also striking is that such film theory regularly draws upon examples of *photographs* used in films – as with the use by Sobchack (who rarely cites specific films) of Chris Marker's *La Jetée* – the classic example of a film composed of still photos, and, anticipating our discussion of Hiroshima-Nagasaki, a film about memory and a city destroyed by nuclear war. It could of course be countered that photographs are used precisely to mark their difference from film, but in fact the argument for film's embodiment relies far more upon the ontology of the photograph than is generally acknowledged. Again, we could take Jennifer Barker's use, in *The Tactile Eye*, of a photograph that figures in Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965), where the camera focuses on a family snapshot that reveals a child abuser alongside his victim (Catherine Deneuve) as a young girl (fig. 1). The camera zooms in closer and closer, until the grain, the *materiality* of the photograph becomes evident, as though tracking down the truth of a memory to its ultimate material source. Such use of photographs almost invariably has some such connection with memory – and often with *trauma* – suggesting that in relation to memory at least, photography carries far stronger sensorial and ontological connections to the reality of the past than does film. As Susan Sontag observes, memory 'freeze-frames' and 'its basic unit is the single image', while the photograph correspondingly 'provides a quick way of apprehending', of remembering something – 'like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb' (22). Michael Lucken has also pointed to recent research suggesting that memory functions more in terms of frozen images than the imagery of duration and movement, such that memory seems to bracket out time and the duration of events, again suggesting a closer affiliation with photography than with film (17). The film theorists also regularly draw upon photography theory, particularly the work of Barthes and Benjamin – unsurprising given the shared technological paternity and close socio-cultural affinity of the two media, seamlessly merging in the contemporary camera-phone. Finally, we could add the central role played by *mimesis* in the 'tactile epistemology' that Laura Marks takes from Merleau-Ponty, 'for whom our relationship to the world is fundamentally mimetic' – an indexical relation to the world that calls up bodily experience *materially*, but which applies equally to photography (138, 148). Hence, the actual distinction between the two mediums is nowhere near as clear as is often claimed.

The elephant in the room, though, is surely the curious indifference that such film theories show toward the 'reality' of what the film depicts – that it is in fact overwhelmingly a *simulated* reality – where the cinematic 'experience' is often evidenced in classic 'art' films (Tarkovsky, Resnais, Lynch, etc.).<sup>4</sup> Within our culture film is predominantly an entertainment medium, its depiction almost wholly an imaginary construction played out by

actors. As viewers, we are perfectly aware of this conceit and consent to go along with it – but no matter how ‘immersed’ we are within this cinematic experience, we are nonetheless aware that it is *not* real and that we are *not* experiencing those events. It is also the case that we now frequently encounter films across a range of screen devices – pads, mobile phones, laptops – and in social contexts that are far from the immersive experience of commercial cinema. With photography, though, by virtue of the medium’s indexical status as an actual light imprint of material reality, as well as for socio-cultural reasons, the photograph *is* strongly identified with reality, such that our actual subjective investment in the photograph can often be far stronger.

Therefore, while there clearly *are* important differences between the two media, the claims for film as a more ‘sensorial’ experience are rather overstated, and hence many of the embodied experiences claimed for film – synaesthesia, empathy, tactility, etc – also apply to some degree to photography. While in relation to our concern with *memory*, the photograph – because of its closer connection with evidence and documentation – has a far stronger cultural link with commemoration of the past. I therefore want to first consider the nuclear attacks on Japan as an essentially ‘photographic’ phenomenon and then to explore how these ideas might assist our understanding of some of the photographic imagery made in the wake of those bombings.

### **Photograms of the dead: Hiroshima-Nagasaki as photographic event**

During the closing stages of the Second World War, on 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> August 1945 atomic bombs were dropped by United States forces on the Japanese port cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The nuclear attacks have been characterised by a number of commentators as a form of ‘photographic event’: a blinding flash described by some survivors in the 1946 US Strategic Bombing Survey ‘as though a large amount of magnesium had been ignited’ (3), followed immediately after by the blast: heat, wind and fires. The ‘instantaneity’ of the single blast, detonated high above the city – very different from conventional accumulative bombing – again echoed the pattern of a single flash exposure. The phenomenon of shadows apparently separated from their owners became one of the most remarked tropes of the new nuclear photograph, as some victims left behind the outline of their bodies, like photograms imprinted upon material reality. Such an unnatural separation evokes the notion of demonic intervention, as in Chamisso’s tale of Peter Schlemiel, induced to sell his shadow to the Devil. Other such ‘photographic’ effects were also observed, as with the textile designs imprinted in the skin of some victims, pointing to the way in which the surface of the body itself came to bear the indexical trace of the nuclear flash. A close association was thereby created between photography and the documentation and memory of Hiroshima-Nagasaki.

Figs. 2-3. William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Haystack*, 1844-45; Matsumoto Eichi, *Shadow of a soldier remaining on the wall of the Nagasaki Fortress Command*, early September 1945.

Jean-Christophe Bailly connects one such image made after the nuclear attack on Nagasaki (figs. 3-4) to the very origins of photography, comparing it with an early ‘sun picture’ by Fox Talbot – *The Haystack* (1844-45) – in which a ladder in strong sunshine is

seen leaning against a haystack (8-9). Talbot's early photograms involved simply placing objects upon sensitised paper to record their shadows and Bailly emphasises this close proximity between object and sensitised paper, bound together by virtue of the sense of *touch* (38). Recalling Balzac's fear that the photograph peeled away one of the 'spectral veils' cloaking the body, Bailly similarly likens the photograph to the extracting of a shadow, observing 'the extreme thinness of the indexical shaving that the photographic plane detaches from reality' (92). This again points us to the barely palpable, indexical nature of the photograph – the direct touch of light upon the photographic emulsion – such that the capture of the shadow, in its separation of the fleeting moment from the flow of time, prefigures the emergence of the 'photographic' itself (52-3, 70-3). In the haunting image from Nagasaki, alongside the shadow of the ladder is that of a soldier and his hanging sword belt – an image characterised by Bailly as a 'diabolic "photogenic drawing"', where the single shadowy figure represents the possibility that *everything could disappear* (138-9). And a shadow, he adds, 'printed upon the very skin of the world' (142).

The question as to whether the use of nuclear weapons could be justified in such circumstances remains highly contested, essentially dividing between the official US claim that their use was essential in ending the war promptly and hence avoiding the massive allied and Japanese loss of life that would have resulted from a planned land invasion of Japan, and the competing 'revisionist' arguments that give greater prominence to diplomatic and strategic reasons for the use of nuclear weapons (Ham, Hastings). While too complex to engage with here, these issues are central to the way in which those events are remembered and commemorated, and hence to the form assumed by subsequent photographic representations and the centrality of the body in that work (Hogan). Photographic imagery made of the attack and its immediate consequences divides between that made from the air by the attacking American forces and that produced on the ground by Japanese amateurs and professional photographers. The more purely 'optical' imagery made from the air by the attackers (fig. 4) could be considered 'transcendental' in the sense intended by Sobchack – as a kind of detached, timeless 'abstraction' of the event. Though as Lucken has demonstrated, the scientific photographic documentation of the events by observation planes was 'a total failure', with the surviving imagery having to be improvised by crew members on the attacking bombers using hand-held still and cine cameras (31-2).<sup>5</sup>

Fig. 4 Cover of *Atomic Bomb Documents: Hiroshima*, compiled by the Chugoku Shimbun (1973).

But the experience on the ground – at the level of the *body* – was very different. The explosion at Hiroshima created temperatures of around 5,400 degrees centigrade at ground zero, suggesting the severity of burns and other damage to the body. Estimates of casualties vary enormously, but are of the order of 80,000 deaths at Hiroshima and a further 40,000 at Nagasaki, on the days of the attacks. Many more with appalling injuries or radiation sickness were dead before the end of the year, with the long-term death total thought by some observers to be nearer 300,000 (Ham, 456).<sup>6</sup> The imagery generated at ground level therefore demands to be read sensorially, *through* the body. Barker, developing Sobchack's corporeal model, focuses upon the sense of *touch*, which she extends from the bodily surface to the



very depths of the body and which she reconceives as being not simply a question of ‘contact’, ‘but rather a profound manner of being’ (2). Following Sobchack, Barker argues that film itself has a form of ‘body’ – ‘a concrete but distinctly cinematic lived-body, one engaged with both the viewer’s and film-maker’s body’; and a body that manifests itself through camera movement, close-ups and cuts (7). In effect, the film is accorded a certain level of *subjectivity*, becoming ‘an active participant of both perception and expression’ (8). In this sense, photography too – as a specific imaging technology – could be claimed to have a ‘body’. In this, the camera could therefore be similarly posed as perceiving expression and as expressing perception, insofar as it receives impressions from the world, which it retains according to its own optical construction, film emulsion etc., and then expresses that perception in the diffusion of its imagery as prints or other image forms. It has a certain ‘subjectivity’, a way of seeing, perceiving and recording the world, not reducible simply to the subjectivity of the photographer. In this the photographic emulsion is the *interface* – a kind of sensitised, receptive skin – between photography and the world.

Fig. 5 Matsushige Yoshito, *Hiroshima*, 6 August, 1945.

We should first consider images made in the chaotic immediate wake of the atomic bombing by Matsushige Yoshito (fig. 5), a Hiroshima photojournalist. The immediacy of these photographs derives largely from their ontology – that they are undeniably a direct, indexical record of enormous bodily suffering: burned and scorched skin, blinded eyes, a lack of proper medical care. They reflect too, the photographer’s own sickened response, incapable of photographing the enormity of what confronted him and making only five images on that day. Matsushige has said of one image: ‘As I came near and raised my camera, my tears blurred the finder so that I could hardly see to take it’ (Marcon, 791). But we can also say that the ‘body’ of photography itself bears the marks of its own traumatic history here, where the negatives themselves were clearly damaged while concealed during the period of American occupation and censorship. Grainy, fogged, scratched and scattered with dust, the damaged skin of the photos reduplicates our visual apprehension of the scenes portrayed, generating an intensely tactile experience of visuality.

Fig. 6 Yamahata Yōsuke, *Nagasaki*, 10 August 1945.

By contrast, Yamahata Yōsuke, a seasoned military photographer, was better able to function when despatched to Nagasaki to make photographs for propaganda purposes, only a day after the attack. Operating in a smouldering wasteland and surrounded by unimaginable suffering, Yamahata nonetheless photographed systematically all day, before leaving punctually as instructed, on the 5.00 pm train. The images reflect Yamahata’s more workmanlike approach: his methodical surveying of the damage, documentation of early rescue efforts and creation of portraits of survivors. Still littered with the charred corpses of both people and animals, Nagasaki was characterised by Yamahata as ‘truly a hell on earth’ (Jenkins, 45). Questioned as to his own state of mind at the time, Yamahata has stated frankly that: ‘all I thought of was the photographs I had to take, and how to avoid being killed by a New Style Bomb. ... In other words, I thought only of myself’ (Jenkins, 17). And this

subjectivity of the photographer – an ethos of duty, professionalism and self-survival, surely forged by his military training and wartime experience – is again clearly embedded in the imagery. But we might also argue a subjectivity of the *camera*, signalled for example in the severe light leak of his battered Leica (fig. 6), the scratching of the film and the fogging of the negatives, thought to be the result of exposure to radiation. Such that the extensive recent restoration of the film could equally be viewed as the *eradication* of that subjectivity and in a way, of part of the traumatic memory to which it bears witness.

Hiroshima-Nagasaki therefore constitutes a quintessentially *photographic* event – one inscribed both in the fabric of the two cities and upon the bodies of its victims. But the actual depiction of that event was subject to strict American censorship between September 1945 and the end of the Occupation in April 1952, after which a flood of publications appeared – reports, surveys and collections of images of the devastation – particularly following the return in 1973 of photographic imagery by the US Army.<sup>7</sup> And while some included paintings and drawings, photography undoubtedly constituted the evidential core of these publications. We therefore see the emergence of a form of what Jill Bennett has termed a ‘countermemory’, built around the anti-nuclear movement and posed by Michael Hogan as being in opposition to the ‘officially sanctioned memory of the atomic bombings’ (Hogan, 4-5). What photographic form, then, does that shared memory assume?

### **Corporeal Memories of Hiroshima-Nagasaki: Domon, Tōmatsu, Tsuchida**

From the late 1950s we begin to see war-themed documentary and commemorative projects produced by photographers and artists, some of whom were aligned with or commissioned by the anti-nuclear movements. Domon Ken’s strict adherence to social realism (fig. 7) brought the formerly concealed bodies of the victims, the *hibakusha*, into the public domain in his 1958 photobook *Hiroshima*. We are confronted there by blinded children, skin scarred by severe burns and bodily mutilation – by the incontrovertible evidence of blighted lives. Yet, notwithstanding being contained within a cover designed by Joan Miró, suggesting a wider artistic ambition, this book remains firmly within the conventions of the humanist documentary tradition and is more likely to prompt a reaction of ‘sympathy’ or compassion, rather than any stronger sensorial or political response. As Bennett contends: ‘Documentary images alone are insufficient, failing to embody affect’ – there’s a need, she argues, to ‘inscribe them into memory’ by activating some ‘affective connection’ (66-7). Art, in tension with photography’s evidential role, might therefore provide a more complex sensory response.

Fig. 7 Domon Ken, *Hiroshima*, 1958.

Tōmatsu Shōmei could be claimed to provide precisely such a sensorial connection in the project *Hiroshima-Nagasaki Document* (1961), a collaboration with Domon in which we see him breaking with that documentary tradition and adopting new visual strategies. Tōmatsu’s work, like that of Hosoe Eikoh, reflects the influence of the intensely body-oriented Japanese art of the period, as with the influence of the Gutai group and that of the Ankoku Butō dance movement of Hijikata Tatsumi. Alexandra Munroe observes that both

Hosoe and Tōmatsu collaborated in 1960 with Hijikata and other artists in the Jazz Film Laboratory on projects that ‘embraced music, dance, film and lighting’ (287).<sup>8</sup> In what is an intensely material, tactile commemoration of the nuclear bombing, Tōmatsu isolates specific objects, fragments and scarred body parts that condense some sense of the material enormity of the damage inflicted by the bombings. Tōmatsu’s approach was innovative in both his selection and combination of material, going beyond the humanist tradition to make a more complex appeal to the senses, further refined in his later solo project *11.02 Nagasaki* (1966), in which he recycles a number of those images. One of the more useful ideas that photography might take from film theory is Sobchack’s conception of perception as ‘synaesthetic’ i.e. where the stimulation of one sense provokes perception in another. Bodily senses, she argues, are ‘cooperative’ and characterised by synaesthesia, allowing Sobchack to claim that ‘I am able to see texture’ and that ‘sight is pervaded by my sense of touch’ (77). Such a heightened conception of sensory interrelationships might therefore help expand our understanding of the sensory experience of photographs.

Fig. 8 Tōmatsu Shōmei, *Hibakusha Kataoka Tsuyo, Nagasaki*, 1961.

Marks, in *The Skin of the Film* (2000) introduces the term ‘haptic visuality’, ‘a relationship of touch’ – which she distinguishes from ‘optical vision’ – to explain how ‘vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one’s eyes’ (xi). In this, she follows Henri Bergson’s conception of ‘image’, where the image isn’t simply a *visual* image, but rather ‘the complex of all the sense impressions’ of a perceived object (73). Tōmatsu’s image of a charred, severed finger thus invokes not only our sense of vision, but also that of touch, as well as arousing revulsion and hence more general anxieties for our own bodily integrity. In relation to our concern with memory, again following Bergson, Marks suggests that: ‘memory may be encoded in touch, sound, perhaps smell, more than in vision’, and hence that ‘cinema can embody cultural memory ... by awakening memories of touch’ (129, 22, 73). Tōmatsu’s intensely ‘fleshy’, corporeal depiction of the *hibakusha* suggests precisely such a tactile experience of visuality, as in his psychologically complex portrait of Kataoka Tsuyo (fig. 8). The *hibakusha* suffered not only neglect, but actual discrimination at work and in relationships during the postwar period, recalling for some the shame of wartime defeat and occupation – Kataoka, for example, despite early suitors prior to the bombings, has regretted that she was never able to marry. For Barker, working with Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the ‘flesh of the world’, skin holds a privileged position as ‘the boundary between the body and the world’ – ‘a place of constant contact between the outside and the inside’, between self and other (27-8). The skin ‘both *conceals* the interior of the body, but also *reveals* its interior workings’ (28). The woman’s wary expression as she peers through a mask-like, heavily scarred yet still highly striking face, can therefore be read not only visually, but also through our own tactile sense – through our own inhabitation of skin and our fears for the integrity of our own bodies.

Fig. 9 Tōmatsu Shōmei, *Portrait of Yamaguchi Senji, Nagasaki*, 1962.

Similarly with Tōmatsu's photograph of the heavily keloid-scarred neck and face of Yamaguchi Senji (fig. 9), where the raking lighting and close-up viewpoint reveal a painful knot of gnarled flesh. Bennett, writing of art that engages with trauma, insists on the need to go beyond basic identification and 'crude empathy', arguing that with trauma we are concerned with memory as experienced in the *present* and hence require a theory of *affect*. And she distinguishes 'common memory' from what she terms '*sense memory*' – a 'deep memory' that operates through the body to produce a kind of "seeing truth" (24). This is a form of sensory memory, Bennett argues, that 'is directly experienced ... communicating a level of bodily affect' (26). Tōmatsu's disturbing depiction of scarred flesh suggests precisely such a sensory memory, tapping into primeval anxieties surrounding the dangers of heat, concussion, sharp objects, and their attendant bodily traumas.

Again attesting to the relevance of these ideas to photography, a number of the film theorists cite Barthes from *Camera Lucida*:

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations, which ultimately touch me, who am here (Barthes, 80; Barker, 31).

In this context, Barthes' use of the term 'radiations' has a quite particular resonance, recalling for us the various forms of nuclear radiation – including infra-red and ultra-violet rays – unseen by the eye but inflicting enormous damage upon both the human and photographic body. And Barthes uses the analogy of an 'umbilical cord', connecting, he says, 'the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed' (81). We can see in this the influence of Merleau-Ponty's conception of the 'flesh of the world', where light as the *materia prima* of the photographic experience, assumes a thick, corporeal consistency – far closer to the palpable tactility of the body than to the crystalline abstraction of vision.

Barthes' method in *Camera Lucida* therefore again draws upon phenomenology, though, he says, a 'vague, casual, even cynical phenomenology', where 'affect was what I didn't want to reduce' (20). His starting point throughout is his own body and the capacity of a photograph to contain the memory of his dead mother, deploying intensely corporeal language in his pursuit of that specific maternal body. Whereas for the film theorists the truth status of what is depicted is secondary to the phenomenological experience of the film itself, Tōmatsu's photograph undeniably gives us the actual body of a *hibakusha*, touched by the deadly radiation of the atomic bomb, such that our bodily reaction to such an image is surely very different. And like the photograph, the scar is itself an indexical trace of the event that caused it. Barthes' concept of the '*punctum*' is also sometimes invoked: an element of the photo that 'shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me' – a kind of 'wound', something that 'pricks' the viewer (26). And he later adds: '[T]he photographed body touches me with its own rays' (81). Again then, we are given a highly tactile, corporeal conception of the operation of the photograph upon the viewer. Barthes' initial intuition of the *punctum* is of some bodily *detail*, a dirty finger-nail, or some intimate object such as a piece of jewellery. Marks observes that: 'Objects, bodies and intangible things hold histories within them', and she coins the term '*recollection-object*' to refer to 'an irreducibly material object that encodes collective memory' (131, 77). Similarly with Tōmatsu's evocation of Nagasaki via a battered watch, violently arrested at the time of the explosion – both an analogue and an index of the

moment of that detonation. And he suggests that for Nagasaki, time itself has somehow doubled – that it is both the present, but also always 11.02 on 9 August 1945 (*Conflict, Time, Photography*, 126). Towards the end of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes returns to the *punctum*, now proposing a *punctum* not of *form* but of *intensity* – like ‘an unexpected flash’ – the intensity of ‘Time’ (96). But what ‘time’ signifies here, is essentially *mortality*.

Barker, again building on Sobchack’s analysis, argues that ‘embodied emotional experiences ... involve the entire body’ (1). Touch involves not only the bodily surface, but the entire body; and is not simply reliant upon *physical* contact, but is rather ‘a profound manner of being’ (2).<sup>9</sup> The power of another deeply disturbing image created by Tōmatsu (fig. 10) surely derives from precisely such a fully embodied, tactile conception of vision. Suggestive of some flayed animal or dangling body part, set against a dynamic backdrop of smoke-like forms, the image painfully evokes some agonised organic form. In fact, the depiction of a melted bottle, evidencing the enormous heat of the atomic explosion, the photograph’s power surely derives from the way in which it deploys a highly tactile, ‘haptic’ vision, recalling the flayed and hanging skin of the bomb victims, and tapping directly into the viewer’s own sensory memories of pain and damage to the body. Proprioception, synaesthesia, bodily memory – and particularly our recollection of pain – are all therefore mobilised in our sensory engagement with the image.

Fig. 10 Tōmatsu Shōmei, from *11.02 Nagasaki* (1966),

Fig. 11 *Repulsion* (dir. Roman Polanski, 1965).

Whereas film theory usually suggests *eroticism* as the ideal mutual relation between film and viewer in the immersive relationship – as for example with the writhing bodies at the beginning of Resnais’s *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) – Barker extends this to examples of ‘horror’. Polanski’s *Repulsion*, on one level a film very much about a disturbance in the erotic relation, is posed as an example of fears of ‘contagious contact’, where the recurring image of a rotting, skinned rabbit (fig. 11) signifies the ‘violation of the skin as a container’. It surely strikingly recalls Tōmatsu’s highly complex image, where again the tactile response is one of revulsion – a ‘fear of touching’ – albeit again complicated by an undeniably phallic and perhaps erotic dimension (49). And in this Barker also cites Benjamin’s assertion that: “All disgust is originally disgust at touching” (47). Because the Japanese public were kept in ignorance about the radiation effects of the bombings, there was a general fear of ‘contamination’ from contact with the *hibakusha*, excluded for example from public baths – such that the image encapsulates both their pain, and the anxieties they engender (Ham, 489).

Returning to the idea of significant memory objects, Marks borrows the term ‘radioactive fossil’ from Deleuze, used to designate, she says, ‘the unsettling quality of certain inexplicable but powerful cinematic images’ – “memory fragments”, or fossils of ‘what has been forgotten’ (84-5). We could perhaps consider the objects photographed by Tsuchida Hiromi in the Hiroshima Museum as, quite literally, such ‘radioactive objects’. Tsuchida’s *Hiroshima Collection* (1982-95) comprises of modest objects – scorched clothing and personal items – isolated against a white backdrop and accompanied by a brief

explanatory text about their owners' fates. The incinerated remains of a child's last meal in a battered lunch box – the token of a parent's sacrifice – metonymically suggests the fate of the child that never lived to eat it. And Marks cites Benjamin's reading of mass-produced objects as embodying 'a power to witness history that narratives lack' (85). Transposed to the context of Tsuchida's personal objects, this might suggest the shock of his image of a melted eye-glass, separated from the burned head of its wearer. Such that these 'fossils' – or 'fetishes' – directly touched by the catastrophe of the nuclear attack, still contain the power to shock or disrupt us in the present, and hence to bodily implicate us within that mournful history.

### **Photographing the skin of the world: Kawada and Ishiuchi**

The haptic connotations of 'surface' – surface as 'skin' – are explored throughout Kawada Kikuji's landmark *Chizu (The Map)* from 1965, a photobook that opens with the scarred back of a victim of Hiroshima. This in turn merges with images of the dark, peeling and blistered 'skin' of the Atomic Bomb Dome, generating an intensely tactile visual engagement with the imagery, while also suggesting analogies between the different forms of surface (fig. 12). This sensory experience is further enhanced by the elaborate design of the book, contained within both a wrap-around folder and a cardboard slip-case. With its pages in the form of folded leaves, reading *Chizu* is a highly physical, almost ritual process, where with full-bleed images, the reader cannot avoid touching the scarred skin and flaking walls of the image itself. Kawada writes that:

A dozen years after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, out of nowhere a giant black 'stain' appeared above the basement ceiling of the Atomic Bomb Dome. Each night the 'stain' – which I had seen myself – filled my dreams with horror (S. Baker, 199-200).

This notion of a 'stain' again evokes bodily fears of contagion as it comes to pervade the blackened pages of the entire book, evoking anxieties of contact with the scarred skin of the *hibakusha*, the fear of radioactive contamination, and the revived memory – somewhat like cinematic 'flashbacks' – of a traumatic, repressed past. And in relation to memory, Marks observes how *ritual* 'connects individual experience with collective experience, activating collective memory in the body' (73). This is perhaps suggested in the interweaving of images of family shrines devoted to the kamikaze pilots – the sacrificed bodies of dead sons – commemorated in photographic portraits and material objects such as military uniforms and ceremonial swords.

Fig. 12 Kawada Kikuji, from *Chizu – The Map*, 1965.

Fig. 13 Ishiuchi Miyako, from the *Apartment* series, 1977-78.

We rediscover this same tactile, stained skin of buildings in Ishiuchi Miyako's *Apartment* series (1977-8), which deploys the peeling, scarred walls of apartments around her hometown of Yokosuka to engage sensory memories of the scars inflicted by Japan's recent history (fig. 13). These are similarly dark, ominous images with their flaking, leprous walls – again evoking memories of a worn and battered postwar nation, damaged both materially and

psychically. Marks' conception of 'haptic visuality', concerned particularly with *surface* rather than depth, with *texture* rather than form, again suggests how such tactile imagery might activate other bodily senses, generating a deeper, 'sensory' memory. What's again striking, though, is that Marks builds her argument, in part, around a video by Shauna Beharry, where the work's central image is in fact a *photograph* – a photo of the artist wearing her mother's sari, where the camera focuses closer and closer upon the grain of the photograph. Beharry has said that she wanted to "squeeze the touchability out of the photo", again subverting the distinction set up between the two media (Marks, 112).

There are clear parallels here with Ishiuchi's 2003 series *Mother's*, which also opens with a family photograph, again in relation to the clothing and memory of her mother, who she photographed shortly before her death. Intensely tactile images that focus on the folds of the skin and the scars incurred by severe burns, while unconnected to the nuclear attacks they nonetheless recall those of the *hibakusha*. Reflecting her original training in textiles, Ishiuchi's work shows an acute awareness of the evocative power of woven materials, making parallels between her mother's body and her underclothes, which she said, "seemed to me to be almost pieces of her skin" (Michiko, 123). Bennett observes the way in which 'a sensation (of pain or loss) attaches itself to objects, as to bodies' – clearly the case with the images of Ishiuchi's mother's cosmetics, evoking *olfactory* memories of a warm, living body (63). And in the image of her mother's hairpiece, Ishiuchi again suggests parallels with the iconography of Hiroshima, as with Tsuchida's similar image of tresses of a victim's hair taken in the Hiroshima Museum. Marks refers to 'tactile memory', observing that: 'Senses that are closer to the body, like the sense of touch, are capable of storing powerful memories that are lost to the visual' (130). Haptic vision, then, focused upon the texture of the body and everyday clothing and objects, is used to encode and bring to light powerful tactile memories. And in all of this the photograph provides Barthes' optico-sensory 'umbilical cord', the Ariadnean thread that returns us to the lost or damaged maternal body.

Ishiuchi's 2008 series ひろしま *hiroshima* extends the tactile logic and working methods of *Mother's* to the commemoration of Hiroshima, where scorched and tattered textiles evoke the flayed, hanging skin of the bomb victims. Ishiuchi writes that she selected objects 'that had been in direct contact with the victims' bodies' – again the indexical link, the direct touch of the body (76). And objects – Ishiuchi refers to them as 'relics' – that, she says, are 'part of the largest scar the world has known'. Though with the same strategy applied by Ishiuchi to Frida Kahlo's relics, there's perhaps a danger here that these might in turn become officially sanctioned memories, promoted by governments and museums – fetish objects that risk blocking living memory. As Kyro Maclear observes, 'the atrophy of meaning ... is the central challenge facing witnesses of trauma', such that fresh strategies are continually required to disrupt and defamiliarise our relationship with cultural memory objects (9).

### **Conclusion: Haptic visuality and the memory of Hiroshima-Nagasaki now**

I want to briefly conclude by pointing to two recent photographic projects that further extend the tactile memory of Hiroshima-Nagasaki and of the war that those attacks ended. Obara

Kazuma's *Silent Histories* (2015) commemorates the child victims of wartime bombing of Japan – some sixty-six Japanese cities were heavily bombed in the war, but their fates largely obscured by the shadow of the nuclear attacks. The project focuses on six individuals, combining historical family photos and artefacts, with documentary imagery of their lives now. Originally hand-produced in an edition of only forty-five but subsequently re-issued in a trade edition, the book remains a highly tactile, interactive experience, with inserted ID cards and photos, facsimile wartime magazines, etc., intended to convey something of the material reality of those lives. Finally, Arai Takashi's *Monuments* (2015), comprised of daguerreotypes produced at sites associated with nuclear technology, that Arai then assembled as composite images. Sculptural objects rather than photographs, these works mark a return to early analogue technologies and are again works that evoke a more complex sensory experience. Particularly interesting is that Arai re-photographed Tōmatsu's iconic watch, placed reverentially by museum staff on a 'paper cushion'. But Arai makes the iconoclastic claim – perhaps more as a critical provocation to thought – that, on examining it with a macro lens, he discovered that the watch hands set at 11.02, had in fact been very delicately hand-drawn, somewhat deflating the object's claim to indexically embody the precise moment of detonation ('Essay', online source), though re-rooting the photograph in Fox Talbot's 'photogenic drawing'. For Arai the watch remains a 'genuine icon', a 'small "monument" of the atomic bombing' – and in this he is surely correct, in that it nonetheless remains a 'fossil', a memory object and an umbilical cord to the past.

The object therefore retains its power to surprise, even shock. A photograph of such an object is itself a more complex, multisensory object than is generally acknowledged. If visual commemorative strategies are to retain their power and relevance, as with many of those produced in response to the 2011 tsunami and Fukushima disaster, they need to sensorially engage with the memory of viewers in the present – and the route to such engagement therefore lies directly through the body.

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### **List of Figures**

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Fig. 5 Matsushige Yoshito, *Hiroshima*, 6 August, 1945.



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### **Biographical Note:**

### **Word count:**

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> All Japanese names are given according to the Japanese convention of surname first.

<sup>2</sup> This interrogation of the photograph would include works such as James Elkins (ed), *Photography Theory* (2007); Elkins, *What Photography Is* (2011); Alex Klein (ed), *Words Without Pictures* (2009); Carol Squiers (ed), *What is a Photograph?* (2014).

<sup>3</sup> We should acknowledge at once that Merleau-Ponty is making rather major conceptual claims here, based on rather thin bodily evidence.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Marks draws upon intercultural cinema of the 1980s and '90s, though here too 'reality' is heavily filtered through an artistic sensibility.

<sup>5</sup> The film made by the high-speed camera at Hiroshima was destroyed in processing, while at Nagasaki the observation plane arrived too late at the rendezvous point.

<sup>6</sup> Later official Japanese estimates are 140,000 dead at Hiroshima and 70,000 at Nagasaki by the end of 1945 (*Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, 113).

<sup>7</sup> See for example: *Hiroshima-Nagasaki. A Pictorial Record of the Atomic Destruction*, Tokyo: Hiroshima-Nagasaki Publishing Committee, 1978; *A Call from Hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, Tokyo: Japan National Preparatory Committee, 1978; *Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Physical, Medical and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings*, London and Melbourne: Hutchinson, 1981.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of Tōmatsu's involvement in contemporary art and of the influence of Yamahata's Nagasaki photos on his work, see Nakamori Yasufumi in *For a New World to Come* (16 and 62). See also Doryun Chong (ed.), *Tokyo 1955-70: A New Avant-Garde* (exh. cat.), MOMA, New York, 2012; Doryun Chong *et al* (eds.), *From Postwar to Postmodern, Art in Japan, 1945-1989: Primary Documents*, MOMA, New York, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty refers to a "style" of being.