AAR ARTICLES

# Imagining Nuclear Weapons: Hiroshima, Armageddon, and the Annihilation of the Students of Ichijo School

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> What is the mythic reference for such an event? Shiva? Prometheus? The Tree of Knowledge? None is sufficient Participating cross-mythically in cultures that encompass the globe, the nuclear explosion must itself become a primary myth in the postnuclear world to come It will become a scriptural text
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> —E. L Doctorow (171)

WHEN MICHAEL HEYMAN, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, virtually canceled the Smithsonian's exhibition on the atomic bomb and the end of World War II, he announced at a press conference. "I've taken this action for one overriding reason. I've concluded that we made a basic error in attempting to couple an historical treatment of the use of atomic weapons with the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the end of the war. Exhibitions have many purposes, equally worthwhile, but we need to know which of many goals is paramount and not to confuse them" (transcribed from TV broadcast, January 30, 1995). This statement makes two distinctions at once The first is between two modes of

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memory. commemoration and historical treatment These two indeed often clash, and Heyman's further remarks showed this distinction to be his real concern. The second distinction is between two objects of memory: the end of the war and the use of atomic weapons This distinction reflects an ambiguity far more fundamental for American culture than the immediate problems of the Smithsonian exhibition. From virtually the moment that Americans heard the news about Hiroshima they have been unsure of what to do with this event. On the one hand, they have placed it in the story of World War II, believing naively that the two atomic bombs ended the war with Japan [1] On the other hand, even before the Japanese surrender, many Americans saw this event as belonging in another story, one in which it served not as an end but as a beginning, that of the Atomic and later Nuclear Age Some have even suggested it as the year 1 in some great division in human history (Sherry). What the Smithsonian controversy showed is that, even fifty years after the event, placing it in both narratives is intolerably ambivalent.

This ambivalence about Hiroshima has been partially ameliorated by displacing it with Armageddon in our imagination of nuclear weapons In America the images of the atomic bomb, particularly after the Soviet Union's successful test in 1949 (Boyer.341), were pressed into the service of apocalyptic speculations, both scientific and otherwise, a process which has until recently assigned the horror that Hiroshima represented to a superpower war in an imagined future (cf. Pease·562). Specifically, images of a nuclear Armageddon have helped us perform two sorts of cultural tasks fundamental for imagining nuclear weapons: those involving difference and those involving representation. By "difference" I mean both the articulation of what makes nuclear weapons different from other weapons and the consequent reflection on the different human situation engendered by them. By "representation" I mean the expressions which seek to describe the use of nuclear weapons and incorporate that description into structures of meaning Armageddon permits us to define the difference of nuclear weapons by their capacity to destroy the human species in a war that no one will win. It also has suggested to many, particularly literary critics but also some nuclear strategists, that nuclear war is but an imaginary event, divorced from reality, such that all representations are, to use the most famous phrase, "fabulously textual" (Derrida·23).

While aiding in these essential tasks of difference and representation, Armageddon has simultaneously helped overcome our ambiguity about

[1] For this article I cannot even summarize the debate over the justification of the bombings For that, see Bernstein and Walker What can be asserted is that, at this point in our historical understanding, any claim that the bombs were dropped *solely* to end the war can be safely deemed naive

Hiroshima itself, domesticating it as an event of World War II Hiroshima was not really different, because so few people died compared with the apocalypse to come; and Hiroshima is not the nuclear war referred to in our nuclear discourse, because nuclear war can only be imagined. Since people on all sides of nuclear issues have presumed them uncritically, these ideas have taken on the aura of fact. Nevertheless, in contemplating Armageddon Hiroshima has still been used but only for assisting in scientific speculations about the consequences of future nuclear events Since the initial United States Strategic Bombing Survey, Americans of all disciplines and political affiliations have felt free to examine Hiroshima to learn what really happens in a nuclear blast, including such things as heat, radiation effects, and so on. We even refer to weapons as having certain multiples of the force of the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima Using Hiroshima to help in scientific speculation has been fine, then, but only to enhance the real object of our fascination We have not used Hiroshima itself to understand our human situation in the nuclear age, for that we have turned away from it to contemplate the apocalypse

With the end of the Cold War, however, apocalyptic imagery itself appears doomed, as our geo-political situation no longer sustains its plausibility Our images of the nuclear threat are now as obsolete as our strategies. Without such imagery, though, we are left with little to think with in contemplating the meaning of these weapons, a situation that could well prove dangerous Since nuclear weapons now appear to threaten cities more than the human species as a whole, we might do well to return to Hiroshima to discover their difference and the possibilities for their representation. At the very least, doing so will expose the Armageddon imagery as a cultural construct rather than a self-evident fact

This essay will suggest how Hiroshima might help define the difference and representation of nuclear weapons by examining the responses to the 1945 bombing of those who endured it. First, I will outline briefly some of the ritual and symbolic responses of *hibakusha*, the term given to survivors of the atomic bombs. Rather than do this generally, I will look at one set of people in particular as a case study. I will then suggest how these people have understood the issues of difference and representation and how their understandings compare with the Armageddon imagery more familiar in America. In the end, I hope to demonstrate that, while both present religious structures for reflecting on the human condition after 1945, Hiroshima and Armageddon provide fundamentally different possibilities for that reflection

## ABSENT BODIES

The groups I will discuss commemorate students killed in the atomic bombing who were from Hiroshima City Girl's Higher School, which I refer to by the Japanese acronym of Ichijo Under the present system in both Japan and America, its students would have been in junior high school. On the morning of August 6, 1945 students mainly from the younger two grades of this school (thirteen and fourteen years old), had been mobilized and brought to the center of the city to help make firebreaks in anticipation of an American bombing. Consequently, no school in Hiroshima lost more students to the atomic bomb At the same time, the school itself, although heavily damaged by the blast, stood at the very edge of the firestorm, so that many of its faculty and students survived With a new roof, the main school building housed classes as early as the following September This combination of tremendous loss with the survival of a viable institution resulted in a group capable of some of the earliest and best documented ritual responses to the atomic bomb, responses that have continued down to the present day[2] While especially rich as a case study, the school should nevertheless be seen as one of many such groups with similar histories.

Given all that had to be faced in Hiroshima—the dead and wounded, the total breakdown in services, social collapse—as distant observers, we can only be struck with the attention and resources directed to ritual problems. In part, this attention simply illustrates the necessity, as well as the sheer work, of ritual in human life, but much of it also grew from the more particularly Japanese treatment of the dead, which has constituted one of the major foci of Japanese religion The peace and happiness of the dead are above all the responsibility of those living who are biologically connected with the dead, rather than of, say, a powerful deity or even the dead themselves. In an earlier article on the civic memorials in Hiroshima I have outlined these ritual responsibilities (Foard 1994), so I will not reiterate them here I would rather like to stress simply the importance of bodily remains for the conduct of death rituals In any ordinary funeral conducted in modern Tokyo an American would, I think, be struck by the degree to which relatives actually handle and manipulate remains rather than simply display or dispose of them

The great ritual problem of Hiroshima, then, was that of ensuring the repose of the dead without, in overwhelming numbers of cases, the two critical elements for doing so. 1) the biologically connected living, and

[2] I will not annotate carefully the sources for the narrative that follows There are three privately published works (Sanada, Sanada and Kojima, and Imaishi) with identical titles but differing contents, which assemble the documents of the various Ichijo-connected groups The only previously

2) identifiable remains. In a culture permeated with what is loosely called "ancestor worship," masses of anonymous dead with no one to care for them produced fundamental anomie In the narrative of how this one group dealt with this situation I will describe some gruesome things that happened to bodies, but let me stress that I do so not for sensationalism, rather because what happens to bodies is very important in the Japanese context.

## THE STORY OF THE ICHIJO RITES

Since August 6, 1945 the people connected with Ichijo have constructed memorials, held rites, written memoirs, and engaged in other symbolic expressions by which they have sought to apprehend the death of the 669 students and to relate themselves individually and collectively to these students' death. Generally speaking two groups have been involved who have had two distinct ritual centers. 1) the surviving relatives who have worked through a Buddhist temple, the Jimyoin, which was originally located at the site where the students gathered but which was moved to the outskirts of city during its reconstruction, and 2) those associated with the school itself, particularly the alumnae association and officials of both the original school and later schools that evolved from it, who were active originally at the school but who later moved their memorial stone and services to the site of the deaths of the students, in what is now city-owned parkland.

On the morning of August 6, 1945 the 669 students and ten teachers from Ichijo were between one and two hundred yards from the hypocenter, where most were exposed to temperatures of perhaps 2,000 degrees centigrade. Nearly all died instantly, although some who were sheltered probably died in the subsequent fireball, and their bodies largely disintegrated into the shattered white bones that remain after cremation Immediately after the bombing staff from the school went to the site to search for remains and check for the girls at relief stations All they could find were the bodies of a teacher and a few students in a cistern, where they may have jumped or been thrown. These bodies had exploded from the heat and were "without eyes," so that while they were recovered they could not be individually identified. The rest of the remains became part of the general cleaning of the city. For several days cremation fires burned throughout Hiroshima, and among the masses of bodies identification of the civilian dead was virtually impossible.

published study is that of Ubuki In addition to the published sources, I interviewed three women of the survivors' and alumnae groups for several hours in the summer of 1990, and attended and videotaped both ceremonies that year

One student who was at the river at the time of the blast made it to Ninoshima, an island in Hiroshima Bay where there was a military quarantine station, and lived one week. She told her story to a nurse: Those who survived fled across the bridge but gradually fell to flames, shouting "Long Live the Emperor." This student's name was recorded, but so many died on that island that they were burned together and placed in mass graves, some of which were still being excavated in 1990.

Out of the original 669 ten bodies were recovered (those in the cistern and others whose bodies were recovered in later city construction as I will describe). Of these two were individually identified. In midsummer of 1947 the school was notified by city officials that road construction had uncovered two skeletons on the site of the temple where the girls had gathered. From their size they were thought to be the remains of students. Near one was found a name tag and by another, in a box, a commuting pass. Their bones were white and perfectly clean. Far off, the remains of an adult male who was judged unconnected with the school were found but none of other students. Perhaps, it was thought, these girls had been left behind to guard the belongings of the group while the rest went to work. They would have been by the wall of the temple so their bodies were somewhat protected and their skeletons intact. At the school parents (one of whom was a dentist) were able to identify them largely from their teeth. In the account of one of the faculty who were present, "all of us there felt keenly how deep and complex was the parents' sight of their child. In the midst of tears of happiness, and joy without laughter, these two departed were clutched to the breasts of their respective parents, and after two years returned home" (Sanada: 85-86). These were the only two who were ever identified and who therefore had normal funeral rites from their families according to Japanese traditions for handling the dead.

On October 30, 1945 there was a memorial service at the school, done in a Buddhist fashion. Repairs began on the school and students from schools that had been destroyed transferred to Ichijo. Also in 1946 some members of surviving families established a wooden reliquary pillar at the site of the temple where the students had gathered on August 6. A picture shows a simple pillar on which is written: "For the Repose (*kuyo*) of Teachers and Students." Around it are uncarved stones and two stone slabs laid horizontally to make an altar upon which there are offerings. Next to the pillar stands a Jizo, the bodhisattva responsible for children. According to the records of this group, the flowers and incense before it never ceased. A ceremony was held before it on the first anniversary and on every August 6 until 1950.

On August 6, 1948 the school-based groups established on the school grounds a memorial stone (Because they believed the Occupation forbade *ireihi*, or soul-comforting stones, they called it a "peace pillar") In designing this stone, they sent a representative to the University of Kyoto to talk with a distinguished physicist, Yukawa Hideki (who the following year would be awarded the Nobel Prize), and learned from him what atomic power was. The stone is really a huge stele, about four feet high, reminiscent of steles used in Buddhism or as gravemarkers (See the accompanying illustration.) It shows three young girls. The two on the left and the right hold, respectively, a dove and a wreath. Their school uniforms and braided hair mark them as living, post-war students These two are placing a wreath on the head of another girl between them, whose short hair and work pants (*monpe*) mark her as a student during the wartime mobilization of all citizens. She has the wings and halo of an angel, and is holding a box marked with the equation $E=MC^2$ A smaller stone nearby gives the history of this memorial and explains that the sculpted relief shows that those represented by the middle girl "had become, as the world's first victims of atomic power ($E=MC^2$), the honored human sacrifices for the progress of human culture." On the back of the memorial itself is the following verse, composed by the principal.

> By your friends
> protected, peacefully
> sleep, o souls,
> on this grassy slope

Also in 1948 the belongings (*ihin*) of the girls that had been found on the temple grounds were enshrined at the school In May of that year the school became a high school in the new school system and was later to become coeducational.

In May of 1949 another skeleton was discovered while a gas pipe was being laid, with articles indicating it was an Ichijo student Altogether four remains were uncovered, but nothing could identify them. They had been in a well, perhaps because they had come for water. These bodies were taken to the grounds of the Jimyoin, the nearby temple I mentioned above, and put under the reliquary pillar. Within a year, under the reconstruction plan of the city, this temple was forced to rebuild at a new location far to the northeast, and the August 6 ceremony began to be conducted by the abbot of the temple at that new location.

Also in 1950 the Ichijo Atomic Bomb Survivors' Association, made up of relatives of the dead girls, was formed. Until that time ritual responsibilities had been assumed informally by the various surviving relatives, but this year the first seven directors were named in order to


The Ichijo memorial stone. Stretching behind it is another stone displaying the names of the dead. In front are offerings of flowers, water, folded paper cranes, and plaques for repose of the dead. The small bowl in the foreground is for incense.

prepare for a major ceremony on the seventh anniversary (important in the Buddhist schedule of commemorations) the following year and to collect funds for a memorial stone (*kuyoto*) on the grounds of the relocated Jimyoin. According to this committee's appeal many survivors felt that the spirits (*tamashii*) of the students had hovered at the riverbank, not at the school, and yet the wooden marker originally housed at the temple there had started to deteriorate and needed to be moved anyway. This sum would cover the establishment of the memorial, the formal enrollment of the victims' names in a register in the temple, and the seventh year service. The unveiling (literally "opening of the eyes") of this stele took place as scheduled on August 6, 1951 under the direction of the abbot of Jimyoin

In 1952 this group decided to construct a statue of Kannon, one of the major Mahayana bodhisattvas, to be the main image of the temple. This was completed in 1955 with a ceremony that their records describe in detail The ceremony was held at an equinox, when dead are visited in cemeteries, and a priest from Daishoin on Miyajima and others from Hiroshima attended The announcement for this ceremony mentioned the atomic bomb as being humanity's first, calls the students the first victims for human peace, and calls the Kannon a statue established for world peace and also for the repose of the children Inside the statue there is a death register (*kakocho*) containing the Heart Sutra and the girls' names listed by grade. This was the first recorded instance in which they connected their rites for the children with world peace

The relatives have ever since been conducting memorial services at that temple on August 6. By the time I went to their service on August 6, 1990, there were few surviving parents (one who spoke most movingly was in his nineties), and the group was led by surviving brothers. The temple itself had made the story of the Ichijo girls its most notable feature, emphasizing the bodhisattva Jizo and the statue of Kannon I mentioned earlier, as well as the memorial stone in its small graveyard. Since the Tokugawa period this temple had been part of a regional pilgrimage tradition, and now the story of Ichijo had become the principal narrative about the Jimyoin in pilgrimage literature

The school groups (alumnae and former teachers) eventually took over the site of the deaths formerly used by the relatives Since under the new school system teachers had been transferred and connections with the past at the school were becoming very weak, in 1957 they moved their memorial to the western end of the new park where the temple had stood, to attract the prayers and "quiet anger" of all who passed by The memorial remains there still In 1985 the Ichijo alumnae constructed an additional stone upon which was attached a plate listing the names of the

dead students; this was set behind the memorial. From my observations this stone is now treated by many surviving relatives as a grave during equinoxes, the traditional time of grave visiting, which is common with many of the memorial stones in Hiroshima. Some go on the sixth of every month There is a constant stream of gifts left at the memorial which are appropriate for children, including such modern toys as video games. Today this is the oldest remaining memorial in a city crowded with them.

This move to a more public location led to a larger, more public role for those associated with the school Initially, a woman who lived near the memorial would informally explain it to visitors, but under the influence of private educational organizations and eventually the city government, the activities of such "storytellers" (*kataribe*) became more routine and formal. Networks were set up for introductions of visiting school groups from around Japan, to whom those who had experienced the bomb told their story and that of the Ichijo girls. Often their attachment to these schools became long-standing and, with individual students, surprisingly personal One woman I spoke with told of how she sees the students who died "overlapping" with those with whom she is speaking The one thing she wants to tell them is how happy they should be to receive an ordinary education

Beginning in the 1970s these two groups, one consisting of relatives and the other of alumnae and former teachers, began to coordinate their rites, with many people attending both. Today the temple service is earliest, with a conventional Buddhist service and some brief speeches In mid-morning there is a secular rite at the downtown memorial stone, which features music and compositions by the children of the school that is now on the site of the old Ichijo school Women who have led the alumnae efforts are themselves in their sixties, many suffer from the general weakness of radiation exposure; and the principal storyteller herself died shortly before I did my fieldwork. In the institutions of the temple and school (particularly now through the efforts of a young social studies teacher who devotes much of his time to this sort of thing) the rites will continue, but these women say they have done all they can do

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ICHIJO

I have related this story not to elicit pity or guilt, and not as an interesting case of death rituals, but because I believe the experience of the people of Ichijo with the atomic bomb invites reflection on the difference and representation of nuclear weapons. In claiming this I do not align myself with the sense of *hibakusha* moral authority that one often finds in Japan, in which they are included in a tradition of people regarded as

sacred by virtue of their special endurance, with knowledge held and passed down in an esoteric manner. Rather I regard them as ordinary people acting within their cultural matrix to handle problems, albeit unusual ones, they have been forced to confront. Their rendering of both difference and representation challenges the predominant American image of nuclear weapons, namely, that of the apocalypse.

## HIROSHIMA AND DIFFERENCE

One of the many paradoxes in the American appropriation of Hiroshima is that while, on the one hand, it is made into a watershed of history, on the other, its difference is often challenged Under the presumption that difference can only be a matter of sheer numbers of deaths, we are told that the Hiroshima bomb caused no more deaths than the fire bombings of Dresden and Tokyo, and far fewer than an imagined American invasion of the Japanese homeland

The history of the people of Ichijo suggests that it was not the sheer number of deaths that required their ritual work Rather it was that the atomic bomb rendered traditional responses to death and tragedy impossible, practically as well as conceptually. These traditional responses I designate as "theodicy." Originally used in theology to mean solutions to the problem of evil, this term is now employed more widely in the human sciences to mean a culture's accounting for and ascription of meaning to suffering (Berger:53-80). Although theodicy refers to much more than accounting for and giving meaning to death, surely death is an important subject for the theodicy of any culture. In every human society death has been a culturally defined and therefore meaningful event as well Every culture has had some mortuary ritual by which a living person is made into a fully deceased one, and by which a community transforms itself from one including the particular person to one without that person. In addition, every society understands death in some abstract way as connected with some cosmological purpose, or as being in the world as part of the general order of things. Most have understood some sort of afterlife, sometimes, as in Japan, involving a complex relationship between the living and the dead.

What I am suggesting is that these sort of meanings, as they were developed in popular Japanese death rites and ancestor worship, became impossible in the case of the girls of Ichijo school. In Hiroshima the general East Asian biological connection of death with the ongoing family was broken. Through the absence of bodies and the extinction of many families, the dead were disconnected from the nurturance of a family and, hence, from any normal post-mortem existence. Of course, even in

normal circumstances there have always been such "unconnected dead" (*muenbotoke*), who have been treated on the margins of major ancestral rituals such as the mid-summer return of the dead (*obon*), but these unconnected dead were pitiable because they could never find final repose in death. In Hiroshima this unrealized death has been moved from the margins to the center

In a cultural sense, then, we could say that the girls of Ichijo did not die; rather, they were annihilated. Of course, by any biological definition they died, but death is not simply a biological event, it is a cultural one as well. I choose the word "annihilation" to signal the extinction of earthly existence beyond the categories and mechanisms of the cultural handling of death To put it in more anthropological terms, the symbolic structures no longer worked in the face of this reality. Death was no longer incorporated into existence but rather seemed forever apart from it. We know this, not from objectively examining the deaths of these girls ourselves—and certainly not by just counting them—but through the ritual work of those who sought to make sense of it all. Many of their ritual efforts were spent on setting certain distinctions between this annihilation and ordinary death.[3] Note that this was true even though they were dealing with deaths measured in the hundreds, not hundreds of thousands.

We see the distinction in handling of the dead most clearly in the distinction between actions of the surviving relatives and those affiliated with the school, the former opting initially for more traditional services, the latter for more novel, public ones Both sides say (euphemistically) that relations were often delicate In the end, though, the relatives could not bring to a close the ritual processes of death and have already ceded control to larger community groups Since Japanese death rituals for individuals (as opposed to the collective ancestors) should ideally come to a close on the thirty-third anniversary of death, and in actuality come much sooner, this ceding of ritual responsibility is a clear and dramatic articulation of the inadequacy of traditional theodicies

This tension between the conventional and non-conventional handling of death is seen throughout Hiroshima's history in many groups and in many ways, but in the end the practical problems of masses of unrecovered and uncared for dead have consistently tipped the ritual balance toward new, *ad hoc* ritual [4] The city-sponsored public ceremonies that are often represented on American television are in large part a result of the presence in the Peace Park of the remains of approximately 60,000

[3] I follow Bell and Smith in believing that ritual is largely about distinctions

[4] Another well-documented case is that of the widows of Nukui village, who have a similar dual-ritual system See *Hiroshima Shinshi* 478-533, and Kanda

anonymous dead (Foard 1994) We can see the distinction most clearly in an instance in which the normal theodicy of Japanese culture could be made to work, namely, in the emotional moment when the two identifiable bodies were recovered, as described earlier This is the ultimate basis of all ritual activity in Hiroshima and does indeed make it different from deaths in Tokyo and elsewhere, no matter what the numbers

One might be tempted to argue that this sort of problem is specific to a culture rooted in ancestor veneration and so should not concern those of other cultural traditions. Such an argument would convince, however, only those whose methods of theodicy do not involve any ongoing community. In *Spirit in Ashes* Edith Wyschogrod has argued that mass death breaks the connection between death and the "life-world" (16). Viewed in this light, the case of Ichijo might demonstrate that the distinction of nuclear weapons is not just the sheer numbers of deaths that they cause, but that in causing those deaths they render theodicy, and hence cultural death, impossible by breaking the connection between death and community The exact *way* that they threaten this connection will vary from tradition to tradition but will probably involve, in varying levels of importance, not only the numbers of deaths but also the speed, non-discrimination, and totality of extinction. Even without the imagined nuclear apocalypse, then, we can wonder with Robert Jay Lifton about the future of immortality

## REPRESENTATION

In addition to the seeming impossibility of accommodating these girls' deaths through traditional theodicy the representations of the event itself have been at best shifting and indeterminant Even the most basic descriptions have presented problems Witnesses to the atomic bomb have seen another world, full of weird, unspeakable sights: people walking with skin falling off, unrecognizable even to relatives, the natural world gone mad with black rain and birds exploding in the air, and one's own self able to pick casually through human bones. The most common image used by survivors is that of the Buddhist hells with all their stench and smoke. In general, the claim from testimonial writings is that those who did not experience it cannot know it.

In addition to these problems of simple description the bombing for these people has been indeterminate in meaning This indeterminacy comes not for want of trying, as can be seen in the claim, inscribed by the $E=MC^2$ stone, that these girls were sacrificed for a new and better human age or, in the writings about the bodhisattva Kannon, for peace itself These claims are now largely abandoned, even though they have been

literally set in stone the idea that these deaths were for human progress is an unmentioned embarrassment, and the suggestion that they died for peace would make their deaths an appropriate part of the war.

After the occupation these and other such survivors have been under pressure from those who are all too happy to find the bomb's meaning for them, including both the political left in its Cold War, anti-American stance, the political right in its cultivation of Japanese victimhood, and even the city's official identity as a Mecca of peace, which many *hibakusha* find a sham. Their hostility to ideological and religious closure comes from a sense that such schemes cannot grasp the magnitude of the event and may even cheapen it by relating it to other goods and evils

Many *hibakusha* until very recently have refused to discuss the atomic bomb at all, even with family members, in part because it was just too painful but also because there were no words that could be used In this they invite comparison with scholars of a post-structuralist stripe (Solomon) who claim that there is a total lack of reference for nuclear language Jacques Derrida himself has called nuclear language "fabulously textual" (23), by which he means without factuality and totally unconnected with history Indeed, so in effect did Bernard Brodie, arguably the first nuclear strategist and one of the first thinkers at Rand, who late in his life dismissed all such talk as an illusion (Kaplan: 341-342).

The claim that a reality cannot be described, however, differs from the claim that there is no such reality to be described (cf Chaloupka:8) To make the latter claim, Derrida is surely correct in saying that no text will ever describe an all-out nuclear exchange, but surely incorrect in his claim that Hiroshima cannot be a "real referent" for the nuclear imagination: "[Nuclear war] has no precedent It has never occurred, itself; the explosion of American bombs in 1945 ended a 'classical,' conventional war; it did not set off a nuclear war The terrifying reality of the nuclear conflict can only be the signified referent, never the real referent (present or past) of a discourse or text" (23)

The problems *hibakusha* have had with nuclear words, then, are not the problems literary critics have had with them, because for the *hibakusha* "the real referent" is all too clear Even though there is an incompatibility between the death-world they experienced and the ordinary world, so much so that the former cannot be expressed in the descriptive or even moral terms of the latter, that death-world is real, and they must object when it is denied In order to assert the reality of what they experienced, they must actively remember, no matter how painful it may be. Many point to specific incidents that forced them to speak Sometimes these are national or international events, but more common is the case

of a woman of Ichijo who was riding in a taxi in Gifu Prefecture when the driver described a recent traffic accident as "worse than Hiroshima." At that moment she decided to speak.

This need to assert the reality of that event drives the survivors' attention to specific places. Note the significance of place in the history of the rituals: on three occasions, in response to man-made forces and natural deterioration, the people of Ichijo sought to maintain a ritual presence at the place of death. As I have discussed elsewhere (Foard 1995), through its permanence place endows past events with actuality, an actuality sought by such people as the Ichijo storyteller I mentioned above, who told her story where the girls died.

Despite their deep suspicion of the adequacy of any expressions, the survivors relate their narratives in formal ritual and pilgrimage settings in which their repetition and redundancy seem appropriate. (These are, of course, the public rather than the traditional settings.) They justify their attention to story and place in terms of preserving memory, not because their stories can ever be fully understood, but "to bring peace." Without any clear understanding of what political mechanisms might be required, they claim that the telling of stories itself can, in fact, help do this. The experience of the Ichijo people, then, suggests that nuclear talk can neither be fully denied nor fully accommodated into our sense of community over time. The only representation possible, then, strives not to domesticate the experience of the bomb into human memory, but to use the memory of its reality for apotropaic purposes. The reality of the bomb is asserted—indeed must be asserted—only so that it can be refused a permanent place in human history.

## CONCLUSION: HIROSHIMA AND ARMAGEDDON

Since the onset of the superpower conflict, nuclear reflection has yoked itself to the Cold War and indulged itself in opposing human extinction. As a consequence, the end of the Cold War has meant the obsolescence of not only our strategies toward but also our images of the nuclear threat. Although excluded from our apocalyptic obsession, harder moral issues have been with us since 1945, moral issues that are as pressing now as they were then: Is the instantaneous extinction of cities different from other war death? If using a nuclear weapon (or two) does not endanger the human species, is it permissible under certain conditions? If so, how do we represent such death in our religious and cultural systems of "just war" and other meanings?

Such questions are beyond the range of this historian of religions. What is clear is that the efforts of Hiroshima survivors suggest measuring

the difference of nuclear death by the impossibility of theodicy, of which the apocalyptic imagination is but one culturally specific and historically bound expression Following such a measurement of difference can help us see that we have not achieved freedom from nuclear danger in the past few years solely because the apocalyptic scenario seems less plausible and that we need new theological and philosophical reflections. Furthermore, the survivors' insistence on the reality of references for nuclear language, in contrast to our own critics' insistence on the opposite, affirms that the use of nuclear weapons is indeed possible because it has already happened. In the end, incorporating these victims' voices can transform our sense of difference and modes of representation to reflect more accurately our post-Cold War situation, when more than ever we should imagine the nuclear threat through Hiroshima rather than Armageddon As the Smithsonian controversy exposed, however, Americans still recoil from peeking under the mushroom cloud

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