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Photography, National Identity, and the “Cataract of Times”: Wartime Images and the Case of Japan

JULIA A. THOMAS

THE YOKOHAMA MUSEUM OF ART offered up an anomaly in the summer of 1995. No other museum in the Tokyo metropolitan area referred to the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's surrender through an exhibition of photographs; indeed, no other major exhibition that summer featured documentary photography from any period.¹ The Yokohama Museum, on the other hand, discreetly yet firmly constructed a vivid photographic recollection of the decade that saw the cessation of hostilities. This article examines *Photography in the 1940s*, as the Yokohama exhibition was called, against the striking absence of photographic documents of the war in other art museums and against the wider struggle in Japan over the purpose of history.² Through the analysis of this particular exhibition, I explore the larger interpretive problems presented by photographic art collections. As historians grapple with the expanding importance of visual images,³ our analyses must account for what I see as the inherently unstable relationship among still photographs, national identity, and concepts of time as they come together in museums.⁴ Understanding this

¹ Concurrent exhibitions in major public museums specializing in photography included *Tokyo kokuritsu kindai bijutsukan to shashin 1953–1995* [Photography and the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 1953–1995] at the newly opened Film Center of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, and two exhibitions at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography: *-ism '95: The 1st Tokyo International Photo-Biennale*; and *Mono, kao, hanmonogatari—modanizumu saikō* [Objects, Faces, and Anti-Narratives—Rethinking Modernism]. Exhibitions at other venues that occasionally feature photography included the Meguro-ku Bijutsukan's photography exhibition, *Domon Ken: Koji junrei* [Domon Ken: Pilgrimages to Old Temples] and the Setagaya-ku Bijutsukan's *Sōken 1200 nen kinen Tōji kokuhō ten* [Treasures from the Tōji Temple on the 1200th Anniversary of Its Foundation]. I discuss aspects of these exhibitions in “History and Anti-History: Photography Exhibitions and Japanese National Identity,” in Susan Crane, ed., *Museums and Memories* (Stanford, Calif., forthcoming); and “Raw Photographs and Cooked History: Photography's Ambiguous Place in Tokyo's Museum of Modern Art,” *East Asian History* 12 (December 1996): 121–34.

² The exhibition ran from April 18 to August 30, 1995, and was one of three photography exhibitions from the permanent collection that the museum mounts each year.

³ There is debate over whether visual images serve as additions to textual sources of historical knowledge or whether they overwhelm and transform traditional texts, thereby transforming the practice of history. For instance, Raphael Samuel argues that a new historiography “alert to memory's shadows . . . might give at least as much attention to pictures as to manuscripts or print.” Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Vol. 1: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), 27. Alternatively, Edith Wyschogrod takes the position that the inclusion of visual images within history's frame of reference “signal[s] not a mere expansion of the means for acquiring and distributing historical information but a fundamental epistemic transformation and cultural upheaval . . . Language itself has become volatilized into the image.” Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others* (Chicago, 1998), 69.

⁴ I discuss what I see as the continued prominence of the “nation” and “national culture” as defining categories for understanding the arts in “Global Culture in Question: Japanese Photography in

critical triangulation of image, nation, and time is, I argue, the key not only to unpacking the ambiguities of *Photography in the 1940s* but a general theoretical grasp of the role of museums in the creation of historical consciousness.⁵

I will start by examining *Photography in the 1940s* as much as possible on its own terms, treating it as a visual rendering of history crafted by the museum staff that unpropitious summer. Taking into account statements of curatorial intent and the images absent from the gallery walls as well as those chosen for exhibition, I analyze three possible renditions of Japanese identity available to gallery viewers in Yokohama. Although this analysis begins by treating the exhibition as a "text" worthy of consideration in its own right, any interpretation must rest on a broader reading of Japan's current circumstances. The past few years have brought relentless troubles to Japan's economic, political, and social institutions. Even before the wider Asian economy soured, Japan's problems included the end of its own economic boom, the plunge of the stock market, the precarious state of Japanese banks, the death of the Showa emperor, political corruption and the Liberal Democratic Party's loss of virtually unrivaled power,⁶ the revelation during the Kobe earthquake of woefully inadequate preparations for meeting natural disasters,⁷ and the lethal activities of the Aum Shinrikyō doomsday cult. Together,

Contemporary America," in Harumi Befu and Sylvie Guichard-Anguis, eds., *Japan outside Japan* (London, forthcoming).

⁵ As is evident from my treatment of this fine art photography exhibition as a contribution to historical recollection, I think of history not as the exclusive enterprise of professional historians but as a shared social activity where many kinds of documentation are brought to bear. This article therefore participates in the growing conversation on collective memory and historical consciousness that revolves around the fundamental questions of where, how, and for what purpose history is recollected. Different perspectives on this issue are explored in great depth in "AHR Forum: History and Memory," *AHR* 102 (December 1997): 1371–1412. From this inclusive perspective, the past is recollected and reconstructed through a wide range of media (books, museums, memorials, parades, theme parks, drama, television, films, children's picture stories, toys, and costumes). However, as I hope to demonstrate, analyzing fine art photography exhibitions offers particular rewards. These exhibitions pull together social, technological, and art historical pasts, private sensibilities, and public ideals of civic propriety. In a public art museum, collections of photographic images refer simultaneously to "Beauty" and to "Truth," to "Commerce" and to "Art" under the eye of a visitor who sees both as a private individual and as a member of "the public." In bringing together these disparate elements, fine art photography exhibitions become not only particularly rich "mnemonic sites" (to use Pierre Nora's phrase) but, because of their unsettled mixture of elements, also capable of illuminating broad ideological tensions over the proper shape of the past. Given photography's uneasy status as an art medium, it readily illuminates multiple, competing approaches to the past—which in Japan include an aestheticized, dehistoricized version, a secular, empirical version, and a highly nationalistic celebration of an almost sacred heritage.

Doubts about the political and historical agency of photographs in the fine art context have been raised not only by historians committed to more traditional sources but by some art critics as well. Photography critic A. D. Coleman is reasonably typical of such skeptics when he compares museums to mortuaries and argues that documentary photographs in particular are "meant to serve purposes only marginally compatible with those of repositories and showcases for fine art . . . at least before the work has been generated and lived its life in the world." Coleman, *Critical Focus: Photography in the International Image Community* (Munich, 1996), 107–08.

⁶ Several perspectives on these economic and political problems of the Heisei (1989–) period are presented in "Symposium on Continuity and Change in Heisei Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 23 (Summer 1997).

⁷ In response to the Kobe earthquake on January 17, 1995, Japanese photographer Eikoh Hosoe spearheaded a charity drive based on donations from 260 photographers from twenty-four countries. These photographers donated 430 prints, which were auctioned by Sotheby's to raise funds for the Japan Red Cross and the earthquake victims. The combined efforts of Eikoh, other faculty members

these events have undermined the postwar national consensus on what it means to be Japanese.⁸ Prosperity, political passivity, and social harmony no longer appear axiomatic national traits.

In these circumstances, artists and curators, the public and the government, respond anxiously to images in museums that might comment on a national identity largely understood as a cultural phenomenon.⁹ Fine art photography exhibitions, as the anomalous Yokohama show suggests, have the capacity to become dangerous mirrors for a troubled nation seeking to understand itself. In this context, *Photography in the 1940s* might be seen as a courageous act of domestic political engagement, or as a disingenuous, even irresponsible, evasion of wartime memories, or as an inclusive vision of human solidarity. Both the exhibition's contents and its immediate context reveal deeply rooted tensions over national identity in contemporary Japan and suggest the importance of history—visual and otherwise—as an arena for contesting the future parameters of democratic practice.

This article, then, moves outward from an analysis of the exhibition itself, through a consideration of how tensions in Japan over the appropriate mode of national history impinge on our understanding of this exhibition, to theoretical concerns that transcend these particulars. The final section of the article will focus on how photography's malleable relationship with time—and thus with history—allows it to serve as a vector for fundamental concerns over national identity. Through these widening circles of interpretation, I try to demonstrate how historians can incorporate the analysis of photography in art museums into research on historical consciousness without treating the exhibitions or the images as mere illustration.

YOKOHAMA, a commuter's train ride from Tokyo, is an old port city, one of the first to admit Americans and Europeans in the nineteenth century. The Yokohama Museum of Art, on the other hand, is new and not very inviting. Situated on a large concrete plaza, it is a vast structure with an eight-story watchtower and a cavernous

of the Tokyo Kōgei Daigaku Shashin Center (Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics, Center of Photography), and the Cultural Products Division of Asahi Shinbun (Asahi Newspaper) also resulted in a book by the Kobe Aid Fund, *Sekai no shashinka kara fukkō no machi e* [From the World's Photographers to a Restored Town] (Tokyo, 1996). This unusual effort demonstrates an awareness of both photography's commercial value and its potential for social engagement.

⁸ Takashi Fujitani, emphasizing the pivotal impact of the Showa emperor's death in 1989, points to a "new search for authenticity" in "Electronic Pageantry and Japan's 'Symbolic Emperor,'" *Journal of Asian Studies* 51 (November 1992): 849. Historian Nakamura Masanori argues that "the grand tale of Japan as an economic superpower and the world's most stable political system has already lost its power of persuasion over Japanese citizens." Nakamura, "The History Textbook Controversy and Nationalism," in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars: Textbook Nationalism, Citizenship, and War, Comparative Perspectives* 30 (April–June 1998): 28. Gavan McCormack considers multiple causes of Japan's malaise including corruption and environmental destruction in *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence* (Armonk, N.Y., 1996).

⁹ Viewing the arts as one of the primary ways of defining Japanese national identity is not just a postwar phenomenon. See Satō Dōshin, *Nihon bijutsu: Kindai Nihon "kotoba" to senkaku* [Japanese Arts: Modern Japanese "Words" and Pioneers] (Tokyo, 1996), for a discussion of the Meiji (1868–1912) period origins of the term *bijutsu* (the arts) and how that category was used to define "Japan." For further analysis, see Stefan Tanaka, "Imagining History: Inscribing Belief in the Nation," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 53 (February 1994): 24–44.

gray atrium. The building radiates an appreciation of the gargantuan. However, *Photography in the 1940s* demonstrated none of this relish for sheer size. The exhibition was, instead, excruciatingly precise and exquisitely crafted.

With eighty-four photographs from Europe, America, and Japan, Assistant Curator Kuraishi Shino and the museum staff created a dense compendium of images engaging aesthetic, social, and political themes.¹⁰ The exhibition brochure forthrightly justified choosing the theme of the 1940s through reference to the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's defeat.¹¹ When pressed to elaborate further, Kuraishi reiterated that it was the express purpose of the exhibition to juxtapose "aesthetic sophistication" with "the serious political confusion . . . of the period."¹² There can be no doubt that this exhibition confronted the past: the question becomes how and why it did so. Why choose to pierce the silence about the war that hung over Tokyo's photography world that summer?¹³ What histories were articulated through this international collection of images? What idea of Japan took shape through these photographs?

Two images commanded the entrance to the exhibition: Robert Capa's "Collaborators, Chartres, August 18, 1944" and Ansel Adams's "Mount Williamson from Manzanar" (1942), Manzanar being one of the internment camps for Japanese and Japanese Americans in California.¹⁴ (See Figures 1 and 2.) In a sense, these paired scenes of moral failure from France and the United States set the tone for all that followed. The deliberately ordered exhibition then presented Sakamoto Manshichi's serene prints of *haniwa* (the archaic clay figurines renowned for their enigmatic smiles) and of medieval Buddhist statuary.¹⁵ These Japanese works were followed by classic paeans to America's natural beauty,¹⁶ particularly of the far

¹⁰ All the names of Japanese people are written in the Japanese order with family names first unless they appear in quotations from sources that have reversed their normal order or the authors have used the English form of their names in an English-language publication. The name Hiroshi Hamaya in Figures 4 and 7 is given in English-language order, family name last, at the request of Magnum Photos.

¹¹ "Shashin tenjishitsu: 1940 nendai no shashin" [Photography Exhibition Room: Photography in the 1940s], in "Yokohama Bijutsukan josetsuten" [Yokohama Museum of Art, from the Permanent Collection] (May 18 to August 30, 1995).

¹² Kuraishi Shino, private communication with the author, August 11, 1995. I am indebted to Mr. Kuraishi for his thoughtful responses to the questions I put to him about the exhibition and for his kindness in helping me obtain copyright permissions and prints for some illustrations in this article.

¹³ Japanese museums (with the exception of those always concerned with representing aspects of the war, such as the Peace Museum in Hiroshima and the museum attached to the Yasukuni shrine) largely avoided marking the fiftieth anniversary of the war's end. In Washington, D.C., by contrast, the National Museum of American History, the National Archives, the National Air and Space Museum, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum all featured exhibitions explicitly dealing with the war. This confluence of exhibitions was not the result of consensus on how to remember World War II in the United States, as the controversy over the Smithsonian Institution's display of the *Enola Gay* demonstrates. For the text of the original Smithsonian proposal, see Philip Nobile, ed., *Judgment at the Smithsonian: The Uncensored Script of the Smithsonian's Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibit of the Enola Gay* (New York, 1995). For a retrospective account from the standpoint of a specialist in Japan, see John Whittier Treat, "The *Enola Gay* on Display: Hiroshima and American Memory," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 5 (Winter 1997): 863–78.

¹⁴ The wall label does not explicitly state that Manzanar was a Japanese internment camp. However, the story of Manzanar is known in Japan in part through photographs taken by an inmate: Miyatake Tōyō, *Miyatake Tōyō no shashin, 1923–79* (Tokyo, 1984). Titles of images are taken from the wall labels supplied by the Yokohama Museum of Art and do not exactly match the titles of the figures in all cases.

¹⁵ Sakamoto Manshichi, "Haniwa" (1945), "Hand of Vairocana, Tōshōdai-ji" (1945), and "Hand of Mahavairocana, Enjō-ji" (1945).

¹⁶ These works include Edward Weston, "Civilian Defense" (1942) and "China Cove, Point Lobos"



FIGURE 1: Robert Capa, "Collaborators, Chartres, France, August 18, 1944." Copyright Magnum Photos, Inc., New York.

West, by further celebratory scenes of traditional Japanese culture,¹⁷ by a few stylized Japanese wartime propaganda shots of civilian workers, and then by images of Western soldiers at war. In the middle of the exhibition, the war ended in a few enigmatic photographs and the postwar period began to unfold. Tokyo springs up from its ashes in a frenzy of rebuilding, while New York revels in garish decadence and Paris displays elegant fashion.¹⁸ Back and forth, the exhibition swung between "the West" and Japan, between nature and culture, between war and peace.

(1940); Minor White, "Sun over the Pacific, Devil's Slide" (1947) and "Sandblaster, San Francisco" (1949); Harry Callahan, "Weed against the Sky, Detroit" (1948); and Ansel Adams, "Grand Teton and Snake River, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming" (1942), "Teneya Creek, Dogwood, Rain: Yosemite National Park" (1948), and "Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico" (1944).

¹⁷ These include Domon Ken, "Potter's Wheel, Kyoto" (1940) and "Matsuo and Chiyo, Scene from a Bunraku Puppet Show" (1940–43); Hamaya Hiroshi's "Boys Singing to Drive Evil Birds Away, Niigata" (1940), "Welcome Fire for a Departed Soul, Niigata" (1945), and "Fire Festival for the Traveler's Guardian Deity, Niigata" (1940).

¹⁸ Richard Avedon, "René, the New Look of Dior, Place de la Concorde, Paris" (1949), "Dorian Leigh, Coat by Dior, Avenue Montaigne, Paris" (1949), "Carmen, Coat by Cardin, Paris" (1949), and "Dorian Leigh, Schiaparelli" (1949).

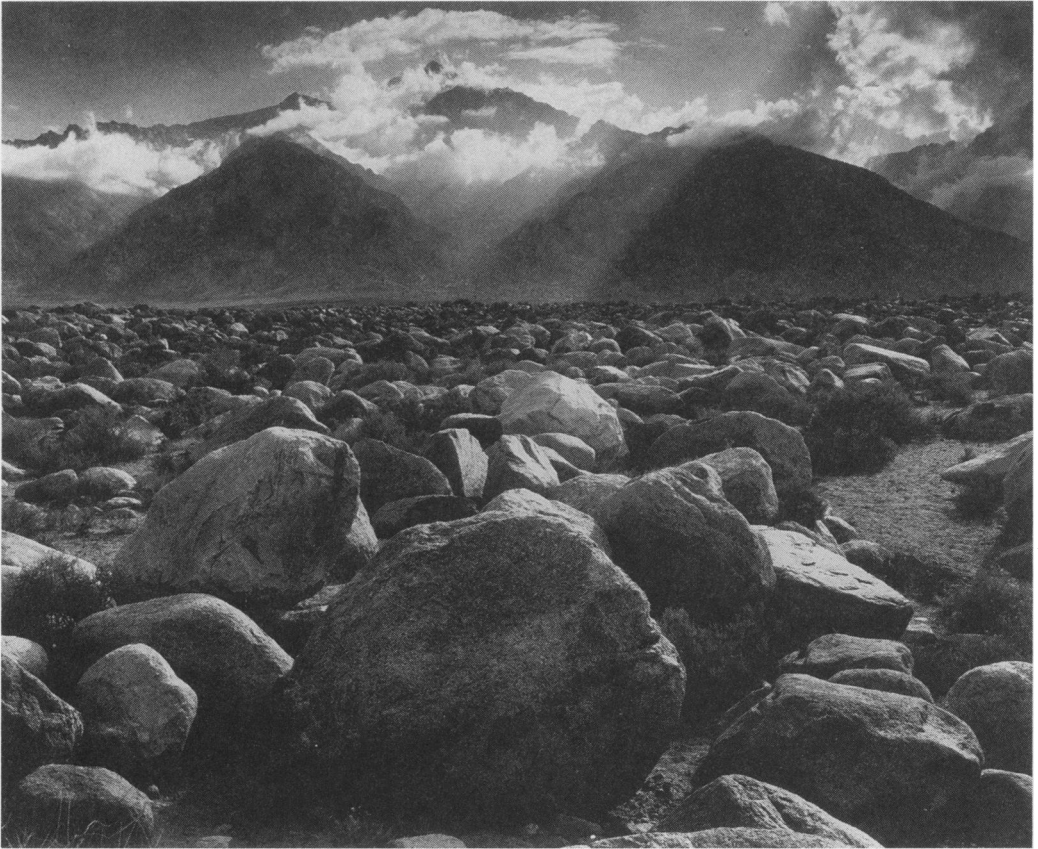


FIGURE 2: Ansel Adams, "Mount Williamson, the Sierra Nevada, from Manzanar, California," 1945. Copyright Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust, Collection Center for Creative Photography, the University of Arizona, Tucson.

Two separate though interwoven narratives emerged from the images on the walls: one about "the West" and the other about Japan. In the first narrative, the West was made to indict itself. Capa plays the leading prosecutor with his photographs of French collaborators whose heads have been shaved, of an American soldier kicking a prisoner, and of a wounded child in Sicily.¹⁹ Henri Cartier-Bresson's "Gestapo Informer Recognized by a Woman She Had Denounced, Deportation Camp, Dessau, Germany" (1945) reinforces the theme. The seeming predilection for personal confrontation among Westerners demonstrated by Capa's and Cartier-Bresson's work was evinced even in photographs not related to the war. For instance, in Weegee's "The Critic," an impoverished woman glowers at two grotesque, bejeweled matrons leaving a limousine. (See Figure 3.) This apparent Western tendency to pervert social harmony reverberates as physical deformity in Lisette Model's portraits of a hermaphrodite and dwarf in postwar New York, which are used to close the exhibition.²⁰ Even the joys of victory, marked

¹⁹ Robert Capa, "Chartres, August 18, 1944," "Collaborators, Chartres, August 18, 1944," "Leipzig, April 18, 1945," and "Troina, Sicily, August 6, 1943."

²⁰ Lisette Model, "Lower East Side, New York" (1940) and "Hermaphrodite, 42nd Street Flea Circus, New York" (1940).



FIGURE 3: Weegee [Arthur Fellig], "The Critic," 1943. Copyright 1994, International Center of Photography, New York, Bequest of Wilma Wilcox.

by Alfred Eisenstaedt's photograph of the kissing couple titled "V-J Day, Times Square" (1945) and Capa's view of Liberation Day in Paris (1944), seem, in this context, histrionic.

The cumulative psychological portrait of a race prone to excess was unmistakable; yet the Nazis, Japan's allies, were hardly pictured at all, and the Holocaust was absolutely invisible. The only German image in the entire show, a show purportedly dedicated to dealing with the political confusion of the 1940s, was August Sander's "Junger Soldat, Westerwald" (1945), a close-up portrait of a soldier in whose face it is difficult to read anything more profound than sheer youth.

While the Yokohama Museum's indictment of Americans and Western Europeans was precise and unmitigated, the brutality of these foreigners seemed principally to endanger themselves. The exhibition pointedly avoided being a parable about Western aggression against Japan. Indeed, when the exhibition turned our gaze to "the East," the Allies became a remote, ambiguous presence. For instance, Hamaya Hiroshi's "Half-Breed in the Orphanage of Harbin, China" (1940) depicts a Eurasian child standing forlornly behind high gates with a European crest. (See Figure 4.) The harm represented here seems indirect, the fault obscure. Whose child is it? What East and what West come together in this frail boy's body? Who made an orphan of the child? Even Hiroshima was represented only by Kimura



FIGURE 4: Hiroshi Hamaya, "Half-Breed in the Orphanage of Harbin, China," 1940. Copyright Magnum Photos, Inc., New York.

Ihee's 1946 photograph of a couple slumped in an overgrown field outside the city a year after the bombing. The couple appears tired, but any injuries are invisible, and the city becomes a presence only through the caption.²¹ There were no depictions of Western soldiers in Asia, no representations of fighting on the continent nor any vignettes from island battlefields. It was as though East and West had never bled into the same soil, had never really touched.

The second narrative presented by the exhibition made Japan the central figure, a Japan divorced not only from "the West" but also from "the East" outside its

²¹ Recent discussions of the relationship between photographs and their captions (and text in general) include Mary Price, *The Photograph: A Strange, Confined Space* (Stanford, Calif., 1994); W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *The Language of Images* (Chicago, 1980); Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1986); and, most notably, Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago, 1994).

home islands. In avoiding images of Asia outside Japan, the exhibition reduced the war in this second narrative to an overwhelmingly civilian undertaking. It was a war of defense against an anonymous, seldom-glimpsed enemy. Not only were there no representations of Western soldiers in the East but also virtually no Asian military men of any nationality and certainly no Asian men fighting each other. Only one member of the Japanese armed forces was pictured in the entire exhibition; this airman stands proudly in his clean uniform before a Douglas DC-4 in Yagi Osamu's 1941 portrait "Fighter of the Air." The staged photograph of the unnamed hero presents him and his aircraft against a blank sky without any context, as though the DC-4 were parked before a photographer's screen.

Since, with this one exception, the exhibition avoided representations of Japanese military men, its non-Western narrative highlights Japanese women, brave, beautiful, and clean.²² They serve as military nurses, as volunteer steel workers, and as correspondents in orchestrated propaganda shots. (See Figure 5.) In slightly less sanitized images, Hayashi Tadahiko depicts women lined up in a neighborhood association fire brigade in 1941 and women maneuvering lumber down a muddy forest road in 1943.²³ (See Figure 6.) Together, these photographs present a heavily gendered rendition of wartime Japan as a woman's world. Only after the war ends do Japanese men appear in any number, smoking in the Asakusa district of Tokyo, selling books, and standing in unemployment lines.²⁴

The conflagration of World War II subsides for Japan with Hamaya Hiroshi's quiet "Sun on the Day the War Ended, 1945," in which the sun alone fills the frame, and Morooka Koji's 1946 photograph of a sunlit city street with strolling couples titled "Peace Is Restored, Tokyo." We do not see any of the subject matter from which Japanese photographers made powerful images in the aftermath of the war: returning army personnel waiting to be discharged, Occupation soldiers patronizing strip joints and shoeshine boys, Japanese civilians scavenging through rubble.²⁵ The main focus is on the reconstruction of urban dwellings and shops, as in Nakagawa Kazuo's four-part series *Ginza Recovery*, which charts the rapid rebuilding of downtown Tokyo in 1944, 1945, 1946, and 1947.

The duality of the exhibition narrative is enhanced by the choice of "the forties" as its frame of reference. In a country where several alternative methods of calculating time exist, issues of dating are never entirely neutral. The concept of "the forties" relies on a system of dating imported from the West in the 1870s rather than on the official Japanese method of measuring years by imperial reigns, in which each enthronement resets the calendar at year 1. During the war, dates were

²² It has been argued that during the war the Imperial House was presented to the Japanese public in a particularly feminine guise, one of motherly concern for the nation, in order to enhance its appeal. See Kanō Mikiyo, "'Omigokoro' to 'hahagokoro': 'Yasukuni no haha' o umidasu mono," in Kanō Mikiyo, ed., *Josei to tennōsei* (Tokyo, 1979). See also T. Fujitani's discussion of the emperor and gender during the war in *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996).

²³ Domon Ken, "Young Nurse, Red Cross Hospital, Azabu, Tokyo" (1941); Hayashi Tadahiko, "Line Up of Members of the Neighborhood Association" (1941).

²⁴ Kimura Ihee, "Asakusa Park, Tokyo" (1947) and "Booksellers' Shinbashi Area, Tokyo" (1948); Okumura Taikō, "Unemployed by the Bridge" (1949).

²⁵ Depictions of these subjects can be found, for instance, in Kuwabara Kineo, *Tokyo: 1934-1993* (Tokyo, 1995); and Yoshida Jun, *Yoshida Jun shashin kan: Sengo fōkasu 293* [The Photographic Perspective of Yoshida Jun: Postwar Focus 293] (Tokyo, 1983).



FIGURE 5: Domon Ken, "Young Nurse, Red Cross Hospital, Azabu, Tokyo," 1941. Copyright Domon Ken Kinenkan, Sakata-shi, Japan. Courtesy of the Yokohama Museum of Art.

usually written according to the reign year of the emperor, a method of dating that continues in governmental forms and other official papers today.²⁶ Alternatively, the Japanese Empire also took 660 BCE as its inaugural year, marking its calendar from the arrival of the first emperor of Japan, grandson of the sun goddess Amaterasu. Through this calculation, Japan celebrated the year 2600 in 1940. With these options before it, had the Yokohama Museum wished to convey a different history, it might have mounted an exhibition, for instance, on the Showa teens, covering 1935 to 1945. In choosing the temporal frame of "the forties," the curator used time as an interpretive device, ensuring that war was balanced with peace and

²⁶ The Showa era began in 1926 (Showa 1) and ended with the death of Hirohito in 1989. The current era, Heisei, then began.



FIGURE 6: Hayashi Tadahiko, "Carrying out the Timber, Futatsui, Yoneshiro-river, Akita," 1943. Copyright Hayashi Yoskikatsu, Tokyo. Courtesy of the Yokohama Museum of Art.

"the West" was balanced with Japan, obscuring the empire's long engagement on the Asian continent.²⁷

In sum, the images presented at Yokohama created a double story of Western aggression and Japanese innocence, Western shame and Japanese recovery, and the abiding beauty of Western (primarily American) landscapes and the immemorial loveliness of Japanese traditions. It was a tale underscored by the dichotomies of male and female and of nature and culture.²⁸ But definite as these presences were, they also conjured up absences. Where were the pictures of Koreans, South Asians, Okinawans, Nazis, Jews, Russians, Chinese,²⁹ and many others who might have complicated the neat oppositions on which this bifurcated tale rested? Where were Japan's leaders, Japan's soldiers, and the occupying Americans? These invisible images crowded the blank spaces on the museum walls; the exhibition seemed

²⁷ To this day, issues of calculating time remain controversial both in indicating the span of the war by what it is called—the Pacific War, the Fifteen Year War, the Greater East Asian War, or World War II—and in how to date official documents. See, for instance, Ienaga Saburō, *The Pacific War, 1931–1945* (New York, 1978), xiii–xiv.

²⁸ The link forged here and elsewhere between women and (Japanese) culture as opposed to men and nature undermines the assumption of several American scholars that the association between women and nature is universal. See, for instance, the statements of Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford, Calif., 1974); and Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York, 1979).

²⁹ The only exception to the exclusion of Chinese is Henri Cartier-Bresson, "Shanghai" (1949), depicting refugees from the Chinese civil war.

almost overwhelmed by possibilities foregone. In short, *Photography in the 1940s* remembered, but it remembered with deliberate selectivity.

ALTHOUGH CURATOR KURAISHI SHINO may have set out to convey the “serious political confusion” of the period, confusion seemed little in evidence in the expurgation of all images of Japanese militarism, colonialism, and occupation. Elsewhere, such absences might have occasioned comment and even public outcry. Imagine a German photography exhibition, especially one at a major public institution, claiming to represent the political situation of the 1940s with virtually no images of Nazis; imagine an American documentary on the 1960s without reference to Vietnam, political assassinations, or the civil rights movement. But the Yokohama exhibition, while well attended, elicited no major reviews, much less any protest. Accustomed as we have become in the United States to viewing museums and memorials as the battlefields of competing historical interpretations, it is perhaps the lack of controversy in response to *Photography in the 1940s* that most challenges us to understand its context.

For many Japanese, the aporia that seemed so glaring, at least to this American viewer, may have hardly registered. Especially before the death of wartime Emperor Hirohito in 1989, reluctance to remember the 1930s and 1940s was keen. The grandparents who never spoke of wartime or occupation experiences, the whitewashed textbooks read by children, the government officials who carefully expunged wartime images from the arena of public discussion and stridently resisted Asian demands for apology and recompense all conspired to make forgetting easy.³⁰ For many Japanese people, the past remains simply past and irrelevant to their current lives.³¹ As I have already noted, Tokyo-area photography curators other than Kuraishi found it simple enough to avoid all reference to the war in the summer of 1995.³²

³⁰ The Ministry of Education banned a textbook series written by historian Ienaga Saburō in part because of the photographic illustrations he had chosen. These photographs—captioned “Air-raid on the Mainland,” “Wartime Manners and Customs,” “Damages of the War” (showing a one-armed veteran begging), and “The Atomic Bomb and Hiroshima”—were rejected, said the ministry, because “only dark pictures are included and on the whole the impression is too dark.” See Ienaga Saburō, “The Historical Significance of the Japanese Textbook Suit,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 2 (Fall 1970): 9. For other discussions of the resistance to remembering the war, see Norma Field, *In the Realm of the Dying Emperor* (New York, 1991); Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York, 1994); and Ienaga, *Pacific War*.

³¹ Although the benefit of remembering past wrongs (whether suffered or perpetrated) is seldom questioned outright, Timothy Garton Ash points out that, “historically, the advocates of forgetting are numerous and weighty.” Ash, “The Truth about Dictatorship,” *New York Review of Books* (February 19, 1998): 35. In Japan, many progressives and academics as well as ordinary citizens and government officials opted for willed amnesia and ignorance of the war and wartime atrocities as a way to move forward without recriminations. See Yoshida Yutaka, *Nihon no sensō-kan: Sengōshi no nakano henyō* [Japanese Views on the War: Changes in Postwar History] (Tokyo, 1995). Even in Japanese veteran groups, some of those who wished to discuss their military experience have been dissuaded on the basis that it “has nothing to do with us anymore,” and the value of forgetfulness has been emphasized. Philip Brator, “History Put on Back Burner But Front-line Tales Remember,” *Japan Times* (August 20, 1998).

³² The atomic bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki escape the general amnesia on the war and are much more frequently and openly discussed and represented in the visual arts. Although photographs of the immediate aftermath of those events are rare because of the scale of the destruction and subsequent Occupation censorship, photographer Yamahata Yōsuke carried his camera around

On the other hand, in the 1990s, what might be termed a "memory shift" has accompanied the "regime shift" in Japan's political economy described by political scientist T. J. Pempel.³³ Willful amnesia about wartime activities is a less plausible stance than it used to be, and indeed, as Australian historian Gavan McCormack argues, "the question of responsibility for the war that ended half a century ago becomes more pressing for Japan" rather than less.³⁴ Some grandparents who never brought themselves to speak of the war with the younger members of their families now relate their experiences on a web site created by the "Computer Ōbāchan no Kai" (Society of Computer-Literate Grannies).³⁵ The Asahi newspaper and publishing company has created several forums for people who wish to write about their war experiences, most recently an open-ended newspaper series titled "The Torment of Memory," which solicits stories from former soldiers of the imperial army.³⁶ Television shows have explored aspects of the war as well. Controversy over how to represent Korean and other non-Japanese dead has disturbed the tranquility of Hiroshima Peace Park, and similar problems of representation have been raised at war memorials in Okinawa after decades of silence.

On the official level, each Japanese prime minister since 1993 has intoned "deep remorse" on the August 15 anniversary of the war's end. Partly due to the lawsuits initiated in Tokyo courts in the early 1990s by Asian victims pressing claims for apology and compensation, it has become less easy (though not impossible) to deny outright the most gruesome aspects of the war—the massacres at Nanking and elsewhere,³⁷ the use of chemical and biological weapons,³⁸ human experimentation

Nagasaki following the blast. American curator Christopher Beaver organized an exhibition of these images, "Nagasaki Journey: The Photography of Yōsuke Yamahata, August 10, 1945," which opened in Nagasaki in August 1995 and toured New York, San Francisco, and Washington. Other Japanese photographers who have taken the aftermath of bombings as their subject include Shomei Tōmatsu and Domon Ken.

³³ T. J. Pempel, "Regime Shift: Japanese Politics in a Changing World Economy," in "Symposium on Continuity and Change in Heisei Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 23 (Summer 1997): 333–62.

³⁴ Gavan McCormack, "The Japanese Movement to 'Correct' History," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars: Textbook Nationalism, Citizenship, and War, Comparative Perspectives* 30 (April–June 1998): 16.

³⁵ "Computer Ōbāchan no Kai" started its web site in early August 1998. Their home page (in Japanese), called "August 15, as We Remember It," contains photographs from the 1940s and can be found on the World Wide Web at www.setagaya.net/jijibaba8-15/.

³⁶ Letters from an earlier series have been translated in Frank B. Gibney, ed., *Senso: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War; Letters to the Editor of the Asahi Shimbun*, Beth Cary, trans. (Armonk, N.Y., 1995).

³⁷ In May 1998, members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) visited the memorial to the victims of the Nanking Massacre for the first time. While the leader of the group, senior deputy secretary general of the LDP Nonaka Hiromu, acknowledged the "scar" of Nanking as "an abnormal incident in an abnormal age," other members of his party criticized the trip. The Nanking Massacre is one of the most controversial issues of the war. The Japanese government has strongly condemned as inaccurate Iris Chang's book, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York, 1997).

³⁸ In accordance with an international treaty to ban chemical weapons, the Japanese government has committed itself to disposing of the chemical weapons it left in China after the war by 2007. It estimates that 700,000 chemical shells remain; China puts the number at 2 million. "Japan's Chemical Weapons in China: Arms Disposal to Cost ¥100 Billion," *Japan Times* (August 14, 1998). For a fuller description of the wartime use of these weapons, see Sheldon H. Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932–45, and the American Cover-up* (London, 1994).

in Unit 731,³⁹ and the system of sexual slavery. In 1996, Ministry of Education officials, once so adamant that textbooks present the Asian war in the mildest terms possible, permitted mention of the military sex slaves known as “comfort women.”⁴⁰ From the perspective of Japan’s fiercest critics, especially its Asian victims, this “memory shift” appears belated, prevaricating, and self-interested, but it has, nonetheless, changed the dynamic of recollection in Japan.⁴¹

AS WITH ANY RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION, *Photography in the 1940s* is an artifact of contemporary possibilities for historical practice as well as a repository of history. The very existence of the exhibition promoted the tentative shift toward recollection outlined above, but that still leaves the pressing question of exactly what conception of the nation’s past and its current identity was projected by this particular collection of images. Why did the Yokohama Museum of Art assign itself the task of resuscitating wartime images and then refuse to show images of Japan’s militarism? Why focus on the 1940s and then never hint that Japan was occupied by foreign troops for half that period? Why indict the West but not in relation to harm done to Japan? In other words, how are we to understand the history that *Photography in the 1940s* created?

The first possible answer to these questions might be a simple explanation involving the availability of photographs themselves. It could be argued that no pictures of Japanese military subjects, for instance, met Kuraishi’s standard of “aesthetic sophistication.” Of the more overtly topical photographs selected for the exhibition, most conform to a modernist documentary aesthetic institutionalized in American museum photography departments since the 1960s. Others, such as Domon Ken’s conventionally stylized propaganda photograph, “Young Nurse, Red Cross Hospital, Azabu, Tokyo” (Figure 5), may have been included less for reasons of aesthetic sophistication than the photograph’s now canonical status.⁴² However, by either criterion, there was a wealth of photographs available, taken by Japanese amateur, press, and military photographers and by non-Japanese all over Asia as

³⁹ Morimura Seiichi, *Akuma no Hōshoku* [The Devil’s Gluttony] (Tokyo, 1982); Hal Gold, *Unit 731 Testimony: Japan’s Wartime Human Experimentation Program* (Tokyo, 1996).

⁴⁰ As historians Laura Hein and Mark Selden point out, the permissible sentence or two referring to “comfort women” in middle school textbooks hardly fulfills the demands of “critics sympathetic to the comfort women [who] have censured these descriptions as inadequate for their failure to discuss, still less condemn, the system.” Hein and Selden, “Learning Citizenship from the Past: Textbook Nationalism, Global Context, and Social Change,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 30 (April–June 1998): 10. See also Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Jūgun Ianfu* [The Comfort Women] (Tokyo, 1995); and “Special Issue: The Comfort Women; Colonialism, War, and Sex,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 5 (Spring 1997).

⁴¹ Pragmatic apologies have helped strengthen relations with other Asian countries, but the overt instrumentality of some statements of remorse undermines their effectiveness. For instance, in August 1998, newly appointed Minister of Agriculture Nakagawa Shōichi retracted his statement that there was no evidence that women were forced to serve as sex slaves by the Japanese armed forces, saying that such comments might have negative effects on the ongoing fisheries talks between Japan and South Korea. “Nakagawa Retracts Sex Slave Comments,” *Japan Times* (August 1, 1998): 2.

⁴² The exhibition includes Capa’s “D-Day,” a photograph whose borderline legibility (induced, famously, by a nervous darkroom technician) blurs the issue of aesthetic sophistication. This image assumed its iconic power as a relic of D-Day itself but now influences aesthetic standards precisely through its iconic power; the potency of comparable Japanese photographs will depend in part on the extent of their cultural circulation.

Japanese forces advanced.⁴³ A more complex sense of how standards of aesthetic sophistication are created would admit a broader class of photographic imagery, including the poster art and magazine graphics that helped mobilize Japan's wartime population.⁴⁴

The second possible explanation for the absent images might be that none existed in the Yokohama Museum's permanent collection, from which this exhibition was drawn. Given that the Yokohama photography collection is growing steadily, the museum could have obtained such pictures, had it wished to do so.⁴⁵ Even more to the point, a very different story was already available within the resources of the museum as of 1995. Its extensive Robert Capa collection alone could have provided images of Jews and of Nazis. Capa's photograph of a leveled Warsaw could have thrown the destruction of Tokyo into relief; home-front suffering could have appeared universal and not just a Japanese phenomenon with Capa's portrayals of Londoners during the Blitz. Had the time span been extended back to 1938, Capa's pictures of China could have conveyed a fuller story, revealing something of Japanese aggression on the continent. In short, neither aestheticism nor availability accounts for the twists in Yokohama's tale. The choice of images at Yokohama was not, I think, determined by necessity but rather by interpretations of the war and of appropriate representations of Japan's national history.

In turning to the possible interpretations guiding this exhibition, we enter a field sabotaged, almost literally, by secret dangers. I refer not to the explosive issues of intentionality and audience response or to the problems of museum-created histories that charge debates in the American and European contexts. Rather, in Japanese museums and galleries, ultranationalist activity, seemingly supported by the police, circumscribes what can be shown without controversy.⁴⁶ Those rare works that concern the war or the emperor system (*tennōsei*) draw ultranationalists' ire and their blaring sound trucks. Art is destroyed, artists threatened, museums harassed, the police visit at midnight, and exhibitions are closed.⁴⁷

⁴³ Important examples of Japanese war photography can be found in Kuwabara Kineo, ed., *Nihon shashin zenshū*, Vol. 4: *Sensō no kioku* [Memories of War] (Tokyo, 1987); and in *Nihon shashinka kyōkai, Nihon shashin shi, 1840–1945* [The History of Japanese Photography, 1840–1945] (Tokyo, 1971), trans. by John W. Dower, ed., as *A Century of Japanese Photography* (New York, 1980). See also John Taylor, *War Photography: Realism in the British Press* (London, 1991); and the Time-Life series *World War II*, esp. Arthur Zich, ed., *The Rising Sun* (Alexandria, Va., 1977); and Rafael Steinberg, ed., *Island Fighting* (Alexandria, 1978). The latter volume contains a striking photograph of Japanese troops dressed in grass skirts and black face by Yanagida Fumio, 10–11.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, the carefully composed image by Kanamaru Shigene and Yamawaki Iwao of two determined Japanese soldiers coming over the edge of a trench, one heaving a grenade, with a trampled American flag in the foreground, "Uchiteshi tomamu" [Ever Onward] (1943), or the graphics in illustrated magazines of the period such as *Nippon*, *Hōmu Raifu* [Home Life], *Manchuria Graph*, and *Front*.

⁴⁵ Comparison between the exhibited photographs and the *Yokohama bijutsukan shozō hinmoku roku II: Shashin* [Catalogue of the Collection, Yokohama Museum of Art, II: Photographs] (Yokohama, 1989) shows that the museum continues to make acquisitions of this type of photography.

⁴⁶ Positions along a political spectrum are, of course, always relative. The term "ultranationalism" (*chōkokkashugi*) was used by Japan's leading twentieth-century political theorist Maruyama Masao in discussing far right-wing activities, and it has become the customary term for describing such groups by those who disapprove of them. On the other hand, historian Hata Inuhiko of Nihon University used a different scale in making the following distinctions in relation to the 1937 Nanking Massacre: "conservatives" consider it an "illusion," "radicals" call it a "massacre," and moderates believe it is somewhere between the two. "Nanking Debate a Rallying Point," *Japan Times* (August 19, 1998): 3.

⁴⁷ Gallery owners have been visited late at night by plainclothes policemen and advised not to open

These far right-wing groups are no small handful of malcontents but number about 120,000 in 980 organizations across the nation. Their ties to particular politicians and bureaucrats are indistinct but potent. For instance, when an ultranationalist group objected to the Toyama Museum of Modern Art's acquisition of Ōura Nobuyuki's "Holding Perspectives," a print series with images of Emperor Hirohito, the Toyama regional assembly intervened by deeming the art offensive and publicly questioning the judgment of museum officials. All planned Ōura exhibitions were canceled and the catalogues for the exhibition burned after a Shinto priest tore up the museum's display copy.⁴⁸ In most cases, the impulse of the police, gallery owners, museum officials, and even artists with avant-garde proclivities is to avoid confrontation and expunge from view the stray chrysanthemum (symbol of the imperial family) or offending reference to Chinese and Korean comfort women. Artist Shimada Yoshiko, quite exceptionally, fought back when the Toyama Museum succumbed to right-wing complaints about Ōura's work by sending the ashes of one of her own paintings in protest to museum authorities. The museum returned the ashes. Shimada reports that it is easier to live outside Japan because her own work is critical of the emperor system and sympathetic to the plight of the comfort women.⁴⁹ Such protective self-censorship and lack of law enforcement leaves the art world paralyzed to resist ultranationalist pressure.

Given this threatening atmosphere, the staff of the Yokohama Museum did not, could not, operate without constraint in choosing images for an exhibition touching on the vexed subject of the war. The curator willingly entered the fraught public sphere where incompatible senses of Japanese national identity, some supported by vicious nationalists, compete for recognition. Although he did not choose to engage such controversial issues as the guilt of the emperor, the ruthlessness of the military, or the nation's dedication to war, he also refused the safety of silence. In these circumstances, *Photography in the 1940s* might be perceived as an act of courage. On the other hand, it proceeded very gingerly down the path of memory. A tense ambiguity, perhaps the frustrating consequence of subconscious self-censorship, connected its juxtaposed images. Positioned against the competing

exhibitions, as happened with Kitagawa Yūji's exhibition in Gen Gallery in June 1993. Later, the police admitted the visits but denied suggesting that the exhibition be closed. E. Patricia Tsurumi, "Censored in Japan: Taboo Art," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 26 (1994): 66–70. Nor are the visual arts the only ones censored in this powerful way. For instance, "Sevuntiin" [Seventeen], written by Ōe Kenzaburō, concerns the October 1960 assassination of Asanuma Inejirō, chair of the Socialist Party, by Yamaguchi Otoyā, a seventeen-year-old right-wing fanatic who committed suicide three weeks after his arrest. Ōe's story, published in two parts in the literary magazine *Bungakukai* (January–February 1961), earned him death threats and harassment from the extreme right, especially Dai Nippon Aikokutō's leader Akao Bin, who had been Yamaguchi's mentor. This story has never been republished in Japan after its controversial first appearance, and foreign rights to translation have never been granted even though Ōe was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Luk Van Haute, "Young and Politically Incorrect: Ōe Kenzaburō's Early Marginal Heros," in Bjarke Frellesvig and Roy Starrs, eds., *Japan and Korea: Contemporary Studies* (Aarhus, 1997), 104. For another instance of right-wing attacks against literary arts, this one ending in a bloody attack on a publisher's family, see John Whittier Treat, "Beheaded Emperors and the Absent Figure in Contemporary Japanese Literature," *PMLA* (January 1994): 100–15.

⁴⁸ Nancy Shalala, "Censorship Silences Japanese Artists," *Asian Art News* (September–October 1994): 62–67; and Shalala, "Hidden Terrors Put Gag on Art World," *Japan Times* (July 10, 1994).

⁴⁹ The Ota Gallery in Ebisu, Tokyo, continues to represent Shimada, and Mr. Ota kindly provided background information on the problems faced by artists such as Shimada and Ōura.

senses of Japanese nationhood and history outside the museum, the exhibition can be interpreted as having given shape to three radically different forms of national identity: Japan as a nation formed through a history of innocence and resistance, Japan as a nation inviolable in its ahistorical essence, and Japan as a nation engaged in traumatic self-discovery through engagement with the Other, a Japan that finds itself in the mirror of the West.

The first possible mode of national identity emerges from reading the exhibition as directly as possible and taking Kuraishi at his word: he sought to confront the events of the 1940s and convey the experience of the Japanese people. The images he presented depicted a people swept away by the tide of war, a war visited upon them not so much by the West as by some unnamed natural force, although the West, arguably, was analogized to nature obliquely through many photographs, particularly those of Ansel Adams. Indeed, on close examination, many of the images convey the impression of Japanese people being driven away from culture into nature: women into the forests as recruits to take over logging operations, the couple into the field far outside Hiroshima, the sun itself on the day the war ends. Against a natural disaster of such magnitude, little resistance was possible, or so this collection may have suggested. For the general populace, the war was less action than stunned reaction.

In these circumstances, the only possible antiwar stance for practicing photographers may have been what historian Ienaga Saburō places under the rubric passive resistance, the refusal to participate enthusiastically in the war. The exhibition brochure briefly suggests this view when it mentions that some photographers, rather than be absorbed into the propaganda machine, "consciously became engrossed in Japanese traditions and conventions" and used their mastery of "the theory and practice of documentary photography" to record objects and events unrelated to the war. They tried to drop out, tried to find a place of refuge from contemporary Japan in the customary Japan of the rural hinterlands.⁵⁰

Hamaya Hiroshi is a prime exemplar of this strategy.⁵¹ Traveling to distant Niigata, far from Japanese military, industrial, and governmental centers, Hamaya focused his lens on folk customs. With a longing eye, his camera recorded an undulating line of boys carrying torches through a snowy night in a celebration designed to chase away imaginary evil birds and lift mid-winter spirits.⁵² (See Figure 7.) The Fire Festival for the guardian deity of travel also captured Hamaya's attention.⁵³ But during the same year, 1940, when these photographs were taken, Hamaya left Niigata to go to Japanese-occupied Harbin, where, treading on conquered soil, he photographed the "half-breed" orphan whom we see later in the exhibition. Should the Harbin series be viewed as an act of resistance or as an act of complicity? Does the receptivity to circumstances under which documentary

⁵⁰ Kuraishi does not refer directly to Ienaga's thesis in the exhibition brochure, but his conception of "dropping out" is similar to Ienaga's concept. Ienaga, *Pacific War*, 204–08.

⁵¹ Okatsuka Akiko, curator at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, also discusses Hamaya's career and his decision to flee wartime work in *Nihon kindai shashin no seiritsu to tenkai* [The Founding and Development of Modern Photography in Japan] (Tokyo, 1995), 25–26. This exhibition ran from January 21 to March 26, 1995. I am grateful to Ms. Okatsuka for providing background information on the pressures faced by public art museums in Japan.

⁵² Hamaya Hiroshi, "Boys Singing to Drive Evil Birds Away, Niigata" (1940).

⁵³ Hamaya Hiroshi, "Fire Festival for the Traveler's Guardian Deity" (1940).



FIGURE 7: Hiroshi Hamaya, "Boys Singing to Drive Evil Birds Away, Niigata," Japan, 1940. Copyright Magnum Photos, New York.

photographers necessarily work protect them from charges of active perpetration of the events around them or does it implicate them?⁵⁴

The same question arises with the work of Domon Ken. His images of a Kyoto potter's wheel and a Bunraku puppet show may evoke timeless custom and suggest passive resistance to the war, but they are part of a body of work that also includes propaganda shots used to rally the nation.⁵⁵ The exhibition forthrightly included both aspects of Domon's work just as it did Hamaya's. Perhaps, recognizing the complexity of competing loyalties to state, society, family, and self, the exhibition implied that even inconsistent acts of non-engagement with the war should be lauded as heroic, considering the nation's general commitment to total war. As curator, Kuraishi may even have been intimating that the same was true for his own

⁵⁴ The role of documentary photographers has been praised and attacked on these grounds. Don McCullin, an active practitioner, defends documentary work saying, "I hate carrying cameras, they disfigure me. I carry a conscience." McCullin, "Notes by a Photographer," in Emile Meijer and Joop Swart, eds., *The Photographic Memory* (London, 1987), 26. In contrast, critic Allan Sekula dismisses the efforts of documentary photographers as a cruel means by which "the oppressed are granted a bogus Subjecthood." Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," in Victor Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography* (London, 1982), 109. More subtly, W. J. T. Mitchell argues that the aesthetic, ethical, and political goals of a documentary project may be ultimately irreconcilable. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 294–95.

⁵⁵ Domon Ken's work was represented by four images: "Head of Anira, Muro-ji" (temple statuary, Anira is one of the twelve Yakushi generals) (1940); "Potter (Potter's Wheel), Kyoto" (1940); "Matsuo and Chiyo, Scene from the Bunraku Puppet Show 'Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagami'" (part of a series, 1940–43); "Young Nurse, Red Cross Hospital, Azabu, Tokyo" (1941).

act of noncompliance with the consensus of silence on the war by photography museums that summer.

The problem of interpreting *Photography in the 1940s* in this way is that the images of tradition created by Hamaya and Domon could have worked in the 1940s as passive resistance only in the context of a society whose energies were utterly devoted to the imperial cause. The gestures of these photographers attain the status of political opposition only if they are positioned against the backdrop of a dedicated populace sending its middle school students to work in bomb factories and its teenagers to die in suicide missions. In the Yokohama exhibition, however, we saw virtually none of this dedication to military victory. Without the purposeful activity of empire in the foreground, the images of traditional art and customs cannot appear to countermand the values of the state. Instead, their loveliness is absorbed by the nation at war: the quiet visage of a Buddhist statue melds with the quiet face of a military nurse. In not showing or not being able to show photographs documenting Japanese militarism, *Photography in the 1940s* transformed passive resistance into mere passivity. Without adequate context, the meaning of the images is transposed from the discourse of resistance to one of acquiescence.

Ironically, then, the constraint on exhibiting imperial and military images within art museums undermines the possibility of recollecting a legacy of innocence or passive resistance. If the deeds of Japan's military masters and enemies cannot be represented, the identity of the Japanese people cannot be understood as having emerged through resistance to those deeds. Indeed, on a more abstract level, the proposition that national identity emerges through the contingencies of time is itself undermined. In creating a consciously retrospective exhibition, the Yokohama Museum may have hoped to suggest that contemporary Japanese identity is rooted in history, that the nation is itself a historical artifact, the result of various decisions, events, and accidents that have impinged on its nature. The curator may have sought to present photographs that document moments of national becoming. In this effort, however, *Photography in the 1940s* fails. That which can be shown—the impotent innocence of the emperor's subjects and the timeless images of traditional arts and festivals—suggests not a nation formed through contingency and will but one best understood through some timeless aesthetic essence.

The sense of nationhood conveyed through this collection is that, whatever the war was, whatever natural forces beat against the nation, Japan remained inviolate. Postwar rebuilding spectacularly and rapidly reconstituted the physical basis of life, but in these postwar years as well the identity of the nation remained the same. The brush with American occupiers vanishes without trace. The cumulative image is of a Japan that transcends the eventfulness of history for an abiding cultural essence.

Despite the curator's stated purpose of creating a history through photographic images, the indirect pressures of ultranationalist censorship won out on two levels. Not only have many of the images of Japan's war been excised from public view, but the general concept that history is the medium through which national identity emerges has also been checked. Before the "memory shift" of the 1990s and even after, Japan's far right wing has sought to project an image of Japan in which national, state, and popular interests are identical, best represented in high art forms that de-emphasize contingency and idiosyncratic creativity. Traditional arts

such as kabuki and Nō, calligraphy and Japanese-style painting, lacquerware and ceramics garner large governmental subsidies, while those arts prizing individual expression or the role of chance are more suspect in that they hint at alternatives foregone and competing perspectives, only some of which can be identical with those of the state. Photographs, particularly when elevated within public museums, unless strictly dedicated to formalism or representative of trends in European and American art, threaten to shatter this ideal of Japan as a changeless culture.

In having the potential to suggest the nation's historicity by creating interactions between specific images from Japan's past and present-day viewers, photography exhibitions can promote what for the right wing is the subversive notion that national identity is always in a state of becoming.⁵⁶ Worse yet, from this perspective, if a viewer can interrogate the past on the museum wall, he or she might interrogate the policies of the present. The right-wing concept of national essence is not simply a conservative plea for the purity of the past but a contemporary polemic against democratic practices that foster respect for competing interests, constantly renegotiated through open political activity. It is not just a particular version of history but historicity itself, the necessary matrix of democracy, that becomes the core issue for the Yokohama exhibition and for the struggle over Japan's national identity in general.

BOTH OF THE INTERPRETATIONS of the Yokohama exhibition that I have presented so far—as proposing a mild national history for Japan and as resisting narrative history altogether—leave out a crucial element: the American and European photographs. My analysis of the form of Japanese nationhood represented in this exhibition has focused exclusively on the Japanese photographs, but this approach may be too simple, accepting a dichotomy that can be overcome. A third way of interpreting *Photography in the 1940s* might take its images of Western aggression and Western collaborators to stand in for obscured memories of Japanese brutality and national complicity. In this scenario, through sublimation and projection, Japan's aggressive past might be obliquely acknowledged.

Though implausible, this reading of the exhibition can be supported in several ways. For instance, one could argue that *Photography in the 1940s* chose not to portray the West as a direct enemy of Japan, thereby easing the way for Japanese viewers to identify with the perpetrators of violence. The right wing has claimed that the Fifteen Year War was justified due to European and American colonialism in Asia—so *Photography in the 1940s* chose not to represent Westerners in Asia. In the images on the walls, the brutality of Westerners is frequently directed at other Westerners, a fact that may recall the terrible treatment suffered by Japanese army recruits at the hands of their own officers. Seen in this light, the exhibition contained not two separate narratives—one of the West and another of Japan—but a single narrative in which the West becomes the subconscious past of a guilty nation. When the narrative required violence, our eyes were directed westward, and

⁵⁶ I have discussed the resistance to photography on this basis in "Raw Photographs and Cooked History."

when the narrative depicted the home front, we saw Japanese women and culture, but, by this third reading, *Photography in the 1940s* was ultimately one story of war with innocence and brutality on all sides.

Construed in this way, *Photography in the 1940s* defies a new right-wing approach to history currently being urged by groups such as Jiyūshugi Shikan Kenkyūkai (Liberal View of History Study Group) and Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai (Society for Making New History Textbooks).⁵⁷ These groups, despite organizational and intellectual ties to the form of ultranationalism described above, aggressively revise history not merely to mask failures (although they seek to do that as well) but to affirm what they prefer to call the Greater East Asian War as an act of self-defense and purposeful liberation of Koreans, Chinese, and other peoples suffering under American and European colonialism.⁵⁸ Far from lamenting the defeat of Japan's noble aims, this version of history views the sacrifices of the Fifteen Year War as providing the foundation for Japan's postwar prosperity. In short, theirs is a tale of pure national triumph. Although such retrospective defenses of Japan's war aims are not entirely new,⁵⁹ the orchestrated efforts of these "study groups" and their aggressive embrace of history as the battlefield of national identity must be seen as a response to the general shift toward recollection in the 1990s and indeed as part of it.⁶⁰

In keeping with the "memory shift" within Japan and recognizing that visual media serve wide audiences as "theaters of memory," the Jiyūshugi Shikan Kenkyūkai and its affiliates vigorously promote their message not only through books⁶¹ but through television,⁶² cartoons,⁶³ and films such as *Pride: Unmei no toki*

⁵⁷ These national organizations were formed in 1995 and 1996 respectively by University of Tokyo Professor of Education Fujioka Nobukatsu.

⁵⁸ Fujioka Nobukatsu insists that the issue of the so-called comfort women is "a grand conspiracy for the destruction of Japan" and a falsehood that portrays Japan as a "lewd, foolish, and rabid race without peer in the world." See Gavan McCormack's discussion of Fujioka's views on this issue in "Japanese Movement to 'Correct' History," 18–19.

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Hayashi Fusao, *Daitōa sensō kōtei ron* [Affirming the Greater East Asian War], parts 1 and 2 (Tokyo, 1965); *Nihon e no keikoku* [A Warning to Japan] (Tokyo, 1969); and *Hayashi Fusao chosaku shu* [An Anthology of the Writings of Hayashi Fusao], 3 vols. (Tokyo, 1968–69). Historian Hayashi's argument that Japan went to war to liberate Asia met with immediate rebuttals and denunciation.

⁶⁰ The forces within Japan working to revive history have responded actively to this new threat. Historian Nakamura Masanori points out that articles in *Rekishi hyōron* [History Criticism], *Kyōiku* [Education], *Sekai* [The World], *Kikan: Senso sekinin kenkyū* [Quarterly War Responsibility Research], and *Shūkan kin'yōbi* [Friday Weekly] have denounced Jiyūshugi Shikan Kenkyūkai, although Nakamura also suggests that "historians, politicians, middle- and high-school teachers were slow to react." Attempts by Fujioka and his followers to have references to "comfort women" once again excised from textbooks have met with stout resistance within Japan, where over 200 petitions have been presented to city councils urging that these references be retained. Nakamura, "History Textbook Controversy and Nationalism," 28.

⁶¹ Best-selling books by Fujioka Nobukatsu have forcefully promoted this version of history. His best-known publication is the three-volume *Kyōkasho ga oshienai rekishi* [The History Not Taught in Textbooks] (Tokyo, 1996–97). His general themes are repeated in *Ojoku no kin-gendai shi: Ima, kokufuku no toki* [Disgraceful Modern History: Now, the Time of Recovery] (Tokyo, 1996). His attack on changes in the textbook coverage can be found in "'Jūgun ianfu' o chūgaku ni oshieru na" [Don't Teach Middle School Students about the "Military Comfort Women"], in Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho o tsukuru kai, ed., *Atarashii Nihon no rekishi ga hajimaru* [A New Japanese History Is Beginning] (Tokyo, 1997). Other well-placed academics who have supported his arguments include Hata Ikuhiko and Nishio Kanji.

⁶² The Asahi Television program "Asamade" [Live 'til Dawn] on February 1, 1997, featured members

(Pride: The Fatal Moment).⁶⁴ Nor has the power of museums to shape historical consciousness been ignored by this new brand of right-wing revisionism. For instance, in the spring of 1998, critics connected with Jiyūshugi Shikan Kenkyūkai and led by University of Tokyo professor Fujioka Nobukatsu forced the panel advising the governor of Tokyo on a city war museum to redraw its plans. These critics denounced as “masochistic” the original plan’s characterization of Tokyo as a city with military targets.⁶⁵ Although the new proposals for the museum continue to call for exhibitions at sites of former military facilities, all references to Tokyo as a military city have been dropped, and the space proposed for displays concerning the American bombing campaign (which killed an estimated 80,000 to 120,000 people) has been enlarged. In this proposed museum and in other media, the wartime history of Japan takes the form of righteous action in self-defense against the West and justified violence on behalf of other Asians. While the right-wing image of Japan discussed earlier deflected attention away from the past toward enduring cultural symbols and sought to remove the besmirching traces of time from the essence of national identity, the image of Japan molded by the new right is, by contrast, vibrantly historical. From its perspective, eventful narrative history can be revived as a basis of national unity, since memory bears no burden of shame or pain.

Seen against this aggressively triumphant vision, *Photography in the 1940s*, with its gentle portrayal of domestic Japan and strictly non-confrontational depiction of Allied violence, becomes a bulwark of moderation. If we further consider the exhibition as bridging the dichotomy between Japan and the West to create a single narrative, it becomes possible to read it as a plea for a new historical beginning, one that refuses to take the nation as the sole object of recollection. In keeping with this benign interpretation, *Photography in the 1940s* could be said to promote the transnational idea that a shared knowledge of terror and death forces us to recognize that no one nation stands alone: one nation’s history always entails the perspective of others. German historian Michael Geyer argues compellingly for this response to the shattering experience of war. He portrays the “commemoration of death as work on the bond of human solidarity, mindful of a genocidal past,” and insists that this commemoration is “a necessary element of the renewal of historical

of the study group attacking historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki as “sick” for his work on comfort women revealing the extent of the forced abductions and government complicity. See Yoshimi, *Jūgun Ianfu*.

⁶³ Cartoonist Kobayashi Yoshinori is a member of the movement, publishing a cartoon series supportive of its stance on Japanese history in the magazine *Sapio*.

⁶⁴ *Pride* (the original title was in English) depicts wartime Prime Minister General Tōjō Hideki as a hero vengefully hounded to death by the victorious Allies during the Tokyo trials that followed Japan’s defeat. Tsugawa Masahiko, the actor portraying Tōjō, and the film’s director, Itō Shunya, treated the film as an ideological as well as a commercial venture. The ¥1.5 billion production costs were underwritten by the president of a home construction company known for his links with right-wing groups. It was a box-office success and became the top-grossing Japanese-made film in the first six months of 1998. Among those defending it against a surge of protests from domestic and foreign groups, including an official protest from the Chinese government, was Hosokawa Ryūichirō, former managing editor of the major newspaper *Mainichi Shinbun*, who exonerated Japan from responsibility for the war with China by suggesting that this war was “started with a conspiracy engineered by Liu Shaoqi, a Chinese Communist subordinate of Mao Zedong.” Hosokawa, “Japanese Need a Good Dose of *Pride*,” *Japan Times* (June 2, 1998).

⁶⁵ “War Museum Plan Rephrased,” *Japan Times* (April 21, 1998).

consciousness, which will then be able to look back on the epoch of world wars as a passing era."⁶⁶ By this light, Japanese national identity and representations of that identity in photographic exhibitions will necessarily engage other nations and other images from around the world. In this sense, there can only be one story.

Despite its attractions as a psychoanalytic reading and its suggestion of human solidarity, this third interpretation of the Yokohama exhibition is, finally, implausible. The gulf between self and other—*gaijin*, outsiders, foreigners—that structures Japanese national consciousness is such that it is unlikely that many Japanese visitors recognized themselves in Robert Capa's soldiers or Edward Weston's female nude with a gas mask entitled "Civilian Defense" (1942). The notable dearth of images of Germans also betrays a reluctance to draw parallels between Japan and the part of the West to which Japan was allied during wartime. The "West" *in toto* remains foreign. As sociologist Kosaku Yoshino has argued, "Japanese identity is the anti-image of foreignness and, as such, can only be affirmed by formulating the images of the Other; namely, the West."⁶⁷ Even the catalogue of the Yokohama Museum's complete photographic holdings is organized along this principle: the first section devoted to Japanese photographers, the second labeled *Gaikoku sakka no shashin* (Photographs by Foreign Photographers).⁶⁸ Given the refusal to represent, let alone claim, the impulse toward brutality and annihilation as universally human, *Photography in the 1940s* did not, I believe, commemorate that painful decade in such a way that historical consciousness could be renewed on an altered basis of human solidarity. Instead, eventfulness, activity, and specific histories mark the images created by Europeans and Americans; the images by Japanese are quiet and still. These two collectivities stand opposed to one another without serving as mirrors of a universal humanity.

Photography in the 1940s changes hue as our understanding of its background changes. Against the right-wing urge to forget, it appears to have made a stand for the value of remembering; against the new right's triumphal vision of Japan's wartime aims, it appears to have been a mild antidote, offering the heroism of survival rather than that of noble liberators. At best, the exhibition was a modest act of historical representation, compelling principally in its precise calibration of the limits of historical consensus in Japan at the moment of its production. Just as the "regime shift" in Japan's political economy remains open-ended, so too the "memory shift" has yet to consolidate opinion on the role and nature of modern history. Certainly, *Photography in the 1940s* did not challenge the public to confront the harsher images of Japan's past. It did, however, present it with a few tools to participate in a democratic form of history making, if history is, as Raphael Samuel argues, "not the prerogative of the historian, nor even, as postmodernism contends, a historian's 'invention' . . . [but], rather, a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Michael Geyer, "The Place of the Second World War in German Memory and History," *Neo: New German Critique* 71 (Spring–Summer 1997): 40.

⁶⁷ Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry* (London, 1992), 11.

⁶⁸ As of 1989, the foreigners' section encompassed no East Asian and no South Asian photographers at all. *Yokohama bijutsukan shozō hinmoku roku II*.

⁶⁹ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 8.

MUCH AS IT SAYS ABOUT the current situation in Japan, *Photography in the 1940s* speaks to an issue that transcends the particularities of the exhibition, the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's surrender, and Japan itself. This larger issue is the problematic relationship of photography with time. As the Yokohama exhibition demonstrates, when art museums create visual histories, they necessarily mediate between whatever sense of time inheres within the images and the broader social conception of time and national history. In some circumstances, this mediation is relatively simple. Where nations understand themselves as entities that change through time, photography can seem naturally to mark history because it is assumed that the viewer, photographer, curator, and nation partake of the same quality of continuous, evolving time. In these conditions, documentary practices flourish, and photography in art museums can speak to aesthetic and political developments with ease. Where national identity has resisted temporality, as in Japan, the capacity of photography to mark time becomes subversive. Museums resist photography in general and documentary photography in particular.⁷⁰ In other words, these three elements—photography, temporality, and national identity—triangulate the space within which museum curators must work. In Japan, that space happens to be contested and relatively small. In the United States and Europe, where it is larger, the force of this triangulation is sometimes overlooked.

A brief examination of some critical perspectives on photography will reveal how variously photography's relation to time has been understood. Although the photography critics whom I will consider here, John Berger, Roland Barthes, and Siegfried Kracauer, do not directly address the question of how a nation's sense of time influences a photograph's relation to time, they represent the extraordinary range of views on photography and temporality. Berger, for instance, argues that a photograph *is*, in its very essence, a moment in time. He insists, "The true content of a photograph is invisible, for it derives from a play, not of form, but of time."⁷¹ For Berger, a photograph is analogous to the movement of a conductor's baton, more allied with music than with painting. Its rhythms are the temporal rhythms of modernity, the rhythms of a public eventfulness that is assumed to be universal and democratically accessible. For Berger, time is all of one substance—"the continuum" as he calls it—and every photograph gestures outside itself to this whole. "A photograph," he argues, "whilst recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what is not seen. It isolates, preserves and presents a moment taken from a continuum."⁷² Indeed, Berger insists, "every photograph is in fact a means of testing, confirming and constructing a total view of reality."⁷³ But to conceive as Berger does of photography's destination or effect as a total reality, we must elide the differences among individuals and various forms of collective audience—the nation, the global art world, citizens of Yokohama, subjects of the emperor. The

⁷⁰ For instance, according to its director, Ueki Hiroshi, the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, did not hold any photography exhibitions between 1974 and 1995. Instead of deploring this neglect of the medium, Ueki emphatically justifies the museum's lack of interest in his foreword to the catalogue of the first exhibition to break this pattern. Ueki, "Foreword," *Tokyo kokuritsu kindai bijutsukan to shashin 1953–1995*, 7.

⁷¹ John Berger, "Understanding a Photograph" [1974], in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, Conn., 1980), 293.

⁷² Berger, "Understanding a Photograph," 293.

⁷³ Berger, "Understanding a Photograph," 294.

identification between photography and continuous time makes the place and mode of consumption of an image insignificant.

Other critics see photographs as causing spasms in the linear flow of time. Roland Barthes in particular admires photography's capacity to render a unique moment repeatable: "What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially."⁷⁴ In calling the camera "a clock for seeing," Barthes is not underscoring some universal, rhythmic sense of time nor is he interested in public time. Instead, through Barthes' clock, the individual witnesses madness, disorder, and death; the camera is a clock that allows us, paradoxically, to see the irregularities of time.⁷⁵

In contrast to Berger, Barthes focuses on the problems of audience and place. He deliberately contrasts private delectation of the image with museum displays of photography, and finds the private experience far more compelling. Alone, Barthes sinks into an image, enjoying an intense private reverie. He tells us, "if I like a photograph, if it disturbs me, I linger over it."⁷⁶ Time stops, to be revisited again and again, becoming disordered. Because of this private intensity, Barthes claims, "society is concerned to tame the Photograph, to temper the madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at it."⁷⁷ Society does so in part by making photography into art, into a public icon. In the public space of a museum, the photographic image is regularized and subordinated to public control—or so Barthes argues.

But in Japan particularly, the opposite seems true. Private imagery appears to disturb society little. Marking family, school, vacation, and business events with snapshots is a private ritual nowhere more stylized than in Japan. Photographs of the deceased are routine elements of Buddhist memorial services. Pornographic photography circulates with remarkable frankness and lack of constraint. Making photography into a public art, however, lifts it from the ephemerality of daily life and places it in the extended realm of national experience and memory. Here, the viewer is no longer the individual or small group but the larger civic collectivity. In the public art museum, collections of photographs appear to comment on Japan's cultural form of nationalism. Rather than taming the photograph, as Barthes suggests, this displacement tempts madness of a public, not a private, sort. This museum photography, curated deliberately, threatens to recall not only a particular collective history but collective historicity as well. The contrast between Barthes' experience and the Japanese evidence illustrates that the relationship of photography to time cannot be understood without reference to the viewer's various subjectivities (including his or her nationality), each of which has its own sense of temporality and history.

German film critic Siegfried Kracauer presents yet a third view when he argues that the photograph has no inherent relation to the time. In a 1927 article, he points out that, although a photograph may *seem* to be "a representation of time," "time

⁷⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York, 1981), 4.

⁷⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 15.

⁷⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 99.

⁷⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 117.

is not part of the photograph.”⁷⁸ For Kracauer, a photograph does not preserve time; rather, time stands outside the image, transforming and, ultimately, diminishing and desiccating it. “If photography is a *function of the flow of time*,” he maintains, “then its substantive meaning will change depending upon whether it belongs to the domain of the present or to some phase of the past.” Eventually, a photograph is “emptied of life” as time passes, unless we work to resuscitate it.⁷⁹ In effect, Kracauer is arguing that the continued connection between an image and a moment in time, far from being natural, is the result of purposeful effort.

The problem of “the flow of time” haunted Kracauer, who returned to the issue almost forty years later when he began work on *History: The Last Things before the Last* (posthumously published). Deepening and altering his previous analysis, Kracauer declares that time is not “homogenous”; it is not a continuum. “Because of the antinomy at its core,” he argues, “time not only conforms to the conventional image of a flow but must also be imagined as being not such a flow. We live in a cataract of times.”⁸⁰ If this is so, a photograph never represents a simple beat in the even, universal temporal flow, as Berger would have it. Instead, the practice of photography—and of history—must grapple precariously with heterogeneous forms of time. While for Berger, time is a string of notes in a public concert and for Barthes, the delicious yet disturbing moments of private intenseity, for Kracauer, time, both public and private, is a towering waterfall, a jarring cataract of currents, each flowing at a different rate and a different temperature. From Kracauer’s perspective, neither photography nor history can grasp the whole structure of this elusive, fractured reality. Kracauer believes neither in a “total reality” nor in the ability of the word or image to refer to that whole. Instead, Kracauer insists, both history and photography are inherently provisional, redeeming transient phenomena from oblivion and allowing us to “think *through* things, not above them when, and only when, we contend with the cataract.”⁸¹

If, as Kracauer argues, photographers and historians both have contingent relationships to heterogeneous time, it follows that curators working with photographs to create histories also practice a contingent craft: they are tightrope walkers across the roaring waterfall. It is not just the curator’s own views and the photographers’ aesthetic and historical materials but also the outlook of a transient public audience that must be brought together to create that fragile compound: the meaningful exhibition. How the civic collectivity understands itself in relation to time will influence how photography exhibitions function within the public sphere. Kracauer is not interested in national identity per se nor specifically in the idea of atemporality within his cataract of times, although he does speak of “‘pockets’ and voids amidst these temporal currents.”⁸² Nevertheless, his insistence on time’s multiplicity and discontinuity provides a means of understanding the competing ideas of history in contemporary Japan and elsewhere. The idea of a “cataract of

⁷⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” rpt. in *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Spring 1993): 424.

⁷⁹ Kracauer, “Photography,” 429.

⁸⁰ Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (1969; rpt. with new preface, Princeton, N.J., 1995), 199. Kracauer’s argument against the homogeneity and continuity of time directly contradicts Berger’s view.

⁸¹ Kracauer, *History*, 192.

⁸² Kracauer, *History*, 199.

times" illuminates the way in which that nation can appear to conform simultaneously to the regular rhythms of modern development, to a sense of collectivity that transcends the flow of time, and to a unique and glorious beat of its own. Time thus becomes the matrix of the tension among various forms of modernity and postmodernity in contemporary Japan. Recent photography exhibitions convey this tension with particular force. Each curator must negotiate the multiple senses of time that are currently part of the Japanese identity.

The point I want to stress is this: neither photography, nor national identity, nor time is a stable element. Photography can chronicle public time, refer only to private memories, or suppress temporality in favor of strict formalism. Collectivities, national and otherwise, can share global chronologies and structures, or they can mark their differences in time and in form. Time can serve as the denominator of national development, or it can be excluded from accounts of national essence. Stable definitions of these elements are possible only in particular circumstances where ideology deftly masks its own assumptions. What the exhibition at Yokohama suggests is how precariously these three elements cohere in an atmosphere where fundamental questions about history are being raised. The triangulation between photography, national identity, and time is what makes photography exhibitions in Japan today so charged with possibilities. This triangulation makes curating photography a political as well as an aesthetic act, and it allows institutions such as the Yokohama Museum of Art to participate in Japan's contemporary struggle over the fundamental basis of its national identity.

The attempt made in *Photography in the 1940s* to suggest Japan's historicity through documentary photography is unusual. It denotes one of the many new avenues toward self-understanding being explored in post-postwar Japan. As Gavan McCormack argues, "For those who would see, the seeds for many different possible futures are sprouting in Japan. Which will strengthen and grow to maturity, and which will weaken and die, will be determined by the struggles that will ensue over the years that span the end of the century and the millennium."⁸³ This exhibition, however tentatively and inadequately, participated in that struggle for the future by trying to provide Japan with a usable past.

⁸³ McCormack, *Emptiness of Japanese Affluence*, 20.

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