Time, Space, and the Body in Atomic Bomb Literature: A Literary and Choreographic Investigation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

by

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Introduction

This thesis is an investigation of several themes that are central in the literatures of Hayashi Kyōko and Ibuse Masuji. I chose these authors because they each have a unique distance from the atomic bomb. Hayashi is a hibakusha, a surviving victim of the bombing, but she was born and raised in Shanghai, returning to Nagasaki just a few months before the attack. Ibuse, on the other hand, grew up in a Hiroshima suburb, but was in a village just outside the city when the bombing occurred. Their literatures explore time, space and distance, the body, and nature such that their intentions for writing atomic bomb literature are manifested through those themes.

I began this thesis process with the desire to investigate how a nonexperiencer can make creative work about a historical event that she did not experience firsthand. How can she establish her authority and responsibility in making work about the bomb? For those nonexperiencers who have made such works, what are the methods they use to provide entry points into the history for their readers? These questions were the basis for my choreographic process. The final chapter of this thesis extensively discusses my process for two original works: Navigable Möbius and Navigable Reverie. The first piece was greatly inspired by the Butoh workshops I took while abroad in Kyoto, Japan. The second piece focused more on literary imagery that I drew from Hayashi and Ibuse’s literature. As discussed further in the chapter, my process relied heavily on movement generation based on visual and literary atomic bomb sources. For structures and movement that I created, however, I made the conscious choice not to disclose the imagery that
inspired me until later in the process. From past experience, if the movement were taught simultaneously with the imagery, the resulting movement would be detached from my vision. Toward the end of the process, when the movement is more or less second nature, the imagery can be a way for each mover to personally incorporate it into their bodies.

My motivations for writing this thesis have strong foundations in my family history. Although I am ethnically half Chinese and half Japanese, I was raised in a predominantly Japanese household. Before coming to college from Honolulu, Hawaii, my Eastern upbringing was never a point of contrast among my peers, and as I learned to understand and embrace my ethnic identity, I developed a keen interest in Japanese history and literature. During World War II, my grandmother and grandfather, along with their entire families, were evicted from their homes and ordered to Tule Lake Concentration Camp. I also had family in Hawaii when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941. These personal connections to Japan, though far removed from my personal experiences, are the inspiration behind my investigation of the atomic bomb.

The first chapter analyzes three works by Hayashi Kyōko: *Ritual of Death*, *From Trinity to Trinity*, and *The Empty Can*. As Hayashi is still alive today, she has made it her life-long goal push for nuclear disarmament. Her writing is grotesquely detailed, and its structure interweaves memories into a present narrative; thus, it emphasizes the ongoing health and environmental consequences of the atomic bomb. Another theme she explores, and rightfully so, is space and distance. At a certain distance from the bomb herself, Hayashi is able to engage her readers in a distance
similar to her own through the intricate relationships among characters and man and nature in her stories. She “calls herself an ‘un-Japanese Japanese,’” feeling most at home in Shanghai (Otake, “Introduction”, xiii). In addition, I found that her use of personification depicts nature as hibakusha in a way that the reader can empathize with nature’s suffering and not have to directly intrude on the experience of hibakusha. Finally, because Hayashi survived despite being so close to the epicenter of the bomb, survivor guilt and the suffering of second-generation hibakusha is another prominent theme. Hayashi’s writing is so provocative and effective such that after reading just several of her works, her message that mankind is forever on the brink of destruction is very clear.

Ibuse, while he uses similar imagery and personification to portray the bomb, Black Rain and The Crazy Iris convey a slightly different message of moving forward. This second chapter, which focuses on Black Rain, investigates how time, nature, and the body convey Ibuse’s message, and how he is able to write about the bombing of Hiroshima as a nonhibakusha without invading the hibakusha experience. Ibuse’s distance from the bombing is obviously in that he did not experience it, but his ability to converse with hibakusha and get their stories gave him a solid foundation for his narrative.

From a choreographer’s perspective, I wanted to situate myself in the place of artists like Ibuse – a nonexperiencer. I cannot compare myself to Ibuse because I am of a different generation and a different culture, but in the same way that I was able to enter into his narrative and learn about Hiroshima, I hoped to create that same process of understanding for my ensemble.
Chapter One: Hayashi Kyōko

The atomic bomb literature that focuses on the August ninth bombing of Nagasaki, Japan, situates the consequences of nuclear weapons at the forefront of the narratives. The history of the atomic attacks on Japan provides insight as to why Nagasaki atomic bomb literature has a slightly different focus than that of Hiroshima. Atomic bomb literature in general depicts the misery of deaths, of mysterious injuries and ailments, and of the toll of defeat on the morale of the Japanese people. However, because Nagasaki was the second of two atomic attacks, the attack raised many questions about the intentions of the second bomb. In the summer of 1945, Interim Committee member James Byrne voiced that “the new weapon’s implications for civilization were irrelevant,” and that America’s production of the bomb before the Soviets was the priority (Hasegawa, Racing the Enemy, 89-90). President Truman’s Secretary of War Henry Stimson and the Interim Committee decided that two bombs were to be used in August 1945. “The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the result of a single decision” (Hasegawa, Racing the Enemy, 90). According to President Truman’s Memoirs, about half a million American lives were saved by the atomic bombs. Since there was no indication that Japan was going to surrender, for the Soviet Army to enter the war would have resulted in many more American casualties, and thus, the bombs were dropped to spare those predicted deaths (Selden, “Introduction”, xxx-i). According to one of Admiral William Leahy, President Truman’s “top priority was to minimize the loss of American lives,” and was justified later that lives were indeed saved in the bomb’s use (Hasegawa, Racing the Enemy, 103-4).
The bomb that hit Nagasaki on August 9, 1945 was *Fat Man*, a plutonium bomb different from the uranium bomb, *Little Boy*, which dropped on Hiroshima just three days prior. *Little Boy* was the first nuclear weapon to be used in warfare, and the ultimate success of the bomb put America ahead of the Soviet Union in the nuclear arms race. In the years leading up to World War II, America invested over two billion dollars in the Manhattan Project, a team of scientists and engineers commissioned by President Franklin Roosevelt who created the atom bomb in complete secrecy (Truman, *Statement*). In July of 1945, the successful test of the weapon at the Trinity Site in New Mexico helped solidify the plan to use both atomic bombs that August.

According to the Manhattan Project’s official document, American forces considered many factors in deciding on a target for the bomb. There was always a primary target and two secondary targets in the case of poor weather. The target cities were of “strategic military value” and also had significant buildings in close proximity for optimal destruction. Most importantly, the target cities must be “relatively untouched” by previous bombings (The Manhattan Engineer District, “The Atomic Bombings”, 9). Nagasaki was a secondary target after Kokura.\(^1\) Nagasaki, as an economically viable harbor, was one of the largest trade seaports in Japan. The city’s main industry was steel, and the production of “ordnance ships” and other military equipment was deemed an asset to America’s military (The Manhattan Engineer District, “The Atomic Bombings”, 11). Many foreigners, especially

\(^{1}\) Nuke-Rebuke 22-Names of other targets are not documented and are never referred to by name. In an eyewitness account of Nagasaki (Eyewitness Account: Atomic Bomb Mission Over Nagasaki by William L. Laurence), in reference to the failure of the primary target, “The winds of destiny seemed to favor certain Japanese cities that must remain nameless.”
Koreans, were drafted to work in Japanese steel factories, and therefore many poor
good quality, unstable residences were interspersed among the various factories (Weiner,
“Japan’s Minorities”, 163). On August 1st, Americans air raided a Nagasaki shipyard
causing quite a disturbance. For this reason, the atomic bomb that was dropped just
eight days later was very unexpected. On August 9, 1945 at 11:02 AM, just after an
all-clear signal sounded, Fat Man hit the city, destroying two of Mistubishi’s targeted
steel and ordnance factories (The Manhattan Engineer District, “The Atomic
Bombings”, 12-13). According to Peter Jennings in his 1995 hour-long program
titled, “Hiroshima: Why the Bomb was Dropped,” the committee responsible for
picking targets of the atomic bomb chose several cities that fulfilled the military’s
criteria. Based on the committee’s list of target cities, the American military was to
refrain from conventionally bombing those cities so that the strength of the atomic
bomb would be as accurate as possible (Jennings, “Hiroshima”, 00:23:00-00:23:15).

Because Nagasaki was the target of the second and more powerful atomic
weapon, survivors and historians alike question the necessity for that second bomb.
From the American perspective, the decision to drop two bombs was predetermined
and therefore dropping Little Boy and Fat Man were not seen as two separate
missions. However, from the hibakusha perspective, the seemingly unrelated use of
the second bomb to end the war caused confusion. While all atomic bomb literature
criticizes the ethicality of the bombs, Nagasaki hibakusha authors especially focus on
the consequences of nuclear weapons because they suffered such unthinkable
repercussions from an attack the American military deemed a “field test” (Jennings,
“Hiroshima”, 00:58:40). The primary reason for dropping the bomb on Hiroshima
was to save American lives after the tragic Battle of Okinawa where 13,000
Americans and 75,000 Japanese were killed (Jennings, “Hiroshima”, 00:16:00-
00:17:00, 00:36:00). However, according to Jennings, there were also two ulterior
motives for using the uranium bomb. The bomb would inflict a great psychological
impact on the Japanese nation, and it would be an attack so spectacular that it would
be internationally recognized (Jennings, “Hiroshima”, 00:23:30-00:24:00). Japan’s
military had already lost its momentum and strength by the summer of 1945, and
although near defeat, their intention not to surrender encouraged America to move
forward with the bombing. Japan conveyed their endurance through kamikaze
pilots, Japanese suicide fighters who flew their planes into American ships (Jennings,
“Hiroshima”, 00:19:00).

The most significant criticism regarding the second bombing of Nagasaki
deals with the irrelevance of the second bomb to the Pacific War. Jennings’s special
program on the bomb acknowledges that President Truman and the military
authorities wanted the plutonium bomb to be “field-tested” (Jennings, “Hiroshima”,
00:58:40). The uranium bomb, Little Boy, did not need to be tested before hitting
Hiroshima. The plutonium bomb, while successfully tested at the Trinity Site, had no
previous use on civilian areas. Nagasaki, therefore, served as nothing more than a
guinea pig city for the plutonium weapon, Fat Man (Jennings, “Hiroshima”,
00:58:40). Thus, it is not unusual for writers of Nagasaki literature to emphasize the
threat of nuclear energy, as they saw the reason for the suffering and death of so
many innocent civilians as something unreasonably inconsequential: they had died as
a simple result of an experiment.
Atomic bomb literature is one avenue that *hibakusha*\(^2\), atomic bomb survivors, use to express their opposition to nuclear weapons. One such author is Hayashi Kyōko, and she addresses the unfathomable suffering of *hibakusha* in order to emphasize her anti-nuclear sentiment. Historical struggles like strict methods for receiving monetary compensation, severe starvation from destroyed crops, infertility, radiation sickness, and societal discrimination all have a place in Hayashi’s works. As a *hibakusha* herself, Hayashi’s personal narratives are the heart of her stories, and the characters and settings very closely resemble her own experiences.

Hayashi Kyōko, having grown up outside of Japan, occupies a peripheral space that offers a unique perspective on the bombing and nuclear energy in general. Hayashi was born on August 28, 1930 in Nagasaki, but a year later, her family moved to Shanghai, China for her father’s job. However, for safety during the war, Hayashi, her two sisters, and her mother moved back to Nagasaki in 1945. They settled in Isahaya, a suburb of Nagasaki, just a few months before the bombing (*Treat, Writing Ground Zero*, 316). Because her upbringing was predominantly spent abroad, Hayashi was an outsider within the Japanese community. Like many other school girls, she was working in the Mitsubishi Steel and Arms Factory on the morning of the bombing. Because the factory was a target for the bomb, located just 1.4 kilometers from the epicenter of the explosion, Hayashi was very fortunate to have survived (*Treat, Writing Ground Zero*, 316). Those victims who did survive the bombing suffered physical injuries, and because radiation poisoning was categorized with other chronically ill outcasts, *hibakusha* suffered similar prejudices (*Lifton*,

\(^2\) The term *hibakusha* describes someone who survived an atomic bomb, but in most cases, it directly implies a survivor of Hiroshima or Nagasaki.
Hayashi indeed suffered greatly from radiation poisoning, but it was the fact that hibakusha suffering was easily forgotten after the war ended that she felt obligated to “combat such forgetfulness” (Otake, Introduction, xxiii). Hayashi, therefore, remains two layers of distance away from Japanese society: a repatriated citizen and a hibakusha. In addition, Otake claims that Hayashi’s short time living in America and her close relationships with Japanese-American couples ultimately allowed her to be naked (Introduction, xxvi). By embracing her distance from Japanese society, Hayashi was able to shed her hibakusha shell – the barrier preventing her from understanding her experience.

Hayashi’s goal in writing atomic bomb literature is to “contemplate the complex net of often contradictory feelings that a hibakusha feels toward himself and other hibakusha either living or dead” (Treat, Writing Ground Zero, 317). Every victim endures her own suffering, and Hayashi problematizes the generalization of victims through her fictional characters. They each have their own narrative and back-story, and much like Hayashi herself, have realistic fears for the ensuing nuclear age. Thus, as a self-proclaimed kataribe of Nagasaki, Hayashi aims to affirm the extraordinary existence of hibakusha by emphasizing that hibakusha existence makes the horrors of the bombings impossible to forget (Otake, Introduction, xxiii).

Time, nature, and the body are three major themes in Hayashi’s literature. Narratives from the characters’ pasts are juxtaposed into the present, therefore time is

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3 The term kataribe was used for the person in ancient Japan who orally recited “key genealogies and cosmologies.” Thus, a Nagasaki kataribe is someone who “speaks for [Nagasaki] with a special authority and special responsibility, and to speak of it for the future” (Treat, Writing Ground Zero, 318).
skewed in a way that acknowledges the imminent danger of nuclear energy. This chapter will analyze three of Hayashi’s works: *From Trinity to Trinity*, *The Empty Can*, and *Ritual of Death*. Each of these stories explores the themes of time, space, and the body through detailed narratives that reflect Hayashi’s personal experiences. Her keen awareness of the environment and nature are also important to her work, as her narrator in *From Trinity to Trinity* claims nature was the first atomic bomb victim, or her “senior hibakusha” (Hayashi, 50). This first site of the atomic bomb was at the Trinity Site in New Mexico. The first plutonium bomb, the same type of bomb dropped on Nagasaki, exploded in this vast desert in the summer of 1945. The narrator in *From Trinity to Trinity* is able to come to terms with the bombing only after visiting its origins. The landscape of New Mexico is a significant aspect of this story, and it also provides an entry point for empathizing with this nonhuman victim.

Nature and the body coexist in our memory of our experiences, and they simultaneously serve as markers of time. In Drew Leder’s *The Absent Body*, he cites Michael Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowledge as a means through which we experience. Tacit knowledge of a “coherent entity”, or a concept in whole, begins when we see our immediate experiences as pointers to said “coherent entity.” According to Polanyi, the comprehension of the whole concept is different than the comprehension of the concept’s isolated parts (Polanyi, “The Structure of Tacit Knowing”, 3-4). For example, Leder uses the experience of getting lost in a forest to exemplify tacit knowledge. One does not particularly know what it feels like to get lost in the forest if it has never happened before, but when such experience does happen, we possess a certain expectation of what it feels like to be lost in a forest.
Getting lost in a forest triggers those expectations of feeling afraid, cold, or stressed. In a similar way, having those feelings outside of the context of being lost can also trigger the memory of being lost. Certain landscapes or feelings can trigger the recollection of that experience (Leder, *The Absent Body*, 23). “Our understanding of perceived experience lies in the sensory qualities which indicate the coherence of a multitude of sensory clues and convey their meaning to us” (Polanyi, “The Structure of Tacit Knowing”, 5).

The various characters in Hayashi’s literature engage in this process of discovering their experiences through their bodies. It is the culmination of sensory elements, and the activation of their five senses, which trigger their memories and emotions many years after the bomb. Thus, I argue that through characters and imagery, as they relate to her central themes, Hayashi’s literature provides the reader with an entry point into the experiences of the bomb. I am not arguing that her literature gives readers the means of understanding the bomb or the experiences of the survivors. Instead, the reader is able to empathize with her humanization of nature’s suffering.

*The imagination alone does not achieve inventions or discoveries, but merely evokes a spontaneous, integrative event which brings about the discovery* (Polanyi, “The Body-Mind Relationship”, 102).

**Ritual of Death (1975)**

*Ritual of Death* is one of Hayashi’s first pieces of atomic bomb literature to be published, and it is praised and criticized for its intense realism and sparse prose. By the very fact that Hayashi is a *hibakusha*, critics say her experience somewhat compensates for her documentary-style writing. The story is gruesomely detailed and
realistic, and the distinction between fiction and nonfiction from an outside perspective is difficult to determine. As John Whittier Treat says in *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*, “[Ritual of Death] is a work in which it is impossible for a reader to sympathize with a hero or to submerge himself into a fictional premise” (322). Because the reader is not able to sympathize with the character, he remains at a distance from the narrative so that the facts of the experience are most resonant. While I also found this to be true of *Ritual of Death*, the issues recur in all of Hayashi’s literature are introduced in this story. There are three main themes that will be introduced in this section. First is the surreal and abnormal depiction of nature and the body after radiation exposure. The various characters in the narrative all experience and witness such abnormalities, and it blurs the distinction between nature and the body. Second is survivor guilt, and the idea that survivors, in memorializing their peers’ deaths, realized a sense of guilt in their survival. Finally, the conflation of past and present through her unique structure of two first-person narrators conveys the perpetuation of radiation poisoning in later generations.

The narrator of *Ritual of Death* is forty-four years old, and in 1975 is writing about her experience in Nagasaki at age fourteen. This juxtaposition of past narration and present narration from the same first person narrator completely obscures the story’s time frame. *Ritual of Death* is written in a nonlinear structure that is characteristic of Hayashi’s literary style, and this structure allows the past and present to merge in one continuous narrative. The separation of thirty years between the narrators maximized the information about the bomb in the story. The fourteen year-
old narrator sheds light on the actual experience as it is happening, and the forty-four year-old narrator has learned so much information about the bomb and radiation in the past thirty years. Thus, the present narrative contextualizes the narrator’s memories in fact. *Ritual of Death* is a story about this woman’s August 9th and the many ways her family, close friends, schoolmates and teachers suffered in the weeks after the attack.

*Ritual of Death* is essentially a compilation of different peoples’ stories all from the perspective of the narrator. She begins with her experience in the “Hiroshima-Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Exhibit” and through her reflection shares historical background about the bomb. Then, she shares her story of the morning when she went to work in the factory and the bomb exploded:

> Between the sound of the accelerating engines of the swerving plane and the demolition of the factory, there was a split-second to shout one word, “air raid.” In that breath of time, 73,889 people died instantly (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 30).

The narrator’s family was in a Nagasaki suburb at the time of the bombing, and they only saw the explosion from afar. All of the characters in *Ritual of Death* have close relationships with the narrator, and each story reveals different consequences of nuclear weapons. For example, the narrator’s mother and sister see the mutated fruits and vegetables, Iwatomi dies of radiation sickness, and Akiko had to apply for a *hibakusha* handbook. What results from this structure is an awareness of these real problems broader than the close circle of the narrator’s experience.

The writing structure of *Ritual of Death* is critical to Hayashi’s use of time in her literature because the conflation of past and present illustrates the continuity of *hibakusha* suffering and radiation poisoning into the present day. The structure also
offers a perspective of “old as new” in the narrator’s memory of August 9th (Bhowmik, “Temporal Discontinuity”, 63). Davinder Bhowmik’s essay titled, “Temporal Discontinuity in the Atomic Bomb Literature of Hayashi Kyōko” discusses the idea that memory is the impetus for discontinuity between past and present, and as a result, it is “nonuniform and dynamic in its ordering” (63). He associates this concept with “rhythmic time” which in a literary context means that a narrative with rhythmic time is “filled with events and nonevents that follow no predetermined order” (63). Ritual of Death is written in that structure, resulting in an unusual relationship between the past and the present. In this next passage, the narrator reflects on the past, and the tense change from present to past exemplifies the previously mentioned juxtaposition of memories:

If I had had a blood test then, the white blood cell count might have been as low as two or three thousand. A few years ago it was down to 3,600 when I was checked at the regular examination of bomb victims. I received a letter at that time indicating that I needed a closer examination. I feared death more intensely than when I faced it so directly at age fourteen. By then I had a little son and prayed fervently, ‘I don’t want to die now.’

The infection was bad. When I changed position, the pain concentrated around the lymph glands. It was hot in September… (“Ritual of Death”, 53)

Both paragraphs are in the past tense, but one is a memory and the other is the narrator’s present reflection on the past. The first paragraph is the present, forty-five year-old narrator, and the second is the fourteen year-old narrator. Hayashi employs this writing structure in order to emphasize that the atomic bombings are not an event of the past, but remain the source of many current issues as well. For something to “be in the past”, it can imply that the event is seen at a certain level of nonchalance, and that it is more or less forgotten. However, the process of recalling and remembering the bombing is a trying experience for hibakusha, and thus August 6th
and 9th cannot be forgotten when hibakusha are still alive and suffering today. Precisely because Hayashi’s perspective of the bomb is grounded in the fact that she only returned to Japan several months before the bombing, she could occupy that peripheral space when reflecting on her experience. Thus, as Nagasaki’s kataribe, Hayashi is able to illustrate her belief that “the world has been forever changed by atomic bombs, changed in ways attested to by wounds that do not heal and memories that are never erased” (Treat, Writing Ground Zero, 322). The bomb is accessible in a different way when there is a certain level of detachment from that experience. If such experience still has an active presence in the victim’s life (radiation sickness, keloid scars, ill family members), there is no periphery from which to reflect on the experience – the experience is still occurring.

Thus, Hayashi’s writing structure implicitly points to the fact that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not in fact of the past, but they raise nuclear issues that are of current concern for all of mankind. There are several moments in the narrative when the reader is forced to take a step back from the story to process the longevity of the bomb’s effects on human life. A salient moment was when a girl from the village went to collect newspaper from the narrator’s home. When she notices the narrator sick in bed, she says, “The bomb this time, you know…even those who get home safe all die, sooner or later. The bomb is made that way. I am so sorry” (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 52). For obvious reasons, this claim makes the narrator’s mother furious. The truths about the bomb are the most potent, and many characters in the story remain in denial about their fate.
Another structure to note is that in *Ritual of Death*, “I” is the female narrator in two different times, and the interweaving of their stories also serves to merge past and present. Both narrators are female and closely representative of Hayashi herself, as Hayashi was fourteen at the time of the bombing and around forty-four when she wrote this story. The voice of the present narrator guides the narrative by interjecting into memories and providing more detailed information learned after thirty years. As mentioned earlier, many literary critics opposed calling *Ritual of Death* literature because the writing is more factual than most fiction. These interjections play a large role in the factualness of the writing, but at the same time it is crucial for Hayashi to portray the consequences of nuclear power. Each interjection provides evidence of the confusion and difficulty in attempting to treat the mysterious injuries and illnesses. America withheld information about the atom bomb from the Japanese and therefore the Japanese doctors had no guidance on how to treat the injured victims. The interjections also shed light on the Japanese government’s policies regarding compensation for injured and deceased atomic bomb victims. For example, when the young narrator talks about the amount of money victims received, she states that 52 yen were given to each student who died, and if the deceased was a “special atomic bomb victim”, they received 16,000 yen for their funeral. The interjection, similar to others, starts with phrases that matter-of-factly state facts:

A “special atomic bomb victim” means someone who has obtained a “special atomic bomb victim health certificate,” which is granted to those who come under Article 6, numbers 1 to 5 of the Atomic Bomb Medical Care Enforcement Regulations. I am a “special number 1 atomic bomb victim.” This category covers those persons and fetuses who were within three kilometers of the epicenter when the bombing occurred (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 54).
Here, Hayashi depicts the incredibly meticulous document that states all the rules and provisions for atomic bomb victims. The actual document is titled, “Law Concerning Medical Treatment of A-Bomb Survivors (Law No. 41, 31 March 1957)”. The description of a “special atomic bomb victim” is fiction, yet the way such factual phrasing is framed within the young narrator’s descriptions of the expensive flowers she wants at her funeral is quite abrupt:

To get 16,000 yen after your death, someone has to fill out an application for the payment of funeral expenses, and take that, along with a medical certificate of death, a void resident card, a special atomic bomb victim health certificate and a seal to the proper authorities. I intend to leave a will saying, please buy flower with the 16,000 yen. That’s enough for eighty tulips, even in winter when they are 200 yen each. What a beautiful funeral that will be (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 54).

The abruptness of the shift from fact to personal narration is such that the interjections are read as truths. Because Hayashi is a hibakusha, her written interjections validate the narrator’s experiences by appearing as fact. The fourteen-year-old and the forty-four year-old come together under these written laws, and thus the interjections succeed in conflating the past and present.

Nature-body connections are another theme in Ritual of Death, and are clearly exemplified through the physical abnormalities caused by exposure to radiation. The narrator discusses abnormalities in nature as well the human body, and that serves the greater issue that the environment also changed drastically after the atomic bombs were dropped. Hayashi also describes personified natural examples as victims, which gives the readers another means of empathizing with victims. Something that is unique about nature in Hayashi’s literature is that one is able to see suffering in something other than a human, and therefore one can justify one’s empathy because
of nature’s nonhuman existence. Because Japan is the only country that experienced an atomic attack, an ordinary person’s ability to empathize with hibakusha is essentially unachievable. Thus, Hayashi’s use of nature provides an entry point through which the reader can empathize with a similar yet different pain. Hayashi’s imagery in these descriptive sections is vivid to the point of being fictional, but the surreal nature of the atom bomb removes any doubt in its accuracy:

It was reported, however, that the influence of radiation caused abnormal cell division. Other instances of natural disturbance frequently reported around that time in Nagasaki included twin eggplants, twin pumpkins, and abnormal clusters of fruit on a tomato plant. A friend of mine, Ikeuchi, lost all her straight, black hair, and later curly red hair grew in (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 39).

These images signify the surreal mutations that the radiation inflicted on the people and the environment. Such surreal imagery is one way that Hayashi portrays the confusion in the days following the bombing. “Natural disturbances” allowed for the existence of the unnatural, and that can be interpreted as metaphorical references to such confusion. On a more general note, the way speculation and fact exist in the same narrative adds to the surreal nature of the bombing itself. Reality and imagination merge in memory, and so I wonder how much of the narrative is fact based on experience, and how much of it is fiction. Regardless, the surreal effects depicted in the narrative also create some kind of new species. If we take into consideration the reality-imagination binary and the nature-body relationship, the four elements all blend together in the story. What is real or imagined, natural or humanistic is ambiguous. For example, when the narrator describes the flash, she says:
Those who were looking directly at the flash of the bomb did lose their sight. The fire ball of the atomic bomb was seventy feet in diameter. Rumor has it that an already blind person recovered his sight from the flash, but I think that is fiction. Yet the atomic flash was so incredibly awesome as to permit any fantasy. (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 30).

The surreal experience is in many ways unknowable, and because something unknown is often daunting, Hayashi’s creations of such unbelievable experiences illustrate the daunting unknowns of the bomb.

Hayashi believes the consequences of manmade products that are beyond human control are an ultimate danger, and in light of recent nuclear energy explosions, she is pushing more than ever for nuclear disarmament. Hayashi references her pilgrimage to the Trinity Site in a recent interview following the Fukushima disaster in 2011:

The Ground Zero monument that stands at the Trinity site is the warning sign that humans have plunged into the nuclear age. Damage from radiation isn’t just a special right of victims of the atomic bombings, but is a problem for all those with an awareness of the dangers of nuclear energy (Hayashi, Living the Bomb, 32).

Such observations can be applied to Hayashi’s first literatures, and her articulation of nuclear dangers has only become more prevalent as she continues to speak on behalf of all hibakusha. The last line of Ritual of Death is both extremely ironic and ominous, and it is so powerful to see Hayashi’s awareness of nuclear issues explicitly written.

There is a beautiful line at the end of an American documentary film on the atomic bomb: …Thus, the destruction ended…(Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”57).

At the end of the story, the present narrator reflects on a memorial service that replaced the school’s second term opening assembly in October of 1945 (Hayashi,
“Ritual of Death”, 57). She says, “Sometimes I still sing the same dirge, to mourn for the youth of all of us” (57). Because the story begins and ends in the present, the reader is able to leave the story and return to the present situation – the nuclear age. Treat says that “for Hayashi, the crux is the relationship between nuclear weapons and the biological survival of the species” (Writing Ground Zero, 324). In the way her character “mourns the youth of [them] all” by repeating the same requiem thirty years later is a way Hayashi depicts the perpetuation of the bomb’s effects (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 57). The destruction will never be over until nuclear energy ceases to exist.

The final theme in Ritual of Death is survivor guilt, which Hayashi relates to on a very personal level through the narrator and her relationship with a friend called Inatomi. Being just 1.4 kilometers from the epicenter in Nagasaki, Hayashi’s survival was nothing less than a miracle, and the young narrator in the story recalls much of the guilty sentiment that came with requiring constant care and attention. The narrator and Inatomi met the day after the bombing to help relief teams, both of them having survived the bombing without many visible injuries. They each had their own ways of conveying their guilt, whether those feeling arose after dealing with numerous corpses, or their loss of close friends made them victims of loneliness. For the narrator, it is especially difficult at her age of fourteen to process her exposure to this tragedy. Similar to Kinuko in The Empty Can, the narrator’s first response is to sympathize with the “helpless girls who had died without their fathers and mothers” (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 48). Hayashi explains some of the ways that volunteers
placed bodies so that families could identify their loved ones who may have died in the explosion.

[They] collected bodies burned black and naked white. They were placed in circles with the heads in the center, a practical way of laying out bodies that facilitated identification by relatives who came to look for their dead (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 47).

This process makes the narrator tearful like an “emotionless robot”, and combined with her own fragility and loneliness, she too is losing hope in her survival. She eventually becomes very sick, on the verge of death, and senses the impatience her sisters feel in caring for her. It makes her feel like dying just to appease their impatience (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 54). Inatomi, on the other hand, though he also felt guilty for surviving, saw his survival as a blessing. He seems like a big brother figure to the narrator, and while they recovered bodies together he always brought the narrator water and said encouraging words. They promised each other they would go to Brazil when the war was over and indulge in the warm weather. Inatomi’s guilt is grounded in the fact that he lost all his medical school friends to the explosion. He was afraid to go back to the school because he was already aware many of his classmates died (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 48).

However, what Hayashi also conveys in this story is that eventually all hibakusha will die of A-bomb related complications. This refers back to the exclamation made to the narrator’s mother. “The bomb this time, you know...even those who get home safe all die, sooner or later. The bomb is made that way. I am so sorry” (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 52). The narrator and Inatomi both suffer from radiation-related symptoms, and they too recognize this death sentence the bomb inflicted on them. There is one particular section in the story that resonates with this
sense of inevitable death. At the end of the story, the narrator recalls a memorial ceremony that honors the students and teachers who died. This section is written as a memory, and so the reader is situated as if at the ceremony. She recalls specific gestures of those present, like the “schoolmaster [who] sat motionless with his eyes closed” or the “fathers [who] were all staring at the ceiling”, and there were the “surviving students [who] felt guilty to be there” (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 57). The narrative then shifts back to the present where the narrator describes how she still sings the song from the ceremony “to mourn for the youth of all [victims]” (Hayashi, “Ritual of Death”, 57).

*Ritual of Death* is Hayashi’s groundbreaking work that introduced many significant issues and themes that would perpetuate throughout her career as Nagasaki’s self-proclaimed kataribe, or storyteller. Her use of abnormal and surreal imagery, the nature-body connection, and the resulting conflation of past and present exemplify her ultimate goal to stop the advancement of nuclear energy. In *Ritual of Death*, Hayashi does not intend to “tell us the experience of Nagasaki per se but rather the empty void which that experience occupies, paradoxically in culture,” and that is a “manipulation meant to direct our attentions toward other issues, issues of the continuing states of victimization decades and generations later” (Treat, *Writing Ground Zero*, 327).

**From Trinity to Trinity (2000)**

*From Trinity to Trinity* (Torinichi kara torinichi e) is the story of a hibakusha’s journey to New Mexico, America, where the first atomic bomb test took
place. She travels with a fellow *hibakusha* who lives in America, and the two of them visit the test site as well as an atomic bomb museum. The characters in this story, both past and present, are significant because their bodies and experiences link time, space, and nature throughout the nonlinear narrative.

The narrator has no name in the story, which could imply that Hayashi is writing from her personal experience. I struggled to read this story as fiction because the reality of the narrator’s experiences closely mimic Hayashi’s own experience on August 9th. It is crucial to understand the characters’ different places in the present narratives and the memory narratives in order to understand the role of the body in depicting time. The story focuses on two characters in the present: the narrator and her friend from the factory, Tsukiko. Tsukiko currently lives in America, having started a family with an American man, and she agrees to accompany the narrator on her pilgrimage to New Mexico. Rui is also a third character in the present narrative, but she is merely the receiver of the narrator’s letters. Two characters of the memory narrative are Kana and Katsura. Kana is the narrator’s coworker from the factory, who she has not seen since the bombing. The second character is Katsura, the narrator’s only son. His character represents second-generation *hibakusha* who symbolize Hayashi’s concern for *hibakushas’* future generations.

In Eiko Otake’s introduction to her translation of *From Trinity to Trinity*, she discusses the nonlinearity and malleability of time and space. “Time is not even, space is not empty” is the overarching theme of her research, and such concepts are the crux of Hayashi’s piece. The interactions between the present characters and the characters of memory both skew time. The narrator’s letters to Rui exemplify this
concept by interrupting the present both literally and metaphorically. The letters reflect on the immediate past of her daily activities as well as memories of years ago. As the writing of the letter itself is a present action in the context of the narrative, this active reflecting and remembering brings the past to the present. Similarly, Katsura, a second-generation hibakusha, also embodies a similar conflation of past and present by physically carrying his mother’s radiation poisoning.

The first letter the narrator writes to Rui begins with her concern for the people of the nuclear fuel factory in Tokaimura, where a nuclear accident caused high exposure to radioactive fumes. According to Otake’s footnote, the actual incident the narrator references produced the third highest levels of radioactivity in a nuclear power plant (Otake, *Trinity*, 32). The narrator talks about her and Tsukiko’s trip to the Rio Grande, and the way the river sparked pleasant memories of playing at Nakajima River with Kana and Tsukiko. Although the Rio Grande is nothing like the Nakajima River, the narrator relishes in that memory, imagining that freedom like the free spirit of running water. She feels the harsh current of the Rio Grande, and that recalls a sensory memory. The river symbolizes a merging of time, the impermanence of an experience that, through one’s memory, exists as the baseline for a future experience. In this way, Otake claims “the past and present are not only related, [but] they are intricately united” (*Trinity*, xx). Her first so-called broad exclamation to Rui states her desire for freedom in time:

> I think in this world there are too many goals and promises that we are supposed to undertake. I want time that has no purpose or reward. Like running water, time can be without a purpose – then how relieved our spirit would be. (Hayashi, *Trinity*, 36)
This reference to time without a purpose also skews time in that it slows it. The narrator is not pinpointing a specific experience in time by remembering her days at the river, but instead continuing her memory into the present moment. To be free of time implies the nonexistence of endpoints, that the present is an accumulation of all experiences before it. The time that exists between her memory and her present time at the Rio Grande is a span without an explicit beginning or end. Time is certainly not even, but her connection of past and present is the product of her own perception of time as they relate to her life.

Once again, the narrator proceeds to tell Rui about an incident that happened before she left for America. A man came to her house in the middle of the night and left something in her garden. The object was never disclosed in the letter or in the story, but she says, “his purpose was to violate” (Hayashi, Trinity, 38). She tells Rui that her sense of fear is altered and that protecting her loved ones is a priority. This final letter begins to reference the future, and it expresses Hayashi’s actual fears for the future. Here, Katsura’s character, the second-generation hibakusha, sheds light on the future of hibakusha. The narrator says, “I do not want innocent lives of growing children to be hurt by violence” (Hayashi, Trinity, 39). Drawing from Hayashi’s personal experience, the narrator, like Hayashi, felt responsible for the fate of her son; hurt by the fact that he too would suffer from radiation poisoning. She looks to the future, a time when nuclear warfare could end all life on earth, and wonders if that could ever change. “Is it all right to be so complacent?” Katsura tells his mother that perhaps she is the one who is hurt (Hayashi, Trinity, 39). This brings the narrator back to the present: she remembers the conversation, and it makes her wonder if her
individual experiences are completely independent of the future of nuclear
destruction. Katsura describes his situation as an “inmate on death row without a
prison term” (Hayashi, Trinity, 11). With the understanding that all hibakusha
eventually die from radiation-related symptoms, second-generation hibakusha are
also inevitably exposed to the same suffering. The narrator, in line with Hayashi’s
view, feels immense guilt in passing along radiation poisoning to her son. Many
female hibakusha were either able to reproduce and had sick children, or their bodies
were no longer capable of reproducing. This section of the letter is representative of
Hayashi’s anti-nuclear stance, and it is clear that complacency is inadequate. In the
Afterword by Eiko Otake, she mentions an analysis by Japanese literary critic Kuroko Kazuo. The Japanese term rui (種) can mean species in some contexts, and therefore
the narrator’s letters can be interpreted as addressing mankind because all the
narrator’s letters are to Rui (Otake, Trinity Afterword, 61).

The second and final letter in the narrative portrays that sentiment as well. She
ends the letter with, “The world does not need your experiment. Rui, what do you
think” (Hayashi, Trinity, 57)? This line ends the letter and the story, leaving a strong
statement to mankind. If Rui is interpreted as meaning species, she is asking mankind
what it is going to do about the nuclear threat to its existence. The statement brings
the past, present, and future into one frame, simultaneously recalling memories and
projecting to the future. Time in this context constantly frames the narrator’s
memories, and thus exposes the uncertain future that she very much fears.

Space, the body, and nature are closely intertwined in such a way that the
sensory elements of certain spaces are embodied through memory. Every body in the
narrative occupies space, and by the memories they carry of places past, there is a “continuity of one’s sense of self” throughout their individual stories (Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 11). The experiences in a place begin with the body, as the body is the first point of contact to any space. Thus, our bodies are crucial in situating ourselves in a place, and our senses dictate how we receive a place “on an affective and emotional level” (Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 10).

In the case of the atomic bombings, trauma adds another layer to the remembering and recalling of the experience. Trigg quotes Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: trauma, narrative, and history*, saying that the temporality of trauma results in a delayed experience of the traumatic event. “The subject that survives trauma does so less through the fortitude of subjectivity and more as the uncanny aftereffect of the event, which in experiential terms, cannot be said to have truly occurred” (qtd. In Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 237). Caruth argues that trauma implies the overcoming of death, or simply survival. Trauma seen from this perspective, as opposed to trauma as mere “destruction”, inevitably connects to time. Thus, memory of trauma is a concept of the present because it is “incommensurable with the past” (Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 237). In *From Trinity to Trinity*, such delayed experience happens for the narrator when she visits the Trinity Site. The narrator is aware that as a traumatized subject, she “becomes the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (qtd. in Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 239), and thus the reason for her pilgrimage:

Trinity is the starting point of my August 9. It is also the final destination of hibakusha. From Trinity to Trinity --.
If I make that journey, I can hold August 9 within my life circle. If I can never be free from the event, I should end my relationship by swallowing it. (Hayashi, *Trinity*, 11)

The narrator imagines this site, a place of which she has no familiarity. Yet, precisely because the first plutonium bomb was dropped there, she must go. Her only expectation was to come full circle with her August ninth, a day that, Caruth would claim, she “does not possess” (qtd. in Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 239). The process of the narrator’s ultimate realization is gradual over the duration of her trip. It starts at the National Atomic Museum when she “became conscious of being a hibakusha and felt sensitive to [the] American people’s behavior” (Hayashi, *Trinity*, 20). The section of the museum called “Countdown to Nagasaki” catches her attention, and as she sees the physical map of the plane that dropped *Fat Man* on Nagasaki, she “felt time stop in front of the panel” (Hayashi, *Trinity*, 16).

Trigg argues that the body activates a place as much as a place activates the body (*The Memory of Place*, 11). In the museum, the narrator recalls the morning of the bombing, when she and Kana were hard at work in the arms factory. As she makes her way through the museum, she realizes her distance from the other visitors:

I had turned out to be nothing but a hibakusha. Before entering the museum I was not feeling particularly Japanese or hibakusha (Hayashi, *Trinity*, 19).

For the narrator, her physical presence in the museum created an environment for the visitors to impose their preconceptions. In the same way, the museum triggered her memory such that she was reliving those moments in the factory.

Even though the narrator had never been to the Trinity Site before, the space represents the site of her delayed experience. Just as she hoped, her life came full circle in the place where the bomb began. When the narrator finally sheds her first
tears, she not only “had momentarily forgotten [her] life as a hibakusha,” but she also understood why her sympathy toward nature brought her to that realization (Hayashi, *Trinity*, 50). Nature was another victim with whom she could empathize with in the most visceral sense. Visiting the Rio Grande, driving past the landscape of mesas, and admiring the vast, flat desert stimulated her bodily senses, making the impact of her realization that much greater. Standing in the hot desert, “the waves of silence came lapping and made [her] shudder”. She always saw the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the first victims of the atomic bomb, but here she is standing on the radioactive land, the silent victim. Her “always-present awareness of being a victim” completely disappears, and she returns to her fourteen year-old self:

I may have been walking toward an unknown 「Ground Zero」 as though I were someone from 「the time」 before August 9, but it was when I stood in front of the memorial that I was truly exposed to the atomic bomb (Hayashi, *Trinity*, 50).

The narrative continues through her recollection of the moments after the bomb hit Urakami, the city in Nagasaki where the bomb was dropped. She explains that up until this visit to the memorial, she has “lived with merciless pains” that even now has not ceased. “Over the land that keeps its silence, I must have been seeing the scene of the day when I ran away” (Hayashi, *Trinity*, 51). That memory, both engrained in her mind and body, is finally released.

*From Trinity to Trinity* is unique in that the narrator’s pilgrimage is the same journey Hayashi herself embarked on many decades after the bombing. The narrator’s point of view is therefore of the present and concurrent with Hayashi’s activist work to put an end to nuclear energy worldwide. From the juxtaposed letters to the
narrator’s newfound understanding of the bombing; time, space, and nature coexist to emphasize nuclear energy’s threat to the existence of mankind.

*By freeing materiality from the unconscious, lived place is presented as having inherent unity of its own. The implication is striking: Time loses its privileged intimacy with memory, as place proves itself the more effective absorber of our past... the retention of memory loses none of its vibrancy, precisely thanks to the holding power of place. Time, on the other hand, is that through which memory is dispersed* (Trigg, *Memory of a Place*, 12).

**The Empty Can (1978)**

*The Empty Can* is a story about five girls who return to their high school thirty years after the bombing of Nagasaki and their collective memory of that morning. This story uncovers three important post-bomb issues: the hard truth of infertility after radiation exposure, the way the site of trauma conflates past and present, and the irreconcilable tension between *hibakusha* and *non-hibakusha* that exists even among close friends. The story also simply reveals the ways in which we remember our past.

There are three levels of separation among the five characters in *The Empty Can*. Three of the girls are well-acquainted and were together at the time of the bomb (Hara, Oki, Noda), one had just transferred to the school several months before the bombing (narrator), and the other transferred to the school a month after the bombing (Nishida). Since the story begins with their arrival at the school, the experiencer-nonexperiencer separation is clear from the start. The narrator’s separation from the other *hibakusha* is completely unrelated to the bomb, and is because she is a transfer student and escaped the vigorous application process. Thus, as the story progresses, the three post-bomb issues manifest through the three levels of the experiencer non-experiencer divide.
As a result of all the damage, the girls of N Girls’ High were relocated to a newly built school, and therefore the school grounds were exactly how the bomb left it. The emptiness of this place instigated their memories of the past. The old school is a marker of time for the girls. Without the physical reconstruction of the space, the site remains a space of the past. Thus, the narrator and her three hibakusha friends recall the last time they were all together at the old school. “It was neither the memory of school concerts nor of graduation ceremonies that had nailed me to the spot as I stood at the entrance of the auditorium. It was the memory of the ceremony that had been held in October “in memory of the students and teachers who had died in the bombing” (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 130-1). The memorial was a tangible separation of death and life, but for the narrator, her life was not considered a survival. To survive means to overcome a near-death experience, and it connotes a positive outlook for the future. However, as I mentioned in the previous section, not everyone found living to be less painful than death. In the thirty years after the bombing, the four hibakusha certainly did not live without a struggle. Nishida, however, did not experience the bombing, and the emotional detachment she feels in that moment at the auditorium door is awkward. The auditorium instead reminds her of a school-wide speech contest, and in realizing that separation, Nishida comes to terms with the fact that regardless of how close her friendship is with the other women, she will always be deprived of the experience that forever changed their lives. As this memory is critical in setting up the distance between the five women, it was not without Hayashi’s creation of this visit to the site holds its significance.
Besides emotional detachment, the concept of displacement is a recurring theme in *The Empty Can*. The shifting existence of time and space in the story is exemplified through the physical setting of the story as well as the current lives of the women. The shift in existence means that a space at any given time is never constant. A person walking through my front door changes the space, and that change occupies an amount of time. In *The Empty Can*, Hayashi’s first example of displacement involves a phoenix tree. As the women enter the school, the narrator recognizes the tree as the same one from thirty years before, despite it being dug up and lying strewn on the ground. She wonders, “would it, too, be transplanted to the grounds of the new school” (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 128)? So how much of the natural landscape defines the school-space identity as a whole? Displacement, then, is the separation of something from its site, but the experiences at a site cannot be displaced. N Girls’ High, therefore, is not what is being displaced. Because it is the site that holds the experiences of the past, which the women remember upon returning, it is merely the institution of the school that is being displaced. *That* site is N Girls’ High, not the new location. Nishida, the friend who did not experience the bomb, notices the impact the site has on the four *hibakusha*:

‘Just now when the four of you were standing at the entrance to the auditorium and you all looked as though you were about to cry. I know what you were thinking about just then – it was the memorial service, wasn’t it” (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 133)?

This comment directly connects space to the distance between experiencer and nonexperiencer. Depending who is in the space and what the space represents for that individual, the site has a completely different meaning. Thus, the narrator wonders
about the lonely phoenix tree, but she only recognizes the tree in this old school, and so the tree loses its significance if it is displaced from the site.

Another example of displacement is Oki’s potential placement to teach at a school on one of Nagasaki’s outlying islands. Oki’s injuries following the bombing were so severe that “the way she had looked at that time seem[ed] to have been responsible for the theory that she had died” (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 135). In a central city of Nagasaki, there is the Hospital for Atomic-Bomb Victims, and all the women try to live and work as close to the hospital as possible in case any health issues arise. For a hibakusha, frequent trips to the hospital are not unusual. Oki is especially worried about being placed far from the hospital. Having already been so close to death, moving to an island without easy access to medical attention heightens her fear of death. In addition, the uncertainty of radiation sickness makes the reoccurrence of her near-death experience more realistic. The narrator recalls seeing Oki on the school floor the day of the bombing, and this memory informs the reader of the severity of Oki’s bodily injuries, even in the present. “Now she looked healthy enough, but it was as though she was carrying an unexploded bomb around inside her” (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 135). Oki has no way of knowing when she may die, but either way, she will die of something related to August 9th. Thus, Oki’s displacement from Nagasaki City would increase her fear and awareness of her radiation sickness. The inaccessibility of the hospital brings about a fear that triggers Oki’s memory of her near-death experience.

Another example of repercussions that are recurring themes in Hayashi’s literature is the finding of glass splinters on hibakusha bodies many years after the
attacks. The glass shards that entered the body at the time of the bombing were so insignificant compared to other injuries, that the victims were not always aware of their presence until they resurface years later. The shards collect in the form of a ball of fat, and the skin is thus shielded from those sharp edges (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 137). However, as time passes, the glass shards move around, and sometimes it hits a nerve, or surfaces just enough so the body feels a slight pain. At that point, the victim must go to the hospital as soon as possible so it can be removed before the glass changes location again:

The doctor pressed her back here and there with his fingertips, and then asked Kinuko, “Were you around when the A-bomb was dropped? It might be glass from the time of the bombing, you know.” An X-ray was taken, and when they opened her back in one place a week later, they found glass, just as the doctor had said. The skin was hard in that place, and there were several other places like it (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 137).

As the concept of time is so crucial to Hayashi’s literature, the glass shards represent markers of time that bring together the past and present the moment they resurface. The way the shards collect and inconspicuously navigate the body is fascinating to the women, and yet it simply represents their greater radiation ailments as time bombs waiting to explode. At the end of the story, the narrator says, “Kinuko was to enter the hospital tomorrow. How many fragments of glass from thirty years ago would come out of Kinuko’s back? What kind of glow would those smooth white pearls of fat cast when they were brought out into the light” (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 143)? Hayashi leaves readers to ponder those questions for themselves.

Kinuko is the sixth woman in this story, also a hibakusha, whose stories help to illustrate two post-bomb issues. Her character in The Empty Can is significant for two reasons: she experiences the haunting that comes with having witnessed a death,
and she represents the ways that children coped with the loss of their parents to the bomb. Kinuko, like Oki, is a teacher, and she is unmarried like all the other women except for Noda. The narrator brings Kinuko’s story into the narrative via a memory, as she did not visit the school with her classmates. The narrator did not remember Kinuko during the time of the bomb, but instead from a time ten years later when they visit the grave of a teacher known as Miss T. Kinuko saw the blast send the teacher into the depths of the flash, and Miss T supposedly yelled something to Kinuko, but it was incomprehensible in the chaos. Even ten years later, “the burden of the words that she hadn’t been able to hear weighed on Kinuko’s heart, and lately she had begun to doubt the reality of that scene, even of Miss T’s death” (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 139). Witnessing someone’s last moments of life is a traumatic experience even for a teenager, and Kinuko tells the narrator, “Miss T had become fixed in [her] brain, like a pictures stuck fast to a wall” (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 139). The repetition of a specific memory exemplifies the greater desire of many hibakusha to forget the events of the bombing. For those victims who choose to continue life in silence, refusing to exploit their suffering for the nuclear disarmament campaign, they can only hope that their lives will continue separate from the collective of hibakusha (Ôe, Hiroshima Notes, 19). As mentioned in From Trinity to Trinity, every person killed by the atomic bomb was denied their own personal death (Otake, “Introduction”, xxi): their death was a statistic, generalized and diminished as one of several hundred thousand deaths. Every survivor, on the other hand, is neither living nor dead: they occupy a liminal space unique to hibakusha. Ôe Kenzaburo, a renowned Japanese literature author, approaches this liminal space from a different perspective. While
Hayashi focuses on that liminal space, Ōe writes about those who overcome their fear of death through courage:

If survivors would overcome their fear of death, they too must see some way of giving meaning to their own death. Thus, the dead can survive as part of the lives of those who still live (Ōe, *Hiroshima Notes*, 19).

For Ōe, atomic bomb literature focuses less on the power of nuclear weapons and more on the misery of the victims. He has pondered the reasons as to why there are no stories of those who “now live as normal human beings” (Ōe, *Hiroshima Notes*, 21). However, the women in Hayashi’s literature depict just that misery Ōe describes: it is not a success story of survival, but rather the story of the countless reasons these women are unable to move forward. The women’s anxiety in the possibility of a reoccurring sickness prevents them from moving forward. Hara says, “Thirty years; I feel as though I’ve just been living and that’s all” (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 136). It implies her static state that will remain as long as the possibility of radiation sickness exists. However, Nishida, the nonhibakusha, is the character in *The Empty Can* who conveys Ōe’s perspective. She tells the women:

‘It may sound brutal to say so,” Nishida said, “but once you have your plans set, you have to go ahead with them – that’s life, isn’t it? Even if you are sick.”

It’s no use standing still in one spot. The present, where we are right now, has always got to be a starting point. That’s what Nishida was saying (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 135).

This perspective is important to the story because it emphasizes the divide between *hibakusha* and *nonhibakusha* (experciencer and nonexperiencer). Nishida makes that claim, but no one responds. The story just continues.

The memory of Kinuko in the following days after the bomb brings the narrator full circle in her own memory. As the women are walking around the various
classrooms, they all try to remember which room was their classroom. The narrator does not remember Kinuko until Oki asks about Kinuko’s “empty can”:

I remembered the girl who came to school with the bones of her parents in her school bag. The girl had kept the bones in a lidless empty can that had been seared red by the flames. When the girl arrived in her seat, she took her textbooks out of her school bag. Then she took out the empty can, picking it up carefully with both hands, and placed it on the right side of her desk (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 141-2).

Kinuko was a *hibakusha* who had to bear the burden of both her parents’ deaths. The way she memorializes her parents by carrying them with her at all times is reflective of a child’s dependence on her parents. It is an interesting contrast, then, that the adult teacher tells Kinuko that the ashes are better left at home (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 142. In thinking about distance, we have a child who wants the close that distance and an adult who wants to widen that distance. I think this interaction influenced Kinuko’s perspective on a *hibakusha*’s recovery process. The narrator claims that “Kinuko had said nothing about her past life or her present life” when they met at K Temple (Hayashi, “The Crazy Iris”, 143). I think this is Hayashi’s way of depicting the restart of time, the nuclear age (1945). As mentioned before, *hibakusha* remain in a liminal space between life and death, and to exist in this space that has never before been occupied is a difficult existence. There is significance to the fact that the effects of radiation are still present today. It is impossible to forget the bombings if tangible effects of that experience still exist in the present.

The last passage of the story emphasizes the liminal space with the conflation of past and present represented once again by glass. The narrator thinks about the glass that the doctor will remove from Kinuko’s back the following day. The reader is left with the image of glass splinters in “fat cast[s]” finally being taken from a body
after three decades. *What kind of glow would those smooth white pearls of fat cast when they were brought out into the light?* (Hayashi, “The Empty Can”, 143).

*The Empty Can* is a unique story that succeeds in portraying the delicate line between *hibakusha* and *nonhibakusha*. Hayashi’s creation of a close group of girlfriends with different levels of separation from each other and from August 9th results in a narrative that brings all their various memories from that day to the present. The misery of the bombing resurfaces in the present narrative by way of Kinuko’s stories and stories of glass shards, and such recollection of memories merges the past and present. The recollection of memories both signifies certain sites as triggers, and moreover the displacement of a person or institution triggers the fear of a repeat experience. Hayashi’s themes in *The Empty Can* ultimately attempts to narrate stories and memories of August 9th in order to raise awareness of post-bomb issues in the present.

What is so powerful about Hayashi’s literature is the way she humanizes nature as a method of depicting suffering. Especially in *Ritual of Death*, the reader is exposed to various facts surrounding the bombing, and when Hayashi’s brilliant imagery is contextualized by these facts, the reader gains a heightened awareness of the consequences of nuclear weapons. In addition, because Hayashi’s characters are so closely related to the people in her life, her literature reads as autobiographical in a way that engages in a true *hibakusha* experience.
Chapter 2: Ibuse Masuji’s *Black Rain*

The purpose of this chapter is to expand on the idea that distance, by its malleability, can provide a person with an advantageous, peripheral perspective on an experience. My discussion of Ibuse’s pieces *Black Rain* and *The Crazy Iris*, will explore similar themes depicted in Hayashi’s literature, and how Ibuse’s approach to his literature is vastly different. The most significant reason is that Ibuse himself is not a *hibakusha*. However, unlike Hayashi, Ibuse was born and raised in a rural village in Hiroshima, a place called Kamo (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 9). Ibuse was born in Fukuyama Prefecture on February 15, 1898, just a few decades after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The transitional state of Japan at that time, bombarded with the force of the West, was foundational in Ibuse’s perspective on life and its natural processes.

One of Ibuse’s significant characteristics is his desire for tangibility in his research discoveries. John Whittier Treat, in his work *Pools of Water, Pillars of Fire*, quotes a critic of Ibuse named Yasuoka Shotaro, who has analyzed how Ibuse’s affinity toward painting influenced his literary strategies:

Ibuse may very well have preferred painting to writing because a picture is more than anything else, an object one can actually grasp and view (Yasuoka, *Shosetsuka*, 100-1).

Ibuse’s determination to collect numerous stories from living *hibakusha* speaks to the seamless integration of actual accounts and fictional narratives. His method of research is perhaps a reason for *Black Rain*’s broad audience. As a nonexperiencer, Ibuse figured out how to write for a nonexperiencer.
*Black Rain* was the climax of Ibuse’s writing career, and it was the culmination piece of all his research of Hiroshima and the atomic bomb. The overarching themes in this piece manifest themselves in a larger way, namely in a metaphorical language that is deemed universally understandable. According to Treat, “the work of Ibuse Masuji suggest experiences more quintessentially human than particularly Japanese,” and thus his writing “survives translation” (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 6).

The first major theme in Ibuse’s literature is the merging of man and nature. This is where his upbringing in the countryside shows its influence. First, this man-nature relationship is grounded in certain rituals unique to farming villages. In *Black Rain*, rituals were a point of stability in Postwar chaos, and the continuity of such cultural traditions served as a positive contrast to the destruction of the bomb. The merging of man and nature also comes through in the natural processes of death and life, the circular and arguably endless cycle of life. In Antonín Líman’s, *Ibuse Masuji: A Century Remembered*, he argues that Ibuse has a “deep belief in the ultimate rightness of the natural course and man’s belonging to it,” (357) and therefore he is able to empathize with life through intricate relationships between *man and nature* and *man and his memory* (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 217). Personification of nature, akin to Ibuse’s use of the abnormal in his prose, is also a common method present in all his literature. Symbols like fire, water, and clouds are given humanistic or animalistic qualities and are used to paint pictures of the bombing and its immediate aftermath. Because nature has such cyclical characteristics, a unique characteristic of *Black Rain* is Ibuse’s focus on the regeneration of life after death. While Ibuse indeed discusses
the perpetuation of radiation and the inescapable connection to the bomb most victims possess, he does not dwell on that misery. In fact, his point of depicting various images of suffering victims is not to evoke sympathy, but for the narrative to remain at a certain distance from the experience in order to avoid sentimentality (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 4). Sentimentality has a way of interfering with the communication of facts, and Ibuse wrote *Black Rain* as a way to communicate factual truths through fiction, a goal that is achieved without provoking victim sympathy.

The second theme is the conflation of past, present, and future. In *Black Rain*, Ibuse has three explicit timelines: “distant history, the present of the narrative, and the recent past of the war” (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 210). Similar to Hayashi’s use of letters, Ibuse collected and integrated diaries of *hibakusha* whom he met and interviewed during visits to Hiroshima, and the process of integrating them together merges past and present in the narrative (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 207). These diaries are crucial in *Black Rain* because they are true accounts of the bombing in Ibuse’s own words, and they ground Ibuse’s liberal use of historical documentation. According to Treat, Ibuse’s literature is a unique combination of “fact and fiction, memoir and intervention” (*Pools of Water*, 202). Thus, together with real accounts from *hibakusha*, Ibuse created a narrative that “avoid[s] direct description of the bomb” and therefore did not diminish the integrity of their experiences by subjecting those experiences to historical description (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 204). Ibuse integrates the diary entries in such a way that the four elements of Ibuse’s literature that Treat references are indistinguishable upon first glance.
Space and distance is the third and final theme discussed in this chapter.

Because Ibuse did not experience the bomb firsthand, his perspective in *Black Rain*, exemplified by the first person narrator, occupies a space separated from the victims themselves. The distance is most visible between the narrator’s point of view and the diaries (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 203). Memories can never be a holistic representation of the experience because they are “personal myths” that recall what is “most important to one’s identity and one’s survival” (Liman, *Ibuse Masuji*, 354). Memory of trauma is slightly different from other forms of memory in that the personal aspect of trauma makes the memory inaccessible to an outsider. Ibuse escapes this inaccessibility by rewording *hibakusha* diaries. Ibuse, therefore, does not write about the bombing directly, but he writes about its “displaced effects” (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 203). Treat brilliantly analyzes this distance:

[Ibuse] places a middle ground simultaneously real and figurative between himself and his theme, permitting the reader a knowledge of what, had Ibuse been in Hiroshima on August 6, would be unknowable – because the narrator would be dead (*Pools of Water*, 203).

In altering the diary entries for *Black Rain*, Ibuse integrates his surrender to the processes of nature. There are several examples of Ibuse’s depiction of the victims and how his borderline nonchalance toward their suffering reflects his empathy for nature.

This chapter will focus mostly on *Black Rain* because it is Ibuse’s most noted piece of atomic bomb literature. However, *The Crazy Iris* uses similar themes, so I will incorporate examples from the short story to further convey my points.
**Black Rain (1969)**

*Black Rain* is a fictional story based on the experiences of a *hibakusha* named Shizuma Shigematsu, who is Shigematsu Shizuma in the story. Shizuma is a real *hibakusha* whom Ibuse met in Hiroshima. Shizuma’s niece, Yasuko, was working in a factory when the bomb hit Hiroshima, and her post-bomb experience was the inspiration for *Black Rain*. The original title of the story was *Marriage of a Niece* because the underlying narrative is about Shigematsu’s efforts to arrange a marriage for Yasuko (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 208). However, at the time Ibuse learned about Yasuko, she had already married and had two children. In the narrative, the one thing preventing her marriage is that she was near the epicenter of the bomb and could have health repercussions (Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 15-6). Shigematsu provided Ibuse with Yasuko’s diaries, and Ibuse then did more independent research gathering facts and stories from more than fifty *hibakusha* (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 207). Thus, the organization of the story is Ibuse’s fictional stories intertwined with *hibakusha* diaries. Toward the end of the story, however, Yasuko experiences symptoms of radiation sickness and breaks off her marriage arrangement (Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 219).

By the fact that the narrative’s underlying story focused on finding Yasuko a husband, the narrative makes a significant shift after the marriage proposal fails. Shigematsu’s attempts to convince Yasuko’s potential husband that she was healthy were blinding him from accepting the truths of radiation. Thus, the failure of the match relieved Shigematsu of his hesitation to understand the bomb in full.

According to Robert Lifton in work called *Death in Life*, the narrator’s shift was from “denial toward transcendence.” It is from that shift that the “timelessness of everyday
rituals and nature’s perpetual re-creation of life and beauty” surfaces (551). The continuity of ritualistic and natural themes in the underlying narrative allowed Ibuse’s use of diaries to blend seamlessly within his story. Hence, the analysis of nature and the body, time, and space provides insight into Ibuse’s overall perspective on understanding life after the bomb.

As a nonhibakusha, Ibuse uses nature as his entry point into the experiences of Hiroshima, and his use of personification connects man and nature in a way that allows Ibuse to “write about Hiroshima without writing of Hiroshima.” Treat clarifies this as “mediat[ing] the experience without distorting it” (Treat, *Pools of Water*, 201). The passages that exemplify this mediation draw from Ibuse’s use of rituals and specific references to his rural upbringing. One particular part of Ibuse’s narrative is the carp that Shigematsu and a couple of his friends decide to raise as a hobby. He remembers his doctor saying that “fishing [is] very beneficial in mild cases of radiation sickness, both psychologically and because it provide[s] an added source of fat in the diet” (Ibuse, 27). Fish are symbolic representations of the delicacy and immortality of nature in the same way that the existence of the bombing in hibakusha memories is omnipresent. The men’s process of raising carp through their three stages of growth (*kego*, *aoko*, and *shinko*) signifies Ibuse’s “care” for hibakusha life (Treat, *Pillars of Water*, 217). According to Líman, Japanese rituals “reinforce belief in life,” and therefore the underlying significance of rituals in the story also conveys life in death. Ibuse’s descriptions of the atrocities are criticized as abrasive, but his intention is to show an “overall beauty that transcends ugliness of detail” (Bester, “Translator’s
Preface”, 8). By claiming that there is beauty in death, Ibuse justifies his grotesque descriptions:

At one end of the bridge, a body lay face up with its arms stretched out wide. Its face was black and discolored, yet from time to time it seemed to puff its cheeks out and take a deep breath. Its eyelids seemed to be moving, too. I stared in disbelief. Balancing my bundle on the parapet, I approached the corpse in fear and trembling – to find swarms of maggots tumbling from the mouth and nose and crowding in the eye sockets; it was nothing but their wriggling, that first impression of life and movement (Black Rain, 160-1).

Ibuse ends the passage with the contrasting phrase “the first impression of life and movement,” which draws the reader away from the graphic description just before.

Another technique Ibuse utilizes in his description of the corpse is of the absurd and abnormal. The lifelike description of the corpse is abnormal and extreme, which challenges the reality of the image. Ibuse’s use of the abnormal in his descriptive passages therefore is a method for “humanizing the absurd” and shifting the horror “into the context of normal life” (Líman, Ibuse Masuji, 406). Similarly, Shigematsu uses a jellyfish metaphor to describe the bomb, a sight that was so awesome and extraordinary that simple words do not suffice. The metaphor, images that an ordinary person could relate to, resultantly humanizes the physicality of the bomb:

The mushroom cloud was really shaped more like a jellyfish than a mushroom. Yet it seemed to have a more animal vitality than any jellyfish, with its leg that quivered and its head that changed color as it sprawled out slowly toward the southeast, writing and raging as though it might hurl itself on our heads at any moment. It was an envoy of the devil himself (Black Rain, 54-5).

Although such imagery is abnormal, the passage succeeds in conveying the monstrosity of the mysterious explosion. The abnormal images add to the mystery of this new weapon. The descriptions of the bomb as separate parts are more approachable than the whole image of a jellyfish-shaped creature with quivering legs
and a writhing, colorful head. The fact that the Shigematsu’s description gives nothing definitive about the reality of the bomb further validates Ibuse’s intention to write about, not of, the bomb.

Abnormality in nature’s appearance and processes also depict the graphicness of radiation’s effects on plant’s natural cycles. Just like the double pumpkins in Hayashi’s *Ritual of Death*, the narrator’s descriptions of the landscape utilize the abnormal to express the absurdity of the bomb. While the abnormal does exemplify the absurdity of the bomb, the absurdity of the personification contrastingly humanizes the bomb. The narrator also compares the abnormalities in a plant to the abnormalities in a human’s bodily dysfunction. Whenever he walks through the ruins to get to Yokogawa train station, the abnormal appearances attract his attention:

> Along this road, too, I could see, between the broken stone walls and the ornamental rocks where people’s houses had been, wood sorrel and vetch drooping under the weight of new shoots that had sprouted too quickly for them to support. I wondered whether the shock of the raid could have affected the cell structure of plants in the same way as with human beings (*Black Rain*, 190).

In Ibuse’s short story, *The Crazy Iris* (1951), the main symbol throughout is the iris flower and its rare bloom during off-season. This anomaly of an iris is a spectacle in the broader context of Ibuse’s literary themes. The lone iris represents regeneration in the way it blooms out of season, and its abnormal growth conveys the odd affects the bomb had on nature. In the story, the irises and corpses are physically and metaphorically connected. At the end of the story, the narrator wakes up to a female corpse floating amongst the irises in the river just outside his window:

> What I had seen floating on the surface was a human body. The iris[es] were clustered at one end of the pond and a few yards away was something
looked like a piece of purple tissue. The body was floating on its back, one cheek almost touching the purple object (Ibuse, “The Crazy Iris”, 32).

As it turns out, the woman who dies was “half-crazy” and perhaps committed suicide in the chaos of the air raids (Ibuse, “The Crazy Iris”, 34). Both the flower and the woman were taken from their natural existences by the bomb, yet the iris prospers and the human suffers. The bombing displaces the woman’s mental stability, and the flower blooms during its off-season. This connection can be interpreted in two ways. The iris could represent life for hibakusha in that seeing them side-by-side in the river makes them one entity – life in death. The other interpretation appears more morbid by the fact that the woman died because she went crazy and the iris is a metaphorical representation of the abnormal, unnatural effects of radiation. The closing lines of the story hint at the latter interpretation. The narrator remembers hearing a story about a writer who “saw [a] girl [in a beautiful kimono] floating face upwards on [a] pond near where the iris grew” (34), and the narrator’s friend responds with such conviction:

“There’s all the difference in the world, you know, between the iris in your story and the flower down there in the pond. They belong to completely different periods. The iris blooming in this pond is crazy and belongs to a crazy age” (Ibuse, “The Crazy Iris”, 35).

This claim foreshadows the “crazy age” that refers to the post-bomb, nuclear age. In this new age of nuclear weapons and energy, such craziness portrays death by atomic bomb as a completely arbitrary process. Ibuse’s narrators in Black Rain and The Crazy Iris both think about what lives and what dies, and there is no explanation in the story or in reality. Similar to how the narrator in From Trinity to Trinity came out
of the explosion unscathed at just 1.4 kilometers from the epicenter, there is no predicting what or who suffered from the flash.

The characters in *Black Rain* take note of incidences when some life forms survive over others. These observations are weaved into the narrative as their personal thoughts, and because it is written from the perspective of someone who does not know the facts, it invites the reader to wonder as well. One such observation is a comparison between fish and humans. In recalling a paralyzed fish, the narrator ponders how “fish should die, great granite posts be blown down, and walls be broken through, yet human beings on the ground come through almost unscathed” (87). Here, Ibuse’s belief in the immortality of nature attempts to reflect the strength of humans in this destruction. In this next passage, Shigematsu mentions his childhood knowledge of plants after seeing that a plantain tree’s new shoot had grown an exceptional amount:

The original stem had been snapped off by the blast and had disappeared without a trace, but a new shoot, encased in a sheath like bamboo, was already growing in place. Today, the shoot was a good two feet long. Familiar with trees as I was, after a childhood spent on a farm, I was astonished (191).

Ibuse himself grew up in a farming village, and his voice comes through via the narrator’s thoughts. However, Shigematsu’s description of thousand year old trees that “finally met their fate” in the explosion contrasts this immortality (Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 99). As shrines and temples are often sites of rituals, describing the destruction of trees within these sacred places is meant to shatter the immortality of the physical. As will be discussed in the next section, it is the mental attachment to rituals that were points of stability despite the destruction of the physical spaces.
The second way rituals are significant to Ibuse’s literature is their ability to merge time within the narrative. There are two types of rituals used for this point: There are rituals that ground the narrative in history as community rituals, and there are rituals that the narrator does in order to establish some sense of consistency in his post-bomb life. Memory is also pertinent to this point because the diaries are the narrator’s firsthand memories of the explosion. As mentioned in the introduction of this section, memories are far too personal to be applied to a broad group of people (in this case, hibakusha). Thus, the conflation of past, present, and future are exemplified purely on a personal level. Many of the themes described in these memories are in fact relatable through personification; however, it is the narrators’ perspectives that allow the reader to see this merging of time. It is certain experiences that trigger the memory of the bombing that this section will discuss.

The community rituals the narrator describes in both the present story and his diaries are important in understanding the “norm” of his community. Predominantly a farming community, many of the festivals described in the story pertain to nature, another reason man and nature have such a significant relationship in Black Rain. For example, the narrator describes the annual Sumiyoshi Festival where farmers pray to Sumiyoshi for protection against floods (Ibuse, Black Rain, 126). Setting up these rituals as a communal history paves the way for the smaller, personal rituals that appear in the narrator’s post-bomb daily life. One common ritual introduces water as a symbolic element at the beginning of the story:

I had a raging thirst, so I filled the bucket with fresh water and gargled three times, then drank. I don’t think anybody actually taught me to do so, but when I was a child I always made sure to gargle three times before drinking from a well or spring on un-familiar territory. The other boys said they always
gargled three times first. Besides preventing upset stomachs caused by drinking strange water. It was supposed to be a mark of respect for the water god who dwelt in the well or the spring (Ibuse, 48).

This passage integrates a ritual past with the narrator’s present need for water, and it emphasizes the weight of such ritual. Survivors of the bomb were in dire need of water after the explosion because of the intense heat and burning of the flash. As Lifton exclaims in his chapter titled “The Atomic Bomb Experience,” the dying people’s pleas for water were a “form of ultimate horror [that] was both frequent and particularly significant (Death in Life, 51). In addition, water holds significance because there is an ancient Japanese belief that “water can restore life by bringing back the spirit that has just departed – or is about to depart – from the body” (Inoguchi, “Funerals”, 23). Thus, a plea for water is like a plea for life: “These pleas by A-bomb victims were therefore as much psychological expressions of old cultural symbolism as they were of physical need” (Lifton, Death in Life, 52). The fact that Shigematsu consciously gargled the water three times despite his “raging thirst” indicates the importance of the ritual. This passage pinpoints both the significance of ritual and of water.

However, it is interesting to see the slow digression of rituals with water as Shigematsu begins to come to terms with the bomb. Toward the middle of the story, Shigematsu wakes up from a nap “to a raging thirst and a pain in [his] throat,” and leaves to wash his face with a cloth (Ibuse, 110). There is repetition once again when he wrings out the towel, yet he no longer feels any restrictions:

I washed my small towel in a ditch at the edge of the bamboo grove, wiped my right check and the sinews of my neck, then rinsed the towel time and time again. I wrung it out and rinsed it, wrung it out and rinsed it, repeated the same seemingly pointless procedure over and over again. To wring out my
towel was the one thing, it seemed to me, that I was free to do as I pleased at that moment (Ibuse, 111-12).

This passage depicts a limitless freedom that shifts water’s symbolism from ritual to freedom. Such freedom foreshadows Shigematsu’s ability to let go of his denial about the bomb after Yasuko’s marriage arrangement fails. Especially in saying “the one thing,” it is as if from his perspective, there is no other aspect in his life that was free (112).

Another facet of ritual is the way repetition can make certain the process of the ritual second nature. Loss in significance can be one consequence of repetition, and in Black Rain, disposing of corpses became second nature to many survivors. Shigematsu was working in a crematory, and his manager asked him to read the services for the dead because he “believe[d] one should dispose of the dead with respect” (Ibuse, Black Rain, 131-2). Shigematsu hesitates at first because he does not feel he is qualified to perform the services, but the more funerals he performs the more normal it becomes. There are several incidences in the story when the narrator encounters dead bodies on the street, and the image is so similar to the funerals that he finds himself reciting the “Sermon on Mortality” to himself:

Some of the skulls gazed fixedly at the sky with empty eye-sockets, others clenched their teeth in angry resentment. In olden times, I suddenly recalled, they used to refer to skulls as “the unsheltered ones.” In some holes, only the head and legs had been consumed. In others, bright red tongues of flame still flickered fitfully. I remembered the other body awaiting me, and set of back along the embankment, murmuring the “Sermon of Mortality” to myself as I went. This time, I got through it without so much as a glance at my notes (Ibuse, 138).

The recitations had become so regular that it created a subconscious connection between death and the sermon for the narrator. In his diary, he mentions that the
sermon’s “precepts had no real meaning for [him]; in [his] mind’s eye, like a waking dream, [he] could still see the tongues of fire at work on the bodies of men” (Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 139). At the same time, the sermon serves as a trigger for Shigematsu’s recollection of the explosion.

The festivals and rituals also trigger a sentiment for Shigematsu as he continues to transcribe his journal. In the present narrative, that particular month had many festivals: The Mass for Dead Insects, the Rice-Planting Festival, and the Bamboo-Cutting Festival (Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 101). He recalls that the “peasants of the past” were able to “lavish on each detail of their daily lives,” and that urged him to think even deeper into his experience of the bombing (101):

> And as he wrote on, and the horrors of that day came back to him ever more vividly, it seemed to him that in their very insignificance these farmers’ festivals were something to be loved and cherished (101).

The detail the festivals and rituals in the past peasant’s lives is symbolic of the diary’s contents. Because the diaries are the narrators’ personal memories of August 6, what are the details on which they focus? One example, as discussed earlier, is water and thirst, and another is floating corpses. Such consistency in thematic descriptions is important because the narrators’ thoughts are structured so that the present situation instigates a memory. Thus, the constant shift between past and present is not problematic because the themes are present in all the time frames of the novel. For example, when the diaries shift from Shigematsu to Iwatake, a military *hibakusha*, his experiences have similar characteristics, which make the transitions from diary to diary quite seamless. In Iwatake’s diary, he describes a train ride he took toward his
hometown while in a near-death state. However, his memory of that route made it impossible for him to imagine dying:

With great difficulty, I got a seat in the rearmost car of the special troop train. It was a train of the same Geibi line that ran through my home in the country, and I had traveled back and forth on it a number of times during my middle school days. The sound of the whistle cheered me immensely. Somehow, I felt I could not possibly die now that I had heard that well-remembered sound from the past. The emotion that flooded me at the prospect of a time free from the sleeplessness, strain, and apprehension of the past three days made the three-hour journey seem excessively long and the train excessively tardy (Ibuse, 252).

Such merging of past and present initiates a sense of nostalgia in which the memories of minute details in one’s daily life in the past has the power to bring strength into the dire conditions of the present. This nostalgia, however, can also work in reverse. As a result of the many changes in the environment and people’s daily lives following the bomb, some aspects of daily life changed in a negative way. Shigematsu’s wife, in her diary about her family’s diet during the bomb, expressed how a particular food used to be somewhat pleasant, but had become negative when it became a necessary supplement to food (Ibuse, Black Rain, 69):

In the last years of the war every household in our neighborhood association was supplementing its food with wild plants […] Children who were undernourished or prone to bed-wetting were given the grubs found in figs or the fruit of a certain shrub, broiled in soy […] In the summer when I was a child in the country, there was a woodcutter who used to come selling them, and sometimes I was given them to prevent worms. I remember them as savory and rather nice (69).

This passage is not Shigeko’s way of saying that the bomb changed this food for her, but it ties into the idea that something can lose its significance when it becomes normal. She remembers this as “rather nice” in the context of occasionally eating them to prevent worms (69). However, in the present context, it seems this food is
more of a necessity, and that change in purpose, caused by the bomb, is what portrays the sense of nostalgia. Similar to Iwatake’s train experience, because the memories of the past influence the feelings of the present, freedom that is constrained by something out of one’s control has the ability to blur the separation of past and present. It is through the diaries that this connection is made possible.

The final theme in *Black Rain* is how space and distance between the present narrator, the diary authors, and the characters’ memories convey Ibuse’s belief in life and regeneration (Treat, *Writing Ground Zero*, 389). When the various characters in the story see corpses strewn all over town, instead of feeling mournful, they pass by knowing there is nothing they can do to help. While this is relevant to the point made earlier that death became a norm and therefore less significant, this section will approach that concept from a different perspective. The term “space,” which I will interchange with the term “site,” focuses on the physical spaces where death occurred and memories were had. It is impossible to completely separate time and memory from the effects of space and distance. Spaces are tangible triggers for memories, and so the blurred line between past and present is one way that shows how time merges.

An example from Ibuse’s *The Crazy Iris* eloquently portrays how the displacement of an object that is crucial to a place would completely uproot the significance of that space. The protagonist, a man called Masu, lives in Fukuyama, which is “a hundred miles from Hiroshima” (Ibuse, “The Crazy Iris”, 17). The story takes place just a few days after the bombing, and the villagers await the next announcement from the Americans (Ibuse,18). Masu walks to a place called Kobayashi Inn, a place he had known for more than three decades. There is a jar in
the back courtyard that he has wanted to own for years. Despite the many reasons he gives the landlady to sell the jar to him, she refuses with a different excuse every time. Each excuse hints to the fact that the landlady wants the jar to remain at the inn for sentimental reasons, but she gives Masu one practical reason after another:

It was some time now since I had first asked the landlady to sell me the jar, but she had refused on the grounds that she might need it should the water-supply ever be cut off. There was something very attractive about this jar, but it wasn’t until the landlady’s refusal that I realized how much I had always wanted it. On my next visit to Fukuyama I again made an offer. This time the landlady declined, saying that the jar had been there ever since her father’s day. When I mentioned the matter again some months later, she said she could not part with the jar as it was so beautiful in the rain (Ibuse, “The Crazy Iris”, 19).

Finally, when the villagers were instructed to evacuate, Masu thought the landlady would finally concede. Once again, she refuses saying, “I never heard that we had to evacuate our water jars […] The only thing that’s being evacuated from my inn is people” (Ibuse, “The Crazy Iris”, 20). As the story progresses, Masu continues to look for the jar, and with each visit, the jar is more broken than the time before. At last “it had been pounded into fragments, together with the fallen bricks and debris,” and the sad image of the crushed jar had become cemented in Masu’s memory:

On the train to Iwakuni, I thought about the jar and kept on composing different cards I might send the landlady: “Dear Madam, The image of that bygone water jar haunts me incessantly. How transient, alas, the beauty of this world! Yours sincerely…” (Ibuse, “The Crazy Iris”, 27).

The exclamation, “How transient, alas, the beauty of this world!” is essential in conveying this idea of beauty in destruction. The jar, an object deemed beautiful both by the landlady and Masu, are of comparable importance in the context of this narrative. For the landlady, the water jar is the holder of the Inn’s history and her own family history. This particular object is part of the site’s identity. That is to say that
one, it was one of the few physical objects that Masu uses to identify the destroyed Inn, and two, the landlady’s insistent refusal to sell the jar implies its significance to the physical space. The jar then holds a similar significance to the deceased in *Black Rain*, when the narrator and a man named Mr. Tashiro have a conversation about Mr. Tashiro’s opinion that his wife and daughter did not need a proper burial. In the same way the landlady in *The Crazy Iris* wanted the jar to “die” where it belonged, Mr. Tashiro decided to “leave [his wife and daughter] where they are” (Ibuse, “The Crazy Iris”, 165):

“It can’t be helped,” he said. “I’ll leave them where they are. Wherever a person’s remains are, it’s the same in the end – so much organic matter in the soil (165).

This passage discusses regeneration using the simplest of natural concepts. Unlike cremation, to leave a corpse to naturally disintegrate is to give nutrients to the soil. For these various characters to vocalize their understanding that life comes from death is one way the reader can identify with Ibuse’s perspective on life. One character in *Black Rain*, Teiko, tells the head consultant of the Hosokawa Clinic that he “resigned himself to the thought that both [his] brother-in-law and his nephew are so much charcoal by now,” that it’s “a dreadful thing, but there’s no help for it but to face the facts” (Ibuse, 207). This ties into Líman’s point that Ibuse sympathizes with “all forms of existence” (Líman, *Ibuse Masuji*, 359). This illustrates that Ibuse in fact does not separate man and nature precisely he sees them as equal forms of existence. At the same time, the casual tone of his characters when they talk about the death of their family members reminds the reader that a human does not have a superior
existence to nature. Man and nature’s occupation of the same space inherently narrows their distance.

Líman discusses another kind of man-nature relationship that urges the reader to see space from a perspective out of our reach. He writes a passage of *Black Rain* that was not translated into Bester’s version, and the passage really changes the meaning of the imagery that follows. The passage is translated as follows:

> In my old home at the country they used to say ‘the morning crows bring a good *man*’. It meant that those who saw a crow in the morning would have good luck on that day. Didn’t they praise the harmony of colors of animals and plants? When I started working I looked up at the library of the war supply office the word *man of ma is good*. *Man* is a variation of *ma* and means fate, destiny. In that sense, Hiroshima’s *ma* was extremely bad.⁴

According to Líman, this passage implies that Hiroshima was cosmically in a state of misfortune (Líman, *Ibuse Masuji*, 386). Thus, the next passage about a dying pigeon helps define the narrator’s understanding of death. First, the passage incorporates a personal connection of man and nature with the crows. Second, by saying that “*Man* is a variation of *ma*,” Ibuse is humanizing this sense of destiny:⁵

> Beyond the pond, I noticed a white pigeon crouching in the grass. I went gently up to it and took it in my hands, but it was blinded in its right eye, and the feathers above its right wing were slightly scorched. For a moment, I felt a sudden desire to eat it broiled with soy, but I let it go, tossing it up and away from me into the air. It managed to flap its wings quite well, and flew off just over the tops of the lotus leaves, describing a horizontal parabola that curved steadily towards the left. But then, as I watched, it lost height and plunged into the waters of the pond (Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 171).

⁴ *Kuroi Ame*, 186. Translated by Antonín Líman in *Ibuse Masuji: A Century Remembered*.

⁵ The term *ma* here is the character 運 which can also be pronounced as “un.” It’s interesting that Líman chose to use *ma* because *ma* can also mean “space.” If you replace *ma* with space in the phrase, “Hiroshima’s *ma* was extremely bad,” the element of nature becomes crucial in the meaning.
This analysis can be applied to Katsura’s character in Hayashi’s *From Trinity to Trinity*. He claims that he is an “inmate on death row without a prison term” (Hayashi, *Trinity*, 11). Since radiation poisoning did not have specific treatments, it was commonly accepted that death was inevitable. Beyond Ibuse’s belief that there is life in death, there is also the lingering fear of an unpredictable death. Shigematsu is often at the train station, and in the days following the explosion, the landscape of humans at this communal space, dead and alive, heighten the arbitrariness of death. Shigematsu is not shocked, but there are others who feel nothing more than shock:

> They were appalled at what they found, but they did not know, of course, what kind of bomb had fallen. The horror was so stupefying that they could do nothing but take helpless note of whatever they saw (Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 156).

Shigematsu, on the other hand, saw this landscape as a space representative of the entire city. As Treat discusses in *Pools of Water, Pillars of Fire*, the train station serves as a microcosm of the entire story, and Shigematsu’s observations paint a fairly accurate picture of the various people traveling around Hiroshima:

> Still more came pushing their way out through the crush to the exit. The result was considerably more space, and passengers who had remained silent so far began sporadic attempts at conversation. Without exception, they talked of the bombing. Each told what he had seen or heard as an individual, without relation to the others, so that even synthesizing their stories it was impossible to get an overall picture of the disaster (Ibuse, *Black Rain*, 116).

A train station is a community space where people from all walks of life convene for the purpose of travel. The train station has a ritual-like existence in *Black Rain* because it is a regular, everyday part of daily life. In addition, its gradual breakdown is an interruption that causes chaos and stirs up frustration for the passengers. Thus, the various accounts of the bombing that survivors share are another method Ibuse uses to include personal experiences in his story.
However, the train stories are significant for another reason. One of the passengers, an elementary school boy, described his narrow escape from his burning house. His survival, and then his courage to retell his story, is symbolic of survival in the positive sense. Unlike other diary entries or personal accounts that describe countless deaths, this is a story of survival:

Quite suddenly the boy, with an expression of great revulsion, came out with his story. He had been at home when the ball of fire had burst. There had been a sudden flash and a mighty roar, and he had started to run outside. On the instant, the house had collapsed and he had lost consciousness. When he came to, he found himself trapped between beams or other timbers, and his father trying to get them off. [...] “It’s no use. Don’t think ill of me – I’m getting out. You won’t think ill of me, son?” And flinging the log away, he fled. [...] In despair, the boy sank down among the timbers – whereupon, quite suddenly, he no longer felt the restraint on his ankle, and found himself free to crawl out from between the timbers” (Ibuse, 119-20).

The boy’s miraculous escape is a spark of hope among the other stories of loss. Thus, this space, while a commonplace with a “morbid mood,” has moments of regeneration. Beyond the crowds of frustrated people trying to reach their loved ones or return to their hometowns, the company of strangers who are all experiencing the chaos in one way or another is representative of Ibuse’s broader story (Ibuse, Black Rain, 236). The sharing of personal experiences is one, how other victims could slowly piece together what exactly occurred, and two, how Ibuse actually learned about victims’ experiences. The train is symbolic of movement forward, and thus the positivity he believed could exist among hibakusha exists in that space.

*Black Rain* is such a moving piece to read, and the process of analyzing his incredible use of imagery and personification instilled in me an emotion that I cannot quite pinpoint. This emotion is something that I attempted to achieve with my final choreographic piece, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Ibuse succeeded in
writing a piece that interweaved man and nature, space and memory, and past and present. I read Yasuko’s story as the main narrative, and thus, I agree with John Bester that “*Black Rain* is not a ‘book about the bomb’ at all” (Bester, “Translator’s Preface”, 8).
Chapter 3: Two Original Choreographic Works

The choreography part of this thesis consists of two separate processes that result in two pieces. The inspiration and aesthetic goals were derived from Hayashi Kyōko and Ibuse Masuji’s brilliant use of natural images in their atomic bomb literature. I entered the first process with visual images I gathered while studying abroad in Kyoto, Japan, and I altered those ideas as appropriate to my research. The second process really began with the literature, and the concepts my movers explored were either the literature itself or an idea I extracted from the literature. The literature analyses I have provided in the two previous chapters serve to highlight themes and symbols the authors exploit to convey a means of “understanding” Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I say “understanding” because to understand the bombing could refer to anything from knowing the historical facts to, as a victim, coming to terms with the experience. Hayashi and Ibuse arrive at their individual artistic goals through very similar literary tactics, and I attribute those similarities to their unique distance from the bombings. Hayashi is a hibakusha who grew up in Shanghai and moved back to Japan a few months before the bombings. Ibuse, on the other hand, was home in Hiroshima’s countryside at the time of the attack, but did not experience the bomb. They each had a perspective of the bomb that differed from their Japanese neighbor, and in their attempts to understand their postwar lives; they embarked on a literary journey to investigate themselves and other victims.

The two pieces I will discuss, Navigable Möbius and Navigable Reverie, are collaborative works with two different groups of women. I will first explain the logistical aspects of each piece; location, ensemble, technology; and also elaborate on
specific connections between my research and my choreographic process. My process always begins with movement generation exercises that I usually use to create movement for smaller groups (solos, duets, trios) or larger groups (the entire ensemble). Once I feel there are enough movement and phrases, I make mini-dances. These mini-dances are different combinations of phrases put together with transitions. This “play” aspect of my process shows me a variety of possible structures from which I can create my final piece. As this entire process comes to close, I realized something significant about this experience: By situating myself as a choreographer researching Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the concepts and exercises that I created out of my research were a means of investigating something greater than myself. I never intended to create pieces about the bomb, as people have often misunderstood, but the pieces were mere results of these investigations. Thus, I hesitate when people ask me what my piece was about because the true answer is each individual in my ensemble. Once I tell people outside of the process the subject of my research, they immediately try to make direct connections to the movement, and that is not my goal at all. Thus, this chapter guides you through the convoluted process from literature to movement.

**Navigable Möbius**

Choreography: Lindsay Kosasa in collaboration with dancers
Dancers: Kate Finley, Hibiki Mizuno, Zoe Taft Mueller, Stellar Levy, and Naya Samuel
Music: Lullatone soundscape by Takashi Shima, Noise Noism, Riceboy Sleeps, Rachel’s

I would like to dedicate this piece to 今貂子, who taught me to be a raw egg.

*I am a raw egg*
*delicately rocking side to side*
*on a smooth wooden floor*
Choosing my ensemble for this first piece was difficult for a couple reasons. For senior choreographers, the audition process is optional, and therefore I had the opportunity to ask each mover individually if they would like to work with me. For all choreographic endeavors in previous years, the audition process brought movers from many different movement backgrounds, and it was already understood that these people were interested in working with a choreographer. As a choreographer who draws much of her inspiration from her ensemble, having to create a hypothetical group was very daunting. It was important to me that the ensemble was physically comfortable with each other, but not comfortable enough that the movement they created was predictable. I already had positive relationships with each of these women in vastly different dance settings, so I was confident that this ensemble would work well together and within my process.

As I mentioned earlier, I went into this process with inspiration from Japan. Over the course of the semester, I was taking weekly Butoh workshops from Ima Tenko, who runs a small company out of her home studio. The performance I saw was a collaboration with an accordion player and a visual artist. The visual artist utilized projections to create a landscape for Ima Sensei⁶, and this visual experience was breathtaking.

The artist had three overhead projectors lined up and situated in the center of

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⁶ In Japanese language, you refer to a teacher as *last name and “sensei”* which means teacher. Thus I always called her Ima Sensei.
the audience. Each projector had a different colored light (blue, yellow, and white). I am not exactly sure what materials he used in manipulating the images, but the way he was able to manipulate the colors and textures by projecting the pictures one at a time or in combination was riveting. I was sitting toward the front of the audience, and so I was completely engulfed by the images – it was all I could see. Ima Sensei covered her skin in the usual white color, and her costume in the first part of the performance was a white, toga-like dress. As a solo performance, her presence was the vivid center to a moving, vibrant background.
Above: Ima Sensei during her performance

All photos taken by Lindsay Kosasa in Kyoto, Japan
Ima Sensei’s movement was strictly improvisation, and so the relationship between her and the visual artist was purely extemporaneous. For my piece, the movement and the projection was directed by me, and my process of creating the projection stemmed from experimenting with various manipulations during rehearsals. I did not have access to the full performance setting until a week before the show, so the projection was not added until the movement was completely set. It is interesting for me to think about my movement generation in relation to the performance I saw in Kyoto. The movement quality was no doubt inspired by the image of colors flowing through water - the smoke-like visual of food coloring spreading through the water, and the viscous properties of the oil which colored water.

**Material box:**
- still water
- seltzer water
- herbal tea
- food coloring
- vegetable oil
- soil
- cornstarch
- cranberries
- hydrangea flowers (last night only)

My creation of the projection after the movement, while done for logistical reasons, turned out to be the key to the piece’s cohesiveness. I was worried that the constant manipulation of the images projected and the magnitude of the picture in the intimate
performance space might detract from the movers themselves, but feedback from other audience members said otherwise. Looking back, I would say that my experience watching Ima Sensei closely parallels my audience’s experience viewing my piece. Precisely because the projection was so large, it really created a visual world for the audience. I was able to experiment with different manipulations, and the fact that the projections were slightly different every night made the experience more engaging for my movers and me. I never told my dancers when I was going to try another material in the projection, and there were many points during the piece when they could see the screen. The cranberries and the hydrangeas were examples of such surprises, and when I asked my dancers if those affected them at all, they said that it added to their engagement in the movement. From personal experience, when I do the same dance enough times, the movement can easily become second nature to my body. For this piece specifically, such a mentality would have defeated the purpose of my choreographic process. The piece, which was mostly improvisation, was intended to be different every time. There were prompts, imagery, and visual cues that each mover was aware of during the performance, and such cues changed from night to night. The truly improvisational movement therefore prompted me to manipulate the projections in different ways.
Throughout the process, one of my main goals was to change the improvisation sections in different ways. Naturally, each mover found particularly salient movements that they would use in the improvisation sections. Typically, when I structure improvisation sections, I always make sure I can pinpoint what I want to
change - whether it is the overall group dynamic or something I would like an individual to change.

After reading a number of short stories from hibakusha, the literature does not seem to center around a certain emotion, or even attempt at expressing a certain emotion. I did not feel like an outsider reading their stories, nor did I feel like I was reading impersonal history. However, there were definitely sections that stood out more than others. Vivid imagery or dialogues made me take a step back and reevaluate everything I had just read. For example, in Ibuse’s “The Crazy Iris”, a floating body comes in contact with the pond lilies. Floating corpses and water symbols are common in Ibuse’s literature, and the concept of floating was one of the images that I carried on to the second process.

I took one look and turned out the light. I closed the window. What I had seen floating on the surface was a human body. The iris[es] were clustered at one end of the pond and a few yards away was something that looked like a piece of purple tissue paper. The body was floating on its back, one cheek almost touching the purple object (Ibuse, “The Crazy Iris”, 32).

This imagery can be interpreted to represent the image of the thousands of corpses floating down the Motoyasu River. This visual portrayal expressing the enormity of the casualties is a common theme. Every year, there is a lantern festival in Hiroshima on August 6th to commemorate the deceased. Families who lost loved ones to the bomb gather at the Motoyasu River and send red lanterns in remembrance. Ōe Kenzaburo writes in Hiroshima Notes about his personal trip to Hiroshima on the anniversary of August sixth, and my knowledge that this is Ōe’s actual experience made it that much more genuine:

On my last night in Hiroshima, I go out to watch the Buddhist service of floating lanterns on the river to honor the dead. I attend to honor my friend
who committed suicide in Paris from hysterical fear of nuclear war. The red, white, and sometimes blue lanterns, set afloat near the Peace Bridge, flow upstream as high tide comes in. In the postwar years this custom has found a place in the hearts of Hiroshima’s citizens as though it had been a folk tradition for centuries. Countless lanterns drift soundlessly, illuminating the rivers of Hiroshima (Ôe, *Hiroshima Notes*, 49).

This visual inspiration influenced my choreographic process in significant ways. First of all, the overall movement quality that I worked extensively with was that of oobleck. Oobleck is a mixture of cornstarch and water, and when it is put in a place without any pressure or contact, it just melts into a gooey, liquid-like substance. We played with the oobleck itself one night at rehearsal as tactile inspiration for the improvisation exercises to follow. Along with a number of different music scores that I felt resembled oobleck in musical form, my ensemble quickly melded together within this oobleck framework. It became so much a part of the process that at any point when a mover was beginning to lose the movement quality, all I had to do was say oobleck, and that extra awareness changed the movement completely.

The attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, unlike other genocides and mass murders that have soiled our world’s history, brought to attention the larger issue of nuclear weapons. These man made weapons, developed by a group of scientists and engineers commissioned by President Roosevelt, unleashed a power that no one could accurately anticipate. It wasn’t until the American government used these weapons in Japan that the world came to understand that mankind itself was at risk of complete obliteration. What the world also did not know, or could not have conceivably imagined, was the long-term effects of the weapon’s radiation (Jennings, “Hiroshima”, 00:23:00).
The nuclear bombs altered a victim’s sense of reality and that is the key foundation of the creative works made in the years following the attacks. Atomic bomb literature is written by hibakusha and non-hibakusha, therefore the genre itself does not rely on “factualness” that only hibakusha can relay, but rather the vivid imagery that borders on abnormal. Ibuse and Hayashi both personify nature as a means of portraying the bomb itself and the abnormalities that plagued humans and nature. As Antonín Líman says in Ibuse Masuji: A Century Remembered, “[the diary author’s] use of metaphor reveals that his deeper mind ultimately accepts destruction as the flow of things” (391). Miyaji, a character in Black Rain, describes the fire as snakes that “flicker their tongues in at the windows first, then crawl inside [the buildings]” (391).

This altered sense of reality was important to my process because it was precisely these existential concepts that forced my ensemble to move and create without a goal. It think my process succeeded with such a dominant improvisation section because the movement inspiration was not bound by specific images. Of course, I did provide them with specific imagery at different points in the process, but I made it clear that I was not confining them to any one image. We discussed the different exercises as an ensemble, and it gave each mover the chance to share their thoughts during each exercise. The practice of articulating a feeling to share and also receiving inspiration was crucial when we would do the “same” improvisational structure multiple times in one rehearsal.
To write of [H and N] is to be confronted with a chain of choices, such as whether to narrate, dramatize, or lyricize; speak to the victims or the nonvictims, or even the victimizers; and of course, what words to use to communicate, what works to use to not communicate (Treat, Writing Ground Zero, 43).

This speaks closely to my role as a choreographer. I was confronted with the decision of whether to disclose my intentions for the piece to my ensemble – as it related to my research. At that time, I had not decided the goals of my research, but I knew that I would be experimenting with the ways images and other forms of stimulation created emotion, and then how those emotions were expressed in my group’s individual movements. One of greatest challenges for these atomic bomb literature authors is essentially how much imagination they leave to the readers. It is argued in Writing Ground Zero that “what is crucially at stake is not the resolution of artistic issues but rather the tentative, indefinite tension between our naïve belief in history as concrete and the individual imagination as creative” (Treat, 37). I do agree with the point that such a visceral recollection of the events creates a divide between the author and the reader. However, I don't necessarily find that divide to be problematic. There is something to be said about the way a person internalizes the true, factual depiction of the bombings. As Treat argues, we tend to be confused when presented with information about the bomb because we cannot be sure if it is fact or fiction (Writing Ground Zero, 37).

For the purposes of my choreography, it didn’t matter if my reactions were consistent with the victims’ – and that in itself did not seem feasible. So I tried to work with this idea of “reactions” through an interactive exercise. There was one
exercise that I did with my ensemble toward the beginning of the process. It was somewhat of an icebreaker activity, but the goal was to react to a life-changing event with writing and pictures – and then do the same for an experience written by someone else. I instructed my ensemble to write about a moment when they saw, read, heard, or experienced something that changed the way they thought about themselves, or made them realize something new about themselves. I was careful not to explain to them that I was looking at the ways prose, poetry and art by hibakusha was an alternate means of understanding.

Literature and art about the bomb published and referenced were not only created by scholars and artists, but also everyday Japanese citizens. The bomb was more of a mystery than anything else. In the weeks following the bomb, confusion and chaos increased as doctors encountered untreatable injuries, families were without food from lack of arable land, and the morale of the country was quickly falling. This confusion is portrayed in their writings, and like much atomic bomb literature, the writing took the form of fiction as personal memoir. However, journals like Hiroshima Diary are personal accounts written verbatim. Hiroshima Diary is about a doctor who was injured in the bombing, and he lets the reader into his innermost thoughts and fears through his painfully descriptive diary entries. Therefore, had I told my ensemble that this exercise would serve as a comparative resource for me, I imagine they would have chosen very different moments. They may have chosen a more traumatic event like a broken bone or a death in the family, but instead, they were very simple experiences that would not necessarily be categorized as “life-changing”: 
An icebreaker game

A comment after a performance

A summer dancing with professionals

Waiting for a bus

Seeing *Ophelia*

The overall concept of the exercise was planned, more or less meaning that I had a goal. How I was going to reach that goal was very much an improvisation. As my movers wrote their paragraphs, I told them to leave room for two circles that they were to draw in the bottom half of the page. In the first circle, they were to draw the experience without lifting their pen (let’s call it “after” because the drawing represents how the experience changed them). The pen rule both limited the amount of time they could spend, and the continuous drawing left little room for second-guessing. For the second circle, they had to imagine that this experience never happened. I posed the question, “How does one forget?” At first it seemed redundant to have to think about the before and after of this experience and then go back to the feeling of the before, however, drawing the before and drawing the before having thought about the after is completely different. Contemplating “what if” is a question that atomic bomb literature urges us as readers to think about. Such discussion is relevant because there is historical proof that the bombs were unnecessary in ending the war. Japan was on the verge of surrender anyway, and there is evidence that President Truman was aware that there were other options for ending the war. There was the option to wait for Stalin’s army to enter the war, or to alter the unconditional
surrender in Japan’s favor, but those options were not known outside of the executive committee (Jennings, 00:39:00-00:39:30). This was not public knowledge until much later, and it therefore made the truth difficult to comprehend.

This brings me back to the exercise. Drawing the circle having considered the “what if” of the experience seemed to be the most difficult task, because they really had to think critically about how this moment impacted them. Once that was complete, they entrusted their page to another ensemble member. This second person was to choose a circle and write down five words that came to mind when they looked at the image. Each sheet had a passage at the top that described the experience, but the idea was to only use the circles as inspiration for the words. Only after the five words were chosen could they read the passage. Finally, the second person had the chance to draw a circle based on the passage and the five words that they wrote to describe the original circle. That concluded the exercise and a discussion followed.

Sharing in my process has rules. For some people, these moments are private, and the group is to respect that person if they are not willing to share. In addition, anything that is shared stays in the group. I like to think that my movers grow in the time that we work together, and that having this trusted space opens their minds and awareness of each other. So much of my process, and the movement that is created, lies so firmly in the personal exploration of each mover. The piece itself, then, is a “cathartic experience”, as my dancers told me on the last night of performances.
Navigable Reverie

Choreography: Lindsay Kosasa and dancers
Music: Melodium, Lykke Li, Sounds of Nature, Sigur Rós (arranged by Lindsay)
Dancers: Sora Akiyoshi, Stellar Levy, Hibiki Mizuno, Zoe Mueller, Miranda Orbach, Haley Perkins, Sally Williams

"Standing on the land that speaks no words, I shivered, feeling its pain [...] Over the land that keeps its silence, I must have been seeing the scene of the day when I ran away."
-Hayashi Kyôko, *From Trinity to Trinity*

A special thank you to Kate Ten Eyck, Charles Carroll, Kate Finley, Kelsey Siegel, Evan Weber, and Christian Lalonde for helping make this wall happen.

My first piece began with a visual inspiration that was part of a performance unrelated to the atomic bombings. Thus, the process of integrating the broader goals of my research into my choreographic process occurred in a strictly unidirectional
way. At the time, my understanding of my research goals were quite broad, and it was
the resonant imagery I encountered in reading the atomic bomb literature which
helped to shape the piece’s overall movement quality. However, the process for this
piece worked in the opposite direction. At first, it was frustrating to begin the process
without a clear vision and concrete goal for the piece, and therefore I relied heavily
on the inspiration from my literary sources. It was important for me have a firm grasp
on the literature before beginning this second choreographic process, and in many
ways, this was the first time that I restricted myself to inspiration from specific
sources: the atomic bomb literature. It was only after I had gathered enough imagery,
quotes, and passages that I could visualize what I was looking for from my ensemble.
Of course, as I kept reading, more inspirations surfaced, and I integrated those into
my process as well. Something that I pride myself in is the methods I use to convey
such imagery to my ensemble, and then how I alter those images on the spot until
they are moving in the way I imagined. My process is very strictly against showing,
or dare I say, demonstrating, because the collaborative effort implies a certain
democracy. My democratic process has worked in such a way that the descriptions
and prompts I give for an improvisation are broad enough that it challenges the
individual to reach into their own style. As the choreographer, I reserve the right to
edit as I please, but it is in my best interest to uphold the integrity of my movers’
phrases. If I disrupt the entry point of the phrase, that is, the mover’s own
interpretation of my prompt, she becomes detached from the edited phrase and will
not perform it as genuinely (subconsciously or not).
The visual imagery that I pulled from Hayashi and Ibuse’s literature included burnt corpses floating through waterways, vast, flat landscapes, and the herds of wounded people running away from the bombed city in desperate need of water. The idea of floating especially resonated with me because an object cannot float independently of nature: gravity keeps objects grounded. Air resistance can give the effect of floating – leaves falling from a tree, feathers blowing in the wind. This almost inhuman ability to float made it that much more of an impact to read about dead bodies floating by the hundreds. They were weightless, fully submerged in nature, the other victim of the bomb.

Choosing my ensemble for the second process was much more difficult than I anticipated. One of my movers was making her own piece for the concert, and another decided to work with other choreographers. There is no rule against movers being in more than one piece, but I try to avoid it if possible. Because there are only about six weeks in the process, there is not much time experiment before the editing process takes place. My original idea was to be in my own piece with Stellar and Hibiki (both from my first piece). I thought if I were to be in my own piece I would want to have a smaller group so that we could create movement on a more intimate level. However, as my research progressed, I became interested in the concept of body as a landscape. As I will discuss more in detail later, the ambiguity of my movers as landscape or as human was a very provocative concept I wanted to explore further. This also made it impossible to be in my own piece because I needed to be separate from the group when creating landscape structures. Thus, I decided to have six movers. However, due to an unfortunate foot injury, my final ensemble altered
slightly. The mover who was hurt still participated in rehearsals and made floor phrases, but I wanted to have another body in the process that had full capabilities. Miranda entered the process halfway through, and she learned some movement but also created her own phrases using some of the same prompts. My injured mover ended up performing in the piece, and very little of my original piece was compromised by this change. The final piece had seven movers.

Now, I will go into detail describing my process. Because I chose an ensemble slightly different than before, introductions were appropriate once again. After basic name introductions, everyone had to share their favorite flower. Flowers are such significant symbols in atomic bomb literature, and as it turns out, thinking about the natural processes of flowers was a large part of the movement generation process.

Favorite flowers:
Sora: orchid ladies
Stellar: jasmine
Hibiki: hydrangea
Zoe: poppy
Miranda: sunflower
Haley: lily
Sally: magnolia

We began the process once again with a ten-minute improvisation, and the only prompt was to float. They were in pairs, and while one danced with her eyes closed, the other observed. Once everyone had their ten minutes, each pair came together and discussed what they noticed as observers and how it felt to emulate floating. Then, each pair was to come up with a duet that incorporated the essence of each other’s floating movements. Whether the observer remembered a specific moment in the improvisation or noticed movement themes, each duet would convey a
unique sense of floating. Those duets served as a baseline movement bank for later processes.

The majority of the choreography we had by the first half of the process was based on the idea of homelessness. In figuring out an experience-based entry point into the concept of emptiness and loneliness, I thought of homeless people. I asked my ensemble to write about an experience when they interacted with a homeless person or to recall a memorable image of a homeless person they had seen before (Miranda was not yet in the process).

A: A homeless person that I encountered/will always remember was a man who entered a subway car, spread out a mini-mattress, and abruptly started lying down. It was a stunning moment and shift in space of the public transportation becoming a private resting space.

B: There is this man that roams the streets near my friend’s house in the Keys. I used to hang out with her often and would always see him waking in her neighborhood or at some point on my drive home. I was always shocked. I just remembered a story of a homeless woman who used to hang out at my house. My dad always had to ask her to leave. A curve was added to my driveway to end that occurrence.

C: Guitar red: serenading student/townies on Fridays outside of Starbucks – probably for about three years or five.

D: She was perched on the slate-paved sidewalks of La Paz with her child in her lap plucking at the place where the blanket draped over her lap met the one spread out on the slate. She stared through my legs to the pedestal of the column across the street.

E: At a subway stop, a homeless woman came through signing a gospel song. Her singing wasn’t very good, and no one gave her money, but she walked through saying, “God bless you” to most people.

F: In Montpelier, a homeless man in his mid-40s asked me for money when I walked past him with my dad and then again when I walked past with Aaron two times. He asked every time.
I did want the ensemble to share these experiences with the group because I needed the image to stay internalized. I asked them to think about places that they considered to be safe and comfortable, and the way emptiness and loneliness are shielded from those places. Each dancer then created that safe and comfortable place using the other five bodies. They had the absolute freedom to place each dancer in a position, and they had to be completely satisfied with their place before we moved on to the next. We called each place the creator’s “house.” Observations from peers and faculty on this section were that there was a sense of interdependency and community among the movers while they simultaneously emote loneliness and isolation. This idea connects to the individual-collective relationship Ōe Kenzaburo discusses. The conflation of the individual and the collective in atomic bomb victims is an issue that many authors grapple with in their literature. For example, in Ōe Kenzaburo’s *Hiroshima Notes*, he talks about a man named Mr. Sadao Miyamoto. Miyamoto was a *hibakusha* who played an active role in the peace movement and firmly believed that the Ninth World Conference could effectively ban nuclear weapons. He left with these parting words:

I appeal from Hiroshima, where mankind experienced the atomic bomb for the first time, for even today many people are suffering from leukemia, anemia, and liver disorders; and they are struggling toward a miserable death. But I am really afraid of my future. In this hospital, some people have committed suicide or become insane when they learned that their illness had been diagnosed as an A-bomb disease. Lastly, I plead that all of you will cooperate to bring about a bright, warless, world (qtd. in Ōe, 56).

From the perspective of the victims, the decision to be active in voicing their experiences of August 6th coincided with the plea for nuclear disarmament. Although those are not mutually exclusive, some *hibakusha* documented their experience for
their own personal records. If not a hibakusha himself, who else could recall such details? Unlike Miyamoto, many were discouraged by the active space because it robbed them of their individual suffering. Also, like I mentioned in Hayashi’s chapter, to be robbed of your personal death is unforgivable because it diminishes the value of a human life (Otake, “Introduction”, xxi). I decided that the bodies in this choreography would not have a consistent type of existence (live humans, dead humans, inanimate objects, plants and animals). The ambiguous shift assists the conflation between individual and community I am trying to achieve in my piece. At this point in the process I can elaborate on several of these shifts.

The more fully formed section of the piece begins with a duet. My goal is to extend the unison in order to develop a deeper relationship between Stellar and Hibiki before Stellar’s shift from alive to dead. The dragging aspect of this section portrays two sides of death: deaths of personal sentiment and those that lose their significance as one in a million. In the days immediately after the attacks, there were so many injured and dead bodies scattered across the city, that many neglected corpses simply lay where they fell. In some cases, passersby would carry a corpse to the side of the road, and that sort of impersonal interaction with a corpse is something that I explored in detail. There are many different ways to carry or drag a body that can convey the closeness of the relationship of the carrier to the deceased. Having different kinds of interactions among the ensemble is not problematic because their relationship to each other is constantly changing throughout the piece.
This section includes three houses and a “twig” section. The twig section actually came together in an alternate space. During the blizzard, the studio was snowed in, and so we had rehearsal in the science center. The section was a transformation of the duets the dancers made at the first rehearsal. Then three of my dancers from last semester taught the three new dancers one of the floor phrases we created for the piece last semester. Thus, each individual phrase consisted of six movements that were either from their duets or the phrase from last semester. The point of contrast within those phrases is where “twig” comes to play. On our way from the studio to the science center, we gathered six tree branches that we thought had interesting shapes. Each dancer chose a branch and recreated its shape with their bodies. I inserted the “twig” in the middle of the six-move phrase solely for the purpose of contrast. It was only after seeing the “twigs” within the phrase did I realize why I made all of my choices. The branches, in many ways, resemble burnt corpses.
Something that caught my attention in seeing all the branches covered in snow was that almost all the trees were completely bare. They were naked and vulnerable in the aftermath of the blizzard, and somehow the shapes of the bare branches were so stark against the white snow that I knew I needed to use them in some way. Another observation was that the twig shapes made by bodies resembled the shadows that the bomb left on the few buildings left standing. The flash of the bomb was so powerful and so quick, that people who were standing against a wall or sitting during the bombing were evaporated in the explosion and only left a shadow on the space. Those shapes became physical records of those who disappeared in the flash, and the starkness of the “twig” stillness in the phrase is symbolic of the split second it took to be absorbed by the explosion.

Photo by Andrew Ribner

The transition from the end of the phrase into Zoe’s house also transformed movement from a duet. All of the transitions in this phrase were manifestations of my
ideas, and I was able to draw movement from the phrases they had made in order to sequence the various transitions. The collapse of Zoe’s house is one my favorite images. Adding on to the image of burnt corpses and the intense presence of dead bodies, it was interesting to read about the ways that bodies were organized for the claiming of corpses. In *Ritual of Death*, the bodies were laid in circles with all their heads in the middle so that people could go through bodies faster (Hayashi, 47). However, it was the images of piles upon piles of bodies that left such dark images in my head. Therefore, the collapse from Zoe’s house represents such piles of bodies that family members rummage through in hopes of finding their loved ones. I have the dancers slide off one by one, aiming to portray the lack of delicacy in searching through piles of bodies. I thought it would be interesting to take the searching party out of the physicalization completely: meaning that there was not a dancer who was pulling the bodies from the pile one by one. The individual body was removing herself from the pile, somewhat abstracting the image. At this point there are animalistic inferences that I did not intend to emphasize, but again, how this collapse is interpreted does not have to be clear in order to “work”. The sliding bodies could also represent maggots feasting on the piles of dead flesh, or the winds that easily blow through the flattened landscape. All of those images “work” with this transition, but what was important to the process were the inspirations for creating that structure.

The next transition into Hibiki’s house, the third and final house of the section, was a purely aesthetic choice. Having created a majority of floor work in this process, I was struggling to find transitions from a prostrate position to standing. In
the spirit of oobleck and gooeyness, I had them inch forward one caterpillar step in
the time it took Sally to drag Hibiki to the place of her house.

Hibiki’s house is the transition between the first and second sections. This
second section is derived from movement and exercises inspired by flowers. I started
this shift in focus with a phrase-making exercise. The prompt was to be the growth of
their favorite flower. Flowers have main stems that connect to the ground or tree, and
other flowers and leaves grow from that main stem. When some flowers die, new
ones grow in, and such is a simplified natural process of flowers (based on my
observation of a flower plant growing in my kitchen). I instructed them to be on their
feet and stationary for this phrase in order to resemble the flower’s main stem. Part
two of the phrase was to create a traveling phrase in which they were moving in a
vast field of their favorite flower. I specified that the movement should not resemble
frolicking, but the point was to physicalize the contrast between a singular flower and
a field of flowers –the sight, scent, and touch of this second situation is multiplied.
Thus, this second part needed to travel and be at a quick pace to emphasize that
contrast.

At this point, Stellar had hurt her foot, so this exercise was with five movers
only. After they created their solos, I watched them all individually in search of
common movements or sensations. There were two obvious pairs and a solo that
came out of their showings. For one duet, I had them alter their solos slightly so that
they would one, be roughly the same length, and two, there would be two
moments of unison interrupting their solos. I grouped the other duet and solo together
to make a trio and gave them the same instructions. While both groups worked on
their phrases, I had Stellar study a passage from Hayashi Kyōko’s story *Yellow Sand*. I had recently worked with recitation and movement in Eiko Otake’s class called Delicious Movement for Reflecting on Nakedness, and I enjoyed it so much I wanted to try it with my ensemble. I wrote the passage for Stellar on a whiteboard and had her mark the passages phrasing (where she would pause) and highlight words to emphasize. The marked passage looked like this:

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The yellow sand / grew deeper as time passed / In time / the sky, the town, and the girls all sank / into the yellow sand / dispersed as countless black specks / It resembled the rape flower landscape / which I saw with Okiyo-san / but in the landscape / at the foot of the slope / the brightness of that day was missing. (Hayashi, *Yellow Sand*, 216)
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“/” are pauses, *italics* are emphasis

At that point, the first duet had created their phrase. I wanted to toy with timing through the relationship between movement and words. The first task was for the duet to time their movement based on Stellar’s reading of the passage. The second task was for Stellar to phrase her reading based on the duet. Performed back to back, the differences between the two phrases were very clear. I went into the exercise knowing that spoken word would not be a part of my final work, but it provided an interesting dynamic to the movement manipulation. The flower solos, duets, and trio would be manipulated further as we developed this second section.

The flower movement, however, did not end up with its own section in the piece. Instead, I layered that movement with my third section. The inspiration for this third section is a video called *Weightless* by Erika Janunger. Erika Janunger is a Sweden native who works in architecture, film, and music mediums. *Weightless* came out in 2007, and since it was shared with me four years ago, I had always wanted to create my own weightlessness through the altering of camera angles. Continuing with
the concept of floating, I thought it would be fitting to have an actual floating section. The concept behind this project is that there is a freestanding wall-like structure located at stage right, and the dancers will be doing their choreography treating the wall as the floor and the floor as the wall. However, there will simultaneously be a projection in the back that will project the live dancing at a ninety-degree angle, conveying a sense of weightlessness. At this angle, the wall becomes the floor and the floor becomes a wall.\footnote{Photo Left: original at www.erikajanunger.com. Photo Right: original at ninety degree rotation}

The process of movement generation was very difficult because the process of improvising was so unusual. I spent most of the creative process lying sideways on the floor and telling them whether the movement was believable from my angle. Videotaping served us very well in evaluating the movement and figuring out exactly what needed to change. Similar to the video, the rotated image had to be movement that seemed humanly possible.
There are two main reasons why this weightlessness section was a part of the piece. First, this section would end the piece to signify the idea that hibakusha exist in a liminal place: they are neither grounded in nor free from their experience. The illusion and abstraction leaves the audience with a sense of ambiguity, and that aligns perfectly with my feelings after reading the literature. Nothing about the future of nuclear weapons is resolved in any of the stories. We only get a sense of the author’s point of view, and that is as much as literary theorists can say about the author’s perspective as well. Of course, many theorists problematize atomic bomb literature by questioning its existence as a genre or whether it can even be called literature (Treat, Writing Ground Zero, xxi-ii), but they also have no entry point into a hibakusha’s experience. Also by the fact that the radiation poisoning has become a multi-generational problem, there is no way to approach the subject peripherally. By peripherally, I mean that the effects of the atomic bomb are not a part of history that
we can reflect on as a society disconnected from the bombing. As long as hibakusha are still alive and generations after them suffer from radiation poisoning, August 6 and 9 remain alive as well.

Another reason why I wanted a weightlessness section has to do with the concept of reverie. Personally, ambiguity and liminal space emotes a certain dreaminess, and many images associated with dreams are also weightless such as clouds. I noticed that the dancers tend to close their eyes when they are doing their wall phrases. I never explicitly instructed them to do it one way or the other, so it was interesting to see how they interpreted the weightlessness instructions.

The merging of the second and third sections became a prolonged transition between the first section and the final wall duet. I incorporated tempo and level changes into the phrases for dynamism and chaos. In the effort to convey confusion as a contrast to mourning, the movement reminds me of a whirlwind that moves any which way. That could be interpreted as long-awaited freedom, but by this point in the piece, the solemn mood prevents the audience from seeing that freeness as positive. The combination of the wall phrases, the projected wall phrases, the music, and the flower phrases create an environment similar to a funeral service. I hesitate to use the word funeral because the term comes with so many preconceived emotions. Funeral services are seen as celebrations of life, and therefore while it is sad occasion, there is positivity throughout. This section of choreography is commemorative in that way, and I succeeded in integrating quickness and traveling without losing the overall mood of the piece.
For the ending of the section, one wall duet is on stage alone. I wanted all the attention to be on this phrase. It is a stark contrast to the dynamic movement just before it, and that serves to slow down the entire piece and bring it full circle to the duet in the beginning of the piece. To close the entire piece, I decided to make one last house. One member of the final duet drags Sally on stage to the location of her house. At that moment, the other five movers delicately approach the pair on hands and knees, as if not to disturb Sally. Sally wanted to make her house a human blanket, and so everyone just drapes around her. The image is once again a pile of bodies. As the lights fade out, hundreds of white flowers fall from above onto the bodies. This last scene is intended to leave the audience sensing the delicacy of life.

Photo by Andrew Ribner

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Reflecting on all the work I have created thus far at Wesleyan, what I have shown as my final work truly feels like a culmination piece. In my time here at
Wesleyan, I have created five collaborative pieces. With each piece, my ambitions and visions became more complex and more integrative of technology. ‘Dance as Research: Research as Choreography’ was the name of a research methods class that I took in 2011, and that mantra perfectly describes my experience as a dance major. The independence and initiative required to make my visions a reality were in itself a form of research that directly affected my process. In the last three of five pieces, I used live-feed projections, and that was my means of creating an active role for myself in the pieces. For Navigable Reverie, my vision took so much more effort, planning, and trouble-shooting than I could have ever imagined. I definitely entered the process aware that I was increasing my risk of trouble by adding so many technological elements to my piece.

The wall was the first piece of my process, and there were numerous things I had to take into account: most obviously there was creating a wall design suitable for the choreography, obtaining the parts, and building the piece. The unexpected obstacles were how to make sure the wall pieces got to the performance venue in the most efficient way, how the wall could be stored in the venue, and most importantly, how the wall would be constructed and broken down in a timely manner during the actual performance. It was not without the generous help of so many brilliant and patient faculty and students that this wall turned out to be exactly what I had hoped. After gathering almost 800 pounds of sand bags to hold the wall, securing tools, and essentially choreographing the set-up and takedown of the wall, the wall was a flawless addition to the piece.
The second part of the process was the live projection of the choreography on the wall. As I mentioned in this chapter, the wall and the projection were solely for the floating/dreaming section of the piece. Because one could not happen without the other, it was crucial that I got both the wall and the projection to work correctly. Unfortunately, to do something as simple as rotate the output image from a camera, I needed access to special computer software to execute it. As is the case with technology, if something can go wrong, it will. I did not actually have the full technology to run the piece until the night of dress rehearsal. I had not given myself any room to doubt that it would work, and I had no alternate plan that I was willing to perform.

I am so proud of this piece, and the experience I had putting it all together was trying and fulfilling. So many people have told me that it brought them to tears, was utterly mesmerizing, and that there were no words to describe how they felt. The combination of the movement score and the technology created a space where they felt vulnerable and awestruck in an invigorating way. Without knowing the details of my research, audience members told me that the piece was truly relatable on a personal level. Because I had seen the piece so many times, the impact of the final performance was less climactic for me than for people who were seeing it for the first time. I had no intention or goal to emotionally move the audience in any way. Thus, it was overwhelming to be showered with praise and questions. Many viewers expressed their reactions as similar to a “reverie” in that the dreaminess of the piece reflected their inability to pinpoint what was so salient about the performance.
Conclusion

It was critical for me to realize that my entry point into the literature was the imagery that the authors used to talk about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When I began my process, I had no knowledge of the relationship between the literature and my process. There was a sense of superficiality that I felt going into my research. However, what I realized was that the themes I explored – the conflation of past and present, man and nature, experiencer and nonexperiencer, and space and distance – were my means of investigation and my inspiration in my creative process. The connection of the literature to the movement was anything but superficial, and that is one of the most significant realizations I have at this point. By integrating the literature into my process, I was setting up an environment that investigates what it means to “understand” something greater than oneself.

A major question that I answered was: In what ways could I utilize physical movement to evoke an emotion that is detached from the emotions associated with the mourning and sadness of the atomic bomb? My audience had difficulty articulating how my piece was moving to them, and that ambiguity is a direct translation of my reaction to Hayashi and Ibuse’s literature. When choosing passages to include in my choreographic process, it was a simple “gut feeling” that allowed me to deem certain passages significant or inspiring. Feeling moved and inspired is an effect, not a conclusion of my research. One of the reasons why I was drawn to this topic of research was the distance between my family’s past and my present identity. I did not want to close that distance in any form, but I felt responsible for investigating the distance in hopes of a greater understanding of myself. Thus, when
the audience saw my piece and felt moved and inspired, the communication of “a greater understanding” was successful.
Bibliography


