

**CONSTRUCTING COLLECTIVE VICTIMS
DOMON KEN AND TOMATSU SHOMEI: TWO JAPANESE PHOTOGRAPHERS**

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Introduction

Domon Ken (1909-1990) is doubtlessly one of the most notable and influential photographers of the immediate post-war period in Japan. With his emphatic advocacy of what he termed “realist” photography in the 1950s, Domon shaped a whole generation of young photographers, some of them having become Japan’s leading figures in the field. His personal ideas of what a photograph should transmit became paramount to photographic representation during the 1960s. However, to begin an analysis of Domon’s work itself, it is necessary to explain his notion of “realism” in photography in some detail.

While the idea of “realist” photography was not new to post-war Japan, as it had been practiced to some extent before and during World War II, its broad discussion and theoretic formulation was achieved through Domon Ken and several other important figures in the journal *Camera*, established in 1946. From 1950 onward, Domon acted, together with Kimura Ihee (1901-1974), as judge in a monthly photo contest conducted by *Camera*. This practice was quite different from similar contests of other photo periodicals, as *Camera* was the only publication that employed professional photographers as judges, instead of the editorial staff. This particularly stimulated a large following for Domon’s ideas among a steadily growing amateur movement.¹

By means of their monthly discussions, Domon articulated his idea of what a photograph should represent. To be able to capture the “real”, any subjective involvement by the photographer is by any means to be avoided. Domon advocated that the “snapshot” as he called it, referencing American social photography, should be immediate and capture the atmosphere of a given moment beyond the immediately visible. This means he called not only for pictorial representation, but also the emotionality of a particular instant, is to be made visible in the photograph. This has to be achieved through capturing the right angle, shadow and by any other means at a skilled “realist” photographer’s disposal.²

Domon stressed the importance of the “photographer’s eye”, as he strongly objected to the notion that the camera as a mechanism itself is inherently realistic. Here Domon again reveals his proximity in approach to Western photography by emphasizing, like Edward Weston, that only the educated and talented eye, trained to see the “real”, is able to achieve true “realism”.³ The camera is a mere tool that transports the image as the photographer sees it to the chemical surface of the photograph.

Domon considered “realism” as the only valid current in post-war photography. Revealing his political views quite overtly, he states that the Japanese had been deceived by the government throughout the wartime-era and that the public was now craving to see the “real”.⁴ Photography’s role was to present them with just that.⁵ He vehemently dismissed pictorial photography, or as he called it, “salon photography” as outdated and exhausted.⁶ Its time was over, he said, stressing that only the “absolutely unstaged” photograph, i.e. only the true image without even the faintest artificiality, is the sole valid means of capturing the hardships of post-war society.⁷

In 1953 there arose an intense discussion of Domon’s “realism”. Increasingly the prevalent approach in Japan to the “social photograph” was negatively labeled as “beggar photography”.⁸ “Realist” photography was particularly dismissed by the critic Watanabe Kosho as designing a false image of post-war society by emphasizing minority subjects. Another critic, Tanaka Masao, while defending the approach Watanabe denigrated, yet argued that Domon’s images were too sterile and void of emotions. This critique is quite fascinating as Domon himself advocated that a “realist” photograph should capture not just the image, but the emotions that surround it.⁹

This concern with emotional content may have led Domon to proclaim the end of what he called the “first phase of realism” in 1954, and the start of a “second phase” which should embrace a deeper and more beautiful aesthetic.¹⁰ However, since he did not elaborate any specific characteristics or compare his oeuvres of the first and second phases, hardly any clear distinction can be made between the two. However, according to this temporal definition, the work I am intending to focus on belongs to the second phase of “realist” photography.

Hiroshima (1958)

Domon shot the images for his photobook *Hiroshima* in 1957 and it was published in 1958 by Kenkosha. Photobooks were of particular importance to immediate post-war Japan, as photographic equipment and material was scarce and photography was not yet considered as art per se. Therefore, the dissemination of photographers’ work was limited to privately organized exhibitions or to the production of photobooks.¹¹

The book’s black cover is decorated with a white abstract drawing of a deformed face, seemingly torn in pain and agony, hinting at the burned faces of the bomb’s victims. The first page shows another abstract, less figurative, childlike drawing, which may also represent a face. One can read the book’s title and Domon Ken’s name in both Japanese and Roman letters, executed in an edgy, childlike script. Both drawings were made by the renowned Japanese artist Sano Shigejiro (1900-1987), a former student of Matisse and Miró, who gained considerable prominence through designing a large number of book covers from the 1940s to 1960s.

The page is covered with a red-colored transparent foil. Thus, it combines childish innocence with disturbing distress, suggesting the emotions it seeks to evoke within the viewer. Pages four and five state the content of the book in a single sentence given in both Japanese and English (page five includes an additional table of contents in English). I will cite the English version here: “The collection of photographs is a record of the scars left in the wake of the atomic bomb exploded on [sic] the city of Hiroshima at an altitude of 570 meters at 8:15 a.m., Aug. 6, 1945.”¹²

Following this statement, the reader finds Domon’s foreword, first in English, then followed by the Japanese version. After a table of contents in Japanese, the main body of 130 pages of photographs follows. The photographic plates are themselves followed by 46 pages of commentary by Domon titled “Hiroshima notes”, this time with Hiroshima written in kanji. English is limited to the translation of the foreword and the table of contents. It could be assumed that the photobook might have been intended for foreign readership to some extent, and that circumstances such as limited funds may have prevented a translation of Domon’s “Hiroshima notes”, which are also included in his autobiographical book *Shinu koto to ikiru koto* of 1974.¹³ However, the absent translation of the notes fits the layout and intention of the book, as their content is extremely intimate. As shall be discussed later, *Hiroshima* was largely intended as a ‘victims’ account for a domestic audience, creating national unity through collective victimization. The translated parts suggest the inclusion of a foreign audience to some extent, but if an international circulation was the aim, why was a minor part translated and the whole notes corpus left out? In fact, the book can rather be considered as a national endeavor. Their missing translation in any case is unfortunate, since their content offers an especially intriguing topic for analysis, as will be elaborated later.

Hiroshima Analysis

It is particularly notable that “hiroshima” is written in the syllable script katakana and not in kanji as would usually be the case.¹⁴ It indicates the special significance of the term itself. It is not the city that is referred to, but an event that is above all characterized by the atomic bomb and the suffering caused by it. The title is thus transformed into a symbol. This symbol is intended to stand for an injustice and pain that is detached from the actual place Hiroshima itself, making it a signifier for the general suffering of the Japanese people during World War II.

The red-colored foil covering the opening page in addition to the edgy abstract drawing clearly states its intention visually. It creates a strong tension within the viewer, immediately polarizing him by indicating that something terrible and sad is associated with “hiroshima”, and can be found documented in the following pages. The use of the signal color red evokes different associations, all of them with strongly negative connotations. One may immediately think of a signal to stop and

pause or of alarm, but also of blood, thus being a metaphor for death and pain. The red layer covering the drawing paradoxically transforms an image that could have been rendered in kindergarten into something disturbing, making it simultaneously disquieting and innocent.

In addition, one is able to observe something here that is prevalent throughout the photo-book and is, I might argue, an integral part of Domon's intention: the collective victimization of the Japanese people. As will be more obvious in the analysis of the images' content, the opening page intentionally creates pity through using the drawing style of a child, a fragile object, thereby evoking compassion by invoking the most vulnerable of victims: women, children, and the elderly.

The initial citation that was given in the beginning of this essay is quite self-explanatory and its lack of neutrality is evident. It reveals that the following pages will not deal with the subject in an objective, but in a highly emotional manner. This sentence is a statement, whose language already reveals on the first pages what Domon's "realist" photography, exemplified by the *Hiroshima* volume, aims at evoking: the victimization of the Japanese people.

The picture section commences with a color image (the sole color photo in the book) of the burned arms and scarred breast of an elder man, identified as Yoshikawa Kiyoshi in the notes section. While the lower side of his right breast is devoured by a long scar, the left breast is cast in shadow. His right hand's fingers are deformed and the long ingrown fingernails may indicate his advanced age or inability to sufficiently take care of himself. His belt and indigo blue trousers are also clearly visible, giving the impression of the subject being examined by a doctor. The image expresses a silent, yet forceful statement of protest.

The accompanying notes speak in a quite direct and emotionally charged language. In the first paragraph one finds words such as "devil's messengers" when referring to the pilots of the Enola Gay, followed by an in-depth description of August 6th, 1945 as Mr. Yoshikawa has experienced it. We learn that his house collapsed on him and that he managed to rescue his wife from the debris. The first-person narrator, presumably Mr. Yoshikawa himself, continues his account by describing the devastation around him, the burning city which he saw in the distance and the black rain shortly after the bomb's impact. The whole text reads as a shocking eye-witness report of an immeasurable tragedy.

The language is very personal and intensely emotional. It spares no private detail, which is the most striking characteristic. The privateness of this and the other personal accounts in the notes section is in fact remarkable. Indeed, they read as if addressing family members or close friends, but not as intended for a public readership. The whole photobook reads and looks as a private yet horrifying

account of a crime, assembled for an understanding friend. The text offers a story that one must tell, in order to relieve oneself – a therapeutic practice, so to speak.

By combining the private character and the intended audience, its intention quickly becomes clear to the critical reader. The book acts as an emotional bond between those who were made to suffer and their fellow countrymen. It is a pictorial and textual bond between Japanese people; therefore it can be argued that the main target audience was doubtlessly Japanese.

Continuing an analysis of the photo plates section is a challenge to a weak stomach, as Domon closely covers a woman's skin transplant surgery. Although black and white, the images are hard to look at and shall only be described briefly.

The surgery consists of the transplantation of a skin fragment from the woman's leg to her left upper cheek, in order to beautify her burned and deformed skin in that area. In the notes section, the woman is described anonymously as a 33 year-old wife and mother. Albeit anonymous, the text again includes an intense and personal report on the suffering in the immediate aftermath of the bomb's impact. The reader is also told that the woman had to undergo nine separate surgeries on eleven parts of her body. The dates of these are given and range over a period of slightly more than five months.

The victimization theme is drastically articulated. The images are documentary close-up shots directly and frontally capturing the theme. Domon here does not follow his own notion of emotional truth articulated in 1953.¹⁵ Neither does he play with angle, space or shadows, as in the first image of the book, to capture hidden emotions; nor does he invoke the sadness of the moment. These images are purely documentary coverage of a surgery and their explicitness is obviously meant to shock the viewer. However, as severe as they might seem, these photographs still comply with Domon's notion of documentary "realism" as a direct and neutral representation as he advocated it early in 1950. His early notion of "realist" photography is here exploited to the extreme.

However, there is more to these images than mere shock. Domon is not famous for mincing the truth, but for articulating the immediate actuality, no matter how disturbing it might be. He is a master in exploiting the possibilities of the camera. Through combining the documentary neutrality of the images and the emotionality of its accompanying text in the notes section he implants the impression of suffering even more strongly in the viewer. As shall be argued here, *Hiroshima* plays with a considered balance of emotional reality, which is not limited to the text, but evoked by several of the photographs, combined with pure documentary "realism". This combination of "emotional truth" and straight documentation aims at evoking deep compassion and thus solidarity and bond-

ing with the victims. Therefore, it can be argued that this indicates a deliberate calculation and exploitation of the viewer to communicate Domon's personal view of "hiroshima".

Following the documentary coverage of the surgery, the book includes a series of forty photographs of patients in the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Hospital. Among these images are close-ups of burned and scarred as well as partly deformed body parts and documentary coverage of a foot surgery, in addition to images of everyday life in the hospital with women in kimono playing boardgames, chatting or reading illustrated magazines. The viewer can see faces that are bravely smiling and those devoured in pain and agony. A middle-aged man plays go with an elder man, who is later seen leaving the hospital whilst all the patients bid him farewell. The rooms of the hospital are often decorated with folded paper cranes, a symbol of solidarity with the atomic bombs' victims in Japan. Shocking close-up coverage of deep wounds and surgeries, interwoven with cheerfully optimistic images of normal life in an institution of suffering, creates a symbolic gesture. It is again part of the well-calculated layout of the whole volume. This series suggests that while pain is omnipresent, hope endures.

While the face of one woman can in one image be observed in great pain with her teeth clenched, in another image she smiles as she is coiffured by a fellow patient. As the series almost exclusively utilizes female and child subjects, it comes to stand as a substitute for the assaulted and fragile Japan. Its citizens are innocently blemished, but while fragile, they and their country are still brave and will recover, no matter how severe the wounds.

The next series of six pages includes images of the severely ill boy Kenji, who at the time of the bomb's impact was unborn in his mother's womb. One image shows the boy lying in a hospital bed attended by a nurse. His face looks weak and emaciated, and in the following images he has passed away. His father is depicted in front of his grave. This very individual fate speaks of all of those unborn children who suffered in the bomb's aftermath, while at the same time these images move the narrative out of the hospital.

The following six pages form a coverage of research conducted on the short- and longterm effects of atomic bombs. Among technical gear and photographs of statistical data, two Japanese scientists can be seen discussing a scientific report with a Caucasian man. The notes section identifies this series as depicting research into keloids. By juxtaposing the story of Kenji with this rather neutral coverage of science, Domon again makes use of the contrasting effect of combining images conveying emotional truth with those of plain documentary character.

This neutral documentary coverage of keloid research is followed by thirty-seven pages with images of the Six Directions School near Hiroshima and the Hiroshima Municipal School for War Vic-



Domon Ken,
Hiroshima, 1957.
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tims. The first institution, named after the six Buddhist directions, accommodates children who have lost their parents through the atomic bombing or suffer from related disabilities, such as blindness. The second is a Christian orphanage.

The images offer an intimate glimpse at the children's daily life. The viewer observes them playing, eating and happily smiling into the camera. Despite their pitiful situation, they have not lost an intense lust for life. The images stress that they are normal children engaged in activities typical to their age. Here in particular Domon's sublime skill as a "realist" photographer is overtly evident. The children do not seem to mind or even recognize the presence of the camera. Domon is able to capture what appears to be an unadulterated genuine coverage of the children's daily activities. This can be observed in particular intensity in the ten pages separately devoted to two blind twin female students at the Hiroshima Municipal School for War Victims. By seeming to play with Domon, the children's innocence increases the emotions of sympathy arising in the viewer. These images of the two institutions, I think, represent the foremost example of Domon's notion of emotional "realism" within the *Hiroshima* volume. At the same time, both institutions form symbols of solidarity with the victims, in particular with those whose sufferings were caused through the explosion's aftermath: victims who are totally innocent of any responsibility for war.

The fact, however, that a Buddhist inspired institution and a Christian orphanage are covered together raises an additional interesting aspect. It indicates that victims are not separated by faith, but united by what was done to them, making them part of an indiscriminate collective suffering. They are presented as victims of the same deed. Therefore, religious faith and other differences become meaningless. Domon regards himself as the advocate for the unjustly treated, by informing the Japanese of their agony, with the aim of extending the role of victim to all Japanese citizens. The term "hiroshima" again becomes a symbol for national unity through collective victimization, a unity that transcends other differences.

In the succeeding pages families are portrayed. The first image depicts an elderly woman lying on a futon and staring ahead with empty eyes. She is helped by a girl in the next photograph, thus again implying solidarity. Following this, a father is depicted on his sickbed. The next photograph shows six members of the family in a rundown house, the languishing father, an ashtray and magazine in front of him, being fanned by his son. This image is particularly intense, as it reveals sadness and devastation in the immediate domestic environment of the people. One can only imagine the traumatic effect on the children of seeing their continuously weakening father suffering.

The thus following pages are again full of joy and optimism, closely following the psychological pattern of the book. The first images show a young woman holding her infant daughter who in

the following picture is receiving a haircut.

The image after this is perhaps one of the most iconic in relation to immediate post-war Japan. The girl's father, his face disfigured by numerous scars, is seen laughing wholeheartedly, transforming his face into a grotesque mask. He holds his daughter with a scarred and rough hand. She again smiles at the camera with the innocent, pure and soft expression of an infant, while her mother looks at her affectionately, her own face showing slight discolorations and burns.



Domon Ken, *Hiroshima*, 1957. © Domon Ken. Reproduced with the permission of the Domon Ken Photography Museum, Sakata, Japan.

is represented by the unharmed, healthy infant. The girl indicates a new age that, despite not being scarred by the past, still bears a burden of responsibility not to forget that suffering is collective and cannot be easily undone with time.

This photograph encompasses all that “hiroshima” indicates and thus all that Domon is attempting to evoke. The people in it act not as individuals, but as representations. The father represents the masculine war victim, who has fought for Japan's cause and bears now the marks of injustice and pain forever carved in his body - a favorite subject of Domon's photography of the 1950s. The wife, or the feminine, full of passionate and genuine maternity has unjustly been assaulted. She acts as a bridge between the war-torn past and the new future, which

Following the young family's portrait, Domon included twelve pages of photographs whose main focus is nonliving things. He photographs the Atomic Dome from the exterior and interior as well as parts of the interior of the (then) new Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum by Tange Kenzō, which continues to be attacked for its single-sided representation of the war. The last pages show the numerous tombs of the bomb's victims in Hiroshima.

Hiroshima Nagasaki Document (1961)

Hiroshima is by no means the sole example of Japanese photographers dealing with the politi-

cally charged issue of atomic bombing.¹⁶ Another world-renowned photographer who has addressed this topic is Tomatsu Shomei (b 1930). Tomatsu belongs to a group of artists who emerged in the first two decades after World War II, whose work, albeit deeply influenced by Domon's notion of "realist" photography, takes quite a different approach. As the critic Watanabe Tsutomu pointed out in 1960, the so-called "next generation of photographers" (those that came after Domon, Kimura etc.), amongst whom he includes Tomatsu, emphasized their own opinions and feelings in their photographs and rejected the purely documentary "realist" style.¹⁷ While these artists retained their "photographer's eye", they took a different, more subjective and emotionally charged approach.

Tomatsu devoted much attention to the aftermath of World War II, just as Domon did. Interestingly, Tomatsu has not photographed Hiroshima but Nagasaki, to which he devoted a whole series. The 1961 series *Nagasaki*, like *Hiroshima*, is a fascinating photographic account. Two photographers could hardly have taken a more different route than did Tomatsu and Domon for depicting the same theme. Contrasting both series reveal intriguing insights into the perception of the role assigned to photography by both artists in dealing with provocative subject matter.

A comparison is facilitated by the fact that parts of both series have been included in a compendium of images, entitled *Hiroshima-Nagasaki, Document 1961* (hereafter referred to as *Document*),¹⁸ which was published by a human rights group named The Japan Council against A & H Bombs in 1961.¹⁹ It is interesting to note that the *Document* is published in separate full Japanese and English editions, indicating that, contrary to *Hiroshima*, it was aimed at both a domestic and international audience. The text explicitly focuses on both the immediate and longterm effects of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Consistent with its strong advocacy for atomic disarmament, the book also covers the 1954 atomic tests at the Bikini Atoll, conducted by the United States and radioactively injuring the crew of a Japanese fishing vessel.²⁰ The volume in general puts strong emphasis on the atomic bombs' insidiousness, by particularly stressing their immediate and longterm effects on human beings.²¹ Like Domon's *Hiroshima*, it also points out a lack of government support for the bombs' victims until the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, accusing occupation authorities of suppressing the public thematization of the bombings.

The *Document's* images are treated anonymously and no credits are directly assigned to any of them. This makes clear that the main emphasis is on the photograph as a means to convey a message rather than as an artwork. Their status as objects of art is thus reduced, treating them rather as documentary material whose message is more important than authorship.

However, by knowing Domon's and Tomatsu's work one can easily single out their photographs. Tomatsu's images are placed before those of Domon, which are placed at the end of the

book. Tomatsu clearly focusses much more on subtle aesthetics than on pure documentary characteristics. By utilizing angle, light and shadow in a much more emphasized and subjective manner, Tomatsu achieves an emphatic and emotional overtone. By distancing himself from the “emotional truth”, advocated by Domon, Tomatsu’s emphasis lies on the photographer’s subjectivity and the emotions he sees and seeks to convey in the very instant that he takes the photograph.

The “snapshot” is however not abandoned, but employed in a different manner. None of Tomatsu’s images is staged, but there is still a theatrical atmosphere to them. The young girl in the *Nagasaki* series, blind on one eye, in one image appears artificial and staged like a bunraku doll, being controlled by the person behind her, seemingly acting as her puppet master. Tomatsu’s employment of light and shadow is masterfully exemplified here. She appears as if devoid of human life, yet at the same time she is elevated to supreme beauty and emotionality. The bomb’s young victim is rendered aestheticized, almost picturesque, thus emphasizing her fragility. Simultaneously, her missing left eye gives the photograph an atmosphere of accusation, since as beautiful as she might appear, her face is scarred by the bomb. Yet she is brave and plays like any other child of her age. This aestheticizing of a scarred beauty conveys a similar message as Domon’s juxtaposition of shocking documentary with “emotional truth”.

The play of light and shadow is continued in the next image with the same girl having climbed a tree and reaching out for one of its blossoms. The center of the image is not her missing eye, which is overlooked in the symphonic composition of dark and light. Once the defect is noticed by the viewer one feels an even stronger sympathy. Therefore, this clearly shows Tomatsu’s supreme talent in employing subtlety.

These emotions are certainly not objective, but such as the photographer wants to convey. The photograph remains a snapshot after Domon’s definition, but is not an objective, unaestheticized snapshot, making his approach distinct from Domon’s. The photographs might at first suggest neutrality, but it is Tomatsu’s emotional response which screens the image, even more so than in Domon’s *Hiroshima* photos, which rely instead on the suggestive juxtaposition of images to create emotional content. Tomatsu does not convey images in a documentary way, but captures subtle emotions lying deep within. Through this he evokes a feeling of pity and compassion for the victim, and sympathy for her fate. This again aims at a collective feeling of victimization, by demonstrating that not even the youngest have been spared by the bomb. The message is one of a fragile, beautiful, yet assaulted Japan.

The strongest distinction between Domon and Tomatsu is apparent in an image of the girl with her mother beside blossoming cherry trees. At first sight, the viewer is confused as to what is

the main theme of the image: the girl with her mother; or the cherry blossoms. Tomatsu strives to contrast beauty with beauty, as it is obvious that for him the girl signifies a tragic beauty, just like the ephemeral cherry blossoms, whose buds will fall when they are most beautiful. This image is strikingly filled with subjective emotions. While Domon emphasizes a shocking mixture of documental “reality” and “emotional truth”, Tomatsu employs subjective subtle beauty in order to convey a similar message.

While Tomatsu does not employ the juxtaposition of documentary shock and “emotional truth”, he still utilizes juxtaposition to create allegories. In the next images in *Document*, a Christian woman is portrayed. Since Nagasaki is the place with the largest Christian population in Japan, her faith and the choice of subject is unsurprising. In one image she is depicted praying at a grave and in another worshipping a cross hanging on the wall of a rather dreary looking place. The woman’s face bears severe burns, yet still she appears beautiful. Her portrayal seems intimate but yet detached. Tomatsu links the images of her burned face to those of broken and abandoned Madonna figures. Their faces are bruised just as that of the woman and yet still they retain beauty and dignity. Thus, Tomatsu creates a subtle and empathetic allegory of the woman as a modern-day Madonna, a martyr, who has suffered for the sake of others. Not shock, but sympathy through subtle pathos is Tomatsu’s pictorial language.

Through contrasting Domon with Tomatsu I do not seek to value either one’s work in any sense. On the contrary, a comparison of both reveals fascinating insights in their individual and general approaches to the same theme. In fact, as has been discussed before, both advocate the collective victimization of the Japanese people. While Domon uses a much more straightforward language, Tomatsu employs subtle aesthetics. Neither one is to be valued above the other. A “realist” photograph by Domon is no less fascinating in its pictorial language than a more aestheticized snapshot by Tomatsu. The political statement, however, stays the same. Both regard the Japanese people as those who were made to suffer, by their own government and by the American military. Indeed, Tomatsu was a strong advocate against American occupation and the Anpo treaty. The peak of this accumulation of resentments are found in the atomic bombs, which are used to create the ultimate symbol of the Japanese people as a collective body of victims.

Comparative Analysis

My aim is, however, not to accuse Domon or Tomatsu of blunt single-minded nationalism, but instead to analyze their attempts to collectively victimize the Japanese people. It is well known that Domon, and to some extent also Tomatsu, was intrigued by the writings of the philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro (1889-1960) and my aim is to draw a connection between Watsuji’s basic theories

and Domon's "realist" photography in the *Hiroshima* volume. Central to Watsuji's theories is the concept of betweenness, as he explains it in his work *Rinrigaku* (The Study of Ethics) of 1937-1949.²² Influenced by the writings of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), for whom the caring individual being, compassionately immersed in its surroundings, is a principal concept, Watsuji extends this to the case of Japan, by saying that the individual is in every case part of a group, between so to speak. Inspired by Zen ideas, especially those of Dogen (1200-1253), whom he studied extensively, Watsuji explains that the individual is in correlation with the things that person is surrounded by. The individual is therefore not independently able to follow its own will, but needs to somehow subordinate his intentions to his surroundings. Watsuji formulates this as the negation of one's independence through which the individual becomes moral. Simplified it can be said that the individual is in every case part of a group and stands in correlation with it. Therefore, the individual has to compromise individuality for the sake of the group. At the same time the individual shares characteristics with the group which bonds them together.

This notion can be applied to Domon's *Hiroshima* and other works of "realist" photography, such as Tomatsu's *Nagasaki* photographs. Both attempt to create a group consciousness by extending the role of victim beyond those who were directly affected by the bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively. Domon in fact calls himself a "Japanese photographer"²³ and states in 1953 that "if a photographer turns away from these war victims while holding a camera, a mechanism that facilitates the most realistic of records, I would call him an anti-humanistic betrayer of the Japanese race".²⁴ These statements could not express his mission more clearly.

As was stressed before, Domon regards himself as an advocate for the Japanese people. His images are the means to bond individual victims with the rest of the Japanese people. He sees the role of "realism" in post-war Japanese society as a "national responsibility" of a Japanese photographer.²⁵ Therefore, following the philosophical notion of betweenness in Watsuji, he positions himself as part of the group "Japan" in the role of its advocate. This can be said of Tomatsu as well, although he does not do so as bluntly as Domon. Yet, through the advocacy of the camera both attempt to create a correlation between individuals and group. This group, however, is not just the neutral body of Japanese citizens, but a group who share the mutual characteristic of having been assaulted by the atomic bombs and by their own government. The suffering therefore is not limited to those who actually suffer physically: they act as symbols for a national pain. This follows quite directly Watsuji's notion of the betweenness of the individual as being a correlative part of larger continuum, the group of Japan in this case. Both appear to regard the Japanese people as a collective body of victims, who bear responsibility for each other. At the same time they also present Japan as a fragile nation that has been unjustly assaulted. Still, however, this nation remains beautiful, regardless of the harm having been done to it and the scars left on its body. Their photographs create a symbol for



Domon Ken, *Hiroshima*, 1957. © Domon Ken. Reproduced with the permission of the Domon Ken Photography Museum, Sakata, Japan.

unification through collective suffering that shall never be forgotten.

Moreover, the photographs suggest a strong sense of harmony and tranquility. The choice of predominately female and child subjects evidences this. This harmony stands in sharp contrast with the clearly visible scars and disabilities caused by the atomic bomb. The women in the hospital and the children in both of the institutions covered are often depicted engaged in daily life activities, attempting to resume the rhythm of regular life. Were it not for their wounds, one would not suspect that there was something wrong. However, these wounds, which are most often extremely clearly and skilfully captured by Domon and Tomatsu, catch the eye. The viewer imagines the figures struggling hard to forget their hardships, while at the same time one knows that this is impossible. It is this juxtaposition of visual harmony and disturbance which makes these images so evocative.

Conclusion

Domon and Tomatsu deal with the atomic bombs' aftermath in very individually charged ways, while pursuing a similar goal: that of collectively victimizing the Japanese people. The bombs have often been exploited in the postwar context to relativize Japan's own responsibility and guilt in World War II. Both Domon and Tomatsu equally utilize the event and the resulting suffering in this manner. While the cause of this suffering is not shown pictorially, but only suggested, it accompanies the photographs with its ghostly vapor, being felt, yet not seen. However, the photographs give the sufferings a face, which is most crucial for creating a collective consciousness. The pain is not merely anonymous, but connected to concrete persons. Acting as symbols, they are made to stand as representations for the many nameless others, in order to bond them with the collective group of Japan.

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Endnotes

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- 4 Abe (1997): p. 183.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Vartanian, Ivan et al (eds.). *Setting Sun – Writings by Japanese Photographers*. New York: Aperture: 2006: pp. 22-27.
- 7 Ootsuka, Shinichi et al (eds.). *Nihon no shashinka – Nihon shashinshi gaisetsu (Japanese Photographers – History of Japanese Photography – An Outline)*. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1999: p. 71.
- 8 Abe (1997): p. 205.
- 9 Thomas (2008): p. 384-386.
- 10 Abe (1997): p. 208.
- 11 See Shoji Yamagishi in Szarkowski, John and Yamagishi, Shoji (eds.). *New Japanese Photography*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1974: p. 11. and Parr, Martin and Badger, Garry. *The Photobook: A History, Vol. 1*. London: Phaidon Press, 2004.
- 12 Domon, Ken. *Hiroshima*. Tōkyō: Kenkōsha, 1958: pp. 4-5.
- 13 Domon, Ken. *Shinu koto to ikiru koto (To Die and to Live)*. Tōkyō: Chikuchi Shokan, 1974.
- 14 Due to the special notion which the term “hiroshima” written in katakana script implies, I have purposely chosen the above writing without capital h, in order to indicate its role as a symbol and statement.
- 15 Thomas (2008): pp. 382-384.
- 16 For an overview see Tokuyama, Toshio. *Genbaku to shashin (Atomic Bomb and Photographs)*. Tōkyō: Ochanomizu Shobō, 2005.
- 17 Ootsuka (1999): p. 78.
- 18 *Hiroshima-Nagasaki*, document 1961. Tōkyō: The Japan Council against A & H Bombs, 1961.
- 19 See <http://www10.plala.or.jp/antiatom/index.html> for the Japan Council against A & H Bombs.
- 20 *Hiroshima-Nagasaki*, document 1961: pp. 25-29.
- 21 *Hiroshima-Nagasaki*, document 1961: pp. 1-15, 28- 36.
- 22 See Watsuji Tetsurō. *Rinrigaku (Vols. 1. and 2.)*. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1949.; Watsuji Tetsurō (transl. by Yamamoto, Seisaku and Carter, Robert). *Watsuji Tetsurō’s rinrigaku*. Buffalo, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996. and Mayeda, Graham. *Time, Space and Ethics in the Philosophy of*

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23 Abe (1997): p. 198.

24 Thomas (2008): p. 382.

25 Abe (1997): p. 198.

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