HERMENEUTICS OF RUINS: FROM TRACES TO THE HEALING OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN *CHILDREN OF THE BEEHIVE* AND *VOICES IN THE WIND*

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INTRODUCTION

In 1948, Japanese director Hiroshi Shimizu released *Children of the Beehive* (Hachi no su no kodomotachi, Hiroshi Shimizu, 1948), his first film produced after the Second World War. A self-financed project, it contained no scripted dialogue, was shot entirely on location, and starred a group of non-professional child actors (McDonald, 2006: 185). It tells the story of a gang of war orphans who wander aimlessly surviving on petty theft until they encounter a repatriated soldier who leads them on a journey across Japan. The film presents a country devastated by military defeat, including a sequence showing Hiroshima still in ruins after the atomic bombing. But its realism extends beyond the setting, as the children in the cast were essentially playing themselves. They were real war orphans from a shelter funded by Shimizu himself in the aftermath of the war (Drew, 2004).

Until then, Shimizu had been one of the leading directors at Shochiku, a major Japanese film studio. For this project, however, he made the unusual decision to establish a small independent company and shoot the film with only three crew members: cinematographer Saburo Furuyama, assistant director Shinichi Sekizawa, and former director Tadamoto Ōkubo, who, having been left unemployed after the war, accepted the role of educator of the orphaned children. The remaining tasks were carried out by people with no professional experience in filmmaking, such as the two employees from the Atami train station outside Tokyo who were recruited to serve as assistant director and as the actor playing the repatriated soldier. The children themselves contributed to the production not only as performers but also by carrying equipment and holding reflectors. A single truck transported the entire crew and all the production materials between locations (Sato, 1997: 32).

While the production methods were unprecedented in Shimizu's directorial career, the sensibility that informed them was not. Since the 1930s, his films had been reflecting his commitment to social causes:

> His characters are almost always those who are alienated from the mainstream of society, whether by personal situation (poverty, family breakdown), profession (his men are often artists; his women, hostesses or prostitutes), or geography (most of his films are set in outlying areas of Japan, particularly the mountainous and inaccessible Izu Peninsula). Shimizu's sympathy for the outsider grants him the perspective from which to look sceptically at the society into which his characters fit only uneasily, if it all (Jacoby, 2004).

The "journey-event" also had precedents in Shimizu's work, both as a method of production and as a narrative framework. *Mr. Thank You* (Arigatō-san, Hiroshi Shimizu, 1936), one of his most celebrated films, had a narrative structured around a bus journey through the mountains of the Izu Peninsula. The story begins at the departure point of the bus's journey and ends at its destination, offering glimpses into the lives of its passengers along the way. The same structure is used in *Children of the Beehive*, which begins where the children first meet the repatriated soldier, stops wherever they stop, and concludes when they reach their destination, an orphanage known as the "Introspection Tower". This location also establishes a connection with another of Shimizu's films, *Introspection Tower* (Mikaeri no tō, Hiroshi Shimizu, 1941), which had previously reflected his concern for the education and care of underprivileged children. Like *Mr. Thank You*, *Children of the Beehive* presents a light-hearted narrative punctuated by a few more sentimental episodes, but all characterised by a structure akin to an adventure comedy and a mise-en-scène more attentive to the movement of its cast and their relationship with the setting than to the eruption of personal dramas.

However, *Children of the Beehive* differs significantly from Shimizu's earlier work, and not solely because of its unusually austere production methods. The historical event it deals with is of a far greater magnitude, as it constitutes 20th-century Japan's most profound national trauma: a years-long military conflict that resulted in millions of deaths, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the defeat and devastation of the country. In this context, Shimizu's film addresses two central concerns: the first is the need—more intuitive than explicit—to take the camera into the spaces of a shattered Japan and explore them as a way of confronting the wound head-on; the second is the need to start the healing, which explains the addition of a fictional layer in the form of a journey taken by two archetypes of alienation in post-war Japan: the orphan and the repatriated soldier.

Nearly 70 years later, Nobuhiro Suwa would make *Voices in the Wind* (Kaze no denwa, Nobuhiro Suwa, 2020), a film that deals with Japan's most significant collective disaster of the 21st century—the Tōhoku earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident—through a similar journey narrative, a filmmaking process markedly open to the real, and a confrontation with the ruins left in the disaster's wake. The film was inspired by an installation of the same name: an unconnected telephone booth that a resident of Ōtsuchi, Iwate Prefecture, installed in his garden to talk to his deceased cousin. After the Tōhoku disaster (in which more than a tenth of Ōtsuchi's population perished), its creator decided to make the booth open to the public so that other survivors could use it in the same way. According to reports in the Japanese media, the phone booth attracted thousands of visitors, prompting producer Eiji Izumi to commission Suwa to make a film about it. Out of this emerged the plot for *Voices in the Wind*: Haru, a teenage girl who lost her parents and younger brother in the tsunami, sets out on a journey from Hiroshima to Ōtsuchi, where her family home once stood.

But Haru's journey is not motivated by the existence of the phone booth. In fact, she only discovers the booth by chance, as Suwa believed it would be more effective for the journey to remain open-ended and only find its purpose at the very end (Daichi, 2019). Rather, what drives her is a gradually discovered desire to return home. It is also no accident that her journey begins in Hiroshima: Suwa was born there, and he had previously explored the tragic legacy of the atomic bombings in *H Story* (2001), which tells the fictional yet plausible story of a film crew led by Suwa himself that attempt to shoot a remake of *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959). The project is doomed to failure, allowing the filmmaker to reflect on the impossible nature of recreating the ruins of Hiroshima, and to explore a spectral space between memory and the marks of trauma (Muñoz-Garnica, 2018: 8).

Although Suwa did not experience the bombing himself, its imprint is evident throughout his filmography, including in *Voices in the Wind*, where it appears not only in the film's point of departure in Hiroshima, but also in the testimony of an elderly woman who tells Haru of her memories of the attack, which she experienced as a child—memories, incidentally, that are the genuine recollections of the actress who portrays her. In this way, Haru's journey establishes a relationship not only between the film's locations but also between the memories of the disasters of 1945 and 2011.

As in *Children of the Beehive*, Suwa's filmmaking methodology was grounded in an openness to the real that is clearly inspired by André Bazin, embracing a conception of cinema in which images preserve the imprint of the real—by virtue of their photographic basis and the inherent *objectivity* of the cinematic apparatus—and therefore aspire to respect "the ambiguity of the real" (Bazin, 2008: 136). The film's plot took shape progressively; the script functioned merely as a general guide and in most cases the actors improvised their lines. Haru's final monologue, for instance, was not prepared: Suwa decided that the actress would improvise it upon stepping inside the phone booth for the first time (Wakata, 2020). Although the film featured professional actors (including the rising star Serena Motola alongside veterans such as Hidetoshi Nishijima, Tomokazu Miura, and Toshiyuki Nishida), it also incorporated non-professionals who simply recounted their own personal stories.

In this way, the exploration of national trauma, the healing journey narrative and the methodology of improvisation and openness to the real establish a clear connection between *Children of the Beehive* and *Voices in the Wind*. Indeed, Suwa himself reinforces this connection: in an essay on Shimizu's film, he describes it not merely as a docufiction about war orphans but as a crystallization of the ideal of filming childhood. He goes on to ask: "Is it a coincidence that this crystallization, achieved in isolation by Hiroshi Shimizu, emerged simultaneously in Italy and later spread to France and Iran, resonating with the spirit of a new cinema that has endured to our day?" (Suwa, 2018: 73).

Suwa thus suggests that Shimizu in Japan—at the same time as Italian Neorealism yet with no intention of imitating it—planted the seed of cinematic modernity. He conceives of this modernity as a succession of interconnected movements—from the French Nouvelle Vague to the New Iranian Cinema—to which he himself belongs. *H Story*, for example, is conceived of as a dialogue with *Hiroshima mon amour*, just as *Un couple parfait* (2005) engages intertextually with one of the canonical works of cinematic modernity, Roberto Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (1954) (Muñoz-Garnica, 2018). Viewed from this perspective, both *Children of the Beehive* and *Voices in the Wind* belong to a modern cinematic tradition that transcends national and historical boundaries. They even recreate what Serge Daney identified as the foundation of this type of cinema: the ruins of cities devastated by the Second World War, leaving a modernity

THE RUINS ARE REAL SPACES THAT FUNCTION SIMULTANEOUSLY AS DOCUMENTARY TESTIMONIES TO TRAUMA AND AS INSTRUMENTS OF HEALING

founded "the ruins of annihilated and disqualified cinema, on the fundamental refusal of the fake, of mise en scène, of the stage" (Daney, 1983: 172).

Another element that consolidates the dialogue between the two films is the development of a parent-child dynamic between victims of catastrophe: between the repatriated soldier and the war orphans, and again between Haru and Morio, a character who gradually becomes both her travelling companion and her protector, and who also lost his wife and daughter in the tsunami. But of greatest interest for this study is the way both films concentrate these concerns on the ruins: real spaces that function simultaneously as documentary testimonies to trauma, as places where that trauma can be confronted, and as instruments of healing. To this end, both films deploy a series of formal strategies that will be analysed below to explore the dialogue they establish. First, however, it is important to outline the conceptual framework that informs this study and to address a noteworthy phenomenon of modern Japanese history: the promotion by social and political forces in the country of a kind of collective amnesia in relation to the traumas of the past, which effectively makes these two films acts of resistance.

TRAUMA, CINEMA AND THE CONCEALMENT OF PAIN

Out of all the possible human responses to the shock caused by a traumatic event, researcher Dominick LaCapra highlights two: "acting out" and "working through". In the first, we performatively re-enact or relive the past as if it was occurring in the present rather than merely represented in the memory; we are thus haunted by the return of that which we have repressed (Yoneyama, 1999: 31; LaCapra, 2001: 70). In the second, we attempt to take a critical distance from the problem and to distinguish between the past, the present and the future. Thes two categories are reminiscent of the types of memory distinguished by Tzvetan Todorov (1996) in his now classic work *Les abus de la mémoire*: on the one hand, "literal" memory, which renders the remembered event insurmountable, leading to a subjugation of the present to the past; and on the other, "exemplary" memory, which allows us to construct a principle of action for the present out of the recollection.

LaCapra's and Todorov's conceptualisations of "working through" and exemplary memory foster a collective understanding of trauma, whereby the specific behaviours and (dis)affections of the victims are articulated publicly and politically. In this way, trauma acts on the members of a community and "leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander, 2012: 6). This is why the power of mourning—a basic tool for managing trauma—lies in its shared nature, in the exposure of the pain to the world ("socialization or ritualization of the repetition compulsion") in order to seek solace and "resumption of social life [...] and renewal" (LaCapra, 2001: 66).

In this "resumption of social life", returning from the trauma to a restored life, the multidirectional conception of memory (Rothberg, 2009) can become a powerful ally. Thus, in contrast to a model of isolated or subordinate memories, they should be brought into conversation with each other, interweaving them so that they can influence one another and generate unexpected solidarities between the different communities that have suffered catastrophic events, even at different moments in time, like the traumatic events recounted in *Children of the Beehive* and *Voices in the*

Wind, which, as shown above, can still engage in dialogue with one another.[1]

If, as Caruth (1995) suggests, a traumatised person is "possessed" by an image or an event, it could be argued that Japan is a "possessed" nation that has constructed its narrative of resilience through the elevation of the nation-group, so that it can act as a reflective shield against any uncomfortable accusations that might be levelled against it. Stories of resilience and irrepressible progress, insofar as they reinforce the moral status of the community (Wohl and Branscombe, 2008; Shibata, 2021: 108), also encourage societies to look the other way, establishing what Reyes-Mate (2013) calls a "facticity" that discriminates, conceals and consigns to oblivion. This may explain why Volpato and Licata (2010: 7) argue that collective amnesia and forgetting are common phenomena in the processes of constructing national identities. In this way, "[m]aintaining silence may be more useful than redesigning the past when it comes to shaping the future" (Evans, 2003: 9).

Therefore, "reality is not facticity, what is there. Reality also encompasses what is not, what wanted to be but could not be, what was thwarted" (López, Seiz and Gurpegui, 2008: 103). Progress—or the appearance of progress—cannot be separated from that hidden part it contains within itself, and thus the construction of a facticity "entails waste materials or ruins that do not form part of the reality achieved" (Reyes-Mate, 2003: 27) but that are there nevertheless.

In response to these dynamics of pain concealment, however, memory can rebel and permeate cinematic practice, opening up different, non-institutionalised avenues of access to the past, because what was relegated to the margins of history is part of reality, even if it is not part of "facticity" (Reyes-Mate, 2013: 59).

Children of the Beehive and *Voices in the Wind* thus become the victims' partners in rebellion, albeit on two distinct yet deeply interconnected levels. On the first level, Hiroshi Shimizu and Nobuhiro Suwa refuse to portray a "facticity" that does not incorporate the collective suffering caused by the Second World War and the Tōhoku disaster. As part of the traumatised society themselves, they take a stand on the margins of the film industry (as noted above, Shimizu went so far as to give up his privileged position at Shochiku) to turn their gaze towards the ruins. Both seek healing through the protagonists' wanderlust, the impulse that leads the children to follow the soldier to the "Introspection Tower", and Haru towards the telephone in the wind. And while this first level is founded on the socio-political dimension of the filmmakers' stance and their desire for healing, the second addresses ethical and aesthetic questions: through their specific and deliberate use of cinematic resources, both films offer the spectator the possibility of engaging with a hermeneutics of the ruins to develop a complex understanding of the traumatised emotions of the victims shown on screen. Through the despair Haru expresses on her journey, her frustration that everyone else seems to carry on "as if nothing had happened", cinema acts as a mediator between the traumatic past and the wounded present, giving concrete form to these dynamics of resistance against collective forgetting and institutionalised silence.

BETWEEN SELECTIVE MEMORY AND AMNESIA: RUINS AS A WITNESS

As a pathological phenomenon, trauma is defined not by the event that causes it but by how we process and convey it (Caruth, 1995). In this respect, this study is especially concerned with trauma's discursive nature, and specifically with the materialisation of that nature through the medium of film through a refusal to aestheticise its consequences and a profound respect for its victims.

Children of the Beehive was released in 1948, just three years after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when Japan was still under US occupation. That same year saw the conclu-

sion of the so-called Tokyo Trials, a series of legal proceedings against Japanese war criminals that were "seen as an atonement obligation imposed on a defeated Japan, and the faithful execution of that duty was seen as one of the few means for Japan to gain reacceptance by the international community" (Tomoki, 2020: 17). Major urban centres such as Tokyo, Osaka and Hiroshima had been reduced to rubble, and economic and political turmoil was mounting due to low production and rising inflation (Teranishi, 1994: 139).

Thus, after the war, Japanese society was dominated by a strong sense of injustice, combined with the certainty of having emerged from the conflict as victims (Kaoru, 2020: 8). As Sebastian Conrad points out, we cannot understand the articulation of postwar memory in Japan without considering the American presence in the country. Both what could be remembered and what had to be forgotten had been predetermined by the Allied power, which informed any possible interpretation of the past:

> The enunciative space for interpretations of the past was further delimited by the institution of censorship. In both countries, the central objects of national commemoration were subject to restrictive measures by the occupation authorities. In Japan, coverage of the atomic bomb explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was largely prohibited, and photographic documentary was banned. Only after the end of the occupation in 1952 were pictures of the catastrophic event published in major newspapers (Conrad, 2003: 88).

The postwar narrative constructed by the United States during the occupation endowed Japan with various roles: aggressor, as the perpetrator of the war; victim, as the casualty of the atomic bombing; and loser, following its capitulation (Kaoru, 2020). Of the three, the one strategically promoted by Washington—and, conveniently, accepted by Tokyo—was the second (McCormack, 2014): at a discursive level, the crimes committed by Japan during the war were neutralised through their juxtaposition with the brutal impact of the atomic bombing. With the international community having exonerated Japan, it was left to the United States to promote a heroic and "lesser-evilist" narrative that would justify the killing of hundreds of thousands of people.

There was thus a tendency to incorporate the injuries the country had suffered rather than the ones it had inflicted into the discursive construction of Japanese national "facticity." According to Dower (1999: 14), this preoccupation with their own misery, which led a large proportion of the Japanese population to ignore the suffering they had caused others, sheds light on how self-perception as a victim influences the identities that nations construct for themselves.

According to Evans (2003: 9), the Japanese showed the world that they had reconciled with their past by abandoning militarism and authoritarianism and embracing a "positive pacifism" (McCormack, 2014: 73) that coexisted with a "historical amnesia" regarding war crimes (Dower, 1999: 14).

However, it would not be fair to the films analysed here to treat the concept of historical amnesia in absolute terms as the epistemic foundation upon which this study is based. Both realities can coexist: on the one hand, the revision of national history in the decades after the war resulted in the downplaying or omission of atrocities committed by the "defeated" and the celebration and "memorialisation" of the lives lost (Inuzuka, 2013); on the other hand, as Orr maintains, the amnesia was never actually total, but rather intermittent and partial: "there have always been voices of conscience, just as there have always been incidences of inadvertent and willful neglect of Japan's aggressive past. Rather than dwell on this amnesia, one needs also to trace the selective and manipulated remembrance of those aggressions" (Orr, 2001: 173). It might therefore be more appropriate to refer to these social and institutional processes and patterns of remembering and forgetting as

the implementation of a selective memory—a facticity, after all—rather than a collective amnesia.

In any case, the deliberate forgetting of the crimes committed by Japan during the first half of the last century constitutes one more step on the path toward the main reasoning and basis of this analysis: after the Second World War, the process of memory construction was affected by a distortion that continues to permeate the discursive elaboration of catastrophic events in contemporary Japan. The distorted discourse is ambivalent and complex, because while it elevates the legitimacy of the victim, it tends to ignore the power of the ruins, despite the fact that these two elements are intrinsically connected. Ultimately, the ruins recall a responsibility that can fragment a victimising narrative.

The postwar period brought with it the silence imposed by the US military and the initiation of the "Japanese economic miracle" in the 1960s. In the case of the 2011 triple disaster, this distortion was expressed in the narratives of "resilient nationalism" and "Ganbarō Nippon!"[2] promoted by the administration of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe (Shani, 2016: 130).

> The trauma narratives created around 3/11 are socially and culturally constructed. This narrative of natural disaster tells a story of communal suffering on the national level and removes questions of blame from a very politically fraught context. This national narrative also avoids the difficulty of talking about or looking at the actual destruction itself. It moves away from the site of danger and distress to a distant, yet comfortable and familiar narrative of recovery (Dinitto, 2014: 344).

Aiko Kashimura goes further in this sense, suggesting that one of the reactions to the Tōhoku catastrophe was not distortion but rather the suspension of representation: "In Japan disasters are not well articulated and represented. Disasters are viewed as unrepresented things." (Kashimura, 2016: 203).

In light of this distorted (non-)representation, that selective memory or partial amnesia, this study analyses films made by filmmakers—"voices of conscience", as Orr describes them—who have chosen to revisit the catastrophe in all its complexity through protagonists who are traumatised individuals doing all they can to carry on. In a context where the ruins of Hiroshima constituted forbidden ground, Shimizu used them as a form of resistance and a symptom of an intellectual approach that refused to coexist with a conflict-ridden present that excluded the past. In Warburgian terms, the filmmaker acted as a seismograph to measure the sometimes violent movements between the tectonic plates of memory and of history. The director sought to integrate the destruction caused by the bombings into the collective psyche of the Japanese people, not through a one-dimensional notion of victimhood but through the way the children interact with each other and with the soldier, through a soundscape that colours the imagery with warm and gentle tones, and through the rejection of anything programmatic or that might impose a single doctrine or a singular memory.

On the other hand, *Voices in the Wind* constructs a discourse on collective trauma and the paths, both solitary and shared, toward healing. Like Shimizu, Suwa revisits the ruins through his young protagonist, Haru; as she embarks on her personal quest, she becomes a custodian of the testimonies of people affected by catastrophe: an elderly woman who witnessed the bombings of Hiroshima; Morio, a man who, like her, lost his family in the 2011 triple disaster; but also a Kurdish family that embodies the complex reality faced by migrants in contemporary Japan. As spectators, we understand that for Haru the institutionalised "Ganbarō Nippon!" narrative represents an unreasonable demand to give up her memories, guilt and grief and look towards the future. Confronted with this frustrating and empty narrative, she decides to undertake the reverse

journey: to return to the heart of the traumatic event, to the ruins that bear witness to her loss. It is there that her healing begins.

THE RUINS: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The two films examined here respond to collective trauma through the logic of "working through" and what Todorov terms "exemplary memory", eschewing the direct representation—and consequent aestheticization—of the disasters and instead seeking a way of overcoming them grounded not in reliving the events themselves, but in revisiting their traces. One key feature of this approach is the temporal distance between the catastrophe and the story in each film: *Children of the Beehive* was shot and set three years after Japan's surrender, while *Voices in the Wind* takes place eight years after the Tōhoku disaster. Both films are thus sufficiently removed from the events to avoid sensationalist images of the catastrophes, yet close enough for their traces still to be visible.

Children of the Beehive

The opening of *Children of the Beehive* firmly establishes the film's temporal coordinates. The setting of the Shimonoseki railway station immediately situates us in a postwar Japan whose wounds remain painfully exposed. The ragged orphans scour the area in search of opportunities to steal; travellers disembark from trains and wait beside their belongings (Shimizu includes some close-ups of both actors in the film and real passers-by); a man with a missing leg (possibly lost in the war) acts as leader of the gang of child thieves. These opening scenes thus reinforce Japan's self-image as a victimised nation.

A series of shots introduces the gang's hideout, nestled amidst large concrete pipes that Shimizu uses for his typical geometric compositions and framing-within-the-frame effects (Figure 1). Yet the visual prominence of these structures also creates the impression of a landscape under construction, which has not yet succeeded in erasing the remnants of earlier destruction. It is a precarious, transitional environment through which the orphaned children move naturally, establishing one of the film's central ideas: that looking only toward the future and the hope of reconstruction is simply impossible.

As noted above, the sequence that most clearly reveals the seismographic quality of *Children of the Beehive* is the one set in Hiroshima, one of the stops on the characters' journey. It opens with

Figure 1. The children's hideout in *Children of the Beehive*

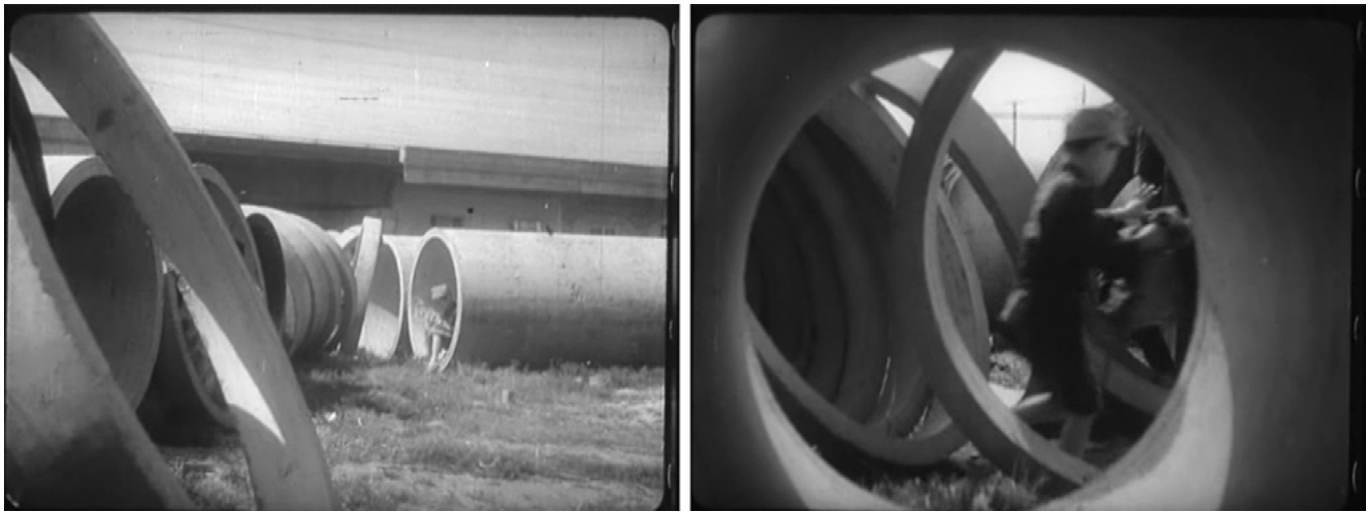




Figure 2. Shot/reverse-shot structure in the Hiroshima sequence of *Children of the Beehive*

a long pan over the city in an extreme long shot, moving from the less devastated end of the city to the other end, which the camera gradually reveals to be a wasteland of ruins. Here, Shimizu evokes a much more unequivocal opposition between destruction and reconstruction, reinforced by a subsequent shot/reverse-shot structure (Figure 2). In a medium long shot of the repatriated soldier and one of the children, we see the "living city" stretching out behind them, with new buildings and cars moving through its streets. The following long shot, filmed from behind them, places their figures amid the ruins of the "dead city", on a devastated hilltop that serves as the setting for the entire sequence. Shimizu is not particularly emphatic in his presentation of the rubble (although it clearly plays an important role in the compositions), which only makes their presence more striking: they appear both as a Dantean landscape of "twisted rock that looks extraterrestrial" (Cortés, 2020: 29), and as an everyday setting through which the characters move unperturbed.

Figure 3. The staircase and the hilltop in the Hiroshima sequence of *Children of the Beehive*





Figure 4. Playing with verticality in the Hiroshima sequence of *Children of the Beehive*

This lack of emphasis is also closely related to the historical context of the film's production. At a time when direct representations of the effects of the atomic bombings had been subject to restrictions during the US occupation (Conrad, 2003: 88), the integration of the ruins into the everyday texture of the scene functions as a way of inscribing back into the image that which had been partially excluded from public discourse.

If the mnemonic significance of the ruins appears to go unnoticed by the characters, it does not escape Shimizu. The filmmaker uses this setting to develop what is arguably the central—and perhaps even the only—dramatic focal point of the film: the story of Yoshibo, the only child whose past is known to us, whose mother died at sea. In Hiroshima, the protagonists meet up again with a repatriated woman who had first met them at Shimonoseki Station at the beginning of the film. Yoshibo, the first to notice her, runs up the steps and stands before her with his arms outstretched, as if claiming the woman's company for himself alone. Despite their apparent spontaneity, the staging of these two moments (Figure 3) establishes two significant visual patterns. The first involves playing with verticality by alternating high-angle and low-angle shots on the steps and through the frenetic movement of the children as they run up and down them. The second turns the hilltop into something resembling the heart of the ruins, a place where the return of the traumatic past collides with the present.

The scene makes clear that Yoshibo's attachment to the woman is rooted in his longing for his absent mother. The shot in which he shields her with his outstretched arms can thus be read as an expression of his fixation on the past. Yet what is ultimately negotiated on the hill is a new separation. With the soldier's assistance, the woman must persuade the boy that it is in his best interest to continue on his journey to the orphanage, where he will receive an education and the possibility of a future.

At this point, the visual motif of heights, ascents and descents comes dramatically into play (Figure 4). Yoshibo leaves the hill apparently convinced, but he turns back to look at the steps in a slightly angled shot taken from the hilltop. Then, a low-angle shot from the boy's point of view shows the woman looking down from the top of the hill. Her figure, small and only partly visible in the frame, seems almost to dissolve among the ruins.



Figure 5. Yoshibo and the woman hidden among the ruins of Hiroshima in *Children of the Beehive*

Driven by nostalgia, Yoshibo climbs back up the hill and searches desperately for the woman, unable to bear another separation. She hides among the rubble, and when he fails to find her, he bursts into tears. A long shot (Figure 5) captures this scene, holding its position as he exits the frame, after which the woman emerges from behind the rocks and watches him leave, her figure now even more concealed within the image.

Through this recurrent playing with verticality and the woman's repeated "disappearances", the hilltop comes to signify a space where past and present are negotiated. The ruins of Hiroshima, testifying directly to a national trauma, also bring Yoshibo's individual trauma to the surface, reviving the repressed memory of his separation from his mother. In obedience to the official "facticity", Shimizu avoids any explicit reference to the bombings or the war, yet the location alone is eloquent enough to evoke them. Narratively, the film simply stages its most significant personal drama against the backdrop of these ruins, the traces of the catastrophe. However, its hermeneutics of the ruins encourage us to read this story as a tiny part standing in for a much larger whole.

The Hiroshima sequence has its reflection in another one later in the film. Yoshibo falls gravely ill and asks one of his companions to help him get to the top of a nearby mountain, where he hopes to be able to see the sea so that he can remember his mother. When they finally reach the top, the boy carrying him discovers to his horror that Yoshibo has died on the way up. Yet this revelation serves merely as the abrupt conclusion to a sequence lasting several minutes showing the boy carrying Yoshibo up the mountainside. The sequence echoes the one on the hilltop in Hiroshima, with its heights and ascents. As Jesús Cortés observes, however, this mirror-sequence is completely devoid of pretext: "Neither allusions nor symbolism, neither destiny nor the future, neither war nor death. Only a child struggling up a mountain with another child, exhausted and motionless, on his back" (Cortés, 2020: 29).

Shimizu concludes both sequences with a dramatic punctuation (separation in one, death in the other), but he lingers on them long enough for the repetition to focus our attention on what has been gained along the way: not (just) compassion for

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Yoshibo, whose fixation on the past prevents him from completing the journey, but also hope for the companion who carries him on his back to the end, just as the children and the repatriated soldier carry one another through the final stages of their journey to the "Introspection Tower". If trauma is collective, healing must be collective as well.

Voices in the Wind

As noted above, the odyssey taken in this film connects Hiroshima and Ōtsuchi, the beginning and end of Haru's journey and the sites of two national traumas. In consonance with this structure, Suwa adopts a circular pattern that repeatedly returns to the trope of the ruins. In both cities, scenes set amid devastated landscapes bring Haru face-to-face with the traces of her loss and lead her, like Yoshibo on the hilltop in Hiroshima, to break down in tears.

A comparison of these two scenes (Figure 6) suggests that this circularity is also constructed through formal repetition. The first scene, set in

Figure 6. Left: three frames from *Voices in the Wind* set among the ruins left by flooding in Hiroshima. Right: three frames depicting the ruins of Haru's former home in Ōtsuchi



Hiroshima, takes place after Haru's aunt has been taken to hospital in critical condition. Her illness reawakens Haru's memories of the death of her family, who perished in the Tōhoku disaster. Several neighbourhoods of Hiroshima have recently been affected by severe flooding that has done damage to streets and homes. Ignoring the barriers set up to restrict access to the area, Haru wanders through these new ruins and, standing amid the debris, delivers a monologue expressing the feelings of guilt she carries as the sole survivor of her family. Suwa seems to suggest that she is drawn to this particular devastated landscape by a kind of magnetic force. In one of the few houses left standing after the flood, she meets an elderly woman who recounts her memories of the atomic bombing in 1945, and it is in response to the old woman's testimony that Haru verbalises her own condition as a survivor of the tsunami for the first time. The ruins in this first sequence carry a personal and national mnemonic weight that transcends the flood, which serves primarily as a catalyst. Here, for the first time in the film, Suwa creates a dynamic of multidirectional memories. This is especially evident in Haru's interaction with the elderly woman: rather than a competition of memories of suffering across generations, what emerges is a dialogue that intertwines them and begins to construct a network of solidarities that Haru will encounter throughout her journey.

The frames selected here (Figure 6) reveal two formal devices that associate Haru with the ruins. The first is a rear shot, close to Haru's point of view, which places her in a painful confrontation with the devastated landscape; the second is an extreme long shot that renders her tiny. In this way, Suwa establishes much the same idea that Shimizu articulates in the opening sequence of *Children of the Beehive* at the train station: reconstruction is impossible because the ruins cannot be ignored.

A while later in Ōtsuchi, standing before what little remains of her former home, Haru is once again framed from behind as she faces the ruins (Figure 6). She then repeats an action we saw previously in the scene in Hiroshima, where she collapses in exhaustion among the debris and a man comes to her aid and helps her back to her feet. In the Ōtsuchi scene, she sinks to the ground once again upon the remains of her house and then Morio encourages her to rise. The actions are virtually identical; what differs is the scale of the shot, which is much closer the second time.

THE RUINS OF HIROSHIMA REOPEN THE WOUNDS OF A TRAUMATIC PAST, WHILE THE RUINS OF ŌTSUCHI TELL OF A PROCESS OF HEALING MADE POSSIBLE BY THE JOURNEY ITSELF.

Despite the formal differences between these two moments, their similarities are clear. Both men express a kind of empathetic solidarity with Haru. We learn that the first lost his sister and has not seen his children for years due to his divorce, while Morio lost both his wife and daughter in the tsunami and carries a burden of guilt as a former worker at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Through this empathy, both characters suggest an unfulfilled fatherly instinct, and their efforts to help and protect Haru similarly hint at a recognition of a shared loss.

In this way, the ruins of Hiroshima reopen the wounds of a traumatic past—suffered individually by Haru and historically by Japan—while the ruins of Ōtsuchi tell of a process of healing made possible by the journey itself.

As is typical of Suwa's films, *Voices in the Wind* relies heavily on long takes. This final sequence among the ruins of Ōtsuchi consists of only two shots lasting a total of six minutes before Morio finally helps Haru to her feet. As a result, each cut highlights the expressive significance of this operation. This is how we should understand the third shot in the sequence, which marks a shift in



Figure 7. Frame from *Voices in the Wind* showing a ruined house in Ōtsuchi

the point of view while at the same time affirming the characters' growing recognition of the shared nature of their suffering. In LaCapra's terms, their pain becomes a means of seeking consolation and of re-entering and resuming their social life, to use LaCapra's expression (2001: 61). This third shot reframes Morio and Haru on a wider scale (Figure 7), showing the ruins of the house in their entirety, the row of neighbouring homes that testify to the continuity of life in the town, and the hills in the background. At the same time, the glare of sunlight "burns" the image and creates a dividing line in the shot, providing a shelter beneath which the two characters walk together as they leave the site of the trauma behind. The cut to this shut thus entails a new way of seeing not only for the spectator but also for the two characters, who have just taken a decisive step in their shared process of healing. As the change to the scene suggests, they are beginning to envision their future in a brighter light.

Of course, this step forward does not mean the end of the trauma, but it does mean its transformation into a shared experience. In this way, the film eschews a linear narrative about characters overcoming their pain to acknowledge a more prolonged process of mourning, closer to the "mourning work" described by Creighton (2014) than to the narratives of instant resilience promoted by institutional discourse. This mourning work might include the creation of spontaneous memorials, community storytelling or the recovery and restoration of photographs swept away by the tsunami, all of which are understood as ways of reinscribing lost relationships in the present.

CONCLUSIONS

Like any other political community, Japan has articulated its relationship with collective traumas through institutional narratives that tend to organise, channel or even limit its memory. In

contrast to these frameworks—ranging from the restrictions imposed during the US occupation to contemporary rhetorics of resilience—the films made by Shimizu and Suwa propose ways of relating to the past that involve re-inscribing it into present experience rather than insisting on its closure. In this sense, the analysis of the two films sheds light on how certain methodological and formal resources—an openness to the real, the metaphor of the journey, a focus on ruins—serve as ways of intervening in the memory regimes of their respective historical contexts.

In *Children of the Beehive*, this intervention is articulated through a shift towards the intimate, which, far from representing a de-historicisation, functions as a strategy for the indirect inscription of trauma. In the absence of an explicit discourse on the war or the bombings (in a context of restrictions on the public representation of the recent past), the film depicts their effects on everyday life, on bodies and on the connections between people. Yoshibo's drama, read as a synecdoche, a "tiny part standing in for the whole", thus allows the image to sustain what could not be fully expressed, transforming the ruins into a space where history persists in seemingly minor yet densely significant forms.

Voices in the Wind, on the other hand, deploys a distinct yet complementary logic. In opposition to the institutionally promoted recovery and resilience narratives in the wake of the Tōhoku disaster, this film insists on a return to the devastated spaces and an openness to fragmentary narratives about the traumatic experience. This aligns the film with practices of "memory from below" whereby communities process their loss by re-inscribing it in the space and in their connections with each other. The ruins thus cease to be mere remnants of the past and become sites of encounters between memories, where mourning is not concluded but instead shared and transformed.

In this way, the dialogue between the two films also facilitates the articulation of a productive relationship between the theoretical frameworks discussed—trauma as a collective process (LaCapra), multidirectional memory (Rothberg) and the critique of "facticity" (Reyes Mate)—and their expression in specific cinematic forms. While such concepts help identify the tensions between memory and oblivion, between "working through" and closure, it is the images that demonstrate how these tensions are embodied in bodies, spaces and actions. Conversely, the textual analysis of the films sheds light on the material and affective dimensions of these concepts, preventing them from being reduced to mere abstractions.

Both *Children of the Beehive* and *Voices in the Wind* are thus inscribed in the cinematic tradition of modernity, which uses the ruins to question hegemonic narratives of progress and overcoming. Rather than opposing these narratives explicitly, these films displace them by exploring what they tend to exclude: the persistence of pain, the materiality of the ruins, and the need for ongoing mourning. In this sense, the films do not merely narrate trauma but aim to make it inhabitable, and to facilitate the "resumption of social life" for the victims through a perspective committed to examining the fractures of the past.

This resistance against the closure of the past can be viewed through a Benjaminian lens. In 1940, Walter Benjamin wrote a brief text regarding a painting by Paul Klee that obsessed him so much that he ultimately purchased it: *Angelus Novus*. In this text, the German thinker describes a cross-eyed angel whom he compares to "history" because his eyes look behind him at the relentless piling up of "rubble on top of rubble", while a storm—progress—has caught itself up in his wings and "drives him irresistibly into the future" (Benjamin, 2008: 310). From this perspective, *Children of the Beehive* and *Voices in the Wind* can act as the necessary anchors to prevent the storm from sweeping history away and erasing the traces of the past. This would be an exemplary practice of memory, facilitating the extraction from the traumatic experience of an

essence oriented towards the future of a repaired life that neither conceals nor exhibits its collective wounds, but merely renders them visible in order to learn how to live with them. ■

NOTES

1 It is not the intention of this study to compare the scale or severity of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with that of the Tōhoku disaster. Rather, its aim is to bring the filmic and discursive articulations that have developed around these two events into a conversation with each other.

2 *Ganbarō Nippon!*, usually translated as "Let's do our best, Japan!" or "Stay strong, Japan!", was a slogan widely disseminated in the aftermath of the triple disaster. In this context, it came to acquire a particular meaning related to ideas of resilience, national unity and collective determination in the face of crisis. At the same time, however, this narrative of perseverance tended to obscure structural problems, including failures in crisis management and unresolved questions concerning responsibility and accountability.

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HERMENEUTICS OF RUINS: FROM TRACES TO THE HEALING OF COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN *CHILDREN OF THE BEEHIVE* AND *VOICES IN THE WIND*

Abstract

The article analyzes how *Children of the Beehive* (Hachi no su no kodomotachi, Hiroshi Shimizu, 1948) and *Voices in the Wind* (Kaze no denwa, Nobuhiro Suwa, 2020) use ruins as ethical-formal devices to address the major collective traumas experienced by Japan since World War II. In both films, the ruins not only serve as devastated settings caused by the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the Tōhoku catastrophe but also act as traces of a pain that resists being addressed by official narratives. Through a cinematic methodology open to the real and the journey as a narrative motif, the directors propose an ethics of testimony that avoids the aestheticization of trauma, instead offering an "exemplary" and "multidirectional" memory that connects different generations of victims and survivors. In contrast to the institutionalization of forgetting promoted by the Japanese state in the name of modernization and stability, these works construct cinematic spaces of resistance, where the traumatic can be collectively processed, thus laying symbolic foundations for a grassroots healing process.

Key words

Collective trauma; Memory; Cinema; Japan; Ruins; Institutionalization of forgetting.

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HERMENÉUTICA DE LAS RUINAS. DE LAS HUELLAS A LA SANACIÓN DEL TRAUMA COLECTIVO EN *LOS NIÑOS DE LA COLMENA* Y *EL TELÉFONO DEL VIENTO*

Resumen

El artículo analiza cómo *Los niños de la colmena* (Hachi no su no kodomotachi, Hiroshi Shimizu, 1948) y *El teléfono del viento* (Kaze no denwa, Nobuhiro Suwa, 2020) utilizan las ruinas como dispositivos ético-formales para afrontar los principales traumas colectivos sufridos por Japón desde la Segunda Guerra Mundial. En ambas películas, las ruinas no solo funcionan como escenarios devastados por los bombardeos de Hiroshima y Nagasaki o por la catástrofe de Tōhoku, sino que actúan como huellas de un dolor que se resiste a ser abordado por las narrativas oficiales. A través de una metodología cinematográfica abierta a lo real y del viaje como motivo narrativo, los directores plantean una ética del testimonio que evita la estetización del trauma, proponiendo en su lugar una «memoria ejemplar» y «multidireccional» que conecta diferentes generaciones de víctimas y supervivientes. Frente a la institucionalización del olvido promovida por el Estado japonés en aras de la modernización y la estabilidad, estas obras construyen espacios fílmicos de resistencia, donde lo traumático puede ser elaborado colectivamente, sentando así las bases simbólicas para una sanación «desde abajo».

Palabras clave

Trauma colectivo; Memoria; Cine; Japón; Ruinas; Institucionalización del olvido.

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