

# **Beyond the View from the Japanese Home Front: The Making of Knowledge and Memory in *In This Corner of the World***

Heidi Ka Sin LEE

PhD student

Graduate School of International Culture and Communication Studies

Waseda University

## **Abstract**

This article situates the animated film adaptation *In This Corner of the World* in a broader cultural context of popular memory and examines the creative process of telling stories of World War II by non-war victim contemporary artists. Contrary to existing research concerning the manga's adaptation and medium specificity, the article builds on the concept of "prosthetic memory" to suggest that the diegetic film re-embodies the Japanese practice of WWII storytelling by personalizing public history and re-historicizes the truth of Japanese war survivors in a commodified form. The article then undertakes a comparative analysis of the film's depictions and the testimonies of *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivors) to evince the paradigm shift in WWII narratives in Japan.

...it is a more difficult thing to write history to make it anything than to make anything that is anything be anything because in history you have everything, you have the newspapers and the conversations and letter writing and the mystery stories and audiences and in every direction an audience that fits anything in every other way in which any audience can fit itself to be anything...

—Gertrude Stein (1935)<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

In the second August 2020 issue of *Kinema Junpo* (the oldest Japanese film magazine), there is a special column titled “War Films that Connect with the Present”<sup>2</sup> to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II. Seven of the 15 films reviewed in the column are Japanese films about the war in the Pacific; all of them are live-action, and none of them are well known to global audiences, most probably not even to audiences in Japan. If they only amount to some war fanatics’ esoterica, how do they connect with the present and with people living in the present? A much stronger candidate for inclusion in such a column is one of those rare successful Japanese films that have reached a wide international audience in 2016-17 and won critical acclaim,<sup>3</sup> the award-winning animated version of *In This Corner of the World*, based on Fumiyo Kōno’s 2007-09 manga series.<sup>4</sup>

Set in the last two critical years of WWII, *In This Corner of the World* tries to reconcile historical facts known to many international viewers as the whole truth with portrayals of concomitant plebeian struggle that is often in near-zero visibility, shutting out extratextual preconceptions and presenting an intimate look at daily lives in war. While many Western critics found the film introspective and refreshingly involving in a way that somehow contradicts the hard truths commonly exposed to them, one critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, going against the majority, disapproved of the film as “a cultural artifact not quite making the translation from Japan to America (LaSalle 2017),” especially with its heroine Suzu Urano raging at the Japanese surrender. Other critics praised the film mostly for the painterly strokes of animation against a greyish WWII backdrop and the episodic moments that reveal a surprisingly compassionate tale of Japanese civilians. Contrary to being oblivious to this harrowing piece of history, their attitude lies more in the major takeaway from the film: “the value of the individual and the power of love over nationalism (Lee 2017),” “an eye-opening experience for those not of that corner of the Pacific...a tentative step toward actually grappling with that history (Moore 2017),” “a deeply sympathetic tale, using the possibilities of animation not just to pique curiosity, but to devastate (Zilberman 2017).” The many positive responses to the conjuring of a foreign, unknown past go to prove the film’s offering of what Alison Landsberg (2004, p. 113) calls a “transferential space” in which “people are invited to enter into experiential relationships to events through which

they themselves did not live” as both local and foreign spectators are transported to the Japanese home front at the tail end of WWII.

The personal story of Suzu helps fill the void in the entirety of official knowledge about Japanese wartime life. Born right before the most chaotic time in human history in one of the world’s most iconic cities, Hiroshima, Suzu is first seen in the film at the age of eight in 1933. Subsequently in 1943, she moves to a nearby city, Kure, where she gets married to Shusaku Hōjō, a boy she met by great coincidence ten years before. The film depicts the home front, which usually provides merely the background or features in only a few minor scenes in war films, as the main, or indeed the only, stage. The enemy is faceless; the Allied attacks are illustrated mostly without a lot of blood and gore; the men are simply sent off to the battle front, and no real action is expected from them at home. Women here are magnified to the extent that traditional masculine figures are nearly forgotten. The conceptualization of war by these women and this film might communicate a propagandistic aftertaste if you zero in on the omission of the Japanese admitting war responsibility, or a cathartic experience if you empathize with the characters as ordinary, law-abiding citizens. This story might at first glance give an illusion of a *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivor) author; yet it does not emulate the typical “never again” trope in the *hibakusha*’s testimonies. This is an imagination of a first-hand WWII experience by a non-victim unaffiliated with any such survivors.

In explicating the “generation of postmemory,” Marianne Hirsch (2008, p. 104) raises a number of stimulating questions regarding the “aesthetics of remembrance”: “What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? How are we implicated in the crimes? Can the memory of genocide [here Hirsch refers to the Holocaust] be transformed into action and resistance?” Falling outside Hirsch’s subject of investigation—the second generation—the manga artist Kōno does not have any family members who are *hibakusha* or war survivors and depicts WWII at a generational and emotional remove. Inasmuch as the author as well as the narrative poses such a curious creative concern over a sensitive historical issue, this article aims to delineate her and the anime director Sunao Katabuchi’s motives and principles behind the creative process of making the manga/film and how they answer the foregoing questions by building this transferenceal space of storytelling for the transmission of what Landsberg (2003, p. 149) refers to as

“prosthetic memories” which “conjure up a more public past...available to individuals across racial and ethnic lines.” They, as opposed to organic or privatized memories, “go beyond the confines of the nuclear family” and “affect people both intellectually and emotionally” regardless of their inauthentic nature (Ibid, pp. 152, 154).

Existing non-Japanese literature regarding *In This Corner of the World* takes on the manga as the primary research subject and concerns its intermedial adaptation, medium specificity, and textuality. Rather than focusing on the constitutive nature of manga as a medium—“superflat-ness”—Jaqueline Berndt (2018) looks at the material dimension of the pictorial craftsmanship in both the manga and the film, with an emphasis on the motif of Suzu’s right hand in conjunction with the comic-specific use of freehand drawing. Through a comparison between the manga and the 2018 live-action television series, Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto (2019) points to the drama’s failure at adapting the original’s reflexive style. Jocelyne Allen (2020), from a foreign translator’s point of view, stresses the importance of the grammar of manga in reinterpreting an interpretation of a past in a different cultural context. All of these texts provide insights into the merits of manga the medium, but do not explore the making of the animated film, arguably the most successful version of *In This Corner of the World* in terms of global transmission, and the relationship between its storytelling/filmmaking process and popular reception. This article attempts to elucidate the formation of *In This Corner of the World*’s transferential space as well as prosthetic memory by drawing on Kōno’s and Katabuchi’s intentions to create/adapt this wartime story. It then undertakes a comparative analysis of the film’s depictions and *hibakusha*’s testimonies, a mnemonic practice in which “[one’s] memory work reconstitutes [his/her] ‘experiences’ (Yoneyama 1999, p. 120).” Because testimonial practice is the exclusive prerogative of *hibakusha* and other war survivors as eyewitnesses to that part of WWII which performs the function of authenticating official knowledge, the nature of their first-hand accounts seems almost the antithesis of that of *In This Corner of the World*—imaginary war experiences by non-victim contemporary artists—except for the subjective aspects. In this light, *hibakusha*’s testimonies best serve as a critical measure of the diegetic film’s intentionality—to see how and to what extent members of present generations “carry their stories forward.” Through examining the similarities and differences of the creators’ and the *hibakusha*’s perspectives on the discourses of such storytelling and testimonial practice, I argue that the animated film *In This Corner*

*of the World*, a category of its own and a representative postmodern time capsule of popular WWII memory, *re-embodies* the Japanese practice of WWII storytelling by personalizing public history and *re-historicizes* the truth of Japanese war survivors in a commodified (and thus more far-reaching) form—a piece of prosthetic memory. I want to further suggest that the main contribution of this internationally released Japanese animation is to wage an ideological struggle on the collective mind of non-Japanese audiences by stifling the obvious and (re)enacting the unnoticeable.

## **2. The making of prosthetic memories in this corner of the world**

I shall begin by briefly explaining Landsberg's theory of "prosthetic memory" and its application to the story/film of *In This Corner of the World*. Prosthetic memory, in contrast to lived experiences or living memory, "emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum (Landsberg 2004, p. 2)" and allows the person to internalize that past event as his/her own, even though he/she did not live through it physically. After investigating the shifts in subjectivities regarding issues of immigration to the United States, American slavery, and the Holocaust through the operation of prosthetic memories by mass cultural technologies of memory, Landsberg arrives at the conclusion that "[p]rosthetic memory teaches ethical thinking by fostering empathy (p. 149)." She continues to compare Max Scheler's essentialist position on sympathy that human beings have an intrinsic capacity for understanding others' feelings and Emmanuel Levinas's pluralist philosophy in which the premise of alterity and the recognition of fundamental, insurmountable differences ground his ethical call for alliances among people (pp. 150-151). Her prosthetic memory shares the "nonessentialist, nonidentity politics" of the latter and constitutes a "strategic form of remembering" in the capitalist system of postmodern commodification (p. 152).

Memory transmission of large-scale traumatic events like the Holocaust, as Landsberg identifies, is increasingly problematic as the last bastions of survivors are dying and living memory of these historical events will soon become unavailable (pp. 111-112). The discourse about "Hiroshima" and "Nagasaki"<sup>5</sup> has reached this point as well. How can this piece of history be passed on at a certain temporal distance, and more specifically, how do mass cultural practices, like film and cinema (and manga and anime in Japan), contribute to this acquisition of historical knowledge? The

animated film *In This Corner of the World* exhibits an archetypal transference space where the mass can obtain prosthetic memories of the Japanese home front in WWII through which they did not live. The epigraph attached to this article, which describes modernist writer Gertrude Stein's idea of historical representation, is particularly suggestive: history is essential for "seeing" and "talking," but not "writing" and "telling." Later, Michel Foucault, in the face of the rise of filmic accounts of resistance against Nazi Germany, echoes her notion of historical storytelling and contends that the intention of those films which often take the liberty of imagination is "to reprogramme 'popular memory'; and also to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present (Foucault and Cahiers 1975, p. 28)." While saying that films can "reprogramme" collective memory might go a little too far, as spectators familiar with the filmmaking machinery would circumvent a complete transfer of such commodified images (Landsberg 2004, p. 21), a meaning-making "framework" does emerge, negotiating existing socialities and even constructing new social values. As Steven Knapp (1989, pp. 145-146) forcefully argues in his "Collective Memory and the Actual Past," "people's ethical and political values take the form of commitments to doctrines or images that are in turn dependent on imagined or remembered patterns of action" and "there would be no necessary connection between the historical actuality of the example [his case studies of biblical and literary works] and its utility." This is not to say that actual historical tragedies can be dismissed and undermined as inexorable happenings condoned without criticism, but that the progressive path of mankind relies on a necessary "rewrite" (not to be mistaken for "revision") of history to be told instead of a mimetic repeat of facts. Or, in Vivian Sobchack's (1996, p. 6) words, "[n]ow objectively indeterminate, History cannot be 'taken up' by consciousness, but, rather, must be subjectively 'made out.'"

The indiscriminate bombing raids prior to the dropping of the two atomic bombs, often dismissed by the executive power as collateral damage in its peace mission (Selden 2010), represented perhaps a greater destruction in their totality, but they were not representative enough for international recognition, which in turn engendered too large a proportion of atomic-bomb works set in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Kōno has always loathed the idea of equating nuclear destruction only with the two cities alongside peacemaking and thus purposively picked a place outside these two cities as her manga's setting (Kōno and Nishijima 2016). Indeed, considering the dominance of

a particular subject position—Hiroshima as “Hiroshima”—“a mode that encompasses the oblique and the unstated, along with the explicitly horrific, requires a story told ‘against the grain’ of all the narratives we have in our heads about... (Elsaesser 1996, p. 163)” WWII and Japan, which are often reduced to “Hiroshima” and Japanese foreign aggression. Furthermore, because Japanese anime functions as an expressive and imaginative “language,” instead of a referential or indexical exposition, that “enables us to grasp some of its capacity to engage with an audience that does not share the same cultural and linguistic background (Swale 2015, p. 139),” Landsberg’s prosthetic memory is useful in the examination of the WWII animated film *In This Corner of the World*—how it was made to result in a somewhat failed “translation,” an experiential learning of history, or a “devastat[ing]” viewing event.

When asked why Minami, a main character and a *hibakusha* in her other “Hiroshima”-themed manga *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms* (2004), was made more placid than originally conceived, Kōno (2012, pp. 368-369) explains this adjustment to her character configuration as follows:

*Hibakusha* characters in books are often depicted as “strange people” either throwing tantrums or being overcome with emotion... It would be better not to include drawings of such emotions since they could appear ambiguous or dubious. I think *empathy-arousing manga characters are those a little bit more ideal for real-life people* [emphasis added].

This policy of her manga-drawing came from a general feeling when manga/novel readers would think about what *should have been* done or said if they were the characters. Avoiding or keeping these “regrets” to a minimum, she continues, a manga can invite empathy with character identification (Ibid). There is a dual thinking process at work in this policy. First, Kōno perceived personal thoughts, rather than actual actions, as the highest quality to define a person. In other words, readers experience empathy not through seeing a character do the same thing as he/she might have done in real life but through seeing that character do what he/she might have failed to do. Second, with this psychology in mind, she portrayed characters who belong to the war generation without reference to war survivors and *hibakusha*’s testimonies. She was fully aware of the possibility that she would draw the way things were told by these survivors (p. 372). The assertive, if not preachy, nature of these oral/historical

accounts might hinder the transmission of the educative values in her story. The broader implication here is that difference or change overrides sameness or similarity.

Condemning the Japanese back then with a condescending attitude, Kōno (2012, p. 383) cautions, “does not feel right.” The absence of depictions of war responsibility in *In This Corner of the World* is a conscious choice of hers, and in fact, she made the utmost effort to avoid such topics:

Although I saw descriptions like shooting at Truman- and Churchill-depicted targets with bamboo spears and treading on their portraits in historical records, such scenes as blaming specific persons were excluded. It is because I felt that the possibility that citizens were thrown into war without the awareness of committing war crimes, or a sense of responsibility, has to be told to people of this era. If these episodes [regarding war responsibility] were inserted, people would just think ‘They were awful because they did this and that’ and leave it at that (Ibid, pp. 381-382).

That is the historical perspective, and a deluge of relatively objective accounts of that past have been recorded in literature, textbooks, and news; the purpose of painting a lively picture of wartime Japanese life, to Kōno and Katabuchi, was to let readers/viewers gain a sensuous experience of the then “normal” domesticity and think for themselves, running in the same vein of that of prosthetic memory. “The precritical narratives that connect us to a collective past,” Knapp (1989, p. 144) suggests, “tend to presuppose that our ancestors largely shared our beliefs and values, for only in that case can our actions readily be seen as continuations of theirs,” as “some tendency to identify with the past and future states of one’s own organism seems built into the structure of human agency (p. 142).” The same images that incite WWII memories and sentiments from the Japanese’s virtual ancestors also generate new public spheres abroad with the film’s international travel and invite foreign audiences to espouse a complicated vision of “Japanese values.”

The device of animation is nothing new to WWII storytelling though. It seems almost inevitable to pit *In This Corner of the World* against the best-known Japanese animated WWII film *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), which is not the aim of this article. Nevertheless, Roger Ebert’s (2005 pp. 180-182) precise statement about an animation’s capacity for affective expressions derives from his observations on the latter film:



“Live action would have been burdened by the weight of special effects, violence, and action....the lack of visual realism in his [director Isao Takahata’s] animated characters allows our imagination more play; freed from the literal fact of real actors, we can more easily merge the characters with our own associations.” Alistair D. Swale (2015, pp. 126, 143), giving a detailed account of anime aesthetics, correspondingly accentuates the “post-cinematic” affordance of Japanese animation—the “emancipation of the imagination to transcend [conventional cinematic production]”:

...at the same time as [anime] makes particular “demands” on both the creator and the spectator, it enables modes of expression that are, by virtue of its indifference to an obligation to integrate perception with the exercise of imagination that correlates to our experience of the physical world, liberating in profound ways.

Animation has another intrinsic quality that directly and constructively deals with a universal emotive language: humor. In this regard, watching everyday life in animated form not only lets imagination thrive but also forges social bonds, because “a large part of the pleasure we experience from humor in everyday life, it seems, is not the solitary pleasure of cognitive mastery, wish fulfillment, ego gratification, or any such thing, but a result of the exercise of behaviors that have an important adaptive function in facilitating social affiliation (Eitzen 1999, p. 86).” However, the amount and level of humor can be quite tricky to decide in portraying historical tragedy. Comic artist Art Spiegelman, the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel *Maus* (1991), while denouncing Roberto Benigni’s Holocaust comedy *Life Is Beautiful* (1997), emphasizes that his animal characters are a use of metaphor to probe into the historical issue but Benigni’s film conversely “turn[s] history into metaphor...universalize[s] everything and genuinely trivialize[s] history (Shibata 2004, pp. 58-60).” Kōno’s characters are in human form and elements of comedy are added as a response to the abstractedness of *Suzu*; yet the visual metaphors in the manga/film—*Suzu*’s imaginative visuals of wartime life as an aspiring artist, the “ogre” who brings *Suzu* and *Shusaku* together, *Suzu*’s lost right hand, the crumbling world under her left hand’s drawings, and more—draw the line between the 1997 and 2016 films. *Black Rain* (1989), a major “Hiroshima” film as well as an intentional understatement of “Hiroshima” as John T. Dorsey and Naomi Matsuoka (2009, pp. 204-205) rightly note, employs “irony and

humor” to demonstrate “a fundamental humility and honesty in the face of a potentially overwhelming subject matter.” To elucidate the ingenuity of the humor in *In This Corner of the World*, two examples in the film will suffice. When Suzu’s drawing of shorelines and battleships is discovered by the *Kempeitai* (Law Soldier Regiment), they suspect her of being a spy and castigate her in-laws for their lack of caution; the family laugh it off later as the oversensitive officers contrast so starkly with the incredibly simple-minded Suzu. Another example comes from her father-in-law: he falls asleep from fatigue after protecting Suzu from shrapnel in an air raid, and Suzu thinks he has died from being hit by shrapnel. Rather than plain mockery or disrespectful parody, these episodes, hinting at the then human condition, come off as clever social satires. An outright comedy out of historical tragedy might not sit well with spectators, but as Kōno and Katabuchi exemplify, adding little doses of humor in life, especially in a hard life, is one of the most effective coping mechanisms in adversity and also in the face of challenging viewing experiences, thanks to “the immediacy of viewers’ emotional responses to humorous moments in films and the discreteness of those responses from characters’ emotions (Eitzen 1999, p. 93),” and rings true to the author’s empathy-developing aesthetics.

Despite a few similarities between *In This Corner of the World* and *Grave of the Fireflies*—both being animations, set in the declining days of WWII, and the protagonists losing younger family members to death with gut-wrenching guilt—Ebert’s (2005, p. 182) enlightenment on the latter elicits an intriguing comment that says the opposite of the former’s narrative essence and interpellative mechanism: “animation produces emotional effects not by reproducing reality but by heightening and simplifying it, so that many of the sequences are about ideas, not experiences.” In fact, the perfectionistic tendency of Katabuchi to reproduce reality and imitate a “documentary” was so compulsive that he, Kōno mentions, even researched the actual weather of specific days and real-life locations not featured in the original comic series in filling the frame with background information (Kōno and Katabuchi 2019). Added to that, the daily experience of the characters is so emphasized that on-screen dates constantly remind viewers of where they are in history instead of story interest and no sentimental background music assails them and pumps up emotion—minimal background music was one of Katabuchi’s many policies in giving a matter-of-fact WWII account (Ibid). Running counter to *Grave of the Fireflies*, *In This Corner of*

*the World* asks the audience to produce ideas from the daily, bordering on banal, experiences, which mirror our way of thinking and allow the emergence of prosthetic memories to put things into perspective. The film epitomizes the oxymoron “magical realism,” the imaginative expression of which effectually builds “distinctive *affective* capacities...‘necessitated’ by its estrangement from an ability to present the ‘actual’” and “attached to specific instances of coloration or visual spectacle (an embracing of the metamorphic possibilities of a purely emergent space) (Swale 2015, p. 143).”

Sharing Landsberg’s belief in the power of prosthetic memory, I do not mean to indicate that the approaches of Kōno and Katabuchi in creating *In This Corner of the World* are inherently constructive or reformist, or that the provision of these prosthetic memories is a moral imperative to building an understanding of the tragic past. However, this film, these prosthetic memories generated by the story, could be one of the first steps to connect spectators from different backgrounds and cultures and mediate between different ethnic groups regarding the generally opposing perspectives of WWII. After all, Fredric Jameson (1981, p. 286) told us, “the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily Utopian.”

### **3. From prosthetic memory to popular memory**

Prosthetic memory has been exerting considerable influence on moviegoers ever since the advent of cinema, though they might not even realize it. In Japan’s case, the simplicity and absoluteness of the Japanese national truth, embodied in the “pure heroes of the war films, who achieve transcendence through suppressing their personal attachments (Dower 1993, p. 49),” pervaded wartime Japanese cinema. One example hinted at in the film is *Teki ha ikuman ari totemo* (Even Though There Are Thousands of Enemies, 1944), a fleeting shot of the film’s billboard when Shusaku brings Suzu to the movies. After the Allied Occupation ended, the psychology of war victimhood became one of the *idée fixes* in Japanese cinema, which often sparked worldwide debates: Kaneto Shindō’s *Genbaku no ko* (1952), Keisuke Kinoshita’s *Twenty-Four Eyes* (1954), Kon Ichikawa’s *Fires on the Plain* (1959), Mori Masaki’s *Barefoot Gen* (1983), Isao Takahata’s *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), Shōhei Imamura’s *Black Rain* (1989), to name just a few. With this wide spectrum of the Japanese victimized condition perpetuated on-screen, the Japanese national identity as the only atomic victim and anti-nuclear pacifist has been continuously forged and felt.

In his account of respected figures' comprehension of war responsibility, Dower (1999, pp. 489-490) cites the Christian educator Shigeru Nanbara's 1945 essay and distinguishes a new-found moral compass guiding the recently defeated Japanese: "Repentance and atonement were possible only for those who devoted themselves to constructing a new Japan devoted to peace and justice; and to pursue such ideals was to honor the dead for they were what the dead believed they had been fighting for." For postwar Japanese filmmakers and writers, at least of the above-mentioned films and adapted novels, postwar physical and psychological consequences are a more pressing issue to dwell on, often making powerful statements against war. 70 years after the war, *In This Corner of the World*, under the hands of subsequent generations who have no first-hand or even second-hand war experience, brings modern audiences in all corners of the world back to the wartime Japanese home front. In the end of the film, however, instead of dealing with war responsibilities or peacebuilding, the characters make do with the consequences—Suzu coming to terms with the losses of her right hand and niece-in-law Harumi, the couple taking home a war orphan, and the family moving forward with the arrival of the orphan.

But before Suzu, the traditional cinematic image of female *hibakusha* and war survivors appeared more problematic: a paragon of unchanging Japanese core values that persist to this day, dumbed down to "an essentializing view of A-bomb suffering" as well as "an experience removed from history and politics (Todeschini 2009, pp. 241-242)." Likewise, William B. Hauser (1991) argues that despite the improvement of the Japanese women's image—from dutiful homemakers to triumphant, independent minds constantly questioning war and expansionism—that their dancing around political issues kept being shown on-screen for fifteen years after the war's end is a problem regarding Japan's democratization itself. Then the most challenging—and even controversial—task in releasing a film like *In This Corner of the World* is the complex portrayal of the female protagonist Suzu. Her deeply personalized, imaginative experience and natural propensity for daydreaming successfully separate her from this solidified glorification of female *hibakusha*/war victim prototypes. Japanese women's roles during wartime cannot be rewritten as strong characters just because one wishes for the blossoming of feminism and egalitarianism. Nevertheless, Suzu is neither a conventional Japanese woman nor a particularly robust wife, and her marital relationship with Shusaku is one embodying subdued yet growing affection.

Indeed, the infectious sensibility of *Suzu* not only manifested itself at the time of the film's initial release, but also when it enjoyed a long run at both Japanese and foreign cinemas. At home, the manga was also adapted into a live-action television special in 2011 and a television series in 2018. The film has been made available on the streaming platform Netflix since 2018. An extended version of the film was released in December 2019. The original film was also broadcasted on television twice in August, the memorial month for the end of WWII, of 2019 and 2020, respectively. Along with the 2020 broadcast, the national broadcaster NHK launched a large-scale online-televisual campaign titled “#*Achikochi no suzu san*” (#*Suzu-san Here and There*) in which *Suzu* acted as a referential ambassador, and submissions of everyday episodes during wartime like *Suzu's* were called for. *Suzu* has officially become an everlasting “WWII survivor” living among us.

Foucault defines “popular memory” as dynamically shared memory which people excluded from publication or official historical writing remember, use, and pass along, but it has “no way of expressing itself (Foucault and Cahiers 1975, p. 25).” Mass cultural media such as film and television, to him, have become productive means to express and even “reprogramme” popular memory. Similarly, Lisa Yoneyama (1999, p. 36) also recognizes popular memory as “long-suppressed yet persistent” and turns to individuals' capacity for assuming historical agency and performing empowering acts of remembrance. On making sense of history, society, and “collective memory,” Iwona Irwin-Zarecka (1994, p. 4) warns against a hierarchization of cultural products: “There is no reason to privilege one form of resource over another—for example, to see history books as important but popular movies as not,” since one's gestalt is formed not only by historical facts but also by familiarly inherited memories, socio-cultural practices, inter-personal relationships, and other external influences. Acknowledging the potential atomizing effect of mass cultural technologies, Landsberg (2004, p. 143) sees in prosthetic memory the power of “open[ing] up collective horizons of experience.” As a relatively less told diegesis in popular culture—the WWII-stricken everyday of Japanese citizens on the home front—*In This Corner of the World* presents “a merging of historical record and popular memory...an emergent whole, a complex narrative that straddles memory and fact” and is “memory made manifest (Allen 2020, pp. 16, 18).”

Producing prosthetic memory about a sensitive historical subject is certainly a delicate cultural operation on popular memory. “If I have made mistakes, please let me

know before it is too late,” writes Fumiyo Kōno in the end of every manga volume of *In This Corner of the World*. The major differences between previous antiwar works and *In This Corner of the World*, as Takayuki Kamiya (2016) compellingly analyzes, are that: 1) the latter includes a variety of minute, verging on trivial, moments of everyday life, which antiwar works in the 1970s lack; and 2) “in our modern creative industry mainly shaped by generations who have no war experience, a new gaze of realism, linked to fears of making wrong portraits as well as humility toward the past, has been born to rebuild the wartime life in painstaking detail.” Kōno explained in many interviews that she, neither a *hibakusha*/war victim nor a member of the postwar generation, initially felt that she had no right to tell this story; Kamiya rightly recognizes her intention of having Suzu childless and her husband Shusaku back alive as a non-victim’s caution.

As for contemporary interpretations of “historical correctness,” Kōno (2012, p. 382) has this to say:

There are complaints from readers about the absence of Japanese soldiers’ assaults on and discrimination against Chinese and Koreans. But if I drew such scenes, it would look all the more like fabrications. ‘In fact, I [the Japanese protagonist] have communicated with those who are locked up and forced into labor and made friends with them [prisoners of war], and then my own people bullied me for that; I am the only one who did nothing wrong’—such evasions cannot be made. That is just some kind of indulgence, some excuse or naïve simplicity of modern people.

The regimen of ostracism geared toward Elle by her French family and neighbors in the light of her love affair with a German soldier during WWII—a vivid act of remembrance by Elle in Alain Resnais’ cinematic milestone *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959)—comes to mind. The brief encounter of Elle and the Westernized Japanese Lui, the tragic tale of the star-crossed lovers, and Elle’s fear of forgetting as an act of betrayal—even the telling and the remembering would betray her German lover who was killed by French Resistance fighters—convey a simplification of war and “Hiroshima,” further evidenced by the Japanese translation of the title “A Twenty-Four-Hour Love Affair.”<sup>6</sup> Such emotions as love and innocence and also the binary thinking of right and wrong would easily overshadow the real issue at hand, namely the constant struggle of living with war. But if there is one thing that we learn from

Resnais' film, it is that remembrance is never the same as fact, even if you experienced it yourself; it selects, discounts, haunts, and stagnates.

In the initial stage of drawing *In This Corner of the World*, Kōno (2012, p. 372) decided that referencing war survivors' testimonies was not an option for contemporary artists:

Many think that it is about reenacting what the survivors talked about when "talking about war," which is wrong. Even though the storytellers seem satisfied with that, they are not. If we just do that, it is like we do not try to listen and digest it, turn it into something of our own, and respond to it saying "It's like this, right?" I think this is what we should do now.

Kōno's stance on war manga-drawing parallels that of *Barefoot Gen's* author, the late Keiji Nakazawa's (2012, p. 351): "What I have experienced cannot be experienced again. Taking in historical documents and literature and imagining things in your head is a manga artist's duty." By positioning herself as a non-victim storyteller in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Kōno engaged in a continuous process of "telling" about "Hiroshima" instead of a continual act of "talking" about WWII and atomic bombs. One of Yoneyama's objectives of writing her ethnography of "Hiroshima" shares the above conviction of Kōno's: "...reflexivity on 'the danger of speaking for the other,'" quoting Trinh T. Minh-ha, she reflects, would only make an indulgent "'excuse for [our] complacent ignorance and [our] reluctance to involve [ourselves] in the issue[s] [brackets in original] (Yoneyama 1999, p. 41).'"

As members of generations who did not live through war, many know nothing about how to physically fight a war, but depictions of living a civilian's mundane life surely resonates. On the illustration of Suzu's Kure home overlooking the battleship Yamato,<sup>7</sup> Kōno expounded on the everyday during wartime:

Often times people see drawing the everyday life as drawing from a micro perspective. But I think that is actually a macro perspective. Everyone gets hungry, changes clothes, and feels sleepy at night. Everyone can resonate with this kind of thing, which I think forms a macro perspective (Kōno and Katabuchi 2019).

If Yamato represents the Japanese's military spirit, here the cooking and cleaning highlights the civilians' homefront morale. In fact, tracing the history of atomic-bomb literature, Yōko Murakami (2016) singles out the everydayness of the non-victim writer Masuji Ibuse's 1965 novel *Black Rain*, against other literary works of *hibakusha* writers like Yōko Oda and Tamiki Hara, as a refreshing and sympathetic, though similarly tragic, narrative about postwar rural life, diverging from the other depressing, punishing stories of self-imposed re-assessment on atomic tragedy-versus-national rebuilding. She further alerts readers to the dangers of indulging themselves in processing the pain of others (the characters) as their own and to their lack of others' perspectives; empathy should not be developed when reading these works. While Landsberg (2004, p. 127) also observes the limits of emotional identification which could deter cognitive engagement with the real circumstances of those characters, Kōno and Katabuchi employ a similar narrative strategy of what Dorsey and Matsuoka call "understatement" with the aim of arousing empathy among the audience and burning in prosthetic memories in their heads. Although creating works like *Black Rain* in the contexts of Japanese art and postwar Japan might imply a political awareness and "serv[e] the interests of those who would dwarf Hiroshima with a nuclear apocalypse," the attitude of Kōno and Katabuchi takes them to a direction somewhat similar to Ibuse's and the director Shohei Imamura's insistent embracing of a non-political stance, which is summarized in the statement of the novel/film's protagonist Shigematsu Shizuma: "Rather than a just war, an unjust peace is not so bad (Dorsey and Matsuoka 2009, pp. 219-220)." But to Suzu, the result is an unjust war which deprived her of her beloved ones and drawing hand; peace, without prescribed and stable attributes, is for one to make and define.

Two-thirds of the way through the film, this worldview of Suzu's reveals itself in full disclosure after she lost both her right hand and Harumi. Death and loss are visualized in the genius stroke of cine-calligraphy (an etching style mimicking the act of engraving on film strips). But the most telling scene comes after an enforced patience on Suzu's part, as she, lost in despair, murmurs to herself in a smudged background: "I'm glad'...I have no idea what I should be glad about. My right hand that held Harumi's hand in June, my right hand that drew Shusaku's face in May...my right hand that had drawn many rabbits in February 7 years ago." Our identification of her despair relies largely on our physically mimetic relationship to the "right hand drawing" images that come before. Jean-Paul Sartre's (1947, p. 39) existentialism could be illuminating here:



“[Despair] merely means that we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills or within the sum of probabilities which render our action feasible.” We have learnt to see the imaginary world through Suzu’s eyes; with her imaginative expression wrecked and subsequently snuffed out, our previous reliance on her right hand signals now an existential danger. A surge of hopelessness overwhelms us and makes us see the real “action” of war. Until the ogre, who “kidnapped” Suzu and Shusaku in the opening sequence, reappears in the end, we have to learn to see the world as it is. It is not “peace” and “hope” Kōno and Katabuchi intended spectators to experience, but a personal “mental transformation” through prosthetic memory of the long-gone past accessible only in such transferential spaces as cinema.

While Katabuchi (2016) shared Kōno’s progressive thinking and attempted to expand on her storytelling approach, he also placed value on the objective reality elsewhere that predicates the formation of such a physical experiential space:

The victims’ oral history of what actually happened in war is undoubtedly crucial. But after all that is just one point of view and a past in memory. Then, to capture the era more objectively, it is of importance to bring pictures and diaries of those days into view.

Moreover, the screen ratio of 1:1.85 also posed a challenge for the filmmaker: if it is originally drawn in a square frame (1:1), that on-screen image would need to be broadened or even changed (Ibid). Katabuchi sees in this “Corner” a much wider “World” in the back, just as Yoshimoto (2019, pp. 21-22) suggests that the title can be alternatively translated in English as “In the Corner of This World,” and therefore he was driven by this understanding to paint all of “This World” (Kōno and Katabuchi 2019). If this film and its worldwide visibility are any indication, the popular memoryscape of WWII in Japan has been meaningfully complicated by Katabuchi’s and Kōno’s flourishes of cartography.

#### **4. The diegesis of *In This Corner of the World* and the *hibakusha*’s testimonies**

After the completion always comes the introspection. The question is: how to judge it in the right way without unfairly dismissing its unique properties? Given Suzu’s interpretative lens and personal struggle, correlating hard facts and the narrative of *In*

*This Corner of the World* simply will not do. Comparing it with other WWII-themed manga/films by authors/filmmakers who are/were *hibakusha*, war victims, or their descendants is one way, but their senior and artistically authoritative position would inevitably eclipse Kōno's and Katabuchi's works due to their inherent inferiority and thus problematize the analytic process. Since the major concern discussed in this article is how to "best carry [war victims'] stories forward," the ordinary *hibakusha*'s experience serves as the best subject of comparison.<sup>8</sup> Though a marked contrast between war films/comics and war survivors' oral testimonies is readily shown, they share one key feature: selective truth-telling. Thus, a juxtaposition of the two storytelling practices has profound implications for our presuppositions about memory and truth, the ways animated images and oral accounts of historical events affect those presuppositions respectively, and how *In This Corner of the World* reconfigures a war victim's account and remolds war victimhood in Japanese war narratives from the dominant *hibakusha* discourse into a mainstream cautionary tale from a non-victim's point of view. Instead of official historical records and canonical *hibakusha* works, the more similar testimonial practice would function as a more reliable barometer of *In This Corner of the World*'s "historical accuracy."<sup>9</sup>

The greatest ambition that Kōno hoped to achieve through *In This Corner of the World* is not to paint an imminent dystopia with watercolor warmth, but to unveil what draws people to examine a war. "The atomic bombs might be a big historical event in retrospect, but to those living in nearby cities like Kure, it might not seem like one in the first place (Kōno and Nishijima 2016)." The author's wish was to take, not only comic fans but also those of the war/postwar generations, down memory lane without too much excitement and too many sob stories. Unaffiliated interlocutors who pass on stories that are not their own, she and Katabuchi threw themselves into intensive background research and have miraculously acquired a strong sense of mission and resolved to tell a WWII story as Suzuko Numata, one of the most representative "truth-telling" *hibakusha* vocal of historical responsibility rather than pure victimhood,<sup>10</sup> did:

Through telling stories (*hanashi te iru uchi ni*), I gradually begin to understand the sentiments of the dead and begin to see (*mie te kuru*). Had it been me before I ever told the stories (*hanashita koto no nai watashi datta ra*), even when someone might have said to me, "This is so, that is not so," I would have simply dismissed them, saying,

“Ah, is that so.” What is important is to become able to see with eyes wide open and to know (*shiru to iu koto*) so as not to repeat the tragedy ever again.... It is great that you [Lisa Yoneyama] came to see me. Let’s cherish this encounter. To come to meet people like this is really a form of actual practice (*jissen*). This, too, must be some kind of *en* (karma). I hope you will learn a lot [from Hiroshima] and you, too, will someday become a storyteller (p. 117).<sup>11</sup>

Numata did not specify how to achieve the “knowing,” but what she alluded to here is the ontological power of speech and hearing. However, this kind of “encounter/*jissen*” does not take place as often as a cinematic encounter. Just imagine taking a flight to Japan-Hiroshima versus going to a downtown cinema. Not only do such oral testimonies (at times with photographs and tours) have an aura of rarity and authority which inferiorizes the popular cinema, but their irreproducible and first-hand nature is also what brings intimate, sympathetic moments to listeners. But here on the solid ground of the present, we can only imagine, no matter how much we have listened to and how many sickening still photographs we have seen and averted our eyes from. Most of all, we are running out of this specific kind of original source. Therefore, to collate the testimonies and the animated film is to expose the upsides and downsides of prosthetic memory through the dialectics of past-present, truth-imagination, and individual-mass.

*In This Corner of the World* closely follows the early life of Suzu Urano, a young bride from Hiroshima moving to the outskirts of Kure to live with her new family in 1943. The mundane nature of wartime Japanese life is put to the center of the film, and the world is painted in a pastel color palette. We first see Suzu as a wide-eyed, innocent daydreamer running her errands in Futaba where she meets her future husband Shusaku for the first time. A fantastically sanguine and artistic girl, Suzu offers her own brother to her childhood crush Tetsu Mizuhara, when he recalls his brother drowning in an Imperial Navy mission; when Tetsu describes a ship capsizing, she draws those white waves as little hopping rabbits. Without prior knowledge of the war, one would think this is going to be a quaint love story up to this point. Of course this will not be the case; since the moment “December 1933” flashes up on-screen, we start bracing ourselves for things going downhill.

The average people run their lives like we do. The virtues to be appreciated here

are the Japanese people's perseverance and sacrifice, and their battle is, as Suzu says, "to survive with whatever [they] have." The largest battleship of Japan, Yamato, "born from the Orient's greatest shipyard" as Shusaku says, is the foremost symbolic object which Japanese war films have been alluding to whenever an upbeat mood or a display of Japan's dominant military strength is needed. While they do not see much of the outward aggression of the Japanese military, there are no such high spirits of serving the greatest nation in Asia either.

Unlike films, a narrator cannot tell an impactful story that spans two years, or else he/she will lose the listeners. Without the aid of images, sound, and characters' exchanges, the storyteller has to pick up the most important details, and at the same time, recount with his/her own dramatic, fateful tone to spice up the tale. Numata started her story of the bombing day with basic information about her and her family, and recalled her then mental state as follows:

I was engaged then. My fiancé was conscripted and sent to the front five months after we became publicly engaged. Our wedding was arranged for the fall of 1945. By the time he left for war, I had met him only three times. I hadn't had a chance to even hold his hand. It was the old days, you see. Just as many other young women of those days, I too was yearning for marriage and I was determined to become a good wife. My heart was fluttering. In those wartime days, marriage was indeed something cheerful, something we could look forward to (p. 116).

In memory, life was not so bad until the worst happened. Life is not so bad at first for Suzu too.

Now as a village bride, Suzu is confronted with day-to-day housework and food rationing, and as the war is pressing on, women have to attend the Reservists' Association's training wearing morale-boosting *hachimaki* (Japanese headbands, a symbol of courage). With an ingenuous heroine like Suzu and her quick-witted in-laws, many of these harsh realities are treated with a touch of comedy. For example, despite the meager rations of food, Suzu takes inspiration from Samurai Kusunoki's recipe "*nanko meshi*" and makes the grains puffy, but the family frown upon the resulting taste. When the first round of serious air bombings inevitably strikes in March 1945, the first thing Suzu thinks of is grabbing paint and paper to draw the extraordinary

spectacle of the bombings. Following our heroine whose colorful imagination continues to foreground the war experience, we know we could survive this war.

More reciting of evacuation guidelines and hiding in air-raid shelters portend the bad times in the second half of the film. A few neighbors, including Suzu, have to send a 17-year-old off to the battlefield, saying “congratulations” rather dejectedly, after his father died in the war.<sup>12</sup> The most horrifying scene is perhaps Harumi being dud-bombed to death. Suzu fails to protect Harumi and suffers such feelings of guilt, but her mother-in-law sighs, “We’re glad at least you survived.” Later, Shusaku berates her for becoming a soulless person as she descends into the rabbit hole of grief. War does not give room for individual meditation. Numata also needed to cope with this reality when disabled by an explosion:

The doctors amputated my leg without anesthesia. When I was told that my leg must be cut off from my thigh, I cried and resisted, saying, “My fiancé is coming back. I can’t get married.” But then someone told me, “It is not only you that’s suffering. If you cut off your leg, you will be able to live.” So I decided... Later in August, I was told that my fiancé was killed in the war. He was already dead in July. All the while I was feeling thrilled about his returning to Hiroshima, he had in fact already passed away. I knew nothing about it (p. 117).

If we seek for an informed opinion, the portrayals in the film do not seem entirely exhaustive. The sincerity of perpetuating war/atomic victimhood often raises non-Japanese people’s eyebrows. Seemingly, the most noticeable absence of WWII key events is the wartime atrocities committed by the Japanese soldiers abroad. And the most curious thing about the characters in this film, in later generations’ eyes, is that they treat everything as if they are natural occurrences. The film is trying to defuse the notion that right and wrong have clear-cut definitions; deeply implicated in the national effort, they do not really “see” and “know.” Only after having encounters with people from other Asian countries did Numata realize the very contrasting meanings manifested in the atomic bombs:

there was a sign on the street [in Hiroshima] with the name of the Eleventh Regiment.  
... As young female students we would walk—back and forth, back and forth—right in

front of the gate [where the troops were stationed], trying to become friendly [with the soldiers]. In those days, [the soldiers were] objects of our romantic admiration (*akogare no mato*). And we paraded with lanterns in our hands, celebrating, “Nanjing surrendered!” “Singapore surrendered!” Did we ever imagine that such horrible things [as massacres and tortures] were happening behind those scenes (p. 119)?<sup>13</sup>

This, to a large extent, is why it does not really make a successful translation from Japan to America, because modern people, especially non-Japanese, have the luxury of retrospect and hardly experienced any phase of oblivion regarding that world-changing period. If we always automatically (and selectively) play scenes of history in the back of our minds, we may miss the bigger picture here: the mutuality among different peoples based on their common experiences. The complete absence of scenes set in our present gives a special importance to this forming of prosthetic memory, as the transferential space offered by this film narrows viewers’ focus to the ordinary citizens’ daily plight without any reminders of our hereditary or historical link to them. Rationing and coupon systems for literally everything are adopted to support the Japanese war effort. Members of civilian groups are very occupied with their duties with food, military backup work, and spiritual mobilization campaigns to maintain and heighten Yamato patriotism. “Luxury is the enemy,”<sup>14</sup> and all kinds of pleasures are prohibited to force the civilians at home into the spirit of fighting the war wholeheartedly.<sup>15</sup> Foreign cultural influences have to be erased in order to etch a more Japanese nationalist ethos in the people’s hearts, which we can see in a scene where Suzu finds her sister-in-law’s Western accessories left in the wardrobe and such things are nowhere to be found anymore. Characters in *In This Corner of the World* have to accept the unacceptable; freedom is out of the question.

There are many illustrations in the film specific to Kure and the characters’ point of view. One incongruous depiction that merits careful attention is the “mushroom cloud.” At the time, many did not comprehend the power, or even the nature, of the nuclear bombs, just as Suzu and her in-laws naively wonder what has happened in the film. The cloud reminds Suzu of telling Harumi about anvil clouds; the “mushroom cloud” is only a side event. Kōno and Katabuchi directed their attention to the personal dimension of Suzu’s experience, and the Hiroshima situation only slowly sinks in. Such personal attachment to the surroundings and people is skillfully rendered in the

“camera’s perspective.” For oral testimonies, however, no visual perceptions could inform a dynamic emotional journey; voicing thoughts and emotions is often the only way. Another *hibakusha* Go Matsuda, whose “anger” toward the establishment is distinguished by Yoneyama (1999) as a quality distinct from conventional storytellers, remembered the living dead on that day:

Heard someone, apparently an old woman, whose body was so utterly disfigured that it was impossible to distinguish her sex, saying, “Damn it! Americans.... Get back at them, please.”... The voice reminds me of the fact that I am still alive and I feel spurred on to somehow rise up for the emperor, yet the next second I am thinking, it’s all over. Yet there is a firm conviction that the Divine Wind will bluster without fail, that Japan is a divine country, that there is the emperor, and that we will never lose, even if stripped of skin or with lives taken.... (p. 130)<sup>16</sup>

Only after a whole week did Emperor Hirohito finally announce Japan’s surrender. Upon hearing the declaration of unconditional surrender in Emperor Hirohito’s Jewel Voice Broadcast, Suzu lashes out and cries, “They knew what we were getting into, didn’t they? They said we would fight till the end! I still have my left arm and both legs. Everything we’ve done slips away. Everything we’ve *come to terms with*. The reasons why we’ve endured it all. So we surrender to violence? If only I could stay abstracted and oblivious until I die [emphasis added].” These lines might initially seem natural as destruction sweeps up the ground; yet they contradict our prior understanding of their deep-rooted militaristic education and strenuous effort to sacrifice and serve.<sup>17</sup> Matsuda continued:

We were taught to believe in the Imperial Rescript on Education, with loyalty to the emperor and love for the country (*chukun aikoku*), and in selfless devotion to the nation (*messhi hōkō*). We were also made to believe in the slogan, “we will not desire anything until we win”; and many were killed even without having been provided with sufficient food. In the eyes of these individuals, the names of those responsible for the war have not yet been disclosed (Ibid).

At least one of the characters, the protagonist, shows deep frustration, agony,

and resentment when such promises are not kept. The word “violence” here means that against the Japanese, and to Suzu, her brother’s and Harumi’s deaths, in addition to the loss of her right hand—her lifeblood. Suzu’s anger is not unfounded; in fact, this is the most critical scene that baffles and at the same time enlightens the audience on the possible individual mentality of Japanese civilians. On the contrary, even though Tetsu served his time aboard the heavy cruiser Aoba and saw violence himself, the obscure fact that his ship fought no honorable battles and came to such an inauspicious end settling in Kure’s harbor makes him implicitly impugn the meaning of war and life. The bifurcation of these two characters’ worldviews, which are supposed to transmute in opposite directions, further muddles the ground for the epistemology of emotional experience. Notwithstanding many survivors’ passive acceptance of fate, Matsuda hoped his indignation would be known and spread:

[When I saw those bones] my own experience overlapped with [those of the dead]. I felt anger rising inside of me. Shedding tears was not enough. Instead, I felt genuine anger—anger against the prewar education I had received, anger against my own ignorance, and anger against the present system. But today, no one seems to be angry. I want people to be angry. What are we engaged in storytelling for? Isn’t there a place where we should direct our anger? To simply give up, thinking that it could not be helped, is not the right attitude. But today everybody’s anger has somehow completely disappeared (p. 133).

The second and last actual death we see is a mother being left in a heap of post-bomb debris with her child alive. We know they are from Hiroshima because they stand in front of the pre-bomb Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome). The site of the Genbaku Dome, a convenient *symbol* to bridge the actual past and an imagined future, features in the film—before and after the atomic bombs—with the same framing. “Visual representation is crucial to rendering an event thinkable (Landsberg 2004, p. 126).” Yet, the oft-quoted warning of Susan Sontag (2004, p. 80) tells us: “Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand.” The many discursive happenings as well as narrative detours in Numata’s and Matsuda’s testimonial practice—often with the help of photographs and tours—help imitate the narrative mode of emplotment; however, it is their critical thinking that affirms the gravity of empirical knowledge.



Their complementary pictures, objects, and on-site visits adequately assist their storytelling, but they are to a large extent derivative and ephemeral in nature. Thus, the value of reproducing a detailed picture of the then topography in the animated film, Ryōta Fujitsu (2016) points out, lies in the overlapping of Suzu's world and our present reality, which "switches on the experiential circuit between our world and the film." That is, in other words, the now-popular "cultural pilgrimage" (*seichi junrei*),<sup>18</sup> also a type of *jissen*. Hence, the transferential space rendered by the film is granted a temporal and spatial continuity in the real world. The prosthetic memories we have obtained from the film are to initiate that continuity: when we stand where Suzu or other characters stand in the film, we can juxtapose the actual history, the film narrative, and our real-life visits to further this experiential relationship.<sup>19</sup>

At last, we find comfort and hope as Suzu and Shusaku take that child home. To many audience members, the compassion and humanity packed in the artistry of the film is powerful and indelible, but the film also ends on a (once again) faithful note to actual history, where war orphan adoption was widely advocated after the war's end (Kamiya 2016).

If the *hibakusha*'s desires are to bear witness, to never let it go in the passing of time, and to remind later generations of the value of critical judgment, then to take on our own prosthetic memories in a transferential space is to connect the fragmented pieces of knowledge, to open up more spaces for critical thinking, and to register anxieties around and even transfigure our pre-existent memories and perspectives.

## 5. Conclusion

The wartime heroine Suzu's engagement with such an intracultural discourse is so appealing that *In This Corner of the World* has been adapted locally three times in ten years, with an extended version of the animated film released just over a year ago. Indeed, the everyday life of the civilians on the home front strikes a realistic and even cathartic chord for the modern Japanese, and in the process of generating prosthetic memories, offers new pivotal insights to its foreign audiences who have hitherto been only exposed to such knowledge as wartime atrocities their ancestors committed, as many positive reviews and ratings show. The Western gaze has been inflicted upon Japan and many things about her since her defeat in 1945; she became a war criminal, an undeveloped nation, and an inferior ally at the mercy of the US's interest. The

flourishing of Japanese mass culture, notably her manga-anime industry, has been steering the country toward a revivalist path of self-examination and soul-searching. Now, with this manga and the widely distributed film, the “Hiroshima” discourse has been reworked to begin a new series of both intercultural and intracultural dialogue among present generations.

“To inquire into the influence of popular culture is to become sensitive about the everyday and the unconscious,” Kazuma Yoshimura (2012, p. 187) concludes in his textual analysis of sceneries in war manga in relation to the representation of “Hiroshima.” In this article, I have examined the use of the everyday and humor in *In This Corner of The World* and its creators’ manipulation of the unconscious, which prove instrumental in forming prosthetic memory as well as popular memory. By foregrounding supposedly privatized memory in the narrative and enfolding imaginary visuals into the created reality, *In This Corner of The World* successfully foments mnemonic tensions in the form of prosthetic memory. In answer to Hirsch’s question of how to “best carry their stories forward” without unseemly appropriation, self-indulgence, and narrative displacement, Kōno’s and Katabuchi’s meticulous historical research and impartial position on the signification of war manga/anime—hence the resulting abstract yet realistic world of *In This Corner of The World*—mark a postmodern response to the waning memories of *hibakusha*. It is not so much a quest for a definitive historical identity as an imaginative reinterpretation of the past. The comparative analysis of the diegetic film and the two *hibakusha*’s testimonies has demonstrated that despite the abstraction of first-person authority, Suzu and other characters together reframe the Japanese war experience for a wider spectacle of that history, and that the narrative, without illustrations of external prerequisites and afterthoughts, effectively enhances reader/viewer credulity and thus augurs a more frequent invocation of prosthetic memory. Anime, “a new mode of artistic expression that has distinctive affordances and proclivities with certain content that makes it a perhaps surprisingly effective tool in the armory of contemporary mass communication (Swale 2015, p. 145),” provides a more conducive arena for communicating past memory in present reality; if “to make an image is to make culture, to decide upon history (Villot 2014, p. 362),” then the animated image would yield the most wiggle room for the play of cultural imagination and bear the least burden in portraiture of people in wartime.

Landsberg’s utopian dream of having one’s identity and politics significantly

affected by commodified prosthetic memory instead of blood or heredity might have yet to be evident or substantiated, but the confluence of historicism and magical realism on the animated plane of *In This Corner of The World* shows promise, debilitating the primacy of official knowledge and bringing what was previously seen as a mere adjunct to the Japanese war narrative to the forefront of historical thinking on the part of foreign audiences and the future generations of Japan. This evaluation of non-*hibakusha*'s artistic intent and its result, thus, leaves more issues for further study—the differences between foreign and local audiences' responses and their implications, the voluntary and involuntary processes of generating both prosthetic memory and popular memory of the increasingly distant (especially tragic) past, the relationship between these prosthetic memories and acts of resistance in real life, and the motives behind present generations' various initiatives of revisiting, reimagining, and re-envisioning the past.

---

1 Recorded in the four lectures delivered by Gertrude Stein (1993, p. 54) at the University of Chicago in 1935.

2 Unless otherwise stated, all translations of Japanese quotations are my own.

3 The film is fresh at 88% on Rotten Tomatoes with an average rating of 7.8/10 on IMDb and 4.3/5 on AlloCiné, as of 26 December 2020.

4 Kōno acknowledges that the comic series, despite winning awards, received a lukewarm reception (*teikuhikō*) during its initial release (Kōno and Katabuchi 2019). Since *In This Corner of the World* found claim to fame through the film version, this article will focus on the 2016 film in narrative analysis.

5 The contemporary use of “Hiroshima” in *katakana* (a Japanese syllabary for loan words, non-*kanji* names, onomatopoeia, and creative use) has a hybrid meaning of “atomic experience,” “anti-nuclear weaponry,” “anti-nuclear power plants,” and “anti-war and peace movements.” See Fukuma 2012. Places in *katakana* with the above meaning are shown in quotation marks.

6 My own translation.

7 The battleship Yamato was the signifier of the Yamato Spirit, the inherent genius of the Japanese nation, which the wartime Japanese heavily relied on psychologically. “The Japanese public was repeatedly reassured by military men, government officials, and their favored intellectuals that if only Japan fought in the true Yamato Spirit, America’s will to battle would collapse in rancorous homefront disarray (Cook and Cook 1992).”

8 Although, strictly speaking, Suzu and her in-law family are not *hibakusha* but war survivors as they (except Harumi) survive air raids but not atomic bombings, it is the *hibakusha*'s testimonies that helped advance the mobilization of Japanese pacifist movements and became a substantial part of the manufactured anti-war phenomenon. Therefore, the more representative *hibakusha* narrative is looked at here.

9 Since both *In This Corner of the World* and the *hibakusha*'s testimonies are imbued with the subjective experiences of ordinary people, Suzu's and *hibakusha*'s own realities are read as their versions of historically accurate events and prioritized before official historical facts in this comparative analysis, despite the fact that the film boasts historical verisimilitude. Janine M. Villot's (2014) examination of the animated film *Millennium Actress*'s (2001) play with memory is particularly illuminating here, where she argues that reality “may begin as decentered and abstracted, for reality is a subjective experience unique to each person and to each culture (p. 361).”

10 Instead of solely harping on atomic victimhood, more *hibakusha* spoke out against the denial of war responsibilities in the 1980s, which emerged as an act of conscience and critical knowledge favored by the then

socio-political climate. See Chapter 3 in Yoneyama 1999.

11 Unless otherwise indicated, all testimonies are from Lisa Yoneyama's (1999) meetings with the *hibakusha*.

12 "You offered congratulations because they were being allowed to serve the nation. You couldn't say, 'This is terrible. I'm really sorry for you. Take care of yourself and come back safely.' But I'm sure their own families said things like, 'Please come home to us' or 'Don't get killed (Arakawa 1992).'"

13 Quoted from Numata's lecture on 3 June 1989 at the Chiran Tokko Museum.

14 The father-in-law chants this phrase at the dinner table in the 2011 television special. It was a popular slogan chanted by the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement which was established in the light of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War.

15 "If you opposed anything about war, of course, you were a traitor. You had to say, 'yes, yes,' whatever the subject. But when I thought about my husband's hardship at the front, doing that much seemed natural (Tanaka Toki 1992)."

16 Quoted from Matsuda's privately compiled pamphlet.

17 The foundations of this militaristic education were "patriotism based on loyalty to the Emperor" and the principle "sacrifice yourself to serve." The conception of a self was not to be endured. The Emperor was the goal of life, even if that meant you must give up your own life (Tanaka Tetsuko 1992).

18 It refers to a mode of travel inspired by popular culture such as manga and anime, films and television drama, folklore, and religion. "Contents tourism," a Japanese-made English term, is another expression in common use for the same meaning. For a comprehensive analysis of anime *seichi junrei*, see, for example, Okamoto 2013.

19 See Hiroshima for Global Peace's webpage of the film's location tour (<https://hiroshimafortpeace.com/in-the-corner-of-this-world-location-tour/>).

---

## References

- Allen, Jocelyne. (2020). "Manga as Memory: cocoon, In This Corner of the World and Popular History." *Wasafiri*, vol. 35, no. 2, 8-18.
- Arakawa, Hiroyo. (1992). "The End of a Bake Shop (from Part 3 Homeland)," in Cook, Haruko Taya, and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 177-181. New York: The New Press.
- Berndt, Jaqueline. (2018). "Kouno Fumiyo's Mangaserie Kono sekai no katasumi ni (In This Corner of the World) im Vergleich zur Anime-Adaptation durch Katabuchi Sunao," in Backe, Hans-Joachim, et al., *Ästhetik des Gemachten: Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur Animations- und Comicforschung*, 53-84. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Cook, Haruko Taya, and Theodore F. Cook. (1992). "Part 5 One Hundred Million Die Together," in their *Japan at War: An Oral History*. New York: New Press.
- Dorsey, John T., and Naomi Matsuoka. (2009). "Narrative Strategies of Understatement in *Black Rain* as a Novel and a Film," in Broderick, Mick (ed.), *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film*, 203-221. New York: Routledge.
- Dower, John W. (1993). "Japanese Cinema Goes to War," in his *Japan in War and*

- Peace: Selected Essays*, 33-54. New York: The New Press.
- . (1999). “What Do You Tell the Dead When You Lose?” in his *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 485-521. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Ebert, Roger. (2005). “Grave of the Fireflies,” in his *The Great Movies II*, 179-183. New York: Broadway Books.
- Eitzen, Dirk. (1999). “The Emotional Basis of Film Comedy,” in Plantinga, Carl, and Greg M. Smith (eds.), *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, 84-99. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. (1996). “Subject Positions, Speaking Positions: From *Holocaust*, *Our Hitler*, and *Heimat* to *Shoah* and *Schindler’s List*,” in Sobchack, Vivian (ed.), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, 145-183. New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel, Cahiers du Cinema. (1975). “Film and Popular Memory: An Interview with Michel Foucault,” Jordin, Martin (tran.). *Radical Philosophy*, Summer 1975, 24-29.
- Fujitsu, Ryōta. (2016). “Anime-shi no naka no ‘Kono sekai no katasumi ni.’” *Yuriika*, vol. 48, no. 16 [Kindle Edition].
- Fukuma, Yoshiaki. (2012). “Purorōgu—Fukusū no ‘Hiroshima’ to media no rikigaku,” in Fukuma, Yoshiaki, Makoto Yamaguchi, and Kazuma Yoshimura (eds.), *Fukusū no ‘Hiroshima’—kioku no sengo-shi to media no rikigaku*, 13-24. Tokyo: Seikyusha.
- Hauser, William B. (1991). “Women and War: The Japanese Film Image,” in Berstein, Gail Lee (ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, 296-313. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hirsch, Marianne. (2008). “The Generation of Postmemory.” *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 1, 103-128.
- Irwin-Zarecka, Iwona. (1994). *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers.
- Jameson, Fredric. (1981). *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- Kamiya, Takayuki. (2016). “Kono sekai no katasumi ni ha ‘hansen manga’ ka.” *Yuriika*, vol. 48, no. 16 [Kindle Edition].
- Katabuchi, Sunao. (2016). “Seikatsu he no keii, kiroku he no jōnetsu.” *Yuriika*, vol. 48,

- no. 16 [Kindle Edition].
- Knapp, Steven. (1989). “Collective Memory and the Actual Past,” *Representations*, Spring, No. 26, 123-149.
- Kōno, Fumiyo. (2012). “[Intabyū] Kōno Fumiyo—hitaiken to manga hyōgen,” in Fukuma, Yoshiaki, Makoto Yamaguchi, and Kazuma Yoshimura (eds.), *Fukusū no ‘Hiroshima’—kioku no sengo-shi to media no rikigaku*, 358-390. Tokyo: Seikyusha.
- Kōno, Fumiyo, and Daisuke Nishijima. (2016). “Taidan: katasumi yori ai wo kome te.” *Yuriika*, vol. 48, no. 16 [Kindle Edition].
- Kōno, Fumiyo, and Sunao Katabuchi. (2019). *Kono sekai no katasumi ni – Kōno Fumiyo Katabuchi Sunao taidan shū: sarani ikutsumono eiga no koto*. Tokyo: Bungeishunjū.
- Landsberg, Alison. (2004). *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- LaSalle, Mick. (2017). “Corner of the World’ a coming-of-age story set in WWII.” <https://www.sfchronicle.com/movies/article/Corner-of-the-World-a-coming-of-age-story-11743043.php> (accessed December 27, 2020).
- Lee, Maggie. (2017). “Film Review: ‘In This Corner of the World’ (Kono sekai no katasumi ni).” <https://variety.com/2017/film/asia/in-this-corner-of-the-world-film-review-1201998441/> (accessed December 27, 2020).
- Moore, Roger. (2017). “Movie Review: Anime depicts Japan on the home front in WWII ‘In This Corner of the World.’” <https://rogersmovienation.com/2017/07/29/movie-review-anime-depicts-japan-on-the-home-front-in-wwii-in-this-corner-of-the-world/> (accessed December 27, 2020).
- Murakami, Yōko. (2016). “Genbaku bungaku no keifu ni okeru ‘Yūnagi no Machi, Sakura no Kuni.’” *Yuriika*, vol. 48, no. 16 [Kindle Edition].
- Nakazawa, Keiji. (2012). “[Intabyū] Nakazawa Keiji—sengo no shakaishi mediashi ni okeru ‘Hadashi no Gen,’” in Fukuma, Yoshiaki, Makoto Yamaguchi, and Kazuma Yoshimura (eds.), *Fukusū no ‘Hiroshima’—kioku no sengo-shi to media no rikigaku*, 328-357. Tokyo: Seikyusha.
- Okamoto, Takeshi. (2013). *N ji sōsaku kankō anime seichi junrei / kontentsu tsūrizumu / kankō shakai-gaku no kanōsei*. Ebetsu: Hokkaidō Bōkengeijutsu Shuppan.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. (1947). *Existentialism and Humanism*, Frechtman, Bernard (tran.).

New York: Philosophical Library.

- Selden, Mark. (2010). "A Forgotten Holocaust: U.S. Bombing Strategy, The Destruction of Japanese Cities, and the American Way of War from the Pacific War to Iraq," in Tanaka, Yuki, and Marilyn B. Young (eds.), *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History*, 77-96. New York: The New Press.
- Shibata, Motoyuki. (2004). *Nain intabyūzu—Shibata Motoyuki to 9 nin no sakka tachi*. Tokyo: ALC Press Inc.
- Sobchack, Vivian. (1996). "Introduction: History Happens," in Sobchack, Vivian (ed.), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, 1-14. New York: Routledge.
- Sontag, Susan. (2004). *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin Books.
- Stein, Gertrude. (1993). "Narration: Four Lectures by Gertrude Stein," in Kellner, Bruce (ed.), *The Major Works of Gertrude Stein: Volume XII*. Tokyo: Hon-no-tomosha.
- Swale, Alistair D. (2015). *Anime Aesthetics: Japanese Animation and the "Post-Cinematic" Imagination*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tanaka, Tetsuko. (1992). "Making Balloon Bombs (from Part 3 Homeland)," in Cook, Haruko Taya, and Theodore F. Cook (eds.), *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 187-192. New York: The New Press.
- Tanaka, Toki. (1992). "Burdens of a Village Bride (from Part 3 Homeland)," in Cook, Haruko Taya, and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 181-184. New York: The New Press.
- Todeschini, Maya Morioka. (2009). "'Death and the Maiden': Female *Hibakusha* as Cultural Heroines, and the Politics of A-bomb Memory," in Broderick, Mick (ed.), *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film*, 222-252. New York: Routledge.
- Villot, Janine M. (2014). "Chasing the *Millennium Actress*." *Science Fiction Film and Television*, vol. 7, no. 3, 343-364.
- Yoneyama, Lisa. (1999). *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro. (2019). "In This Corner of the World and the Challenges of Intermedial Adaptation." *Series (Bologna)*, vol. 5, no. 2, 11-24.
- Yoshimura, Kazuma. (2012). "Manga ni egaka reta 'Hiroshima'—sono <fūkei> kara yomitoku," in Fukuma, Yoshiaki, Makoto Yamaguchi, and Kazuma Yoshimura

(eds.), *Fukusū no 'Hiroshima'—kioku no sengo-shi to media no rikigaku*, 140-194. Tokyo: Seikyusha.

Zilberman, Alan. (2017). “‘In This Corner of the World’: A quietly devastating tale of Hiroshima.” [https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/in-this-corner-of-the-world-a-quietly-devastating-tale-of-hiroshima/2017/08/17/46be2c72-7f7b-11e7-9d08-b79f191668ed\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.cd63a57d9f2e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/in-this-corner-of-the-world-a-quietly-devastating-tale-of-hiroshima/2017/08/17/46be2c72-7f7b-11e7-9d08-b79f191668ed_story.html?utm_term=.cd63a57d9f2e) (accessed December 27, 2020).