

## 5 Hiroshima. How to Create Heritage from the ‘Promethean shame’?<sup>323</sup>

The decision to create heritage for and memorialise an event inevitably reflects the regime of historicity and narrativity of the time in which that choice is made. Whether explicitly expressed or concealed, conscious or not, such decisions provide an account of the event, which is invested with a political function. Resembling a founding fiction,<sup>324</sup> these narratives, at once *historical remembrance* and *axiological reference point*, are all the more valuable for the heritage of wars and conflicts. Requests to inscribe ‘lieux de mémoire’ relating to the Second World War on UNESCO’s World Heritage list have provoked much controversy.<sup>325</sup> Due to the universality and renown conferred by this status, such requests propose constructing a ‘heritage of the worst of humanity’ that has virtues of truthfulness and prevention.<sup>326</sup> The Auschwitz Birkenau camp was the first in a series of Second World War sites to receive World Heritage status in 1979. In 1996, it was the turn of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome). The decision to designate the Genbaku Dome as ‘the witness transmitting the tragedy of Hiroshima to future generations’ was met with opposition. Whilst Japan and the United States are strategic allies, the latter criticised ‘the lack of historical perspective’ in Japan’s request, which would not allow for an

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323 This study is the result of the ethno-museographic research that I conducted in Japan, South Korea, and China from 2012 to 2017. I have presented conference papers on this topic on three occasions: The City University of Hiroshima, Hiroshima Peace Institute (12 February 2014); the Université du Québec in Montreal (4 June 2016) at the Association of Critical Heritage Studies’ biennale conference; Stephen F. Austin University in Texas (19 April 2018). The exploration of the file submitted to list the Genbaku Dome as a UNESCO’s World Heritage Site was carried out by my Masters students (HCP and DYCLAM+).

324 In the sense of ‘fiction instituant’ employed by Lucien Sfez in *Technique et idéologie. Un enjeu de pouvoir*, Seuil, 2002, p. 17.

325 Chloé Maurel, « Enjeux et tensions à propos du patrimoine mondial de l’UNESCO », *Revue d’histoire diplomatique*, 2016/2, p. 177–192.

326 Robert Belot, « La patrimonialisation du pire a-t-elle des vertus véridatives et préventives? Le Dôme d’Hiroshima comme lieu de *dé-mémoire* », *Ethnologies*, Laval university (Québec), vol. 37, n°2, 2017, p. 3–28.

adequate ‘understanding’ of the ‘tragedy of Hiroshima’.<sup>327</sup> Barak Obama would later reformulate this line when he visited Hiroshima for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial’s inscription. He let it be known that history was not the real concern behind creating a heritage site at Hiroshima.

This chapter explores how international recognition that the atomic bomb dropped by the Americans constituted the ‘worst of humanity’ introduces a new hierarchy of horror, which has the effect of lessening Japan’s war crimes and deflecting blame. It questions whether the process of creating heritage at Hiroshima had the effect of de-historicising the event it seeks to memorialise, thereby constructing a heritage without memory that runs contrary to history. I thus suggest that the Hiroshima Peace Memorial be seen as a ‘lieu de dé-mémoire’, a site that undoes memory, through a strategy of avoidance that overstates and does not mention. A double narrative effect is produced: an overstated discourse plays on emotions and enchantment (the bomb, the victims, nuclear danger) and a silent discourse is invisible and concealed (hypernationalism, Japanese hegemonism in the Asian Pacific, Pearl Harbour). The strategy of creating heritage for Hiroshima was thus based on a ‘politics of silence’, on an ‘inherent silence’,<sup>328</sup> produced by an ‘anti-discourse’ (as one would speak of anti-material) that commemorates to forget, highlights to conceal, and speaks to silence. This discourse prohibits any historical criticism: the event ‘Hiroshima’ is transformed into a metaphysical, post-historical object, whereby the discourse of the ‘worst to come’ allows for a forgetting of the ‘worst of the past’. Structured around a dystopia that sets in motion a catastrophising eschatology (the fear of destroying the planet), its effect (if not, its motive) is to silence the past. Philosopher Günther Anders advances this argument by seeing above all in Hiroshima an effect of ‘Promethean shame’,<sup>329</sup> which heralds humanity’s entrance into the era of technology as an end in itself.

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327 Statements by China and the United States of America during the Inscription of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/repco96x.htm#annex5>

328 Catherine Gravet, Héliane Kohler, eds, « Le non-dit », *Cahiers internationaux du symbolisme*, 2013.

329 In Greek Mythology, Prometheus is a titan, god of forethought. His ambition is to steal the sacred fire of Olympus and give it to men so that they have the capacity to transform matter. Prometheus thus teaches men the art of metalwork.

Heritage was long believed to serve history or rather collective memory. Philosopher Paul Ricœur's necessary intervention cautioned against the risk of substituting history and 'of the inversion of the historical into the commemorative',<sup>330</sup> which can contribute to a questioning of the verifiability of memory. Studying the case of Hiroshima shows how the phenomenon of creating heritage has the potential to lead to an obliteration of history, even a manipulation of memory.

### Western Indifference

In the aftermath of 6 August 1945, a profound indifference towards the victims of the first atomic bomb can be observed in the West. The Allies, who had just ended the barbarity of the Nazis, were still at war with the second persecutor, Japan, which had put the Asian Pacific to fire and the sword. This period was dominated by a fascination with the techno-scientific act that had produced a never-seen-before level of power. This ambient 'technophany' amongst the 'victors' contributed to a relativising of the horror endured by the 'defeated'. The hour was not for the compassion that today dominates how the heritage of atomic bombing Japan is represented, but for submission of the 'defeated'.

The great French atomic physicist Frédéric Joliot-Curie, a major force on the left, reacted positively, focussing on the techno-scientific progress that the bomb would enable, without considering its effects on the Japanese people. On 12 August 1945, the Nobel prize winner wrote in *L'Humanité*:

'If one must admire the United States' gigantic effort of research and production, it does not make it any less true that the first principles of its realisation were discovered in France and provided support of prime importance to this new conquest of man over nature.'

The atomic bomb was a technological feat that showed human's capacity to dominate nature (and other humans as well), which, at the time, was considered a decisive factor in the 'progress' of humanity.<sup>331</sup> In the United

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330 Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2001, p. 91.

331 On the reception of Hiroshima in France and the perception of techno-scientific progress in the aftermath of the Second World War, see Robert Belot, *L'Atome et la France. Aux origines de la technoscience française*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2015.

States, it was celebrated as a military, political, and technological victory.<sup>332</sup> In a survey carried out in September 1945, 69 % of Americans surveyed saw this discovery positively and 17 % saw it negatively. 27 % of Americans thought that the atomic energy could change the world, whilst 53 % did not think it would. Surprisingly, only 47 % of Americans believed that in ten years' time atomic energy would be used for practical purposes. As for the bomb itself, 85 % of Americans approved and 10 % disapproved. British opinion was established along similar lines: 72 % of people were in favour of the bomb.

At the same time, questions of commemoration were being debated in Japan over the specificity of the event, and whether the ruins should be removed or the site be preserved as a symbol of horror. On 5 September 1945, a local newspaper *Chugoku Shimbun* opposed the idea of making Hiroshima a place of memory: 'We all, who love our native land, are immensely angry at those who have no shame in putting forward the very irresponsible idea that the city of Hiroshima becomes a war memorial and be forever preserved in its ruined state.'<sup>333</sup> The deputy mayor of the neighbouring city Kure held the opposite opinion, declaring in 1946: 'I hope that you will preserve the ruins left by the flames as a commemoration in homage to eternal peace'. The idea was not to create a 'war memorial', but a memorial 'to peace'. Perhaps not the most obvious approach for a country that had long maintained a culture of war, this pacifist posture would surface very early after the end of hostilities. Pacifism allowed Japan to escape the 'shameful' image of military defeat through transforming a purely historical event (the bombing) into an eternal moral quest ('eternal peace') before the cold war had even begun. This pretext of atemporal pacifism also eschewed the impossibility of 'glorifying' or 'victimising' the survivors of the bomb, the 'Hibakusha' who were ostracised and made taboo by their fellow citizens.<sup>334</sup> Recounting his journey to Japan in 1946 for

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332 On the United States' entry into the atomic era, see Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light. American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1985. According to Boyer, just after dropping the bomb, 80 % of Americans said they supported Truman's decision.

333 Barthélémy Courmont, *Le Japon de Hiroshima. L'abîme et la résilience*, Vendémiaire, 2015, p. 139.

334 Robert Jungk, *Children of the Ashes: The Story of a Rebirth*, trans. by Constance Fitzgibbon, Paladin, 1985 p. 8. *Barefoot Gen* (1973–1974) by manga writer Keiji Nakazawa bears witness to this discrimination. See Pierre Pigot, *Apocalypse manga*, PUF, 2013, p. 44ff.

*Les Lettres Françaises*, Boris Agapov was surprised by the silence of people in Hiroshima regarding the question of the bomb's consequences:

'I asked the inhabitants about the delayed after-effects of the explosion, these after-effects we've heard so much about. No one breathed a word to me about this time bomb of evils, all the mysterious phenomenon etc. People only complained of the damaged caused to their property. Some claimed to have been blinded for several days by the extremely violent light of the explosion. At the present time, in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the grass is growing green, vegetables are growing well in gardens, children are having fun, the trams are running.'<sup>335</sup>

Only in 1957 did the National Diet of Japan vote for a law that guaranteed medical care for the Hibakusha.

André Duboscq's testimony can be cited as symptomatic of this widespread lack of feeling in the early aftermath of the bomb. Journalist at *Le Temps* and later *Le Monde* with significant expertise on Asia, Duboscq was professor at the Institut des hautes études chinoises and the Institut des hautes études internationales. In 1947, he published a book called *Les Japonais*, which he presented as a study on 'one of the actors of an unprecedented drama that played out in the world and is barely over'.<sup>336</sup> There is not even the smallest allusion to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Local councillors were early adopters of the pacifist strategy. Elected as mayor of Hiroshima in April 1947, Shinzo Hamai soon organised an event on the theme of pacifism. The first 'Festival of Peace' took place on 6 August 1947. His first speech erased the war and memory in favour of prayer and fear for the future. The speech presents three themes that would long structure the commemorative narrative in Japan: 'the horrifying army' who threatened humanity; the risk of a 'global war'; and the fear of 'humanity's extinction'. The fantasy of a total wipe out took shape; its approach is to de-historicise and decentre Japan. Hiroshima is no longer a Japanese city, but a global by-word for morality, the 'mecca of world peace'.<sup>337</sup>

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335 Boris Agapov, « Visage profond sur Japon », *Les Lettres Françaises*, 16 August 1946.

336 André Duboscq, *Les Japonais*, SELFI Éditions, 1947, p. 8.

337 Yoshiteru Kosakai, *Hiroshima Peace Reader*, Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, 1980, p. 22.

The Japanese would only acknowledge the bomb's medical consequences relatively late.<sup>338</sup> In 1954, Tokusaburo Dan, an eminent Japanese journalist and editor-in-chief of *Heiwa*, dared speak of the 'ashes of death [that] sowed terror in Japan'. On 1 October 1954, a scientific congress that addressed the subject took place. A short piece in *Le Monde* (28 October 1954) mentions the death of a 9-year-old girl, the thirteenth child victim of the delayed effects of radiation from the bomb. Cinema began to draw upon both the pacifist and proto-ecological aspects of the theme of nuclear warfare through *Gojira* (Godzilla, 1954) directed by Tomoyuki Tanaka. The film series depicts the story of a prehistoric monster who is awoken by atomic radiation. The public became familiar with the idea of total destruction, a theme that could not be treated in Japanese culture prior to 1945.<sup>339</sup>

In the West, the year 1954 marks a watershed moment that sees the fear of nuclear rapture beginning to attack the positive and progressive image of the civil nuclear industry.<sup>340</sup> Following the Korean War and nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll, the debate centred on the defence of Europe within the framework of the EDC (European Defence Community). The catastrophic spectre was increasingly present, a fear that emerged from the pacifist campaign orchestrated remotely by Cominform. It had an impact on enthusiasts of technological progress following the example of Jules Moch, a former student of the *École Polytechnique* and socialist, who published *La Folie des hommes* (1954). From 1951 onwards, Moch was France's permanent delegate at the UN Disarmament Commission and would henceforth speak of 'universal anguish'.<sup>341</sup> His key causes were the 'madness' of thermonuclear war and fighting for 'safe disarmament'. It was thus not by chance that the Peace Memorial Park opened on 1 April 1954.

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338 The embargo on medical information put in place by the Americans, occupying forces in Japan was there for a reason.

339 Pierre Pigot, *Apocalypse manga*, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

340 This did not stop Japan from having been one of the first civil nuclear powers.

341 Jules Moch, *La folie des hommes* (Preface by Albert Einstein), Robert Laffont, 1954, p. 168.

*Geopolitics and Metaphysics of Fear and Shame*

During the Second World War, Japan was the common enemy of the USSR and the United States. Hours after Hiroshima,<sup>342</sup> the Soviet army attacked Japan, 'formally' giving the coup de grâce. Years later, Japanese pacifism elicited the interest of the Soviet Union, which had since become a nuclear-weapon state.

When it carried out its first atomic experiment (29 August 1949), the Soviet Union was conscious of covering up and playing down this major event, which represented its mastering and possession of atomic weapons. At the same time, it launched a remarkably efficient campaign of pacifist intoxication that sought to blame the United States and mobilise opinions against European countries tempted by nuclear military power. It aimed to demonise the United States to weaken its bond with Europe and to prevent Europe from becoming a superpower once again. Using the memory of Hiroshima as a political instrument was part of this strategy. For this reason, the World Peace Council (created on the initiative of Cominform<sup>343</sup>) promoted Japan's attempts to work towards peace. For example, a song festival was created in 1952 whose slogan was 'Song is a great human force, a force for peace'. The *Bulletin of the World Peace Council* praised the event's fourth edition, which took place on 27 November 1955 in Tokyo, and mentioned two songs in particular: 'No More Atomic Bombs' and 'Fuji', 'a song expressing the Japanese people's love for Mont Fuji, currently threatened by launch ramps for atomic rockets'. This example shows that pacifism drew inspiration from the Soviet world, but it also underlines how the Japanese people were resisting American power in their way.<sup>344</sup> Japan's participation in the anti-nuclear campaign was in an indirect and clever way of criticising the United States, singing in unison with the USSR, and re-establishing itself on the world stage.

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342 Stalin would have been informed that United States would resort to the A-bomb and would have not disapproved.

343 The World Peace Council's first president was Frédéric Joliot-Curie, which would lead to his dismissal at the Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission. On 18 March 1950, the WPC launched the famous 'Stockholm Appeal', which specifically demanded 'outlawing of atomic weapons'. Japanese intellectuals welcomed the Appeal.

344 *Bulletin du Conseil mondial de la paix*, 1 January 1956, p.13. Fonds Pierre Biquard, École supérieure de physique et de chimie industrielles de la ville de Paris, carton 5.

According to John Richard Hersey, journalist at *The New Yorker* and Pulitzer Prize winner in 1945, the people of Hiroshima hated the United States. After the dropping of the bomb, he went to Hiroshima to interview survivors. His key witnesses were Jesuits (there was a mission in Hiroshima and a noviciate in Nagatsuka, five kilometres away) who participated in setting up humanitarian mutual aid and taking in the injured. He recounted the event through the eyes of the six survivors in his report for *The New Yorker* published at the beginning of 1946, which would become a book. It is perhaps the first investigation that intimately and precisely describes without pathos the bomb's terrible consequences on people succumbing to 'the strange, capricious disease which came later to be known as radiation sickness'.<sup>345</sup> Hersey is the first to recount, with empathy, the dignity of the dying people and to reveal the incredible phenomena produced by the bomb, like the permanent shadow thrown on the roof of the Chamber of Commerce Building, 220 meters from the centre of the explosion.

He explained that the occupying American forces 'systematically censored all mention of the bomb in Japanese scientific publications'.<sup>346</sup> Whilst the mushroom cloud had immediately acquired myth status, there was a lack of images of the victims due to the American blackout. The first archival footage was shown at the end of the 1960s, and it was only in 1995 that films made by the occupying American forces in Japan could be broadcast.<sup>347</sup> In response, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum from the very beginning aimed to 'illustrate' the event through a significant amount of photographs to confer on the event a radical centrality.<sup>348</sup> Whilst some inhabitants were stuck in fatalism and the cult of the emperor, Hersey did not hesitate to acknowledge that 'many citizens of Hiroshima, however, continued to feel a hatred for Americans which nothing could possibly erase'.<sup>349</sup> His book was a success in the United States, with a first print run

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345 John Hersey, *Hiroshima*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1946 p. 90.

346 *Ibid.*, p. 108

347 Barthélémy Courmont, *op.cit.*, p. 192. See also Selden, Kyoko, and Mark Selden, eds. *The Atomic Bomb Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1989.

348 Frédéric Rousseau (ed.), *Les Présents des passés douloureux. Musées d'histoire et configurations mémorielles*, Michel Haudiard Éditeur, 2012, p. 128. See also Annette Becker and Octave Debary, *Montrer les violences extrêmes. Théoriser, créer, historici-ser, muséographie*, Craphis Éditions, 2012.

349 John Hersey, *Hiroshima*, *op.cit.*, p. 117



of 3 million copies, and provoked a sort of ‘commotion’.<sup>350</sup> Hersey would become an anti-nuclear activist.

It was not because the American occupier censored the truth of this event that the Japanese demanded the truth. The pacifist strategy and the emphasis placed on one bomb is presented as a denial of historicity. Lisa Yoneyama states: ‘Hiroshima memories have been predicated on the grave obfuscation of the prewar Japanese Empire, its colonial practices, and their consequences.’<sup>351</sup> This dialectic leads to favouring a commemoration based on prayers and mourning to the detriment of the ‘truth’: in 1954, the aim was to construct ‘the Peace Memorial Park, a place of prayer for the peace of all mankind’.<sup>352</sup> The metaphysical dimension frees the memorial from the demands of history and serves the objective of exonerating Japan by shifting guilt onto the victor. In the shadow of the geopolitical recovery from the drama of Hiroshima, a metaphysical approach developed.

Against the backdrop of a widespread demand for defensible development, an accusatory discourse on the consequences of technical progress and Western science today dominates. This discourse establishes Hiroshima as the totemic figure of a repulsive representation of the atom bomb by giving the event a sort of metaphysical status. For example, when the tsunami hit Fukushima in March 2011 and damaged the city’s nuclear power stations, the Japanese writer and Nobel Prize winner for literature Kenzaburo Oé came out to present Japan as the ontological victim of nuclear power, both military and civil. He also drew a questionable parallel between Fukushima and Hiroshima.<sup>353</sup>

This argument of a self-cannibalising technologization, a rationalism that sucks the blood of reason, was developed very early on by Günther Anders, a former student of Martin Heidegger.<sup>354</sup> The event of ‘Hiroshima’ is at the

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350 See Michael J. Hogan, *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 149–152; Michael J. Yavenditti, ‘John Hersey and the American Conscience: The Reception of “Hiroshima”’, *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 43, N°1 (Feb., 1974), p. 24–49.

351 Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces. Time, space and the dialectics of Memory*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999, p. 3.

352 Yoshitaka Kawamoto, ‘The Spirit of Hiroshima’, *Museum International*, ‘Museums of War and Peace’, No. 177, Vol 45, 1993, N°1, pp. 14–16 (p. 14).

353 Philippe Pelletier, ‘Hiroshima-Fukushima, même combat’, in *La Fascination du Japon. Idées reçues sur l’archipel japonais*, Philippe Pelletier (ed), Paris, Le Cavalier Bleu, 2018, p. 267–274.

354 Günther Anders (pseudonym of Günther Stern, 1902–1992) was Jewish of German origin and the first husband of Hannah Arendt.

heart of his reflection that would (discreetly) take shape in the middle of the 1950s. He was perhaps the first to transpose upon Hiroshima the ‘crime against humanity’ committed by the Nazis (which, being Jewish, he was particularly aware of). For him, the ‘Apocalypse’ is the infernal logic where man has put himself in the position of wanting that the ‘world becomes machine’. Nuclear power attests to the power of technology that takes power over humans: ‘We are capable of making a hydrogen bomb but we cannot imagine the consequences of what we have ourselves made’. The power of humans replaced the power of God and the power of nature. From this position, what he terms the ‘Promethean gap’ emerges: ‘the asynchronicity that grows each day between man and the world he creates.’<sup>355</sup> Technology was the promise of progress; it can become ‘the power of annihilation’ as Anders wrote in his major work *The Outdatedness of Human Beings* (1956). Philosophers seized the myth of the total destruction of humanity and secularised it: ‘It is the first time that the anxiety of the apocalypse has reached the non-religious.’<sup>356</sup> Yet, this point of view is moralising and guilt-inducing: Anders speaks of ‘Promethean shame’.<sup>357</sup> Starting from other preconceptions, the French philosopher Jacques Ellul comes to the similar conclusion that humans created a world of reification in which they bow down to ‘the superiority of the thing’, thus becoming ‘the object of the object’.<sup>358</sup>

This myth, which was taken up again at the beginning of the twenty-first century despite the cold war having ended, leads some, in entirely good conscience, to free themselves from the distinctions that the historian’s approach imposes. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, for example, considers Auschwitz, the tsunami of 26 December 2004, and Hiroshima within the same work.<sup>359</sup> Hiroshima has even been assimilated into the category of crimes specifically invented for the inalienable and irreducible Nazi horror: ‘crime against humanity’.<sup>360</sup> The inverted outcome of this line of thinking: by dropping

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355 Günther Anders, *L’Obsolescence de l’homme. Sur l’âme à l’époque de la deuxième révolution industrielle* (1956), Paris, éditions Ivrea, 2002, p. 31.

356 *Ibid.*, p. 308.

357 Günther Anders, *Hiroshima est partout*, éd. du Seuil, 2008.

358 Jacques Ellul, *La Technique ou l’enjeu du siècle*, Paris, Economica, 1990 (1<sup>st</sup> edition: 1954).

359 Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Petite métaphysique des tsunamis*, éd. du Seuil, 2005.

360 Pierre Piérart, Wies Jaspers, *D’Hiroshima et Sarajevo. La bombe, la guerre froide et l’armée européenne*, Bruxelles, EPO, 1995, p. 7.

the first atomic bomb, the Americans join the same camp as those they fought against and the Japanese are transformed into victims.

In 1958, Anders visited Japan and attended the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs and Disarmament in Tokyo (August 1958). The conference sought to ban the victors from possessing nuclear arms, a weapon that Japan, which had been defeated, could not have. Disarmament was designed to put countries on an equal geopolitical footing. Anders wanted to go to Hiroshima in person to immerse himself in the reality that inspired his philosophical engagement. His journal *The Man on the Bridge: Diary from Hiroshima and Nagasaki* offers a compassionate and empathetic perspective. He sought to help Japan reintegrate itself into a collective international project, or rather, into an international solidarity project based on a worldwide fear of the 'Apocalypse': 'We are in the same boat'.<sup>361</sup> In his journal, he presents his project: 'The goal of my trip is to accompany the Japanese at least on one part of the journey to show them that they are not alone, that we are considering the threats that weigh on them as they weigh on us, that we recognise their goal as our own'.<sup>362</sup> He spoke of a 'Babel of cordiality'. Anders presents a process that reverses established roles and images: the former persecutor gives lessons to the world and to potential future persecutors. As if fault forces a change of camp, Japan becomes affected with a loss of moral awareness. Japan the belligerent became a Japan of Buddhist temples: Anders was pleased that a young Buddhist Atsushi Ishimoto organised a procession from Hiroshima to the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs and Disarmament in Tokyo.

This metaphysical pacifism has the power of relativising values and of negating time (of historicity): it forgets the meta-values that pushed the Americans to strike Japan with nuclear weapons, the warmongering and racist ideology that Japan had promoted since 1910, and the country's ideological break with the world. It was founded on two strategies: demonisation of the future/undoing of the past and a lack of differentiation/historical confusion ('babelisation' of events). This confusionism, serving comparatist demands, is current practice in Japan. For example, the Maruki Gallery created in 1967 in Saitama prefecture exhibits paintings of Hiroshima created by Iri and Toshi Maruki alongside collections on Auschwitz and Nanjing,

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361 Günther Anders, *L'Homme sur le pont. Journal d'Hiroshima et de Nagasaki*, 1958, p.92.

362 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

and even mentions the victims of mercury poisoning from industrial waste discharged into the sea in the nearby city of Minamata. The UNESCO authorities did not see cause to issue a reminder that this approach was anti-historic. In contrast, in its journal *Museum International*, Terrence Duffy comments: ‘The atomic bomb is thus juxtaposed with images from the Holocaust and from other examples of war and environmental destruction. This reflects the growing concern with finding a comparative dimension for the horrors of nuclear destruction.’<sup>363</sup>

### *Creating Heritage as Redemption*

As the USSR launched its peace offensive, the Japanese government decided to follow the Hiroshima authorities and consecrate its pacifist strategy. On 6 August 1949, a law conferred the status of ‘peace memorial city’ on Hiroshima. Its 1<sup>st</sup> article stipulates that the law has the aim ‘to provide for the construction of the city of Hiroshima as a peace memorial city to symbolize the human ideal of sincere pursuit of genuine and lasting peace’.<sup>364</sup> This ambition for heritage is not conceptualised as a desire to establish a ‘lieu de mémoire’ or a ‘lieu d’histoire’. Its three defining characteristics are:

- erasure of the war, forgetting history (‘peace’)
- decontextualisation of national specificity in favour of an international perspective (‘human ideal’)
- negation of time (‘lasting’)

This strategy proposes forgetting the past to preserve the future. Instead of a ‘Peace Memorial’, the neologism ‘Peace Futorial’ would more readily apply in this case.

Five symbolic places were conceptualised for this ‘peace memorial city’: the cenotaph (list of bomb victims’ names); a peace flame (which will burn until nuclear weapons no longer exist); the Genbaku Dome; the memorial museum (which opened to the public on 24 August 1955); and the Peace Park which, over the years, has become home to around 50 other small memorials paying homage to different categories of victims (students, wo-

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363 Terrence Duffy, ‘The peace museums of Japan’, *Museum International*, n°196, vol. 49. Issue 4, December 1997, pp. 49–54 (p. 51).

364 ‘The Hiroshima Peace Memorial City Construction Law and Commentary’ <https://www.city.hiroshima.lg.jp/uploaded/attachment/23440.pdf>

men, post office workers) and benefactors (Marcel Junot, Norman Cousins, Barbara Reynolds). The attitude towards the Koreans who were killed in Hiroshima is symptomatic of the refusal to seek historical 'truth' and the denial of the suffering of non-Japanese people. A reminder that Koreans worked as forced labourers in the factories of Hiroshima's military-industrial facility would be unwelcome here. 40,000 Koreans were in the city on 6 August 1946. On 10 April 1970, a memorial to Korean victims of the bomb was inaugurated. The inscription on the mausoleum reads: 'Prince Lee-Woo and 20 000 others.'<sup>365</sup>

The museum attests to the same phenomenon of selective amnesia.<sup>366</sup> During a visit in 2014, I looked in vain for a photograph of the Japanese attack on the American Naval Air Force Base Pearl Harbour (8 December 1941), which precipitated the United States' entry into the war. Japan's policy of domination in the Asian Pacific is sidestepped, save for some references to 'incidents'. The war is not present here. Koreans only appear in statistical accounts where forced labourers are only mentioned implicitly and nothing is said about the 'comfort women'. The reasons behind the United States' decision to use the atomic bomb are the subject of a purely political and reductive reading: the Americans had to justify the funding spent on making the bomb and gain strategic advantage over the USSR. Historic silences oppose the profusion of images, personal belongings, and representations (notably burnt bodies) presented in a compassionate staging that offers more emotion than explanation.

Easing the Japanese conscience is spectacularly presented in the final area of the tour. Visitors cross a long room made up of small cubicles with desks where they can sign a peace declaration and a petition for banning military nuclear arsenals. They can read (or hear) letters by the mayors of Hiroshima who have sent letters of protest on the occasion of every nuclear test since 1968. This incredible collision of past, present, and future is designed to produce a cathartic effect for Japanese citizens. Young Japanese visitors in school uniform are required to sign the declaration. The worst of humanity, it is others; the risk, it is the future. It is perhaps the only museum in the world with such practices, even if the 'great illusion' of the utility of heritage and memory is common across all the projects submitted

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365 Yoshiteru Kosakai, *Hiroshima Peace Reader*, Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, 1980, p. 75–76.

366 The museum's architect Tange Kenzo (1913–2005) had already worked on a design for a memorial to soldiers killed in combat that would have been located at the base of Mount Fuji. He re-used an idea of war into an idea of peace.

to UNESCO. The approach represents putting oneself on the side of the Good and the Universal by positively transforming the worst.

The 1993 special issue of UNESCO's journal *Museum International* on 'Museums of War and Peace' includes an article on the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum written by its then-director Yoshitaka Kawamoto, the only bomb survivor of his class of 48 students. Kawamoto mentions the museum's two names: 'Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum' and 'atomic bomb museum'. Emphasis is placed on the horror and the contemporary apolitical risk. The museum is concerned with appearing preventative, prophylactical, and pedagogical: 'Through the exhibits, the people of Hiroshima strive to relay the horrors of the atomic bombing and appeal for everlasting world peace. We would especially like to appeal to children<sup>367</sup> who bear the responsibility of leadership for the next generation.<sup>368</sup> History and memory are absent from this presentation of the museum in favour of a futurist vision that is, at once, abstract (decontextualised historically), dystopian ('the threat of nuclear warfare'<sup>369</sup>) and beneficial (acting for universal peace). The whole museographic apparatus rests on the myth of utility, of visitors 'gain[ing] a greater understanding of the horror'<sup>370</sup> to avoid history repeating itself: 'As the first city to have suffered an atomic bomb in the history of mankind, Hiroshima has the responsibility to insist on the total elimination of all nuclear weapons to prevent our tragedy from being repeated. Hiroshima has consistently made an effort to promote world peace'.<sup>371</sup>

Duffy, who introduces this special issue, does not intervene to question this official Japanese discourse. On the contrary, he supports the fact that 'Peace museums are now emerging as a global trend in museum development'.<sup>372</sup> UNESCO's mission is, of course, to encourage a 'culture of peace'.<sup>373</sup> Despite the fact that the Cold War had ended and, with it, the

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367 Half the visitors in 1993 were children.

368 Yoshitaka Kawamoto, 'The Spirit of Hiroshima', *op.cit.*, p. 14

369 *Ibid.* The French version of this article makes an explicit comparison with the holocaust here by employing the expression 'la menace d'un holocauste atomique' [the threat of atomic holocaust].

370 *Ibid.* p. 15.

371 *Ibid.* p.16.

372 Terence Duffy, 'The Peace Museum Concept', *Museum International*, 'Museums of War and Peace', No. 177, Vol 45, 1993, N°1, pp. 4–6 (p. 4).

373 Revision of the 1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, UNESCO, 1974.

prospect of nuclear war became a purely hypothetical viewpoint, Duffy also puts forward the argument of pedagogical utility: 'The portrayal of conflict for purposes of peace education.'<sup>374</sup> The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, built on the premise of not discriminating between just wars and unjust wars, offers anything but a historical analysis of 'conflict'. This special issue does not ask two very fundamental questions: first, why did the Americans resort to dropping the bomb? Second, what will guarantee peace: the absence of the bomb or the absence of democracy? It is understandable why there is no mention of the importance of democracy, the right to self-determination, and human rights. This perspective suggests that showing the horror and calling for peace allows for historical critical perspectives to be dispensed with, even prohibits them. Kawamoto's piece in the same volume begins with the statement: 'The very name "Hiroshima" has come to symbolize the ultimate horror of the war. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial stands as both a reminder of the past and an eloquent plea for the future.'<sup>375</sup> The catastrophic future that nuclear arsenals were supposed to cause has not happened and the calls for pacifism had nothing to do with it. Paradoxically, the principle of nuclear deterrent has maintained the balance in the second half of the twentieth century: the 'balance of terror', an oxymoronic concept that was difficult to understand.

Pacifism instituted as a system and as a value in itself became a way for Japan not to think about the war. Given these conditions, the reasons behind the country's request to have the dome listed as a World Heritage Site requires further investigation. Initially, the Japanese authorities' desire to reconstruct and erase made most indicative traces of the bomb disappear. During his visit to Hiroshima, Anders was surprised: 'The traces of annihilation were erased; by consequence, the memory of the annihilated was annihilated as well.'<sup>376</sup> He spoke of the need to fight against the 'annihilators'. Anders looked at 'the rusted structure of the dome', the only vestige of the bomb preserved. This dome, which is all that remains of the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, was built in 1914. The Czech architect Jan Letzel designed a three-storey brick building with a five-story central part crowned by a steel-framework dome. This highly resistant building was situated 150 meters north-west of the epicentre. As the skeleton-like frame was the only part preserved, it came to be habitually

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374 Terence Duffy, 'The Peace Museum Concept', *op.cit.*, p. 4.

375 Yoshitaka Kawamoto, 'The Spirit of Hiroshima', *op.cit.*, p. 14.

376 Günther Anders, *Hiroshima est partout*, *op.cit.*, p. 181.

known as the 'Genbaku Dome', meaning 'the dome of the atomic bomb'. The museum tour signposts in English to the 'A-Bomb Dome'.

It was only in 1966 that the city of Hiroshima voted to conserve and restore the dome. There is the tendency to forget that this decision was taken against the Japanese government who did not want to contribute funding towards it. Controversies arose because many wanted it demolished for different reasons. During his visit, Anders did not consider it necessary to commit to conserving this single material witness to the catastrophe. His point of view was unusual at the time. He mentions the risk that creating heritage from this vestige presents: it would be liable to taking one part as the whole. For Anders, 'the absence of markers of what took place here cannot be embodied by this ruined building alone'. Hiroshima had become a symbol that exceeded its historic reality and it must not rule out the event that it was witness to: 'So that those who, even today, still do not know about it, finally understand that the name Hiroshima does not designate a city, but the state of the world; and that they understand that they live in Hiroshima as well.' This resembles the sentiment that runs through Marguerite Duras's film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959): 'You saw nothing in Hiroshima.'

In the 1980s, new impetus was provided that would change the Japanese government's position on the Dome. In 1987, a new renovation programme was launched with a fundraising initiative that would finish on 31 March 1990. All the conditions had been met. Japan could submit its request to UNESCO to list Hiroshima as a World Heritage Site. The Japanese government presented this official justification (28 September 1995):

'Firstly, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, Genbaku Dome, stands as a permanent witness to the terrible disaster that occurred when the atomic bomb was used as a weapon for the first time in the history of mankind. Secondly, the Dome itself is the only building in existence that can convey directly a physical image of the tragic situation immediately after the bombing. Thirdly, the Dome has become a universal monument for all mankind, symbolizing the *hope for perpetual peace* and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons on earth.' (My italics)



Beyond the attention placed on the 'physical image' of the catastrophe, there are two (seemingly contradictory<sup>377</sup>) stem cells at the core of the memory of Hiroshima:

- exceptionality (a unique techno-scientific and military event in history)
- universality (a valuable counter-example for the future of 'all mankind').

The event is essentialised and heritage is created from the future by eschewing any historical perspective. The file used for classification requests that can be consulted at UNESCO headquarters primarily contains technical elements, thus confirming the absence of any desire to inscribe this heritage creation operation in an approach of 'historical truth', of repentance or resilience. Similarly, there is not a sliver of reflection on the questions of democracy, right to self-determination, and human rights, in Japan or in the world, in the past or in the present. The focus is solely on the bomb alone, which allows for a sidestepping of the true issues of *why* the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the nature of the regime that, during the first half of the twentieth century, from Korea to China, conducted a politics of violence and hegemony on peoples across Asia.<sup>378</sup> UNESCO experts did not seem aware of the assassination attempt on the mayor of Nagasaki (January 1990), following his declaration that 'the Emperor bore some responsibility for the war'.<sup>379</sup> Nor did they notice that in 1994, only a year before the submission of the request, 161 members of parliament supported a petition (signed by 4.5 million Japanese people) disapproving of the tendency of their leaders to present 'masochistic' excuses during the annual anniversary marking the end of the war. Creating heritage of the Genbaku Dome is unique in that inherent to this process from the beginning was its opposite goal, namely the un-making of heritage. The honouring of this object immediately shifts its status as a 'witness' of the past (the war) to become, by means of its name, a 'world' symbol: 'Hiroshima Peace Memorial'.

The ICOMOS's report picks up on Japan's arguments without distancing its position, thereby supporting the silences inherent to the heritage

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377 An exception presumably cannot be held up as a model of what must not be done and serve the future, particularly when the catastrophe predicted for 50 years has not taken place.

378 Robert Belot, Woo Bong Ha, Jung Sook Bae (eds), *Corée-France: regards croisés sur deux sociétés face à l'occupation étrangère*, Pôle éditorial de l'UTBM, Belfort, 2013.

379 George Hicks, *Japan's War Memories: Amnesia or concealment?*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1997, p. 72.

approach and the memorial vision of Japan: focussing on the event as it is, projection on the future, illusion on the preventive and pedagogical virtues. By listing this building, UNESCO sees it as a witness transmitting the tragedy of Hiroshima to future generations. It gives in to the myth of the utility of memory, which is not part of the historical approach of the historian. UNESCO's current webpage dedicated to the Genbaku Dome reflects this position:

‘The Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) was the only structure left standing in the area where the first atomic bomb exploded on 6 August 1945. Through the efforts of many people, including those of the city of Hiroshima, it has been preserved in the same state as immediately after the bombing. Not only is it a stark and powerful symbol of the most destructive force ever created by humankind; it also expresses the hope for world peace and the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons.’

What is interesting to note is that UNESCO, whose criteria are quite strict and recommendations imperative, remains silent on the memory that all heritage sites have the vocation to preserve. Whilst it claims to preserve ‘cultural heritage’, its recommendations remain purely technical, such as ‘Protection and management requirements’. UNESCO is not concerned with the *truth* but the *beauty* of the site, with its website recounting: ‘A city beautification plan was developed by Hiroshima City that calls for this area to remain an attractive space appropriate to a symbol of the International Peace Culture City.’ What matters for UNESCO is that the city sought to protect the surrounding environment and planned a consultation process ‘for building height and alignment, as well as wall colors, materials and advertisement boards’. UNESCO must have been pleased with the outcome as the Peace Memorial Park was additionally awarded the designation ‘Place for Scenic Beauty’ in 2007.<sup>380</sup> Visiting Hiroshima can thus elicit that strange sensation of finding yourself at Lourdes, in a place of pilgrimage or a ‘theme park’.<sup>381</sup>

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380 See ‘Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome)’ UNESCO World Heritage Centre <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/775/>. The information boards around the Park also refer to it as: ‘Peace Memorial Park. National Place of Scenic Beauty’.

381 Jean-Louis Margolin, *L'Armée de l'Empereur, Violences et crimes du Japon en guerre, 1937–1945*, Armand Colin, 2007, p. 406. See also Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1994, p. 94.

The two countries most directly affected by Japan's fascist and supremacist politics prior to 1945 reacted negatively to UNESCO's listing of the site. The Chinese government stressed Japan's historic responsibilities: 'During the Second World War, it was the other Asian countries and peoples who suffered the greatest loss in life and property'. They denounced, but without giving precise examples, how, in 1995, 'there are still few people trying to deny this fact of history' and feared that 'it may be utilized for harmful purpose by these few people'. China judged that 'This will, of course, not be conducive to the safeguarding of world peace and security'. The future would seem to confirm these fears. Whilst China was content to express 'its reservations' on the acceptance of this proposed inscription, the government of the United States appeared more hostile. Its statement reminded that the United States and Japan are 'close friends and allies' who cooperate 'on security, diplomatic, international and economic affairs around the world'. Yet the country was not able to lend its support to the project on the basis of what it saw as a violation of history: 'The United States is concerned about the lack of historical perspective in the nomination of Genbaku Dome.' Obama would express the same sentiment during his visit to the site in 2016. The negation of contextualisation means that 'the tragedy of Hiroshima' cannot adequately be understood and serve the cause that this classification claims to defend: 'The events antecedent to the United States' use of atomic weapons to end World War II are key to understanding the tragedy of Hiroshima. Any examination of the period leading up to 1945 should be placed in the appropriate historical context.'<sup>382</sup>

According to Olwen Beazley, for whom this classification is a 'paradox of peace',<sup>383</sup> the American government would have feared the reaction of veterans as well as others who perceived UNESCO's distinction as an insult. It is interesting to compare the reaction of the French communist left to the American response. The newspaper journal *L'Humanité* (6 December 1996) showed itself to be the loyal heir of the pacifist, anti-American positions of the 1950s: it impartially participated in the strategy of making fascist Japan innocent by accusing the United States of practicing a politics of amnesia: 'In its opposition to the recognition of this monument as part of

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382 Statements by China and the United States of America during the Inscription of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/repco96x.htm#annex5>

383 Olwen Beazley, 'A paradox of peace: the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) as World Heritage', in John Schofield, Wayne Cocroft (eds), *A Fearsome Heritage: Diverse Legacies of the cold war*, p. 33.

world heritage — and thus collective memory — the American authorities confirmed the country's determination to attempt to consign a major crime of the twentieth century to the scrap heap. But the international community has not succumbed to orders from Washington and Hiroshima will be a World Heritage Site for humanity'.

This acquiescence to the revisionist instrumentation of heritage and of UNESCO in view of 'whitewashing' history and repositioning Japan geopolitically is visible in Duffy's piece on 'the peace museums of Japan'. Duffy praises how the Hiroshima Memorial Museum allows visitors to record their own 'peace messages' in the lobby area. The historic silences in the museum's scenography are presented as virtues of moderation: 'It neither provocatively confronts the politics of Japan's past nor indeed challenges the visitor with rhetoric against nuclear weapons. Rather, by careful programming, it seeks to model the dignified desire of this city for global peace.'<sup>384</sup> The end of the article increases its pacifist and self-righteous tone, with Duffy suggesting 'One suspects that it will not be long before there is a peace museum in every major Japanese city. This a wonderful expression of commitment to such museums in the public arena.'<sup>385</sup>

Duffy seems to ignore the fact that ill-considered usages of the word 'peace' in Japan can border on intellectual dishonesty. For example, at the 'Peace Museum for Kamikaze Pilots' created in 1975 in Chiran, situated at the southern tip of Kyushu Island, visitors read that the kamikaze pilots 'wished for the restoration of peace and prosperity'. In Japan, the only true memorial to *peace* (in the sense generally understood) was conceptualised in 2001 as part of a report by an ad hoc commission set up by the government. It proposed dedicating a memorial to 'praying for peace' and remembering all those killed, not only the Japanese: 'all the foreign soldiers and civilians who lost their lives in the wars initiated by Japan'. The Japanese government did not follow through with this project which resembled more 'a publicity stunt designed to counteract the negative impact of [then prime minister Junichiro Koizumi's] visits to Yasukuni'.<sup>386</sup>

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384 Terence Duffy, 'The peace museums of Japan', *op.cit.*, p. 49.

385 *Ibid.*, p. 54

386 Michael Lucken, *The Japanese and the War: From Expectation to Memory*, Columbia University Press, 2017, p. 205–6

*Revisionism and Memory Wars*

It is quite common to think that commemorating a heritage of the worst of humanity has values of appeasement, reconciliation and resilience. For Japan, the opposite has happened. Since the UNESCO classification, rather than peace, a return to honouring war heroes can be observed, which has created a war of memories with the countries who were victims of its former politics. This shift would seem to confirm the ineffectiveness of the preventative effects that the classification proclaims and the dangers of the pacifist campaign orchestrated since the aftermath of the war. More than ever, the victim remains history, which has been sacrificed on the altar of nationalist posturing.<sup>387</sup>

Since 1983, fundraising campaigns for financing Japanese peace museum projects have triggered strong reactions from right-wing opposition. With no inhibitions, proponents of this opposition organised a movement that sought to promote the idea of creating museums dedicated to the glory of the Japanese people who died during the war. Close to the Yasukuni shrine founded in 1869 to pay homage to the Japanese people who gave their lives in the name of the emperor,<sup>388</sup> there has been a war museum<sup>389</sup> since 1882 (renovated in 1961 and 2002), which reflects this position: glorification of the soldiers, justification of the wars conducted by Japan, diminishing of massacres inflicted on other peoples.<sup>390</sup> Similarly, the memorial museum in Chiran pays homage to the 'noble sacrifice' of the kamikazes. The museum, which was expanded and reinaugurated in 2000, attracts around 1 million visitors each year. In 1984, Tanaka Masaaki, former secretary to General Matsui (commander of the expeditionary force sent to China in 1937),

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387 It should be noted that the history of historians progresses little by little entirely independent of 'heritage time'. In 1993, the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility (JWRC) was created. Moreover, almost 200 lawyers were working on repatriation demands for victims of the Japanese empire in 1998. See: Jean-Louis Margolin, *L'Armée de l'Empereur*, *op.cit.*, p. 400.

388 The Yasukuni, a religious memorial, has become a symbol for revisionists. Amongst the soldiers honoured, there are 14 members of the armed forces who were tried at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East for war crimes. It should be remembered that, in addition to Yasukuni, there are 52 regional shrines that crisscross the memorial territory of Japan.

389 This museum is dedicated to the souls of the soldiers killed in combat for the Emperor of Japan.

390 This revisionism appears very explicitly in the exhibit labels 'The China Incident' and 'The Korean Problem'.

became the messenger of radical revisionism by starting a series of books that denied the existence of the Nanjing massacre.<sup>391</sup> European scholars remained quiet on this phenomenon, even when they were, at the very same time, initiating the reverse approach in which ‘memory came to the fore in the public space’<sup>392</sup> with Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984), Claude Lanzman’s *Shoah* (1985), Paul Ricœur’s *Temps et Récit* (1985; *Time and Narrative*), and Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s *Les Assassins de la mémoire* (1987; *Assassins of Memory and Other Essays*). It would be unbelievable to imagine the creation of a museum in Germany dedicated to the glory of fallen soldiers from the Wehrmacht and Einsatzgruppen. A comparative study of Germany and Japan would reveal the strange clemency from which Japan has benefitted regarding its war crimes and crimes against humanity. In 1996, the same year of the UNESCO classification, the revisionist current was emerging, and the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform was created on the initiative of scholars, including Kanji Nishio.

Since 2000, this return to the war and its ‘heroes’ has been particularly evident. The most tangible and emblematic representation of this movement is the Yamato Museum (Kure Maritime Museum), which opened in 2005. After visiting Hiroshima, I was totally surprised to arrive in Kure. Kure is an industrial and military port, situated only a few kilometres from Hiroshima, which built warships. The museum shows its true colours: there is a warship on the forecourt, which is impossible to miss. Visitors are then greeted with an enormous propeller and an impressive canon. The *Mustsu* battleship is displayed in a vast entrance hall. Inside, the *Yamato* battleship takes centre stage with cross-section models. Education is in the service of heroism. The technological excellence of the Kure port and its responsiveness is celebrated. From the commander to ordinary soldiers, the men who served on the *Yamato* are praised: they are afforded portraits (individually or in groups) and short biographies. This warship’s unique history seems to justify it being given pride of place at the museum: it left the port of Kure on a ‘kamikaze journey’ and was sunk en route to Okinawa where a bloody battle with the Americans took place, the deadliest for them on the Pacific War. The letters that these sea kamikazes wrote before their departure are exhibited. There are also objects (bottles, telephones, lamps)

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391 Jean-Louis Margolin, *L’Armée de l’Empereur*, *op.cit.*, p. 399. It did not prevent school texts books at the end of the 1980s from mentioning the Nanjing Massacre and starting to make reference to ‘comfort women’.

392 François Hartog, *Croire en l’histoire*, Flammarion, 2013, p. 123.

that were found in the ship during underwater excavations. The soldiers are therefore considered as heroes whose memory should be perpetuated and magnified. The kamikaze 'midget' submarines like the *Kairyu*, are also honoured with a display. Contrary to what *Museum International* had hoped, it is not peace museums that multiplied in Japan after the world heritage classification of the Genbaku Dome. This museum sparked debate within the Kure municipal council in 2002 with the communist group denouncing the fact that it was not a maritime museum but a 'museum of war'.<sup>393</sup>

In the same year of 2005, just before the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bomb, the minister of education supported a revision of school textbooks that sought to reduce the colonialist crimes committed by Japan. This revision would elicit numerous protestations from China, South Korea, and Taiwan.<sup>394</sup> Almost a decade later, in 2014, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed a reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which renounces war as a means of resolving international disputes, that would allow for Japan to send military forces abroad to engage in collective self-defence alongside its allies. This proposal sparked a diplomatic-memorial conflict with China and South Korea.

These initiatives appear provocative towards UNESCO's aims. Similarly, in February 2014, leaders in the Japanese city of Minamikyushu submitted a request to list the letters of kamikaze pilots as documentary heritage on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. A line had been crossed, which was judged intolerable. For the Chinese diplomat Hua Chunying, it was 'an effort to beautify Japan's history of militaristic aggression, and challenge the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War and the post-war international order'. She reminded that Japan had committed 'numerous' crimes against humanity during the Second World War. Recognising the memory of kamikazes as heritage would amount to legitimising Japan as the perpetrator of war and putting the victors and those defeated on equal footing: 'This effort runs completely counter to UNESCO's objective of upholding world peace, and will inevitably meet strong condemnation and resolute opposition from the international community'. Whilst awaiting a response from UNESCO, the Japanese documents in question are held at the museum in Chiran.

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393 Yushi Utaka, 'The Hiroshima Peace Memorial. Transforming Legacy, Memories and Landscape', in *Places of Pain and Shame. Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'*, Edited by William Logan and Keir Reeves, Routledge, London, New York, 2009, p. 46.

394 B. Courmont, *Le Japon de Hiroshima, op.cit.*, p. 210–211.

According to its website, the museum hopes to obtain inscription ‘to forever hand down the letters to generations to come as a treasure of human life’. Revisionist culture in Japan has attained a limit that would be unacceptable in Europe. UNESCO would discredit itself if it were to respond positively and, on the other hand, it would also show that creating heritage from the worst of humanity is impossible.

In response to China, Japan complained about the inscription of the Nanjing Massacre (300,000 killed) on the Memory of the World Register in 2015 by raising questions over its historic authenticity and attacking UNESCO by questioning its integrity:

‘It is extremely regrettable that a global organisation that should be neutral and fair entered the documents in the Memory of the World register, despite the repeated pleas made by the Japanese government. The request was made on the basis of unilateral declarations by China and Japan considers these documents to be incomplete and present problems of authenticity.’<sup>395</sup>

When Nanjing’s inscription was announced, the Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova issued a banal statement explaining the organisation’s role ‘to preserve documentary heritage and memory for the benefit of present and future generations in the spirit of international cooperation and mutual understanding’.<sup>396</sup> This goal is completely to the contrary of what actually happened. Heritage therefore does not soften geopolitical conduct — sometimes it is even an issue of it or hostage to it — nor does it protect against revisionism, even historical negationism.

### *Conclusion*

By recognising what I term a ‘heritage of the worst of humanity’ with Auschwitz, UNESCO did not know that it would be setting off an inevitable chain of events. The reactions to the classification of the Genbaku Dome have shown that touching upon the history of wars and memorial identities will always provoke reactions that do not align with peace and ‘mutual understanding’. History, it seems, was too complicated to be the basis

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395 *Le Monde*, 10 October 2015.

396 ‘International Advisory Committee inscribes 47 new nominations on UNESCO Memory of the World Register’ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/international-advisory-committee-inscribes-47-new-nominations-unesco-memory-world-register>



of creating heritage at Hiroshima. A successful heritage making process demands minimal consensus on the historical reading of the conflict in question and profound agreement on the values that this reading leads us to promote for the future. This happened with Auschwitz. This did not happen with Hiroshima.

The case of Hiroshima presents a ‘non-lieu de mémoire’, which freed itself from the demand of seeking historical ‘truth’. It could be described as a ‘lieu de de-mémoire’, a site that undoes memory.<sup>397</sup> Heritage has been created to the detriment of history, even to ensure Japan’s unpleasant history of violence and hegemony is forgotten, thereby negating the very values of democracy. Moreover, it could also be said that this case presents heritage without memory and without history. The atomic bomb not only destroyed a city, but it erased the war and Japan’s responsibility in it.<sup>398</sup> The classification of the Genbaku Dome legitimised and made viable the shift in Japan’s status from aggressor to victim. For the two central persecutors of the Second World War (Japan and Nazi Germany), two opposing heritage phenomena have been produced: Japanese amnesia and German hyperthymesia. The question remains: does peace and reconciliation without truth allow us to draw ‘lessons’ from History, to cite the usual rhetoric of political discourse?

The universal and almost metaphysical dimension acquired by this catastrophe (or, according to some, ‘crime’) appears to have had the effect of neutralising and absolving the horror which the bomb put an end to, namely the racist and destructive power of ‘fascist’ Japan. The history of Hiroshima has been surpassed by the symbol of the ‘promethean shame’ that it came to embody. This symbol applies essentially to the West and more generally to the Anthropocene. For this reason, during the ‘historic’ meeting between Shinzo Abé and Obama at Pearl Harbour on 27 December 2016, the Japanese prime minister refused to present his apologies, avoided mentioning the ideological dimension of the conflict (by the traditional incantation to the ‘horrors of war’ that would never be repeated) and was happy to celebrate the memory of ‘all men and women’ (presumably including the kamikaze pilots) ‘whose lives were taken by a war that com-

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397 Anne-Marie Paveau, 23 August 2013, « Démémoire discursive et amémoire (in)volontaire », *La pensée du discours* [research logbook], <http://penseedudiscours.hypoteses.org/?p=12318>.

398 ‘As if the past had been pulverised and dissolved by the atomic explosion’. F. Rousseau, *Les Présents des passés douloureux*, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

menced in this very place'. The Prime Minister did not apologise, but he urged 'We must never repeat the horrors of war again'.<sup>399</sup>

To conclude, Japan's heritage strategy could be characterised by three main concerns:

- over-valorisation of a 'pacifist' and 'compassionate' heritage (the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum) whose aim is to victimise Japan all the while rehabilitating it from its defeat (by technology);
- invention of a heritage with 'geopolitical' aims since the Hiroshima Memorial Museum is perhaps the only one in the world that invites visitors to make a geopolitical demand: banning atomic weapons (the text inscribing the Genbaku Dome as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1996 makes an explicit allusion to it);
- the (more or less) discreet and progressive creation of a 'heroic' heritage for purely national purposes (Yushukan Museum, Yamato Museum), which has not learnt, nor forgotten anything from the war.

Japan must contend with a contradictory heritage that emerges from a tendency to relativise its responsibility in the history of the Second World War. The initial utility (memory, reconciliation) proclaimed by Hiroshima's inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has been subverted in favour of reaffirming a politics of national identity.

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399 'The Power of Reconciliation: Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe' [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97\\_abe/statement/201612/1220678\\_11021.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201612/1220678_11021.html)