

The Shadow

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In the archives of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra there are many images of the ruins of Hiroshima. It was part of the area occupied by the Australian Army in the postwar years, and in some photographs the familiar Aussie soldier's slouch hat with its bronze badge symbolising a rising sun, ironically the same symbol under which Japan went to war, can be seen against the backdrop of the devastated remains of what had once been a city.

The pictures capture the everyday life of military occupation: soldiers on parade, army nurses out sightseeing, soldiers talking to women in kimonos, soldiers running in a marathon and so on. All quite ordinary activity, but remarkable for the fact that it is happening in one of only two truly unique places on earth: the remnants of a city obliterated by an atomic bomb. The existential absurdity of this juxtaposition of the mundane and the catastrophic is perhaps best illustrated by a black and white photograph of a game of rugby league being played between an Australian Army team and a team of sailors from Britain's Royal Navy. The picture shows a scrum packing down, with the half-backs stepping away from the crunching collision of the two front rows. The image of a scrum is one repeated many times in the history of Australian sports photography, but what makes this particular instance utterly remarkable is that one of the world's most perversely famous

landmarks, Hiroshima's ruined atomic dome, sits in the middle of the pile of rubble that forms the backdrop to the field of play.

It must have been a tough game for these servicemen, with no grass on the playing surface, just hard packed soil. It would be a little while yet—though certainly not the seventy-five years as was first rumored in the city in the months after the catastrophe—before grass would again grow in Hiroshima. And what of the dirt rubbed into the cuts and grazes on the player's limbs? Such minor wounds were an occupational hazard for the footballer in those years: even the centre of the Sydney Cricket Ground was reduced to a barren, rock-like state by the end of each football season. Still, at least it wasn't radioactive. But if the soldier-footballers of Hiroshima were perturbed by the fact that their game was being played on the world's most dangerous soil, it's not apparent from the photograph. Sixty years later though you can't help but wonder how much leukemia, how many deaths from cancer and how many future birth defects may have resulted from this game. What was a tackle or a dive over the try line worth on this field, in terms of accumulated gamma radiation? These seem absurd questions to be asking in relation to a game of sport. How could one ever even attempt to make such a calculation? But this is exactly the form of question, in which the ordinary things of life embody the very negation of life, which the survivors of the Hiroshima bombing lived with every day of their lives.

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I was eight or nine years old when I first heard of Hiroshima, at the end of the 1960s. I was listening to my little Japanese transistor radio in bed, on a Sunday night. It was some time in early August, close to the anniversary of the dropping of the bomb barely twenty years earlier. A rich and sombre announcer's voice filled the darkness of my room, talking about the horror of the explosion and destruction of the city, and while I can't remember now much of what he actually said, his tone, and the catastrophic sense of the events he described have never left me. But, one detail of the account I do remember clearly is the description of a man sitting in the morning sun on the steps outside a bank, a man who was vaporised in the flash of the explosion, a man who completely disappeared but who left behind his shadow printed onto the otherwise bleached stone of the steps. In the midst of such descriptions of horror I found something incredibly comforting in this picture of a

man sitting outside a bank. Maybe he was waiting for the bank to open, I thought, so he could go in and get some money. The image of a bank, and its stone steps: to an eight-year old boy they spoke of order and stability, despite the chaos of destruction. What happened to the bank I wondered, did it survive the explosion?

It must have been during the school holidays, this Sunday night when I heard about Hiroshima on the radio, because rather than sending me to school the next day, my mother took me shopping with her in the city. I remember that it was a cool, windy winter's day, and that I gripped her hand as tight as I could as we made our way around the drafty streets. The reason I held on so tightly to my mother's hand was because that morning, I'd woken up terrified, terrified that Sydney would be atom-bombed just like Hiroshima, and that we would turn into shadows too, just like the man outside the bank. I don't think I said anything to my mother about these thoughts. I was too terrified to even speak about what I'd heard the night before, lest speaking about it made it come true. So I just bottled up my fear and looked up at the faces of one passerby after another, wondering if they were all going to burn in a nuclear holocaust like the people of Hiroshima.

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At a quarter to three in the morning of 6 August 1945, the B-29 bomber *Enola Gay* took off from an airfield at the north end of Tinian island in the western Pacific. Tinian, previously occupied by Japan, had been invaded by the Americans a year earlier and after a brief but vicious battle during which about four thousand Japanese civilians were killed while most of the nine thousand malnourished Japanese defenders fought to the death—as they did right across the Pacific—the island fell to the invaders. *Enola Gay's* mission was probably the most Freudian of military operations ever conducted: the previous day Army Air Force Colonel Paul Tibbets, the aircraft's captain, had officially named the plane after his mother. Now he was flying her towards Japan to drop an atomic bomb, with the code-name Little Boy, on a city of more than a quarter of a million people. At 8.15 am *Enola Gay* would be over central Hiroshima, and she would let go of her little boy, and he would show her what he could do. Flying in triangular formation, *Enola Gay* was accompanied by two other B-29s: an as yet unnamed plane, Number 91, which would later be called *Necessary Evil*, and a plane called *The Great Artiste*, after its navigator Kermit

Beahan, known as one of the most talented bomb aimers in the air force. Unlike *Enola Gay* with its large, very expensive single bomb, the two other planes carried only recording and observation equipment.

Sigmund Freud had died in London five years earlier, but I can't help thinking that had he still been alive he would have had something to say about the Americans' choice of names for their weapons of mass destruction. However, another of the great theorists of modernity, Theodor Adorno, was still around to comment, though he had much more to say about Auschwitz as the paradoxical product of the Enlightenment than he did about Hiroshima. Even so, Adorno and his co-author Max Horkheimer had captured the spirit of the naming of *Enola Gay* and her destructive little boy quite perfectly in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, when they noted how Americans needed to deny the weight of history invoked by the European use of family names, preferring to playfully refer to each other, no matter how serious the occasion, as Bob or Harry, just like members of a sporting team. Twenty years later Stanley Kubrick would write 'Hi There' and 'Dear John' on the atomic bombs that triggered the catastrophic climax of *Doctor Strangelove* but, as puerile as these tags were, they still failed to surpass the reality of Little Boy and his partner Fat Man, who destroyed Nagasaki three days after Hiroshima.

As with much of the public face of American imperialism in the twentieth century, the homely sentimentalism of the name *Enola Gay* helped mask the ruthlessly instrumental nature of the task at hand, an atom bomb raid. The *Enola Gay* may have evoked mom's apple pie but she was in fact, to use W.G. Sebald's term, the most technologically advanced mobile death factory in existence in 1945. The Boeing Corporation of Seattle had begun design work in 1938 on the high altitude heavy bomber that would become the B-29, also known as the Superfortress. The company had already impressed the Army Air Corps purchase chiefs with their B-17, which was to become the principal American bombing aircraft of the early 1940s, but the B-29, the prototype of which first flew in 1942, was an even greater leap forward in heavy aircraft technology. It had a crew of eleven, could carry a 9,000-kilo bomb load, and its machine gun defence systems were automated, controlled by analogue computers and operated from inside the plane. It was also designed to fly at high altitude, at a level above the operational height and effectiveness of most enemy fighter planes and anti-aircraft guns. For this reason the interior of the

aircraft was pressurised, enabling the crew to move around without oxygen masks. In a giant economy of scale, four separate production plants were set up in Washington, Kansas, Georgia and Nebraska to build individual aircraft, with components coming in from thousands of smaller subcontractors across the country. Having built over four thousand B-29s by the time production ceased in 1946, Boeing realised America's nationwide technological dream in a way Henry Ford had only imagined. Meanwhile, the research and experience the company gained from producing the heavy bomber went straight into the civilian version of the same aircraft, the Stratocruiser, which began rolling off the production lines in 1946, setting up Boeing to dominate world passenger aircraft manufacture for the rest of the century.

Enola Gay, production number 44-86292, was one of fifteen B-29s from Boeing's Nebraska factory given the codename *Silverplate* and modified in a batch set so as to be able to carry an atomic bomb. To the puzzlement of the uninformed production line workers, the aircraft bomb bays were enlarged to take just one very big bomb, and the automated defence systems were removed to make the aircraft lighter. Then they were shipped out to Tinian, to the Army Air Force's elite 509th Composite Group, commanded by Colonel Paul Tibbets.

Tibbets had the reputation of being 'the best flyer in the Army Air Force'. He was thirty years old, a career air corps officer, and had been obsessed with flying since, as a twelve year old in Florida, he'd thrown Baby Ruth candy bars from a biplane to a crowd at a racetrack as part of an advertising stunt. In 1942 he had flown the lead B-17 in the first American bombing raid on Germany, and he had also served as personal pilot for the American European Commander in Chief, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

During June 1945 Tibbets took the crews of his Tinian bomb group through a series of special training missions and bombing raids on small Japanese targets so as to familiarise them with the country's weather and terrain; by the end of July they were ready to strike a selected group of Japanese cities with atomic bombs. When the order came through on 2 August for the attack on 6 August, Tibbets decided to lead the mission himself and picked out the B-29 commanded by Captain Robert Lewis as the instrument he would use to attack Hiroshima. B-29 crews were extremely covetous of their aircraft—after all their lives depended on them—and

Lewis was furious when he arrived at the airfield and saw what had hitherto been his plane decorated with the name of the commanding officer's mother. But there was nothing Lewis could do, orders were orders. At least, for posterity's sake, the sober and conservative Tibbets had only written his mom's name on the aircraft. Most B-29s, with names like *Dinah Might*, *Witchita Witch* and *Heavenly Body*, featured crass illustrations of semi-naked supine woman. No doubt the theatrics of 6 August 1945 would have been decidedly less homely if it had been *Humpin Honey* or *Lil Organ Annie*, rather than *Enola Gay*, who had delivered Little Boy to his date with destiny.

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Enola Gay was preceded by a couple of hours over Hiroshima by another 509th B-29, *Straight Flush*, scouting the weather in the area of the target. Two other aircraft did likewise over Kokura and Nagasaki, the backup targets for 6 August. Orders were that under no circumstances could the bomb be dropped without a visual sight of the target, so as to minimise the risk of missing the city altogether and wasting a weapon that had taken the Manhattan Project's thirteen thousand workers, two billion taxpayer's dollars and three years to create. But *Straight Flush* reported that Hiroshima was free of cloud that summer morning, and from out over the Pacific *Enola Gay* began her run in to the primary target. Little did the residents of the city of Kokura know how much they owed the weather gods, for even light cloud cover would have seen Tibbets and his crew head towards Kokura instead, leaving Hiroshima an unmolested middle-sized city which nobody outside Japan would ever hear of.

Incredibly, it was cloudy over Kokura again on 9 August, the date set for the dropping of the second atomic bomb. So the plane that had set out for the city that morning, *Bocks Car*, under the command of Major Charles Sweeney (who, like Tibbets, had commandeered the aircraft from its original commander Captain Frederick Bock, forcing him in turn to commandeer *The Great Artiste* as one of the mission's two observation planes) flew on to Nagasaki after failing to see any of Kokura through the clouds below. Nagasaki was cloudy that morning too, but by the time *Bocks Car* arrived overhead Sweeney and his crew had used up so much fuel flying around looking for a suitable target that they would have been unable to make

it back to any Pacific island with an American airbase without jettisoning the heavy bulk of Fat Man. So they decided, against orders, to drop it over the city using radar-guided targeting, which seemed a far more productive thing to do than simply dropping it into the sea. In fact, Fat Man missed its central Nagasaki target by five kilometres, saving the lives of tens of thousands of people and meaning that this second, much more powerful bomb actually did far less damage to Nagasaki than the smaller Little Boy did to Hiroshima. With clear skies over Hiroshima three days earlier, *Enola Gay's* bombardier had experienced no such problems finding his ground zero in the centre of the city, the three-way Aioi Bridge which joined the northern end of the Nakajima district to the banks of the Ota River tributaries on either side of it. Little Boy missed its target by only two hundred metres, which, in the days before smart bombs, was considered a direct hit, and it exploded as required, six hundred metres directly above the Shima Medical Clinic.

Within a few years, once all the facts were known, the expression 'the luck of Kokura' would enter the Japanese vernacular as an illustration of uncanny good fortune. The Manhattan Project's target committee had initially selected Kyoto, Hiroshima, Yokohama and Kokura as the target cities, the primary criterion being a densely packed urban area with a radius of at least five kilometres, so as to maximise destruction, with surrounding hills to focus the blast being a desirable bonus. Both the target committee and the Manhattan Project Chief General Leslie Groves pushed hard for Kyoto as the primary target, but the Secretary for War, Henry Stimson, had honeymooned there, loved it, and so vetoed the city on the grounds of its cultural significance. Eventually a new list consisting of Hiroshima, Kokura, Nagasaki and Niigata was drawn up, and those four cities were in turn quarantined from the firebombing raids the rest of the B-29 fleets were carrying out across Japan (indeed, the firebombing of Tokyo one night in March 1945 killed more people than those killed by the initial explosion of Little Boy). Hiroshima had been nominated as the primary target on the final list because it was the only one of the cities that didn't have a prisoner of war camp. Not that the presence of American, British and Australian prisoners in a target city was enough to negate the rationale of the overall enterprise, it just pushed those cities down the list.

But in August 1945, despite the fact that it was not being regularly bombed, Hiroshima was still a city at Total War. Hiroshima had been an important military

town since the middle of the nineteenth century, headquarters of both the 5th Infantry Division and the Army transport division, and serving as Imperial General Headquarters in the first war against China in 1894. In 1937 Mitsubishi had established a naval shipbuilding yard in the port area, and early in 1945, with an American invasion of the home islands expected (and indeed planned) for later that year, Hiroshima Castle had been selected as the headquarters of the entire southern Japan military district. Men of the 5th Infantry from Hiroshima had been involved in all of Japan's key military adventures over the previous decades, including the occupation of Korea in 1910 and the massacres in and destruction of Nanking in China in 1937. In early 1942 they had landed in Malaya and driven the British and Australian defenders down the peninsula and into Singapore, eventually capturing the city-state and condemning the eighteen thousand men of the 8th Australian Division to captivity, starvation and death by slave labour. In August 1945 the bulk of the men of Hiroshima's 5th Infantry were still on the Australian frontline of the Pacific War, occupying Timor, Flores and West Papua. Isolated and cut-off, most 5th Infantry men would actually survive the war, though after Little Boy they would find that they had nothing, and no one, left to go back to.

Earlier, after the annexation of Korea in 1910 and as a direct product of the 5th Infantry Division's work, a steady stream of economic migrants from the Hiroshima district went to seek their fortunes across the Sea of Japan on the Korean peninsula. When the tide of the Pacific War began to turn against Japan this exodus was reciprocated, with thousands of conscripted Chinese and Korean men and women transported to Hiroshima and forced to work on various war-related projects around the city. They were still there in August 1945, many of them working out in the open, when *Enola Gay* appeared in the sky above.

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'My God, what have we done?' asked a fellow crew member of Cold War warrior Robert Taylor (famous for denouncing Hollywood communists to the McCarthy witch hunt), as they sat in *Enola Gay* and watched the mushroom cloud rise over Hiroshima in the 1952 Hollywood version of the Paul Tibbets story, *Above and Beyond*. This was a far more prosaic response than that of the intellectual Robert Oppenheimer's quotation from the *Bhagavad Gita* when Trinity, the Manhattan

Project's first bomb, had exploded in New Mexico in July: 'Now I am become death, destroyer of worlds'. On the ground in Hiroshima, a boy who survived the catastrophe recalled how at 8.15 am:

A dragonfly flitted in front of me and stopped on a fence.
I stood up, took my cap in my hands,
And was about to catch the dragonfly when...

Forty minutes after the explosion, by which time *Enola Gay*, *The Great Artiste* and *Number 91* were on their way back to Tinian, the mushroom cloud was still rising. Approximately three hundred and fifty thousand people were directly exposed to the explosion, with about ninety thousand dying in the instant of the flash. Eighty-five per cent of Hiroshima's buildings were within a three-kilometre radius of ground zero, and of these ninety per cent were destroyed. Briefly, the ground temperature reached two thousand degrees; roof tiles melted, and quartz crystals burst out of granite surfaces. Many people simply disappeared, scorched to nothing in the intense heat. Thousands survived but were so terribly burnt they threw themselves into the river to drown. And there were even some, as the American journalist John Hershey noted in his classic account *Hiroshima*, those who had looked directly at the flash, who found that their eyeballs had melted and run as liquid down their cheeks.

Hiroshima's military administrators had been expecting destruction from the sky, even though they no idea of the form in which it was actually coming. So by August 1945 civil defence works designed to help Hiroshima cope with the expected firebombing, like that being rained on most of the nation's other cities, were well under way. The Nakajimi district, next to the Aioi Bridge and directly under the explosion, was filled that morning with hundreds of school children forced into digging an air raid firebreak. Over the previous year thousands of working-class people living near industrial and military sites had been evicted from their homes so that they could be demolished to create firebreaks. In fact, the manic demolition and digging going on all over the city ensured there were thousands more people than would normally be the case outside and exposed at 8.15 in the morning when Little Boy exploded. On the other hand, twenty thousand younger school children

evacuated to the surrounding countryside in the previous months suddenly found themselves orphans.

Within hours of the explosion, thousands of Hiroshimans were scouring the wreckage of homes and workplaces for lost loved ones, digging up-all-too-recognisable watches stopped at 8.15, along with school bags, wallets, belt buckles, shoes and all manner of other solid personal items that had survived the blast even though their owners had not. But within a few days, many of these survivors found that, despite having lived through the blast, they were covered in ulcers, their hair was falling out, they were bleeding from the gums, they were covered in purple blotches (a form of bleeding under the skin), or that their intestines were bleeding uncontrollably. By the end of the year, another fifty to sixty thousand people who had initially survived the explosion of Little Boy had died of 'atom bomb sickness'.

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'What did Hiroshima mean to you', he asks her?

'The end of the war', she says.

'The whole world rejoiced,' he says, 'and you rejoiced with them. It was a lovely summer's day in Paris, or so I've heard.'

In 1959 the French New Wave filmmaker Alain Resnais went to Hiroshima to make a film about a brief, anguished affair between a diffident French actress and an elegant Japanese man, an architect who was rebuilding the ruined city. In black and white and generally under lit, and with a script by Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is one of the most haunting films ever made. 1959 saw the highpoint of modernist cinema, and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* shared the world's screens with Godard's *À Bout de Souffle*, Antonioni's *L'Avventura* and Hitchcock's *North By Northwest*. Cinema would never see another year like it.

One of the most dramatically transformative effects of the experience of modernity was the creation of a transnational global culture within which products like novels, plays and films, while still made up of elements peculiar to an individual cultural history and style, also came to speak a language understood around the world. Thus in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, the apocalypse brought about by *Enola Gay* is contrasted with one woman's personal experience of the end of the world in rural

France during another period of the war, with an existential temper of suffering the prevailing mood of both of these tragedies, one very public, the other very personal.

‘What did Hiroshima mean to you’ he asks, not ‘let me tell you something about Hiroshima’, because by this point, a decade and a half after the blast, Hiroshima did indeed *mean* something for most people, regardless of place or personal history. *Enola Gay* had plucked Hiroshima from obscurity on the south west coast of Honshu and dropped it onto the world stage, the city’s place in global history now re-imagined, together with Auschwitz, as the site at which the Enlightenment had inverted itself, the ground zero at which two centuries of scientific striving and so-called progress had now imploded.

One of the greatest of ironies in this perpetually ironic story is that while the destruction of Hiroshima was the climax of the experience of modernity, modernity had been something that, over the previous few decades, Hiroshima, like most of urban Japan, could barely get enough of. Japan had begun the process of modernisation and industrialisation a century after Britain and half a century after the United States but, through a combination of militarism and consumerism, had embraced it with at least as much enthusiasm as the rival world powers. And Hiroshima was at the forefront of this embrace: while the city was a key site for both military administration and weapons production, it was also one of Japan’s most ‘Westernised’ cities. By 1937 the Hondori district, a few hundred metres to the east of what would be ground zero, was one of the most important entertainment districts in the country, a dozen or so square blocks that were home to more than one hundred and twenty movie theatres, music halls, cafes, restaurants and shops, which drew crowds from all over the surrounding region.

The most visibly striking demonstration of Hiroshima’s modernity was the city’s most stylish building, the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall, designed by a Czech architect, Jan Letzel, and opened in 1915. Letzel was part of the Czech modernist movement that developed at the end of the nineteenth century, and the Hiroshima Prefectural Hall, a fusion of late Art Nouveau and early Art Deco, was one of fifteen buildings he designed and built in Japan between 1913 and 1923. With its concrete-encased steel skeleton and prominent green dome, the solid but graceful lines of the Prefectural Hall literally embodied modern Japan, as did the building’s everyday use: the bureaucrat-led promotion of the manufacturing

industries of the Hiroshima Prefecture. Ill and chronically depressed by the results of the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923, which had prompted his leaving Japan, Letzel died two years after his return to Prague and so didn't live to see the impact on his beautiful building of the great human-instigated eruption of 1945. Yet it was the confidently modern steel, brick and concrete form of the Prefectural Hall that, despite the fact that it sat almost directly on the site of ground zero, allowed the Hall's structure to survive the blast right above it, even if the same can't be said for all the public servants inside at the time of the blast. When the rebuilding of the city began the decision was taken to preserve the ruined building and the skeleton of its dome as a sign (a complex one; in terms of C.S. Peirce's semiotics, simultaneously icon, index and symbol) of all that had gone on in that horrific split-second.

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So, what did Hiroshima mean to me? From the night I heard about the shadow of the man on the steps, my atomic anxiety grew and grew. It reached the point where, by the time I was ten or eleven, I had become utterly convinced that my world would end in a nuclear holocaust. Many mornings I'd wake and walk out the back of our house and look up and nervously wonder if today was the day on which we would all burn. Often, as I stared at the blue morning sky, I was sure that the flash would burst at any moment, a sensation that came back to me in all its gorgeous horror many years later as I watched Sarah Connor turn into a skeleton while clutching the rails of a park fence during the apocalypse at the centre of the film *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

It turned out though that as the years went by, as I grew older, I found many more immediate crises into which to channel my seemingly limitless supply of anxiety, and my fear of nuclear apocalypse faded into the background. But at the same time, I was also aware of a persistent desire to see the centre of it all, to catch a bullet train down from Tokyo, get off at Hiroshima station, and wander among the ruins of the modern world. Meanwhile, out in the real world, the figurative image of the man's shadow printed onto the concrete steps became, together with the twisted girders of the Atomic Dome, one of popular culture's most enduring signifiers of this, one of the twentieth century's truly great catastrophes.

Recently, on what was in fact my sixth or seventh visit to Japan, I stared out the carriage window at the larger-than-life image of Mt Fuji as the train hammered along at three hundred kilometres an hour towards the other end of Honshu. Why had it taken me this long to make this trip? Five hours from Tokyo Central, and after a quick change at Osaka, there I was, waiting for a tram to take me into the centre of Hiroshima. And, just like the French Canadian dramatist Robert Lepage who created an epic theatre piece about the bombing of Hiroshima called *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, where I had expected to find devastation I found instead 'a place full of vitality and sensuality'. Because apart from the now institutionalised ruin of Jan Letzel's Prefectural Hall, there are no ruins anymore: the Nakajima district, where the school children all died digging the air raid firebreak, is now a grass-covered park; the Hondori entertainment district is again packed with bars and restaurants and shops and just as vibrant as the heady days of the 1930s; Hiroshima Castle, once the Army headquarters and totally obliterated in the blast, has been rebuilt down to the last detail and now houses a museum of Samurai armour.

It was a perfect winter morning. Across from the ruined atomic dome I bought a hot can of tea from a vending machine and sat down on the concrete steps of the riverbank. I stared up into the crisp, clear sky and tried to visualise *Enola Gay* overhead. Instead, high up, the silver shape of an airliner was passing, trailing vapour. I looked at the river and tried to imagine it filled with burned bodies bumping into each other amidst the flailing, floundering arms of the drowning, but it just wasn't possible to conjure the image, or hear the cries. I tried to imagine the flat desert of ground zero all around me, but all I could see was green grass, and concrete, tile and glass buildings.

I finished my tea and walked through the gardens to the museum, stopping to ring the peace bell on the way. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, at the base of the park built on the ruins of the Nakajima district, was one of the first major buildings of the reconstruction. Like many significant twentieth-century structures it was the outcome of an international design competition, won, not surprisingly perhaps, by the Japanese modernist Kenzo Tange, and it's as sublime a piece of urban Brutalism as anything dreamt up by Le Corbusier or Oscar Niemeyer. Within its angular concrete form are gathered the earthly remains of the previous incarnation of the city of Hiroshima: the stopped clocks, melted roof tiles, warped

statues of Buddha, liquefied bottles, shattered vases and crockery, fused rubber shoes, broken bricks and a disintegrating statue of Komon, the Goddess of Mercy. There's also the scorched, rotted tricycle and helmet of a small boy whose father, Shinihi Tetsutami, was so overcome with grief when he found the body of his son still attached to his little bike outside the ruins of their house, that he immediately dug a hole in the garden and buried boy and bike together. Forty years later he dug them up, put the boy's remains in an official grave, and donated the tricycle and helmet to the museum.

All of this, all this detritus of the modern world, I expected to see in the museum, because we've all already seen it, in books and photographs and on television, seen it all before. Yet, there was one thing I truly never expected to see, and that was the actual stone steps of the entrance to the Sumitomo Bank, removed from the ruins of the building and placed, in the most reverential way our godless society now knows, inside the glass case of the museum, the one place where we unbelievers still gather in awe and admiration. And as always, it turns out the story is never exactly as imagined, as it now seems that the shadow that is still imprinted on those old stone steps, the shadow that has haunted me for most of my life, isn't that of a man at all. Because recently a woman has come forward to claim that the shadow is actually that of her mother, Mitsuno Ochi, who was forty-two years old when she sat down outside the bank that bright blue morning in August 1945.

Yet of all the artefacts and remnants and remains of 6 August 1945, for me the most moving are the pictures, on display in the museum, taken by Tomoko Kashihara, a photographer with the *Chugoku Shimbun* newspaper. Having survived the blast, Kashihara saw it as his duty to document what had happened, though in the course of the day he ended up only taking five pictures because, as he put it, each time he tried to take a photo the camera's viewfinder became so clouded with tears that he had to stop. He managed to take his third photo around 2.00 pm, and it shows his wife, wearing an air raid helmet and gathering together her equipment and utensils in the shattered remains of the small hairdressing salon she ran in their home, about three kilometres from ground zero. It's six hours after Little Boy exploded, and already this woman is struggling to get her life back into some kind of order. Later, after everyone's hair grew back, she would be able to open her salon again.

Lindsay Barrett is a member of the Writing and Society Research Group at the University of Western Sydney. He has the distinction of having had funding for his research vetoed by the former Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, on the grounds that it was not in the national interest.

—NOTES ON SOURCES:

Page 1: The photograph of Australian soldiers playing football with British sailors in Hiroshima is held in the photographic archives of the Australian War Memorial. It can be found at:

<<http://cas.awm.gov.au/item/P05210.001>>.

Page 5: 'the best flyer in the Army Air Force', Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Victors*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1998, p. 40.

Page 8: 'A dragonfly flitted in front of me ...'. Testimony of a boy who survived the explosion, drawn from information displayed at the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Museum.

Page 10: 'What did Hiroshima mean to you?' Dialogue from the film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, directed by Alain Resnais, 1959.

Page 14: 'recently a woman has come forward to claim that the shadow is that of her mother...'. This information is displayed in the information panel accompanying the exhibition of the steps at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

Like the two quotes above, the information detailing the destruction of Hiroshima quoted in this essay was obtained from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Other sources drawn on in the text are:

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Michael D. Gordon, *Five Days in August*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007.

John Hershey, *Hiroshima*, Penguin, London, 1985.

Tomiko Kashihara and Yoshito Matsushige, *A Viewfinder Clouded with Tears*, Gyosei Corporation, Tokyo, 2003.

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