

**Re-Elevation Through Exposure:**  
**How Shomei Tomatsu's Photographs Convey and Heal Individual Trauma of the World**  
**War**

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## Abstract

In 1950, Shomei Tomatsu, just emerging from his teenage years, took up photography through a club at Aichi University. Since then, he has been celebrated for being one of the first to capture the lingering, often penetrating, effects of the Pacific War, and the impressions that the American occupation was leaving on Japan. Curiously, Leo Rubinfiel in one of Tomatsu's retrospectives, *Skin of the Nation*, commented, "Perhaps...the shattering of Japan was also the shattering of Tomatsu himself, and it was himself he had to re-create, just as the cities had to re-create themselves..."<sup>1</sup> This interpretation remarkably introduced the idea of Tomatsu's works as being artifacts of his individual identity, rather than of Japan as a whole. To probe more deeply into this possibility, this paper will address the formalistic aspects of two of his photographs from a psychological perspective. More specifically, exploring the post-traumatic mechanisms of reenactment and fusion will facilitate a discussion of how his adolescence came to leave a significant impression on his later works; and how photography perhaps granted him an opportunity to visualize and work through his past that was marked with violence and deprivation. Interestingly enough, Tomatsu's later body of photographs became imbued with colors that had been entirely missing in his past works, such as those discussed in this paper. It is therefore intriguing to entertain the possibility that photography, by allowing for the working through of trauma, (re)elevated Tomatsu to the world of color and life.

## Introduction

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<sup>1</sup> Rubinfiel, "Shomei Tomatsu," 39. *Skin of the Nation* additionally contains numerous essays written by art historians and essayists, giving a comprehensive background of Shomei Tomatsu and his works.

On August 15, 1945, Japanese civilians clustered around their local radios to hear their Emperor's voice for the first time. At noon, Emperor Hirohito made his "Jewel Voice Broadcast," declaring their nation's complete surrender to the Allied Forces. In a dialect far different from that of the common people, he announced the American use of "a new and most cruel bomb" on their land and the subsequent disarmament of Japanese troops.<sup>2</sup> Substituting the word "surrender" with the phrase "the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come," he delivered the speech that urged his subjects to endure the unendurable.<sup>3</sup> Fifteen days had passed, and Douglas MacArthur arrived at the Atsugi airfield as the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers. For the first time in its history, Japan, which had constructed and once embraced the imperialist idea of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, was to be ruled by a foreign power.<sup>4</sup>

Shomei Tomatsu was merely 11 years old in 1941, when Japan first declared the War after its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and other Allies' colonies. When Tomatsu was 15, the War was in its final stretch, and his hometown, Nagoya, became the target of constant firebombing. In witnessing these acts of violence and the Emperor's consequent announcement of Japanese defeat, Tomatsu wrote of his reaction in his essay, "Occupation (*Senryo*)":

To a junior-high-school student who had no direct involvement in the Pacific War, the defeat brought neither sorrow nor joy. Impassive, I paid little attention to the Imperial Broadcast and, leaving the adults' despair and dismay behind, I ran outside the house. I felt as if I myself was the towering, transparent August sky.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hirohito, *The Jewel Voice Broadcast*. Translated by the Atomic Heritage Foundation. & Dower, *Embracing Defeat*.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Yellen, *When Total Empire Met Total War*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Tomatsu, "Occupation (*Senryo*)."<sup>5</sup> Translated version found in *Chewing Gum and Chocolate*.

Tomatsu was denied a voice, and the traumatic strain the war had on his young psyche seems to have precipitated a numbness, indifference, and the “beliefless-ness” he went on to describe.

In 1950, Tomatsu took up photography through a club at Aichi University. Up until and during this time, Japan’s postwar landscape was crowded with “demoralized ex-soldiers, war widows, orphans, the homeless and unemployed – most of them preoccupied with simply staving off hunger,” leading to widespread theft and expansion of the black-market economy.<sup>6</sup> Amidst this culture marked by inflation, starvation, and corruption stood Tomatsu, whose adolescence was made more distressing by the fact that he was often left without parental care to scramble for survival. In his interview with Linda Hoaglund, Tomatsu explained how he had become a juvenile delinquent after his family had been evacuated, leaving him without parental supervision.<sup>7</sup>

While his postwar experiences were characterized by deprivation, he also described a sense of relief bestowed upon the country by the newly introduced occupation army that distributed food and vaccinated the Japanese.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, this did not negate the scarcity that nevertheless prevailed; a sense of normality for the lower- and middle-class families did not begin to return until the 1950s.<sup>9</sup> Even then, this new “normal” proved to be drastically different from that of the pre-war era with the overwhelming presence and dissemination of American political and popular cultures brought by MacArthur and his armies.

It was this society, suspended in cultural disorientation and destitution, that Tomatsu captured. Through his series *Memory of War, Toyokawa, Aichi* (1959), *Disabled Veterans, Nagoya* (1952), and *Protest, Tokyo* (1969), he shared his perspectives on both the physical and

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<sup>6</sup> Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 48.

<sup>7</sup> Tomatsu, “My Approach to Health.” Translated version found in *Skin of the Nation*.

<sup>8</sup> Tomatsu, “Occupation.” Translated version found in *Chewing Gum and Chocolate*.

<sup>9</sup> Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 98.

psychological, dynamic and stagnant landscapes of the post-war country. Leo Rubinfién commented on a retrospective of Tomatsu, *Skin of the Nation*, saying, “Perhaps...the shattering of Japan was also the shattering of Tomatsu himself, and it was himself he had to re-create, just as the cities had to re-create themselves...”<sup>10</sup> This interpretation remarkably introduced the idea of Tomatsu’s works as being artifacts of his individual identity, rather than of Japan as a whole.

Given the well-established connections between photography and psychoanalysis, and the childhood trauma Tomatsu experienced, selected studies from the field of psychology and his personal accounts reveal valuable and hidden insights to his works. More specifically, following Freud’s idea of trauma as something that “[sets] in motion every possible defensive measure,” I will focus on the psychological processes of reenactment and fusion as possible mechanisms that Tomatsu employs through the creation of two particular works.<sup>11</sup> The first section of the paper, “Mirrors of Trauma,” discusses how *Untitled* [Iwakuni] is composed of elements made significant through mirroring that work to ultimately echo his childhood memory of war. The subsequent section, “Fusion and Reliving,” explores the phenomenon of identity fusion occurring in *Untitled* [Sasebo]. Collectively, the paper aims to unveil the adolescent trauma permeating Tomatsu’s postwar works.

### Section I: Mirrors of Trauma

A helpless witness to the destruction of his country, Tomatsu recalls his experiences of laying in his bed, with a mirror propped up in such a way that reflected the B-29 bombers crowding overhead, or “a feast of metallic beauty” as Tomatsu put it.<sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> While his nonchalant

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<sup>10</sup> Rubinfién, “Shomei Tomatsu,” 39.

<sup>11</sup> Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” 29.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey, “Shomei Tomatsu.” Jeffrey translates what Tomatsu had written in his memoirs.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

admiration in the face of violence may initially seem sardonic, it unveils the defenselessness and numbness he experienced at the time, and the resultant trauma that influenced his work.

*Chewing Gum and Chocolate*, which is a reference to the treats that the American soldiers gifted to Japanese children, became one of his most well-known series of works.

*Untitled [Iwakuni]* from the series, taken in 1960, depicts occupation soldiers who look down at the camera, while a large shadow of a foot perpetually threatens to trample the viewer. With the two soldiers whose only faces are fully captured and made almost identical, the shoe further acts as a vague line of symmetry. This mirroring of the soldiers initially strips them of their respective identities and mimics Tomatsu's view of Americans as threateningly unitary. The significance of this doubling will be elaborated throughout this section. Flanking the sides of the photograph are two cropped faces that deprives Tomatsu of an opportunity for escape; their presence leads to a sense of suffocation and stuckness.



Figure 1: Shomei Tomatsu, *Untitled* [Iwakuni], from the series *Chewing Gum and Chocolate*, 1960, printed 1983, 30.5 x 21.9 cm, gelatin silver print.

After being overtaken by the hostility spurred by the subjects of the photograph, I am led to imagine Tomatsu's body rigidly resting on the street with his back flat against the cold asphalt surface. This vision of Tomatsu, in combination with the threat of the shoe's forceful descent, next guides me to an image of a corpse of a civilian. On the other hand, it also leads to an image of young Tomatsu laying down on his bed, watching the spectacles of B-29 bombers made double through his mirror. Just as he had done before, he once again lies beneath the threats of the foreigners, only this time pressing his shutter. Interestingly, this perspective from beneath was echoed in different corners of the nation. In a political cartoon titled *A Gift from Heaven*, Etsuro Kato from *The Japan Times* illustrates canisters that parachute down the landscape filled with outstretched arms and necks of the Japanese.<sup>14</sup> The canisters of democratization and promised reforms that are desperately welcomed inject the illustration with a strong sense of irony. After pointing to this illustration, John W. Dower further comments on how "The most effective 'gifts from heaven' purveyed by occupation troops were often the simplest: sweets, cigarettes, and chewing gum...".<sup>15</sup> Dower accordingly points to a photograph taken of a GI on top of his jeep passing out candy to the Japanese children who hold out their arms, mirroring the civilians illustrated in Kato's cartoon. Regardless of whether it were the bombers, the dubious promise of democracy, candy, or the soles of boots and humiliating grins that rained down, the figurative position of Japanese civilians laying, awaiting for action to be done onto them apparently solidified as a part of the country's landscape.

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<sup>14</sup> Kato, "A Gift from Heaven." This cartoon was included in *Embracing Defeat* by Dower in the chapter, "Gifts from Heaven." Here, Dower utilizes the symbolic positioning of Japanese civilians underneath the shadows of American forces.

<sup>15</sup> Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 72.



Figure 2: Etsuro Kato, *A Gift from Heaven*, 1946

Returning to Tomatsu, the two scenes of his life merge to present a formidable sense of helplessness and humiliation. They exemplify how his photographs came to be the carrier of his adolescent trauma, regardless of whether they occurred consciously or unconsciously. In discussing the dimensions of trauma, Dylan Trigg borrows the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to philosophize that, rather than the past being a passive retention of the body, “a past becomes actualized when the body performs specific actions peculiar to that past, conferring a sense of spatial and temporal unity in the present.”<sup>16</sup> Time and space collapse together through Tomatsu’s reenactment via either conscious or unconscious muscle memory in which “movement in space entwines with the past.”<sup>17</sup> Absorbed into the corpuscles of his body is his past suffering that remains alive and breathing in the form of trauma. The third image of Tomatsu emulating a position of a dead civilian further echoes that of the death of the “psychic activity of the

<sup>16</sup> Trigg, “The Place of Trauma,” 90.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

traumatized self” that Werner Bohleber explains.<sup>18</sup> It is “often described as a sensation that a part of the self has been left behind and stays more or less the same because it can no longer be exposed to life.”<sup>19</sup> This traumatized self is maintained inert, and should notably be distinguished from Merleau-Ponty’s conception of a past that remains alive. The inertness is physicalized and manifested in the two parallel scenes of Tomatsu laying down, paralyzed and consuming the traumatizing force that continues to deprive the life of the already lifeless. This physical paralysis moreover mirrors the psychological paralysis that his childhood had triggered and that he discussed in his interview with Hoaglund:

...once a thorn is caught in your throat, inevitably it will remain lodged there. No doubt the subject of one’s interest varies, depending on the individual. In my case, the defining memories from my youth are of the American bases and the various encounters I had with people from the Occupation forces. So in that sense, the depth of my interest... for the novelist, it would be the story he writes, over and over; for the painter, the portrait he paints repeatedly; as a photographer, it is the subject I continue to photograph. That’s what it boils down to, really.<sup>20</sup>

Tomatsu then ingeniously proceeds to allow the audience to experience this paralysis themselves through the doubling of the soldiers. When discussing the depictions of *doppelgänger*s in “Bauhaus Double Portraits”, Karen Koehler writes, “When the likeness is repeated, the distraction is also momentarily resisted: the doubled figure requires the second look, and that grabbing of recognition a second time demands to be won from the distracted gaze.”<sup>21</sup> Koehler continues and explains the Freudian idea of the *Doppelgänger* being the exemplar of the

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<sup>18</sup> Bohleber, “Remembrance, Trauma and Collective Memory,” 342.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Hoaglund, “Interview with Tomatsu Shomei,” 850.

<sup>21</sup> Koehler, “Bauhaus Bodies,” 270.

uncanny; Dimitris Vardoulakis further describes this existence of duplicates to be an “interruption.”<sup>22</sup> The psychological effect of the duplicated and mirrored soldiers on the audience is not only paralyzing, but also nauseating and horrifying, mimicking the experience of traumatization. Tomatsu elicits in the audience a transient, yet duplicate sense of internal chaos and perplexion, and the inevitable infatuation that he had felt towards the occupation soldiers. The mirroring of the soldiers in combination with the duplication of Tomatsu’s positioning creates a sense of infinite rebound between Tomatsu’s childhood, his adulthood, and the audience, revealing the layers of permeating trauma that makes this photograph possible.

Furthering this sense of Droste effect of perpetual reflections and the similarities between the two scenes of his life is the presence of a wall of distortive reflection. Namely, the mirror and the camera respectively act as a mediator between Tomatsu and violence in both cases. These apparatuses similarly work to double the catalyst of trauma: the mirror doubles the image of the B-29 bombers, and the camera allows for the illusion of the cloned soldiers while accomplishing its apparent function of producing and multiplying a two-dimensional image of reality. While they seem to crowd the world with multiplied numbers of the traumatizing forces, the duplicates they create are merely impressions of reality. Therefore, both could be understood as a barricade or a form of self-preservation from trauma purposefully placed by Tomatsu. In his essay, “Toward a Chaotic Sea,” Tomatsu writes: “I lost my belief in everything. The only things that I believed in were the things I could touch and the things that I saw with my own eyes.”<sup>23</sup> By allowing him to experience but not see, these devices possibly provided him with a space for denial of reality.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. & Vardoulakis, “The Return of Negation,” 100.

<sup>23</sup> Tomatsu, “Toward a Chaotic Sea,” 30

Josef Breuer, who is considered to be the father of psychotherapy, found that having patients re-experience traumatic events through hypnosis allowed for catharsis and consequent alleviation from trauma symptoms.<sup>24</sup> To expand on this psychological perspective and explore the trauma constituting the photograph, I hope to introduce the idea of “reenactment.” This phenomenon occurs when traumatized individuals “re-create and repetitively relive the trauma in their present lives” to varying degrees, and either consciously under a therapeutic setting or unconsciously. In describing “repetition compulsion”, Freud postulated that trauma victims who failed to integrate trauma were to “repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of...*remembering* it as something belonging to the past.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Bessel A. van der Kolk summarizes how Janet’s ideas “that traumatic memories of traumatic events persist as unassimilated fixed ideas that act as foci for the development of alternate states of consciousness, including dissociative phenomena” and how “Unbidden memories of the trauma may return as physical sensations, horrific images or nightmares, behavioral reenactments, or a combination of these.”<sup>26</sup> Consequently, Tomatsu’s recurring perspective from the below, and looking up into the sky of the foreign powers, may be considered a form of reenactment.

Is the reenactment Tomatsu performs through this photograph an adaptive and helpful mechanism? There is a point of divergence between the two scenes that could bring us closer in examining this possibility. While Tomatsu utilizes an apparatus in both cases as a form of protection, a mirror simply mirrors and transmits while a camera gifts Tomatsu with the ability to reflect back at the soldiers. The theoretical conceptions of photography as an act of aggression has long been established with Susan Sontag accordingly claiming, “To photograph people is to

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<sup>24</sup> Breuer & Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*.

<sup>25</sup> Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” 18.

<sup>26</sup> Van der Kolk, “The Compulsion to Repeat the Trauma,” 389. Van der Kolk summarizes the ideas found in Pierre Janet’s essay, “L’Automatisme Psychologique.”

violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder—a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time.”<sup>27</sup> The camera imbued with this violence directly contradicts the inherently passive nature of a mirror. In another perspective, mirrors can hypothetically harm through shattering, but this harm can only be done onto the one using the object, namely, the young Tomatsu. Therefore, there is an inherent and, in a sense, directly contradicting nature that constructs a camera and a mirror. With the camera, Tomatsu captures these soldiers with a willful press of the shutter to possess what had once possessed him, reclaiming a part of the sky that had once been completely dominated by America. While the lifeless part of his traumatized psyche that “stays more or less the same” lies flat on the ground mirroring his traumatized identity, it is perhaps through the aspects that remain “exposed to life” that Tomatsu holds onto his camera.<sup>28</sup> This camera is then allowing Tomatsu to possess a sense of authority that he was traumatically deprived of since childhood. Whether this possible power-acquisition that Tomatsu achieves is truly adaptive requires further exploration of the power dynamic constructed in the photograph.

Closer examination of the photograph reveals ambiguity as to who is holding how much power. The doubled soldiers who merely stand but evoke action through their demeaning expressions; the unidentified leg that dives down; and Tomatsu who captures the image all seem to be each given a sense of authority over one another. Emphasizing this triad of forces are the linear power lines that run overhead and design the trigonal composition. However, the ambiguity of the dynamic is emphasized through specific components. While Tomatsu needs the

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<sup>27</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Bohleber, “Remembrance, Trauma and Collective Memory,” 342.

camera to face the soldiers, the soldiers have the capacity to look at, even overtake, Tomatsu with their bare eyes. While the violently approaching leg additionally threatens to shatter the camera lens that is the source of Tomatsu's authority and identity, Tomatsu ultimately deactivates the leg's action first by paralyzing them through his shot. What is left is an overwhelming sense of intermediacy and suspension. Tomatsu is not given complete dominance over the soldiers, but neither are the soldiers; there is no complete imbalance of power on either side. It is through this ambiguous dynamic constructed by the reenactment that prevents the formation of a dangerous unilateral authority, and I suspect, allows Tomatsu to feel at greatest psychological comfort. Through his application of photography to his experience of reenactment and consequently the construction of a stabilized dynamic, Tomatsu, perhaps successfully, attempts to work through his helpless past.

The perspective from below the shadows of American power from his adolescence that reemerges in his later work echoes the traumatic construction of subservience and humiliation that Tomatsu witnessed and experienced. While some civilians saw the shadows of chocolates, chewing gums, and democracy falling from the sky, Tomatsu questions the ambiguity of what is truly being rained upon the nation that seems to be eternally stuck in the same position that dominated his adolescence. What makes the photograph even more noteworthy is that it embodies a number of reflective mirroring both formally and contextually, ultimately visualizing the process of psychological reenactment. In this process, the traumatized identity of Tomatsu is handed authority, whose weight, however, is not maximized but rather is left to rest at an extent to which Tomatsu can obtain peace. The horror, the helplessness, and the uncanny established by the American forces in both his childhood and the photograph are appeased by this very dynamic Tomatsu constructs through reenactment.

## Section II: Hypnosis, Fusion, and Reliving

*Chewing Gum and Chocolate* was originally named *Occupation* before being retitled.

This original title and the subsequent renaming suggests that under the veil of youthful innocence lurks a traumatic force, one that is capable of dominating and eradicating. It therefore seems valuable to examine one of the photographs in the series that depicts a child as a subject. In this section, I argue that through his portrayal of the child in *Untitled* [Iwakuni], Tomatsu attempts to “fuse” with the youth. In discussing trauma, psychologist Werner Bohleber writes:

In the traumatic situation, the person affected can often no longer maintain the boundaries between himself and the other. Overwhelming excitation and intense anxiety damage the sense of self and bring out a self-object fusion as the core of the traumatic experience, which is difficult to resolve and persistently impairs the sense of identity.<sup>29</sup>

While the previous section elaborated on the physical duplication of Tomatsu’s position and how this mirroring became the core of trauma, this section focuses on how Tomatsu duplicates himself through another identity.

*Untitled* [Iwakuni] captures a scene in which a baby lays on the back of a mother-figure, who is pressed against a wall and holds an expression that lies between struggle and resistance. The root of her stance and expression remain unclear; it seems most plausible that the woman was attempting to push through the barricade of two American sailors. These two sailors whose relatively large bodies cage the baby and its mother, additionally seem to usurp the Japanese crowd behind them. Just as the soldiers of *Untitled* [Iwakuni] had been, these sailors are twinned, inspiring anonymity and the previously discussed paralysis. At this very moment, no one but Tomatsu pays attention to the baby who frowns while tightly holding onto a wrapper. We are led

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<sup>29</sup> Bohleber, “Remembrance, Trauma and Collective Memory,” 342.

to predict that what the child is cramming into its small mouth is a chewing gum or a chocolate. The crowd's indifference towards the child and the mother is made purposeful with the sailors turning their heads to avoid even an accidental glance at this reversed pietà, and crossing their arms as if to protect themselves from the overflowing distress.



Figure 3: Shomei Tomatsu, *Untitled* [Sasebo], from the series *Chewing Gum and Chocolate*, 1966, gelatin silver print.

While this photograph was taken in 1966 – almost two decades after the Japanese surrender and over a decade after the official end of American occupation – there are numerous associative elements of the past to which the photograph points to. This scene takes place in a city with a naval base, which explains the American presence. Yet, this American-Japanese coexistence emphasizes the fact that the occupation never ceased for Japan, but rather became integrated as a permanent part of their landscape. The past permeates this present scene in the form of tension and discomfort, most obviously evidenced by the mother's expression and the baby's frown. Meanwhile, the layering of the photograph further substantiates this emergence of the past in the present. The scene is composed in a way that there are three different groups that pile onto each other: the undisturbed Japanese crowd constitutes the hindmost layer, the mother-child figure the foremost, and the two sailors interpose the two groups. This *mise en*

*scène* facilitates a temporal reading of the photograph. That is, the past, represented by the struggles of the mother and child, seemingly ruptures the continuum of the present that produces an illusion of normality, indicated by the unruffled audience in the background. Between them are the sailors, who, in Tomatsu's perspective, trigger this divide. Furthermore, the insinuation made by the photograph and the title of the series that the baby is consuming either a chewing gum or a chocolate demonstrates how America injected itself into the genes of Japan, now being transmitted to future generations in the form of humiliation and trauma. Extending this sense of trauma is the ironic juxtaposition of mothering and murdering, preservation and destruction that the positioning of the baby and the mother incites: the baby desperately consumes America through the candy, which in turn seems to consume its own mother in the form of the sailors. Through these formalistic elements, Tomatsu is able to specifically implant trauma into the baby's identity as a photographer. The significance of this is emphasized when examining how the photograph offers space for fusion between Tomatsu's identity and that of the photographed child.

The child carries a small body that forcibly challenges the dimensionality of the photograph that would otherwise be rather levelled. Its body reaches out to the viewer and the photographer with its protruding head and arms, ultimately minimizing its distance from them. Although its slight grimace does not reciprocate the direct attention that Tomatsu is providing it, its physical projection offers a channel for convergence of the two identities. Moreover, the child's emergence out of the web of adults who stand behind the sailors, unstirred and expressing indifference in the face of the mother's struggle, duplicates Tomatsu's observation as a teenager: "Far more shocking than defeat, as he recalled it, was the ease with which adults abruptly moved

from hateful war talk to talk about cooperation with the victors.”<sup>30</sup> The child embodies and physicalizes Tomatsu’s adolescence that witnessed the appalling ease at which the facade of alliance was constructed among the adults. Both the photographed child and the photographer’s childhood are victimized by indifference that nears betrayal. Tomatsu creates space for fusing with the child by constructing temporal ambiguity through various elements of the past, and drawing allusions to what he had observed as a child.

It is arguable that fusion additionally occurs between Tomatsu and the other subjects of the photograph. However, there are numerous elements that obstruct this possibility. First, most of Tomatsu’s attention is seemingly driven towards the child, mother, and the two sailors as they dominate the scene. Yet, the tightly folded arms of the sailors; their twinning that gives rise to an in-group/out-group dynamic; and their positioning that turns them into a stern wall all deprive the possibility of Tomatsu’s fusion with the sailors. Similarly, the mother whose eyes are closed and arms are occupied as they carry the baby is also made unavailable for fusion. Tomatsu is left to partake in the identity of the child, whose only boundaries are made loose through the photograph.

The process of fusion is a contested and expansive area of psychology. It is generally agreed to be a natural occurrence; psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Paolo Fonda describes fusion to be “one of the fundamental mechanisms of mental functioning, an essential element in all object relations.”<sup>31</sup> Fonda further conjectures that this normative process achieved through the fluid and unrestricted boundary system of an individual can be internally hindered “from an intense subject’s greed or voracity, as a result of vital needs that have remained traumatically

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<sup>30</sup> Dower, “Contested Ground,” 60. Dower, in his section of *Skin of the Nation*, summarizes what had been recorded in *Nihon rettō kuronikuru: Tōmatsu Shōmei no 50 nen (Traces: Fifty Years of Tomatsu’s Work)*.

<sup>31</sup> Fonda, “Fusion,” 1.

unsatisfied.”<sup>32</sup> In such a case, the individual “tends to incorporate objects reactively, remaining rigidly attached to [the non-Self]” and carries “an underlying longing for a nutritive fusion with the object,” which Fonda describes to be an “impossibility.”<sup>33</sup> This description of abnormal fusion aligns with Bohleber’s theorized destruction of self due to trauma in which the eyelets that mark the boundaries of self collapse, rather than maintaining its flexibility.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, psychiatrist Pierre Turquet established the idea of “basic assumption *oneness*” as a defense function of a traumatized group.<sup>35</sup> According to Turquet, the anxieties that stem from collective trauma are relieved by becoming with others, ultimately becoming “a powerful union with an omnipotent force” and depriving the group of individuality.<sup>36</sup> Adapting this process of unification to an individual level, Mark Stein developed the novel idea of “fantasy of fusion,” a process in which one becomes attached to others, especially those who perpetrated the trauma, with the goal, or fantasy, of forming a semblance of protection against further victimization.<sup>37</sup> I will subsequently address each of these perspectives in relation to Tomatsu and his photograph in which there seems to be a merging (or at least an attempt thereof) of the identities of Tomatsu and the child occurring.

First in light of the justification of abnormal fusion arising from an unsatisfied need due to trauma established by Fonda, Tomatsu may be fusing with the child as a mechanism to restore his own childhood he claimed the war “deprived” him of.<sup>38</sup> With this in mind, the sense of “impossibility” and one-sided desire for attachment arise in the photographic composition—the baby’s head is willfully turned and fist is closed, contradicting its body that is made

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Bohleber, “Remembrance, Trauma and Collective Memory,” 342.

<sup>35</sup> Turquet, “Leadership,” 71-87.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>37</sup> Stein, “Fantasy of Fusion,” 919-937.

<sup>38</sup> Dower, “Contested Ground,” 60. Dower once again summarizes what had been recorded in *Nihon rettō kuronikuru: Tōmatsu Shōmei no 50 nen (Traces: Fifty Years of Tomatsu’s Work)*.

three-dimensional through Tomatsu's photographic choice. Tomatsu may be driven by his unconscious longing to compensate for his halted childhood by perpetuating the youth of the photographed child. This forced termination of the captured childhood consequently negates the purpose of healthy fusion, which Fonda explains to be "growing, changing and reshaping of the Self."<sup>39</sup> However, this speculation is not compelling. It prompts the question of why Tomatsu then chooses to depict a state of apparent struggle, even incorporating a system of trauma in the child's identity, rather than projecting an idealized illustration of its youth. On the other hand, Turquet's vision of fusion as a group response may parallel the dynamic portrayed in the photograph with the Japanese civilians remaining undisturbed behind the lead of American sailors. Yet, this concept does not adequately fit the relationship-formation occurring between Tomatsu and the child that I hope to explore. While Stein's idea of "fantasy of fusion" appropriately focuses on an individual relationship, it specifically does so on the fusion with the perpetrator of trauma in a defense against the possibility of being re-victimized. This principle directly opposes Tomatsu's theorized fusion with the Japanese child instead of the American sailors who are perceived as unavailable.

What purpose, then, might this possible fusion serve for Tomatsu? First, it is interesting to examine the ideas of postmortem photography established by Nancy M. West in relation to this work. In describing the photographs of children's last moments, West comments on the "sublime sense of timelessness, [that renders] moments dreamlike, almost sacred" that their usual monochrome offers.<sup>40</sup> She continues, "The presence conjured by black and white is in part a lack of presence, a semi-presence."<sup>41</sup> I want to argue that *Untitled* [Iwakuni] can be, in theory, considered a postmortem photograph, honoring the death of the photographer's childhood and

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<sup>39</sup> Fonda, "Fusion," 4.

<sup>40</sup> West, "Still Lives," 114.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

his traumatized psyche. The black-and-whiteness constructs a temporal vacuum; in this dimension of reality where the time is made flat, none is allowed but the intersection of the sacrificed childhoods. Consequently, the realm of fusion is actively constructed. In this dimensional space, Tomatsu's identity is made malleable and this active process becomes reminiscent of the process of hypnosis.

In parallel to the notion of trauma as a partial death of the self, as described by Bohleber, Thomas Ross defines trauma as an occurrence that causes an internal breaking.<sup>42</sup> This breakage is elaborated by psychotraumatologist Onno van der Hart as being a "trauma-generated dissociation of the personality" into two distinct parts: *apparently normal part of the personality* (ANP) and *emotional part of the personality* (EP).<sup>43</sup> Hypnosis has been suggested to help with the reintegration of these dissociated identities by allowing the traumatized to re-experience the traumatic past. Described as "a heightened and focused concentration that is achieved in order to actualize a particular goal or latent potential," the altered plane of consciousness that hypnosis constructs parallels the realm of "semi-presence" that this photograph constructs.<sup>44</sup> Further contorting the normative plane of reality in the photograph is the aforementioned temporal uncertainty its layering of subjects inspires. Melding the elements of the past and present; hostility and ease; and protrusion and prostration, this work forms a type of wormhole that allows for the equalization of Tomatsu's and the child's identities. Instilled in the photograph is a hypnotic zone of dissociation that facilitates the process of fusion. Could this fusion have allowed Tomatsu to relive his childhood through the identity of another child, and ultimately liberate himself from his trauma? Rather than fusion being used to construct what Tomatsu had

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<sup>42</sup> Ross, *Lectures On War Neuroses*.

<sup>43</sup> Van der Hart, "The Value of Hypnosis in the Resolution of Dissociation," 2. Van der Hart follows the work done by Charles Myers, Janet, and Abram Kardiner to distinguish the two parts of the personality.

<sup>44</sup> Kohen & Olness, "Hypnotherapy With Children," 359.

been deprived of or become one with the perpetrator, I want to argue that this photograph demonstrates how fusion might allow for reconstruction and reexperiencing of trauma. It would be intriguing for future psychoanalytic studies to explore this possibility of fusion as a therapeutic mechanism for hypnotic reintegration of the traumatized psyche. In a neurological perspective, mirror neurons could be further examined as an agent of the psychological mechanism of fusion.

Regardless of whether there is fusion, a hypnotic zone, or a reintegration present in the photograph, it is indisputable that Tomatsu makes possible a realm of infinite conjectures. When discussing Tomatsu's depictions of the atomic bombing victims, or *hibakusha*, Katrina Genuis takes on a Lévinasian perspective to argue that in the face of suffering revealed by Tomatsu, the observer becomes "focused on the Other and constituted as a self in relation to them."<sup>45</sup> In this established connection triggered by the Other's suffering that is governed, rather than mediated, by God, "we are implicitly enmeshed in transcendence when we are oriented toward the suffering Other."<sup>46</sup> David Brown furthers the Lévinasian ideas to state, "it is through the exposure of 'weakness to the other that what is most important about personhood is revealed.'"<sup>47</sup> Although these concepts more specifically focus on the construction of empathy and compassion through the facing one's suffering, it is certain that the spectatorship, or depiction, of another's vulnerability crafts a unique psychological experience. In *Untitled* [Sasebo], there is most definitely vulnerability arising from the youth of the infant in the photograph, who particularly looks defenseless in the midst of the crowd as it forms the outer shell of its mother's back. Tomatsu uncovers this vulnerability, and subsequently its "personhood," which drives him to "transcendence" to the hypnotic realm of fusion-formation.

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<sup>45</sup> Genuis, "In the Face of Suffering," 363.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 364.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology*, 85.

## Conclusion

The two powerful photographs by Shomei Tomatsu demonstrate how photography can be used to visualize, relive, and recover from individual trauma, particularly that arising from adolescence. More generally, they show how the unique sociological and historical circumstances of World War II and postwar for Japanese civilians expand the intersectionality of photography and psychology. The first section examined Tomatsu's perspective of America from below its shadows that originates from his youth, and later is reproduced in his work, *Untitled* [Iwakuni]. I argue that the mirroring of his positioning, or reenactment, and of the formalistic elements allow for the unwinding and redefining of his childhood trauma. Meanwhile, the subsequent section examined the idea of fusion as a possible occurrence in *Untitled* [Sasebo]. These discussions were constructed with a theoretical basis enabled by different scholars, who represent the respective fields of study. The fields of trauma psychology and the interpretation of the photographs are indeed vast, and, therefore, discussing all the unique and established views was beyond the scope of this paper.

Interestingly enough, Tomatsu's later body of photographs became imbued with colors that had been entirely missing in his past works, such as those discussed in this paper. It was when he visited Okinawa, where the American military occupation continued until 1972, and where he accordingly expected to find exaggerated marks of Americanization that he first rebelled against his constant use of monochrome. Tomatsu wrote, "In Okinawa, it seemed a natural step to switch to color photography...but even after returning to Tokyo, I did not go back to monochrome...I realized later that this was because my fixation on America had weakened. American flashes into and out of view in black and white. In color, America's presence is

diminished.”<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, this diminishment of the U.S. did not signify a restoration of the Japan he had been born into either: “I have embarked on a nameless sea of chaos that is neither America nor Japan. My color photographs sometimes approach things that appear Japanese, but they do not remain there, jumping instead somewhere beyond Japan. Where they will end up, I do not know.”<sup>49</sup> The ambiguity that had defined his feelings towards America seems to have remained; however, rather than it being one that instilled fear, it seems to have turned into one that is rather hopeful. As I continue the interpretation of his photographs as vessels and representations of his psyche, his statement regarding the color photographs leads me to a few points of curiosity. Could it have been his career as a photographer that propagated him into a new dimension of existence—a dimension where he is not haunted by the forces that once traumatized him but rather is given the freedom to relive and reshape them? Could Tomatsu be implying the impossibility of an absolute alleviation from his trauma? While the answers to these questions will never be made certain, it is nonetheless intriguing to entertain the possibility that photography, by allowing for the working through of trauma, (re)elevated Tomatsu to the world of color and life.

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<sup>48</sup> Tomatsu, “Toward the Sea of Chaos,” 165. This version of the translation by John Junkerman is found in *The Skin of the Nation*.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

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