Temporary Ruins: Miyamoto Ryūji’s Architectural Photography in Postmodern Japan

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Abstract

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This dissertation focuses on the acclaimed Japanese photographer Miyamoto Ryūji (b. 1947), whose work deals with a range of structures and spaces that I describe as ruinous: demolition sites that document the incessant development of Tokyo in the 1980s; man-made shelters of the urban homeless; the ungoverned Kowloon Walled City in Hong Kong; Kobe after the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake; pinhole photographs of the late-modern Japanese urbanscape; and, most recently, the Tōhoku region after the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. This project intersects an architectural and urban history of postwar Japan with the close visual analysis of Miyamoto’s photographs to show how images of ruins have served as a visual trope to challenge modernist narratives of progress and late-capitalist development. Second, I argue that these images connect multiple layers of trauma in the contemporary Japanese experience, illuminating the relationship between memory and image essential for an understanding of the role of photography in narrations of history. By examining this relationship, I clarify the ways in which postwar history has been narrated in Japan and how certain images (and the memories they spark) complicate the official narrative.

Miyamoto Ryūji’s work is a compelling example of the ruin as a key theme in postwar and contemporary Japanese photography because of the diverse social and historical issues that converge in his work: urban planning, the commodification of architecture, historical preservation, natural and man-made disasters, homelessness, and, uniting all of these concerns, memory and its relationship to history. Outside of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, images of ruins are an underexplored way of understanding and documenting memory in Japan. Throughout the
dissertation, I unearth the ruin as a central motif of postwar and contemporary Japanese photography in spite of widespread claims that Japan is a country without ruins. In doing so, I propose new ways of understanding the ruin that are specific to modern Japanese history and culture.
# Table of Contents

List of Figures ii

Acknowledgements xi

Dedication xiii

Introduction 1
  
  A Brief History of Postwar Ruins Photography 9
  Literature Review, Sources, Methodologies 20
  Chapter Overview 32

Chapter 1: Temporary Ruins, Recurring Memories 35
  
  An Introduction to *Architectural Apocalypse* 38
  Surveying Demolition 52
  Allegory 71
  Recurring Memories of Ruins 76

Chapter 2: Cardboard Houses, Concrete Slums 88
  
  Early Encounters with *Tezukuri kenchiku* 91
  *Cardboard Houses* 98
  *Kowloon Walled City* 122
  New Claims in Global Cities 137

Chapter 3: Documenting Disaster, Living with Ruins 144
  
  The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake 148
  *Kobe 1995* 155
  Exhibiting Ruins 172
  3.11 *TSUNAMI 2011* 189

Chapter 4: Deconstructing the Camera, Burying the City 197
  
  The Rise of Pinhole Photography at the Dawn of the Digital Era 199
  Pinhole Rooms 211
  “Burying the city” in the Pinhole Camera 217
  Becoming a Box Man 227

Epilogue: A Country Without Ruins? 240

Figures 247

Bibliography 327
List of Figures

Figure 1. Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums and Motomachi High-Rise Apartments, 1973, printed in Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (July 1973)

Figure 2. Hayashi Shigeo, Panorama 2 from the Rooftop of the Chūgoku Newspaper Headquarters, Hiroshima, 1945

Figure 3. Kikuchi Shunkichi, The A-Bomb Dome Stands Amid the Rubble Left by the Bombing (October 1, 1945), Hiroshima, 1945

Figure 4. Yamahata Yōsuke, Nagasaki, August 10, 1945, Nagasaki, 1945

Figure 5. Yamahata Yōsuke, Nagasaki, August 10, 1945, Nagasaki, 1945

Figure 6. Hayashi Tadahiko, “Living in a Collapsed Building,” Kasutori jidai, 1947

Figure 7. Nakamura Rikko, The Reality of Postwar Life B (Shimbashi), Tokyo, 1948

Figure 8. Fukushima Kikujiro, Pikadon: A Record of Life After the Bomb, 1951-60

Figure 9. Fukushima Kikujiro, Pikadon: A Record of Life After the Bomb, 1951-60

Figure 10. Tōmatsu Shōmei, Ms. Kataoka Tsuyo 1 / Motoharamachi, Nagasaki, 1961

Figure 11. Tōmatsu Shōmei, Kataoka Tsuyo / Urakami Cathedral, Nagasaki, 2007

Figure 12. Ishiuchi Miyako, SCAR-1976, accident, 1996

Figure 13. Ishiuchi Miyako, Bay Side Courts, 1988-89

Figure 14. Kawada Kikuji, “Wall of the A-Bomb Memorial Dome: Stain, and Flaking Off,” Chizu (The Map), Hiroshima, 1965

Figure 15. Moriyama Daidō, Midnight Accident, Tokyo, 1969

Figure 16. Yanagisawa Shin, photograph of Tokyo from the period of 1964-70, Toshi no kiseki (Tracks of the City), 1979

Figure 17. Kobayashi Shinichirō, Haikyo yūji (Deathtopia), 1989-1997

Figure 18. Saiga Yūji, Views of an Abandoned Island, 1984-2003

Figure 19. Hatakeyama Naoya, Rikuzentakata, 2011

Figure 20. Tange Kenzō, Hiroshima Peace Center Museum, Hiroshima, 1955
Figure 21. Urabe Shizutarō, Kurashiki Ivy Square, Kurashiki, 1974

Figure 22. Tange Kenzō, Kurashiki City Hall, Kurashiki, 1958-60

Figure 1.1. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Grosses Schauspielhaus, East Berlin, 1985,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.2. “Torikaesareru Taishō kenchiku to kessaku” (A Masterpiece of Taishō Architecture Destroyed), Asahi Graph no. 3148 (July 1983), essay by Matsuyama Iwao and photographs by Miyamoto Ryūji

Figure 1.3. Miyamoto Ryūji, “London Pavilion Theater, London, 1986,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.4. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kenchiku no mokushiroku (Architectural Apocalypse), photobook, 1988

Figure 1.5. Isozaki Arata, Tsukuba City Center, drawing, 1979-83

Figure 1.6. Isozaki Arata, Tsukuba City Center, 1979-83

Figure 1.7. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nakano Prison, Tokyo, 1983,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988


Figure 1.9. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Pavilion of Tsukuba Expo ’85, Tsukuba, 1985,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.10. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nakano Prison, Tokyo, 1983,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.11. Hirayama Chūji, Tange Kenzō’s House, 1953

Figure 1.12. Robert Adams, Tract House, Westminster, Colorado, 1974

Figure 1.13. Hilla and Bernd Becher, Cooling Tower, Zeche Watron, the Ruhr, 1967

Figure 1.14. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Asahi Beer Factory, Tokyo, 1985,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.15. Nakahira Takuma, Summer 1968.3 (from Provoke, no. 1), gravure-process magazine photograph, November 1968

Figure 1.16. Nakahira Takuma, Shokubutsu zukan (Illustrated Botanical Dictionary), printed in the Asahi Journal vol. 13 no. 32 (August 2-27, 1971)
Figure 1.17. Cover to SD (Space+Design) no. 257 with an article featuring Miyamoto’s photographs of the Nazi flak towers in Vienna, February 1986

Figure 1.18. Konpeito’s survey of Ameyoko Street, published in Toshi Jūtaku no. 45 (December 1971)

Figure 1.19. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Gochōme no hūkei” (The Atmosphere of the Fifth District), Toshi Jūtaku no. 63 (April 1973)

Figure 1.20. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Gochōme no hūkei” (The Atmosphere of the Fifth District), Toshi Jūtaku no. 63 (April 1973)

Figure 1.21. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Gochōme no hūkei” (The Atmosphere of the Fifth District), Toshi Jūtaku no. 63 (April 1973)

Figure 1.22. “Eki mae sukōpu” (Station Front Views), Toshi Jūtaku no. 87 (January 1975)

Figure 1.23. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Negishi Race Course, Yokohama, 1987,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.24. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Negishi Race Course, Yokohama, 1987,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.25. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Negishi Race Course, Yokohama, 1987,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.26. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Negishi Race Course, Yokohama, 1987,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.27. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium Swimming Pool, Tokyo, 1987,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.28. Henri Le Secq, “Demolitions, Place de l’Hôtel de Ville,” Album Berger, 1853


Figure 1.30. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Asakusa Shōchiku Movie Theater, Tokyo, 1984,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.31. Hayashi Shigeo, Genbaku (A-Bomb) Dome, Hiroshima, October, 1945, Hiroshima, 1945

Figure 1.32. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nakano Prison, Tokyo, 1983,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988
Figure 2.1. The Motomachi High-Rise Apartments under construction in 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 66 (July 1973)

Figure 2.2. Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums, 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)

Figure 2.3. Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums, 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)

Figure 2.4. Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums, 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)

Figure 2.5. Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums, 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)

Figure 2.6. Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums and Motomachi High-Rise Apartments comparing their “privacy,” 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)

Figure 2.7. Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums with the Motomachi High-Rise Apartments in the background, 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)

Figure 2.8. Miyamoto Ryūji, Interior of Kujirai Isamu’s house Poulailler, 1974, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 79 (May 1974)

Figure 2.9. Miyamoto Ryūji, Irregular exterior of Kujirai Isamu’s house Poulailler, 1974, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 79 (May 1974)

Figure 2.10. An underground village near Dongguan in Hunan Province, from Bernard Rudofsky, Architecture Without Architects, 1964

Figure 2.11. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1984,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.12. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1988,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.13. Exhibition view, “Cardboard Houses,” Yokohama Portside Gallery, 1994

Figure 2.14. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1994,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.15. Miyamoto Ryūji, Cardboard Houses, photobook, 2003

Figure 2.16. Miyamoto Ryūji, “New York 1991,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.17. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1995,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.18. Sakaguchi Kyōhei, “A Japanese Restaurant!? Zero Yen Houses,” 2004
Figure 2.19. Sakaguchi Kyōhei, Zero Yen Houses, 2004

Figure 2.20. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1984,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.21. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1983,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.22. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Osaka 1994,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.23. Nakamura Rikko, “Togoshi 5-chôme,” Fall of 1946 or 1974

Figure 2.24. Miyamoto Ryūji, “London 1994,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.25. Taishō 12, September 1; Earthquake Refugee Huts in front of the Imperial Palace, 1923

Figure 2.26. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.27. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.28. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.29. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.30. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.31. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.32. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.33. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, photobook, 1988

Figure 2.34. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.35. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.36. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Preah Kham,” Angkor, 1994

Figure 2.37. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Angkor Thom Bayon,” Angkor, 1994

Figure 2.38. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988

Figure 2.39. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1997

Figure 2.40. Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1997

Figure 2.41. The Ōno Laboratory, “Tsang Tai Uk – Walled Village,” SD no. 330 (March 1992)
Figure 2.42. Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1997

Figure 2.43. Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1997

Figure 3.1. Map of the “damage strip” of the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

Figure 3.2. A bus dangling off of a collapsed section of the Hanshin Expressway

Figure 3.3. Eruption of Mt. Bandai published in the Yomiuri Shimbun, August 8, 1888

Figure 3.4. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nagata-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.5. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Kobe City Hall, Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.6. Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kobe 1995: After the Earthquake*, photobook, 1995

Figure 3.7. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Temporary housing, Ashiyahama Seaside Town, Niihama-cho,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.8. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Kobe Ekimae Building, Chuo-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.9. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Meiji Life Insurance Building, Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.10. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.11. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Kobe City Hall, Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.12. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.13. Aerial photograph of the areas destroyed by fire in Kobe

Figure 3.14. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Trainyard Ishiyagawa, Hanshin Railway, Higashinada-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.15. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Interchange, Hanshin Expressway 3, Nagata-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.16. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Harbourland, Chuo-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.17. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nagata-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.18. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nagata-ku,” *Kobe 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.20. Ban Shigeru, *Interior of the Paper Church Community Hall*, Kobe, 1995

Figure 3.21. Miyamoto Katsuhiro, Conceptual model for *Topographical Healing*, 1995

Figure 3.22. Exterior of the Japan Pavilion at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale

Figure 3.23. Interior of the “Fractures” Exhibition in the Japan Pavilion at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale

Figure 3.24. Yoshizaka Takamasa, *Japan Pavilion*, view underneath the raised building with a hole in the first floor, 1956

Figure 3.25. Detail of the ripped edge of one of Miyamoto Ryūji’s murals in the “Fractures” Exhibition at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale

Figure 3.26. Detail of the wreckage piled up in front of Miyamoto Ryūji’s murals in the “Fractures” Exhibition at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale

Figure 3.27. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nada-ku,” *KOBE 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.28. Yamahata Yōsuke, *Nagasaki, August 10, 1945*, 1945

Figure 3.29. Yamahata Yōsuke, *Nagasaki, August 10, 1945*, 1945

Figure 3.30. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Shimo Yamate Catholic Church, Chuo-ku,” *KOBE 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.31. The Great Hanshin Earthquake Memorial at Meriken Park, Kobe

Figure 3.32. “The city immediately after the earthquake” Diorama at the DRI, Kobe

Figure 3.33. Wall of photographs and material objects related to the earthquake at the DRI

Figure 3.34. A portion of the Nojima Fault that has been preserved at the Hokudan Earthquake Memorial Park on Awaji Island

Figure 3.35. A detail of the kitchen in the “Earthquake House” at the Hokudan Earthquake Memorial Park on Awaji Island

Figure 3.36. Miyamoto Ryūji, *KOBE 1995: The Earthquake Revisited*, 2006, frontispiece

Figure 3.37. A detail of the curling edges of Miyamoto Ryūji’s photo murals on exhibition at the Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2017

Figure 3.38. Miyamoto Ryūji’s photo mural on exhibition at the Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2017
Figure 3.39. Exhibition view, “Japan-ness: Architecture and Urbanism in Japan since 1945,” Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2017

Figure 3.40. Ikeda Moriko and Miyamoto Ryūji, title screen, 3.11 TSUNAMI 2011, film, 2012

Figure 3.41. Seto Hashime and Miyamoto Ryūji, scene of houses being washed away by the tsunami, 3.11 TSUNAMI 2011, film, 2012

Figure 3.42. Ikeda Moriko and Miyamoto Ryūji, Ikeda-san reenacting her search for the camcorder on the plot of land where her house once stood, 3.11 TSUNAMI 2011, film, 2012

Figure 4.1. Diagram of a pinhole apparatus

Figure 4.2. Katsuhika Hokusai, “Mt. Fuji Through a Knothole,” from One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji, woodblock print, 1830s

Figure 4.3. Ueda Koichirō, Scene 4 Shinjuku West, pinhole photograph, 2011

Figure 4.4. Edward Levinson, Summer Solstice, pinhole photograph, 1998

Figure 4.5. Nojima Yasuzō, Muddy Sea, gum-brichromate photograph, 1910

Figure 4.6. Yamanaka Nobuo, Pinhole Room Revolution I, pinhole photograph, 1973

Figure 4.7. Yamanaka Nobuo, Pinhole on the 9th Floor, pinhole photograph, styrene boards, 1975

Figure 4.8. Yamanaka Nobuo, Pinhole on Floor and Wall (1), pinhole photograph, plywood, 1977

Figure 4.9. Homma Takashi, Tokyo, pinhole photograph, 2013

Figure 4.10. Hara Hiroshi, Niramu House, exterior, 1978, photographed by Miyamoto Ryūji, 1983

Figure 4.11. Hara Hiroshi, Niramu House, interior with skylight, 1978, photographed by Miyamoto Ryūji, 1983

Figure 4.12. Miyamoto Ryūji’s “pinhole house,” 2000

Figure 4.13. Miyamoto Ryūji, Pinhole House, Chuo-ku 2-chōme, pinhole photograph, March 8, 2000

Figure 4.14. Miyamoto Ryūji, Pinhole House, Kōtō-ku, Tatsumi 2-chōme, pinhole photograph, March 7, 2000
Figure 4.15. Miyamoto’s pinhole houses on exhibition at Akiyama Gallery, Tokyo, 2000

Figure 4.16. Miyamoto’s cruciform pinhole photography on view at BankART Gallery, Yokohama, 2012

Figure 4.17. Miyamoto’s handheld pinhole camera designed by a Swiss camera maker

Figure 4.18. Miyamoto Ryūji, *Yokohama Portside*, pinhole photography panels, 2012

Figure 4.19. Miyamoto Ryūji, *grass*, photogram, 2002

Figure 4.20. Miyamoto Ryūji, *grass*, photogram, 2002
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For three amazing women who give me the strength to take on the world

Aunt Bobby, Aunt Beanie, and Christine Marie
Introduction

“If all architecture is finished, if therefore it carries within itself the traces of its future destruction, the already past future, future perfect, of its ruin, according to the methods that are each time original, if it is haunted, indeed signed, by the spectral silhouette of its ruin, at work even in the pedestal of its stone, in its metal or its glass, what would again bring the architecture of ‘this period’ (just yesterday, today, tomorrow; use whatever words you want, modern, postmodern, post-postmodern, or amodern, etc.) back to the ruin, to the experience of ‘its own’ ruin?” – Jacques Derrida, “Letter to Peter Eisenman” (1990)\(^1\)

Hiroshima, 1973. Two incongruous structures flank each other on the bank of the Ōtagawa River, just upstream from the Peace Memorial Museum and Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima (Fig. 1). One is a shantytown: hundreds of wooden barracks built directly along the riverbank by the marginalized populations who reside there, Koreans whose families were brought over as forced labor by the Japanese empire, hibakusha (atomic bomb victims) who were discriminated against for their physical scarring and radiated bodies, and those Japanese who returned from the colonies after the Asia-Pacific War with no claim to land and nowhere to settle. Towering above the so-called genbaku suramu (atomic bomb slum) is the celebrated Motomachi Apartment Complex, the first major government-sponsored effort at high-rise public housing in Japan. The renowned architect Ōtaka Masato, a protégé of Maekawa Kunio and one of the seven founding members of the Metabolist Group, designed the apartments. As such, they were highly anticipated as a model for how to house the growing population, as city centers increasingly became the property of international corporations, indifferent to affordable and livable urban residences. By the 1970s, the slums were residue of the past – poverty leftover from the immediate postwar years that stood in marked contrast to the national narrative of miraculous recovery after defeat in 1945. By contrast, the Motomachi Apartments were the

future, evidence of the country’s robust economic growth and the city’s complete symbolic
rebirth as an international “City of Peace.”

It was in 1973 that an editorial staff member from the architecture journal *Toshi Jūtaku*
(Urban Housing) visited the site to photograph the nearly completed high-rise buildings. The 26-
year-old Miyamoto Ryūji (b. 1947) was just two years out of college, a novice to the world of
architecture, intrigued by the potential for urban living and the future of the rapidly changing
Japanese city. Miyamoto was sent to Hiroshima to photograph the utopic, Corbusien vision of
mass housing as encompassed in the Motomachi Apartments, but he soon found himself
wandering around the degraded, sprawling slums, where he was drawn to the signs of life,
human ingenuity, collectivism, and architectural informality that he attempted to document in
photographs. The goal of this dissertation is to examine the potential of ruined architecture in the
work of Miyamoto Ryūji, a photographer who, since his encounter with the *genbaku* slums, has
continued to seek out sites where ephemeral, fragmentary forms of architecture represent an
alternative to megabuilding and unchecked redevelopment in the contemporary city.

By all conventional western definitions, the *genbaku* slum and other sites considered in
this dissertation are not ruins per se. They are not fallen stones (the Latin origin of the word ruin,
*ruere*, literally means “to fall”) that accord with Albert Speer’s theory of ruin value, or *Ruinwert*,
in which fragmented masonry edifices persevere through time to become monuments to the
power and greatness of past civilizations.² As an informal settlement built from the rubble and
detritus of war, the *genbaku* slum has no relationship to those picturesque landscapes constructed

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with “artificial ruins” in eighteenth-century gardens of Western Europe.³ In their state of degradation, rather, the slums come closer to what Andreas Huyssen calls the authentic ruins of modernity, “an architectonic cipher for the temporal and spatial doubts that modernity always harbored about itself.”⁴ Throughout the dissertation, I illustrate how Miyamoto’s photographs of ruinous architecture represent this “dark side of modernity.”⁵

However, I also point to a more amorphous understanding of the ruin that is not based in western definitions of the aesthetic category. Accompanying the anxieties underscored by Huyssen there exists a conviction in Miyamoto’s photographs that sees the undetermined and undefined status of ruined, fragmentary, and haphazard architectural material as a jumping off point for a rethinking of dominant building programs in the contemporary Japanese city. Beginning with the *genbaku* slum, I use Miyamoto’s work to articulate a different understanding of the ruin, an understanding that is antithetical to the monumentalism associated with ruins in the west and that, more generally, works against monumentalism as a model for urban development. As the antithesis to monumentalism as a system, then, ruins are not stagnant stones but sites of activity, an event, a condition. Considered together, the ruins in this dissertation generate a picture of an urban landscape that is filled with overlooked manifestations of human and architectural agency that offer an alternative to modernist monumentality.

Miyamoto Ryūji was born in Tokyo in 1947; he grew up in the Toyama Heights area of Shinjuku, which he remembers as “a hilly area with municipal housing projects and elementary


⁵ Ibid., 22.
schools curiously interspersed among concrete ruins...a typical view of Tokyo in the years just after World War II had ended.” He graduated from Tama Art University in 1973 with a degree in graphic design and worked for a number of years as a designer and photographer for publications such as Toshi Jūtaku, Jūtaku Kenchiku, Asahi Graph, and Tokyojin. His career as an independent photographer gained momentum in 1983, when upon hearing of the impending demolition of the notorious Nakano Prison, he began to photograph structures in the process of their dismantlement. Miyamoto returned to Nakano repeatedly throughout its demolition, “feeling that [he] wanted to photograph [the buildings] before [they] disappeared.”

The brief moment in time in which the two communities of the genbaku slums and the Motomachi Apartments coexisted (all of the slums were cleared by 1978) is representative of two conflicting architectural programs and philosophies of the city that came to a head in critical essays, architectural surveys, and design practices in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Japan. The first and most pervasive philosophy was that of state-sponsored redevelopment as characterized by slum clearance, deregulation, symbolic megabuilding, the commodification of architecture, and monumentalism. The second approach as championed by a growing number of critics and practitioners argued for site-specific and human-scaled building, vernacular forms, informality, spontaneity, bottom-up planning, and the public right to the city.

Miyamoto’s photography of an array of ruinous structures engages with the intricacies of this dialectic, and it is in this context that I label his work “architectural photography.”

Miyamoto himself is adamant that he is not an architectural photographer; he is primarily self-

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trained, and he rarely focuses his camera on newly completed buildings, the subject of most architectural photography. Nevertheless, I use the term architectural photography because architectural theory and critique inform all of his work. His photographs comment on visions for the city and on modes of vision in the city. In this way, his work induces a consideration of the overlaps between the particularities of the medium of photography and the conditions of the late-capitalist city.

The politics of Miyamoto’s photographs are linked inextricably to the specific circumstances of the remarkable economic growth and urban redevelopment of Japan throughout the postwar period. Rapid reconstruction, including the removal of all signs of wreckage, was central to the nation’s narrative of recovery and progress. And yet, ruinous scenes reappeared in the seemingly endless cycle of planned destruction and reconstruction of Japanese cities, beginning with true abandon prior to 1964 when Tokyo hosted the summer Olympics and continuing through the real-estate price “bubble” period of the 1980s. Cultural critics such as Taki Kōji have described the incoherent and alienating effects of this urban environment, imagining Tokyo in particular as a city of hollow, empty, and meaningless spaces where structures are not allowed to age for fear that they become obsolete. Meanwhile, artists from the likes of Kawamata Tadashi to Yanagi Yukinori have made the metaphorical connection between the semiotic emptiness of modern urban spaces and that of the ruin. In conjunction with an exhibition that featured Miyamoto’s photography in 1992, one curator wrote: “Behind the sparkling façade, there is emptiness in the heart of Tokyo. It somehow seems like a great ruin.”

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8 Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, December 13, 2015.

9 Shioda Junichi, Toshi to gendai bijutsu: haikyo to shite no wagaya (The Urban Environment and Art in Japan: My Home Sweet Home in Ruins), ed. Setagaya Art Museum (Tokyo: Setagaya Art Museum, 1992), 5.
It is with this context in mind that I identify the historical scope of this study as “postmodern Japan.” Beginning with Miyamoto’s early career in architectural journalism in the early 1970s and spanning his work from the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, this dissertation covers the period when postmodern theory was codified and implemented in an array of aesthetic practices – most visibly in architecture, as Fredric Jameson points out – across the globe. Miyamoto’s work resonates with multiple conditions that have been identified as postmodern. Just as, for Jean-François Lyotard, postmodernity “signal[ed] a crisis in narrative’s legitimizing function, its ability to compel consensus,” so too did Miyamoto’s images of Kobe City in ruins after a devastating earthquake in 1995 generate widespread feelings of uncertainty among the Japanese populace as to the national narrative of resilience in the face of disaster. His photographs of the demolition of masonry buildings from the early-twentieth century can be interpreted as a critique of the failures of modernism in line with the postmodernist position in architecture described by Jameson. Or, similarly, his consistent documentary approach to photography might be seen as an attempt to dismantle modernism by “point[ing] openly to the social world and to possibilities of concrete social transformation” in the spirit of Allan Sekula.

In the history of Postmodernism, the ruin has served as an enigmatic motif to represent an historical rupture with the grandiose building plans and grand narratives of Modernism. In addition to the widespread recognition of Walter Benjamin’s earlier contention that ruins are,


necessarily, the foundation of modernity, there emerged a related position that can be characterized by what Slavoj Žižek calls a “feeling for the inert” – spaces and images where “one can perceive the capitalist drive at rest.”\(^\text{13}\) Beyond the end of modernism, we witness an attempt to visualize the end of western capitalism through the aesthetic of the ruin. This, too, was a central impulse of the postmodern period. For, as Jameson stresses, “[E]very position on postmodernism in culture – whether apologia or stigmatization – is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today.”\(^\text{14}\) Miyamoto’s work uses various types of ruinous structures as visual tropes to challenge modernist narratives of progress and late-capitalist development in the Japanese urbanscape.

The spaces that Miyamato documents – demolition sites, post-disaster landscapes, informal housing – are all temporary phenomena that he rescues for memory both despite and in spite of the relative lack of permanent, publicly sanctified “ruins” in the Japanese landscape. Given the long history of building predominantly in wood, Japan is often characterized as a country without ruins. Accounts of the aftermath of natural disasters or war from the pre-modern period frequently describe a scorched, flattened landscape with little to speak of in terms of solid material ruin. When westerners arrived after the military government opened the country’s borders in the mid-1850s, “Japan’s lack of masonry ruins was, among other factors, equated with an absence of memory, a contempt for the serious, a disregard of the solid.”\(^\text{15}\) In European eyes, solid, permanent, masonry ruins signified civilization, and the perceived absence of fragmented

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\(^\text{13}\) Slavoj Žižek, “Not a Desire to Have Him, but to Be Like Him,” *London Review of Books* 25:16 (2003), 14.

\(^\text{14}\) Jameson, “Postmodernism,” 55.

\(^\text{15}\) Clancey, *Earthquake Nation*, 17.
stone in the Japanese landscape piqued colonial impulses. As I discuss in the Epilogue, this was and continues to be an erroneous perception.

The most common term for the ruin in the Japanese language is *haikyo*. It is used interchangeably to refer to the classical ruins of ancient Greece and Rome, the industrial detritus of modernity, and the wreckage of natural and man-made disasters. In the introduction to the edited volume *Haikyo taizen* (The Ruins Encyclopedia, 2010), which includes multiple examples from Miyamoto’s oeuvre, the art theorist and critic Tanigawa Atsushi acknowledges the obscurity of the term as it is used in the Japanese language:

> The concept of ‘the ruin’ is ambiguous. It is not easy to answer decisively the question of what ruins are. Before one realizes it, words that originate in the west slip into this country and come to accumulate a variety of meanings. As ambiguous as the concept of the ‘ruin’ is, the word itself is now firmly established, and it is precisely because of its ambiguity that we are captivated by its unusual power.  

Embracing the ambiguity of the term, the anthology goes on to address a variety of architectural and aesthetic situations that are considered ruins from the perspective of Japan. References to Miyamoto’s photographs of both demolition sites and Angkor Wat appear alongside essays on Piranesi’s prints and the history of Sir John Soane’s museum. Acknowledging the power systems through which words acquire meaning, in this dissertation I, too, take a broad understanding of the ruin. Rather than attempt to fit Miyamoto’s work into a western category and risk repeating the imperialist framework that sustains the notion that Japan is a country without ruins proper, I use the diverse structures and sites photographed by Miyamoto to demonstrate new ways of understanding the ruin that are specific to the modern urban history and culture in which they were produced.

Given the range of meanings evoked by the concept of the ruin in Japan, Miyamoto’s work can be positioned within a lineage of photography that engaged with and responded to a variety of ruinous objects, aesthetics, and events in the postwar period. What I see as the persistence of ruinous imagery raises a series of provocative questions concerning the significance of the ruin in a postwar landscape where memories of ruins largely outweighed their physical presence. What forms do these ruinous images take and how are they framed? How does that framing inform, support or reinterpret narratives of postwar history? And what can we learn about the act of photography from a critical theory of ruins? Below I consider how ruins photography developed in multiple directions in the postwar period in order to underscore the breadth and diversity of this aesthetic category in Japan.

A Brief History of Postwar Ruins Photography

Images of ruins from the immediate postwar period can be divided into two general categories; the first consists of the official photographic surveys intended to document the state of the landscape. Many of the Japanese photographers who worked for the wartime propaganda journal *Front* were also employed to carefully document the bleak reality of life in postwar Japan. Hayashi Shigeo and Kikuchi Shunkichi were both a part of the official survey of the atomic bombs (*Genshi bakudan saigai chōsa*). Hayashi meticulously photographed and stitched together panoramic shots of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, burnt fields dotted with the occasional concrete mound or pile of warped steel, and Kikuchi was responsible for some of the first

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photographs of the Atomic Bomb Dome (Figs. 2 & 3). While today these photographs are employed as documents in textbooks and museums, it is important to remember that many of these photographers were trained as modernist image makers and thus continued to employ aesthetic frameworks despite the disturbing nature of their subject matter. For instance, Ōtsuka Gen was an active member of the pictorialist-turned-modernist Nojima Yasuzu’s studio in the 1930s, and while working for the Asahi Newspaper during the war he recorded the firebombing of Osaka and Kobe. Ōtsuka admitted to being “spellbound by the awful beauty of a city being swallowed in flames,” and his photographs have been praised for their ability to portray accurately the “impression that the spectacle made on his senses.”

Similarly, Yamahata Yōsuke, who was sent by the Western Army Corps in Hakata to photograph Nagasaki on August 10, 1945, the day after the second atomic bomb was dropped, established an iconography of ruins that embraced the dual role of document and aesthetic object (Fig. 4). Years later, Yamahata admitted to his inability to absorb the horror that confronted him. In one image, multiple layers of mist cloud the total extent of the damage, suggesting that this eerie, flattened landscape knows no end (Fig. 5). A similar scene would have confronted

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Yamahata no matter which direction he looked, and yet he still managed to produce carefully composed photographs. The barely erect telephone pole and electrical lines in the foreground resemble a cross rising up out of the rubble—a modest glimpse of the familiar that encourages viewers to search for more recognizable signs in an otherwise disorienting scene. Mark Silver explains, “It is through this overlapping of the known and the unknown, the familiar and the uncanny, that Yamahata’s images both capture the radically disruptive force of the bomb and prompt an aesthetic response in the viewer.”21

Gennifer Weisenfeld’s argument about images of Tokyo and Yokohama in ruins after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 holds true for these postwar photographs as well. She posits, “As a fundamentally visual experience, can disaster and its aftermath ever be divorced from the aesthetic, as uncomfortable as that fact may be?”22 In Robert Jay Lifton’s study of the psychological effects of the atomic bombs, one Hiroshima survivor elucidates this aesthetic response and makes an explicit connection to the medium of photography:

As I walked along, the horrible things I saw became more and more extreme and more and more intolerable. And at a certain point I must have become more or less saturated, so that I became no longer sensitive, in fact insensitive, to what I saw around me. I think human emotions reach a point beyond which they cannot extend—something like the photographic process. If under certain conditions you expose a photographic plate to light, it becomes black; but if you continue to expose it, then it reaches a point where it turns white…. Only later can one recognize having reached this maximum state….23

21 Mark Silver, “Framing the Ruins: The Documentary Photography of Yamahata Yōsuke (Nagasaki, August 10, 1945),” in Imag(in)ing the War In Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film, ed. David Stahl and Mark Williams (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 233.


Here, the photographic process informs an experience so spectacular that it would otherwise be impossible to describe. Perhaps the investigatory mission of photographing the destruction, the repetitive act of searching, focusing, and releasing the camera shutter, sustained or acted as a secondary source of detachment for the young Yamahata. The intense visual focus required by the task transported him into a realm of aesthetic response where ruins constituted the forms and shapes of his photographic compositions.

The second category of postwar ruins photography consists of scenes of life among the ruins published in popular magazines that were revived and cheaply printed after the war. The Asahi Camera commissioned Hayashi Tadahiko to document the ruins of Tokyo for their postwar editions.\(^\text{24}\) Ruins are a frequent protagonist in Hayashi’s pictorial account of postwar life; people sleep, eat, and congregate in the partially collapsed buildings (Fig. 6). Some photographers chose to focus on the barracks themselves – the slums hand-built by survivors from the very ruins of their former neighborhoods. Nakamura Rikko documented these poor living conditions, oftentimes focusing solely on the structures without the humans that created or inhabited them (Fig. 7). Frontal shots present the structures for visual contemplation; their handmade-ness makes for an absorbing pattern of textures and shapes, a montage of reassembled ruins. Nakamura continued to search for evidence of the war well into the 1950s. In a series entitled, “Objets,” he photographed peeling layers of old posters, fragments of burnt walls and broken windows that harkened back to the ruinous landscape of the immediate postwar period.\(^\text{25}\)

\(^{24}\) Mitsuhashi Sumiyo, *Hayashi Tadahiko no sekai: Hayashi Tadahiko no mita sengo, kasutori – bunji – so shite Amerika* (The World of Hayashi Tadahiko: The Postwar as Seen by Hayashi Tadahiko, Katsutori, Literature, and then America), (Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Culture Foundation; Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 1993), 8.

These focused studies of ruined material were a reminder of recent realities that would soon be overshadowed by the material splendor of high economic growth (kōdo keizai seichō ki), which took off in the late 1950s and lasted until 1973.²⁶

As structures in the continual process of formation and deformation, barracks or slums can be understood as a type of ruin. Despite the consistent growth of the economy and the rapid rehabilitation of the country through the 1960s, for some, living conditions did not improve until the early 1970s. Fukushima Kikujirō was a social activist and photojournalist who spent years documenting the genbaku slums before Miyamoto ever visited them. Fukushima’s 1961 book, *Pikadon: Aru genbaku higaisha no kiroku* (*Pikadon: A Record of Life after the Bomb*), follows the life of the atomic bomb survivor Nakamura Sugimatsu and his family as they struggle to gain proper health care and adequate financial relief from the government after the war.²⁷ *Pikadon* is fundamentally about human suffering and the ongoing injustices experienced by the atomic bomb victims. However, the surrounding environment plays an equally compelling role in this visual narrative. The first photograph to appear is a view of the dilapidated slums, ominously positioned below a cemetery on a nearby hill (Fig. 8). We meet Mr. Nakamura on the next page, his disembodied head peering out from a window in a double-page spread of the wooden barrack where he and his family live. The narrative follows Mr. Nakamura in his daily activities, his

²⁶ The often referenced “economic miracle” of postwar Japan refers to the years 1950 to 1973, when “Japan’s gross national product (GNP; the total value of goods and services produced in a year) expanded by an average annual rate of more than 10 percent. Such a record of growth over such a long period of time had never been seen in world economic history (the People’s Republic of China since the 1980s has grown with comparable speed). Only a few minor downturns, such as that in 1954 caused by the end of the Korean War, show up as slight dips on a growth chart that runs smoothly and sharply upward.” Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 243-44.

moments of disabling pain, and his attempts to work through the suffering to provide a living for his family. These scenes are frequently juxtaposed with photographs of the slums (Fig. 9) along with the occasional shot of the Atomic Bomb Dome, held up as evidence of scars on the landscape that mirror the scars on Mr. Nakamura’s own body.

The analogy between scarred human skin and ruins became a central motif for Tōmatsu Shōmei’s visual narrative of postwar Japan.28 In Hiroshima-Nagasaki Document 1961, Domon Ken and Tōmatsu each established their own iconography of ruins in response to the permanent and ephemeral destruction wrought by the atomic bombs. Tōmatsu’s portrait of Ms. Kataoka Tsuyo in Nagasaki is one of the most frequently reproduced images from Document 1961 (Fig. 10). The revealing view of the keloid scar that runs down the right side of Ms. Kataoka’s face incite sympathy in the viewer in line with the goal of the book, commissioned on the occasion of the World Conference Against A&H (Atomic and Hydrogen) Bombs to “show the apocalyptic picture painted by the atomic bombs, and convey the fact that the wounds they caused hadn’t healed, 15 years after the event.”29

Tōmatsu developed sustained relationships with the hibakusha that he photographed and continued to take their photos for decades as he developed his own thinking on the process of weathering and the imaging of ruins.30 He re-photographed Ms. Kataoka in 1975 and again in 2007 (Fig. 11). In the final portrait, her face is positioned directly adjacent to one of the dismembered heads of the statues that fell from Urakami Cathedral with the force of the atomic

28 Cyril Thomas, “Shōmei Tōmatsu: la mémoire des ruines” (Tōmatsu Shōmei: Memories of Ruins), Imaginaire des ruines 35:2 (Fall 2007), 45-54.


30 Tōmatsu returned to Nagasaki many times and eventually relocated there after his seventieth birthday.
blast.\textsuperscript{31} Both visages are weathered by time, but both are also indelibly marked by the same instantaneous moment of ruination. Here, the ruin is the past and the coming apocalypse, a reminder of the moment when the modern world first understood its potential for complete self-annihilation. Tōmatsu wrote of his experiences in Nagasaki: “The ultimate ruin is the atomic wasteland…an entirely new kind of ruin, one that first appeared in the mid-twentieth century. […] I, who thought of ruins only as the transmutation of the cityscape, learned that ruins lie within people as well.”\textsuperscript{32} Ishiuchi Miyako has continued the legacy of Tōmatsu in the 1990s with her intimate imaging of scars (Fig. 12). The connection to ruins is palpable when viewed alongside her earlier work on abandoned buildings (Fig. 13). The peeling paint that disfigures the doors of the forgotten Bay Side Courts mirrors the verticality of the scar that stretches the length of the woman’s torso, dividing the body in half just as the doorway is split down the center. In this version of ruins, time is visualized by texture.

In subsequent stages of understanding and interpretation, many photographers have returned to the one, collectively sanctified ruin in Japan – the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima. Kawada Kikuji’s images of the dome in his groundbreaking 1965 photobook Chizu (The Map) are striking for the ruinous, grotesque aesthetic that he applied to the site (Fig. 14). Kawada used closely cropped photographs to draw attention to the surface of the ruin, an intensely haptic approach that is reiterated by the complex folds and layering of the photobook itself. As Maggie Mustard argues, Kawada’s “photographs of the interior, which he originally called ‘stains’ (shimi), are divorced from legible context,” thus providing a defamiliarization and rethinking of

\textsuperscript{31} The site of Urakami is unique in that ruins of the original cathedral remain collected in the lawn outside the entrance to the reconstruction, nestled in the grass like a small graveyard to the fallen structure.

this ruin turned icon. Kawada’s insistence on a multisensory approach to photography was ideally suited to the ruin, here pictured as material “suffused with the memory of absolute violence.”

Despite the erasure of most wartime ruins from the physical landscape, their memory was invoked repeatedly in the seemingly endless cycle of redevelopment that characterized Japanese cities in the second half of the twentieth century. Members of the Provoke collective responded to the dizzying pace of urban upheaval with their are, bure, boke (grainy, blurry, and out-of-focus) style of photography. For example, in 1969, Moriyama Daidō applied the aesthetic to a series of photographs that he took of posters depicting automobile accidents (Fig. 15) – another ruin of capitalism – while Yanagisawa Shin pictured redevelopment and slum clearance of the early 1960s and again of the 1970s with an off-kilter handling of the camera.

Yanagisawa returned to Tokyo in 1963 as the city was being mobilized to host the Olympic Games. His first assignment after a two-year hiatus from photography was called “Sketch,” a series for Camera Mainichi that chronicled the destruction necessary for the redevelopment of Tokyo into a gleaming, orderly, global metropolis prepared to host the Olympics. Yanagisawa continued to document the changing city well after 1964, asking, “What happens when the Olympics are over? When visibility has been narrowed by raised highways, and you can’t even see the dirty sky because of the smog?” In 1979, Yanagisawa compiled

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36 Ibid., 18.
these photographs into his award-winning photobook, *Toshi no kiseki* (Tracks of the City), a simultaneous work of self reflection and a document of the Tokyo urbanscape. Yanagisawa used the ever-changing cityscape to explore his own inner psyche and recalls being drawn to interesting spatial compositions in the landscape – not newly completed glass facades and modernist grids, but the construction sites before the facades went up, or the last of the barracks in the midst of demolition (Fig. 16).\(^{37}\) He wrote of his goals as a photographer: “Among the things that I fantasize about being able to experience is capturing images of the desolate wasteland that remains when a civilization collapses, when journalists and sponsors no longer have any influence, and everything loses all meaning and form, with a home-made camera and home-made film material.”\(^{38}\) In *Tracks of the City*, Yanagisawa uncovered spaces in the Tokyo landscape that resembled that ruined wasteland, a world without predetermined or overdetermined meanings and forms.

With the spike in land prices in the 1980s, urban redevelopment picked up again with tremendous momentum. Like Yanagisawa, Miyamoto was attracted to the visually incoherent forms of the demolition site. Yet, unlike Yanagisawa, Miyamoto’s career in architectural journalism led him to employ a more neutral, formal style of image-making that favors a direct but distanced approach to the subject. Miyamoto pictured the demolition sites as an architectural surveyor might, presenting these “temporary ruins” as evidence of the often overlooked, destructive side of late capitalism.\(^{39}\) After the bursting of the real-estate bubble in 1992, many

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\(^{37}\) Ibid., 15-6.


\(^{39}\) Miyamoto, “Temporary Ruins,” 50.
photographers hunted down literal ruins in the Japanese landscape, abandoned industrial sites, factories, railways and leisure facilities – all signs of modern progress that have been left behind to rot. These ruins of modernity were not laid to waste because of war or natural disaster; rather, they ceased to function due to the invention of new technologies, the increasing awareness of vulnerable ecosystems, and/or fluctuations in the economy. In a series entitled, *Haikyo yūgi* (Deathtopia), Kobayashi Shinichirō presents an array of defunct industrial sites, rusted machinery, deserted amusement parks and emptied hotels in the process of being reclaimed by nature (Fig. 17). The consistently square, brightly colored images all come from the years 1989-1997. As such, they track the aftermath of the economic recession that began with the bursting of the real estate price bubble in early 1992. The puckish coloring that defines many of Kobayashi’s images is shocking in comparison to the predominance of monochrome in ruins photography. The intensity of the colors reiterates the spectacle of wealth and unabashed development that defined bubble-era Japan, and the picturing of that spectacle in ruins demonstrates the fragility of all economic and social systems.

Featured in *Deathtopia* is the coal-mining island of Hashima, or “Gunkanjima” (battleship island), as it is more popularly known, which was shut down in 1972. In 2004, Kobayashi published a photobook dedicated entirely to the ruined and weathered structures left on the island, as did the photographers Narahara Ikkō, Ōhashi Hiroshi, and Saiga Yuji (Fig. 18). Gunkanjima is a famed site for urban explorers and photographers interested in ruins because of its peculiar and dramatic location. The small island of rock was built up to its edges and then

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40 Located 19 kilometers southwest of Nagasaki harbor, the coal-mining island of Hashima was run by the Mitsubishi Mining Company from 1890 to 1974. It was a symbol of modern industrialization in Japan and, as such, became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015 as one component of the “Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining.” For more on the history of Gunkanjima, see: O-Project, ed., *Gunkanjima zenkei / Gunkanjima Odyssey Archives*, 9th ed. (Tokyo: Sansai Books, 2015).
abandoned as is so that from a distance it appears as a giant labyrinth of ruins emerging ominously from the ocean. The resulting photographs picture a spectacle. They are often printed in strong contrasts to emphasize the hues of the patina and rust, a popular aesthetic in the genre of “ruin porn,” which has been criticized for “objectifying empty buildings as pretty stage sets filled with juxtapositions, fading colors and dramatic light.”

With the rise of the homeless population in the 1990s, photographers such as Miyamoto and Sakaguchi Kyōhei conducted photographic surveys of the cardboard houses built by the homeless from discarded materials found on the streets. These photographs throw into stark relief the reality of homelessness in present-day Japan amidst a larger urban fabric characterized by wealth, excess, and waste. Moreover, they harken back to the similarly pieced-together barracks of the early postwar years. Just as with Nakamura Rikko’s images, one senses an admiration on the part of these photographers for the ingenuity of the handmade designs.

Natural disasters continue to pull photographers to their wasted landscapes, from Ogawa Yasushi’s fragmented photographs of Miyake Island, deserted after the 1983 volcanic eruption, to Miyamoto’s coverage of Kobe after the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, or the slew of artists who have responded to the triple-disaster of 3/11. In contrast to many images of the immediate postwar landscape, those who photograph contemporary disaster seem more aware of the ethics of picturing individual suffering. In this way, images of the ruined landscape stand in for human hardship (Fig. 19). The state of the rubble lends itself to the imaginations of those on the periphery who attempt to understand what it must have been like to experience the wave, the

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lava, or the tremors. Depending on the aesthetic approach and rhetorical framing, these images of ruins have been deployed to various ends; some contribute to the transformation of the event into a spectacle, while others serve a more quiet, commemorative purpose. In drawing connections between scenes of present and past ruins, they can be used to question progressive historical narratives and linear modes of historical time. As the photographer Kitai Kazuo admitted, “I took this shot of the Tōhoku landscape not to document this contemporary tragedy, but because all I could see was the landscape of 1945. I wonder, how much has really changed since that time?” Throughout the dissertation, I demonstrate how Miyamoto’s images of ruins contain the potential to draw out, elucidate, and visualize memories, such as the one articulated by Kitai, through a multitude of potential interpretations, implications, and associations with the ruins photography discussed above. With such comparisons, I argue that Miyamoto’s work can be understood as a form of preservation which seeks to provide a source for memories that complicate a decontextualized, laudatory narrative of postwar history in Japan.

Literature Review, Sources, Methodologies

A vast and growing literature on war memory and memorialization in Japan informs my understanding of the many ways in which traumatic memories have been simultaneously exercised in and exorcised from the public sphere. Personal narratives of the Asia-Pacific War that were shared in the early postwar years became entangled in what Carol Gluck calls “heroic narratives,” in which “villains and victims were clearly marked in strong story lines, which

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44 Kitai Kazuo, conversation with the author, November 26, 2015.
admitted no ambiguity."\(^{45}\) In these narratives, characterized by “historical one-liners,” a few villains were responsible for dragging an entire nation – the victims – into total war.\(^{46}\) The U.S. Occupation played a decisive role in the creation of this narrative in three main ways: 1) by renaming the Greater East Asia War the “Pacific War,” China and continental aggression were excluded from the main narrative; 2) by trying a handful of military leaders, but not the emperor, an image of a nation and emperor misled by militarists was reinforced; and 3) by casting the war as an internal affair – as a war whose causes lay at home – the imperial territories were expunged from the official story, creating a “total amnesia of empire.”\(^{47}\) Because these narratives were repeated over the years and the trauma of those with contending memories was often too great to speak about publicly, those heroic narratives proved durable and came to dominate postwar public memory in national monuments, memorial museums, and textbooks, which were then used to educate younger generations of Japanese who did not participate in or witness the war.

In the context of education, Yoshikuni Igarashi has shown how the discourse of nihonjinron (theories of what it means to be Japanese) emphasized supposedly ahistorical categories, such as Japanese ethnicity, to overcome the drastic social changes that came with Japan’s defeat, to suppress the wartime past, and to stress continuity with prewar culture. He writes, “Culture, or tradition, was a convenient medium through which to project continuity with Japan’s past in order to mask the historical disjuncture of Japan’s movement from a former

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid. 51.
enemy to ally of the United States.”

Born in 1947 and raised in Tokyo during the postwar and high economic growth period, Miyamoto was educated in a world where nihonjinron theory and heroic narratives of the war seeped into textbooks and memorial sites visited on school trips. These narratives and theories, however, did not go unchallenged. In War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945-2005 (2006), Franziska Seraphim complicates this history by examining how the social politics of war memory operated among special interests groups, such as the Japan Teachers’ Union who used memories of the war to oppose whitewashed textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education; engage in battles over public information, the interpretation, and representation of the nation’s past at controversial sites such as Yasukuni Shrine; and protest the public use of Japan’s national flag and anthem, along with the revival of prewar national holidays.

I also rely on Seraphim for an understanding of how the return of war criminals to politics after the Occupation, along with the signing of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan in 1952 and again in 1960, “mobilized popular war memory by invoking the continued victimization of the people by the state.” Similarly, Akiko Takenaka demonstrates how with the rise of the New Left movement and protests against the Vietnam War in 1968-69, narratives and memories of the Asia-Pacific War “also functioned as peace promotion.” Miyamoto participated in these protests at Tama Art University, and in 1969

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50 Ibid., 22. He goes on: “But the experience also transformed it by focusing attention on the need to overcome the ghosts of the past by generating more social equity and a stronger national identity.”

he became a founding member of the Bijutsuka Kyōtō Kaigi (The Artist Joint Struggle Council, or Bikyōtō), a resistance group disillusioned by the failure of the student revolutions and united by the pledge that “contemporary art [and its institutions] must be made into ruins.”

Miyamoto began to exhibit and publish his photographs of ruins at the precise moment when controversial memories of the Asia-Pacific War made a critical resurgence in public discourse after a period shrouded by the “miraculous” strength and consistent growth of the country’s GDP and an increasingly accessible consumer culture. In 1970 it seemed that “Japan’s struggle to come to terms with its war memories came to a temporary resolution with the prosperity of its high-growth economy.” Expo’70 in Osaka – the first international exposition to be held in Asia – ceremoniously marked this historic turning point for the country, a point when the postwar period was declared over once again. Nearly two decades later, the death of the Shōwa emperor in 1989 generated yet another symbolic endpoint of the postwar era. However, as Igarashi explains, “With the disappearance of Hirohito’s body – the key element in the foundational narrative – war memories returned to the Japanese media, both as nostalgia and as critical reflection.”

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52 Kanesaka Kenji, “‘Haikyo to shite no geijutsu’ no haiki: Firumu, āto, fesutiebaru no hōkai igo” (The Abandonment of “Art As Ruins”: The Coming Collapse of Film, Art, and Festival), SD 62 (December 1969), 73. Miyamoto broke with the group soon after its formation when the students were arrested for tearing down and destroying police barricades at a protest. He was suspended from university for one year and was the only member of Bikyōtō to return to school to finish his degree, which, he believes fostered some resentment by the more radical members of the group. Miyamoto, interview with the author, December 13, 2015.


54 As observed by Andrew Gordon, “As early as 1955, as recently as 1990, and numerous times in between, Japan’s postwar era has been deemed ‘finished.’” The goal of his edited volume, Postwar Japan as History, is to “clarify the varied senses in which people have defined the postwar era and marked its boundaries.” Andrew Gordon, “Introduction,” in Postwar Japan as History, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), ix.

55 Igarashi, Bodies of Memory, 204.
(1991), addresses the specific role of the Shōwa Emperor’s death in compelling individuals to share publicly their memories of the war in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In addition to the death of the emperor, the breakdown of the Cold War political paradigm and the anticipated loss of a generation of witnesses, victims, and perpetrators fostered a potent moment for the public re-remembering of World War II. Although no less socially constructed, the individual memories contributed by the wartime generation complicated the comparatively tame, decontextualized narrative of the war articulated in national monuments, memorial museums, and textbooks.

Recent work on peace museums and exhibitions related to the war informs my understanding of how narratives of the wartime and postwar years were presented to Japanese society by public and private institutions. The Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima is perhaps the most emblematic. As the site that most school children visit at least once in their high school careers – a third of the museum’s annual visitors are students – the narrative presented there provides the dominant framework and language for how wartime artifacts are collected and experiences documented. As Daniel Seltz argues, “[C]ommemoration takes precedence over learning in Hiroshima – its museum feels more like a temple than a place of historical analysis or criticism – leaving it unable to advance new interpretations or arguments about the bomb and the war.”

Seltz has shown how debate about the war and its narration occurs only at the level of academics and politics. Memorials and museums, which are meant to engage and educate the public, he contends, have failed to do so when it comes to narratives of the war. Laura Hein and Akiko Takenaka also attest to this in their examination of the failure of the museum Peace Osaka to defend its inclusion of exhibitions about Japanese war crimes against attacks from the political

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right. Kerry Smith and Cary Karacas both detail how the controversies that have surrounded the construction and goals of numerous other memorial museums testify to “how much of the wartime past remains problematic and contested.”

Because of photography’s “malleable relationship with time – and thus with history,” how the medium has been put to use in these contexts is crucial for understanding the rhetoric surrounding images of ruins in Japan. For this, I rely heavily on Julia Thomas’ essay on the one photography exhibition to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the war, “Photography in the 1940s” held at the Yokohama Museum of Art in 1995. She demonstrates how this representative exhibition excised representations of the war experience in other parts of Asia, conveyed the destruction experienced at home as a natural disaster, and, ultimately, presented a national identity that “transcends the eventfulness of history for an abiding cultural essence” that flourishes in the peace and prosperity of redevelopment in the postwar years. In this context, Miyamoto’s presentation of various types of ruins in the contemporary Japanese landscape exposes the violence that underlies the narrative of “democracy, peace, prosperity” that had become synonymous with “senso,” the postwar.

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Outside of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, images of ruins are an underexplored way of understanding and documenting memory in Japan. Lisa Yoneyama’s *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (1999) attests to the phenomenon of ruins becoming representations of memories in Hiroshima. I extend her analysis to account for the persistence of ruinous imagery throughout the postwar, high-growth period in spite of the reconstruction of Japanese cities. To this end, the poet Sasaki Mikirō’s *Yawarakaku, kowareru: Toshi no horobikata ni tsuite* (Softly, Destroying: On the Ways the City is Ruined, 2003) and the architect Isozaki Arata’s essay, “Haikyo ron” (On Ruins, 1988), are two important examples of leading cultural figures who use the ruin to think through alternative approaches to building and urban design. Significantly, both have used Miyamoto’s photographs to visualize their theory of ruins.

As a subject, ruins are easily limited to philosophical and visual analysis (particularly in relation to considerations of the sublime and the uncanny) with less concern for sociohistorical context, as is the case with Dylan Trigg’s *The Aesthetics of Decay* (2006) and Tim Edensor’s *Industrial Ruins* (2005). While these works provide useful methodologies for dissecting the visual impact and phenomenological experience of ruins, they are also firmly rooted in European discourse. As Wu Hung points out, “the Western concept of ruins has become a global one” through the processes of colonization and globalization. However, his work on ruins in China, *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (2012), demonstrates how “indigenous concepts and representations of ruins” have interacted with the western category at different points in history to produce meanings that shift according to dominant conceptions of time, place, architectural tradition, building materials, and poetic or artistic

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tropes. The complex ways in which he weaves together these histories and opens up definitions of the ruin to include a variety of interpretations and representations is an inspiration to this study. Likewise, Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs’s Buildings Must Die: A Perverse View of Architecture (2011) is groundbreaking not only for its theorization of ruins as a critical foundation for urban planning and construction, but also by virtue of the fact that it draws on instances of ruination in a global context, from the “ghost architectures” that dot rural China to the apocalyptic urbanism of Detroit. Similarly, Gennifer Weisenfeld applies ruins theory to an interrogation of images created after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, and her work is crucial for a consideration of reactions to masonry (as opposed to wooden) ruins in the modern Japanese context. My aim, however, is to conceptualize ruins post 1945, when, after two years of considerable firebombing and two atomic bombs, almost all of Japan’s major urban centers simultaneously lay in ruins.

The majority of the resources that I use to contextualize and theorize Miyamoto’s work come from architectural and urban studies journals, particularly Kenchiku (Architecture), Toshi Jūtaku (Urban Housing), Jūtaku Kenchiku (Residential Architecture), and SD (Space Design), which all began under the direction of the editor Taira Keiichi. Taira was a member of the editorial team that was fired ceremoniously in an event now known as the “Shinkenchiku Incident.” In 1957, a group of editors at Shinkenchiku (New Architecture – the most prominent architectural journal in Japan at the time) had become increasingly critical of the journal’s consistent laudatory focus on certain architects and themes, namely the work of Tange Kenzō and his circle. After publishing a critical essay on the architect Murano Tōgo, the group was fired, and Taira went on to start the publication Kenchiku, which ran from 1960-1975. Taira

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62 Ibid., 8.
condemned *Shinkenchiku* for being a “stylebook,” a magazine filled with glossy photographs of recently completed projects by well-known architects.\(^{63}\) By contrast, with *Kenchiku*, Taira hoped to present an honest and critical approach to architecture by “expanding the consciousness of people involved with architecture.”\(^{64}\)

In 1963, Taira left *Kenchiku* to start *SD* (Space + Design), a journal he created to focus specifically on urban issues. On the goals of the journal, Taira stated, “I placed the city, architecture, and arts in relationship to the whole of urban culture, and within that I searched for a mutual interactive relationship.”\(^{65}\) He focused on the idea of space as a common framework by which to understand and analyze these different areas of interest. In November 1966, a special issue of *SD* was published entitled, “Toshi Jūtaku.” It included eight essays on the state of urban housing in Japan. The short introductory text read: “Working from the fact that today’s houses exist as ‘urban houses’ [toshi jūtaku], we are taking up the problem of regulating the quality of the types of urban housing.”\(^{66}\) As Hanada Yoshiaki has pointed out, the first part of this sentence recognizes the fact that by the 1960s most housing in Japan existed in urban centers; thus, there would be no point in considering the housing problem in Japan without also dealing with the city.\(^{67}\) The special issue was so well received that Taira decided to start a new journal devoted explicitly to housing. *Toshi Jūtaku* was born in 1968, and Taira brought on Ueda Makoto to be the head editor. These are the two figures responsible for giving Miyamoto his first job after

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\(^{63}\) Taira Keiichi and Nishimura Yukio, “Kenchiku jānarizumu to toshi dezain” (Architectural Journalism and Urban Design), *Chiiki kaihatsu* 467 (August 2008), 58.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 40.


\(^{66}\) Ibid., 41-2.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 42.
graduating from college and for exposing him to the world of architectural theory and criticism that would shape the later concerns he pursued through the medium of photography.

My understanding of this history is indebted to Hanada Yoshiaki’s detailed biography of Ueda Makoto, as well as Ueda’s own two-volume chronicle on his work at *Toshi Jūtaku*. At the time of their inception, these journals were experimental for their broad understanding of the concepts of architecture and space. As such, they include poetry, photography, design surveys, and critiques of the status quo alongside reports on newly completed buildings. Two critical essays from this period that are of particular importance to this dissertation are Hasegawa Takashi’s *Shinden ka gokusha ka* (Temple or Prison?), first published as a series of essays in various journals and then as an edition in the *SD* book series in 1972, and Kōjirō Yūichirō’s essay, “Kyodai kenchiku ni kōgi suru” (An Objection to Mega-Building), published in *Shinkenchiku* in 1974.

*Temple or Prison?* was a scathing critique of the postwar architectural scene as dominated by Tange Kenzō. Hasegawa labeled Tange’s top-down and external approach to architecture the “temple style” (*shinden zukuri*), in which capital and authority (the top) dictate that the architect focus on a building’s external appearance. While visually appealing from the outside, he claimed that these structures had no empathy for the humans who used them. He

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69 Hasegawa was one of the first critics to openly attack Tange, who advocated a raised, axial style of architecture with equal claims to Greek classicism, Le Corbusier, and Japan’s own heritage of imperial villas. He drew stylistic connections between Tange’s 1942 proposal for a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere Memorial Hall and his design for the Hiroshima Peace Center (1955) to demonstrate the perversity of employing the same style whether designing for “the ethnic people” (*minshū*) or “the victims.” Hasegawa Takashi, *Shinden ka gokusha ka* (Temple or Prison?), (Tokyo: Kajima, 2007), 162-3. This was not the first time that such connections had been made to Tange’s history with fascism, but Hasegawa was the first to delve into a thorough critique of the style itself and the social ills and illusions that it represented. For another major critique of Tange, see: Naka Masami, *Gendai kenchikuka no shisō: Tange Kenzō ron* (The Ideology of Contemporary Architects: A Treatise on Tange Kenzō), (Tokyo: Kindai kenchikusha, 1970). For a history of this criticism, see: Jacqueline Eve Kestenbaum, “Modernism and Tradition in Japanese Architectural Ideology, 1931-1955” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1996).
believed that the temple style prospered in the postwar era because of the way in which the architecture was raised up with the use of ground-level supporting columns, or *pilotis*. In this way, elevated buildings such as Ōtaka’s Motomachi Apartments or Tange’s Hiroshima Peace Center (1955) literally rise up from the ashes of World War II (Fig. 20). Hasegawa labeled these architects *oppressors* and those who use the architecture, its *prisoners*. As a solution to this dire situation, Hasegawa proposed that architects identify, accept, and then reject those authoritarian and capitalistic pressures that controlled them in order to “plan and execute *architectural and urban space in a form that these powers cannot violate*.” That form would take a bottom-up and internal approach, resulting in the “prison style” (*gokusha zukuri*) of architecture. He compared the prison style to medieval cities, “closed to the outside and open on the inside,” which we can identify in Miyamoto’s photographs of the Kowloon Walled City slum.71

Hasegawa’s essays received high praise from the likes of the critic and architectural historian Kōjiro Yūichirō. In his review of *Temples or Prison?*, Kōjiro positioned Hasegawa’s argument within a larger historical turn away from narratives that celebrate the “myth of industry” to those that tell a “human history.” “In the area of modern architectural history,” he wrote, “this means going from the ‘temple style’ to the ‘prison style’ as a critique of contemporary architects.”72 In the end, Kōjiro aligned himself with the “battle for the ‘prison style,’” and urged Hasegawa to continue his “attack” against the temple-style architects.73 Two years later, he published his essay arguing for the value of community-based architecture as

70 Hasegawa, *Shinden ka*, 293.

71 Ibid.

72 Kōjiro Yūichirō, “Kenchikuka tachi wa sogeki sareta” (The Architects Have Been Shot by a Sniper), *Kenchiku* 146 (November 1972), 7.

73 Ibid., 8.
opposed to mega-building.⁷⁴ Although he did not single out Tange as a negative example of megabuilding, Kōjiro’s praise of works such as Urabe Shizutarō’s Kurashiki Ivy Square (1974) is clearly in line with Hasegawa’s theory of the prison style (Fig. 21). Built in the historic merchants’ quarters of Kurashiki near the Seto Inland Sea, this redbrick hotel complex is contained by thick, ivy-covered walls that open onto a spacious courtyard, shops, and restaurants, reminiscent of Hasegawa’s reference to medieval cities as models for the prison style.⁷⁵ Urabe’s site-specific, inward-oriented approach to the Ivy Square stands in stark contrast to Tange’s large-scale, brutalist design for the nearby Kurashiki City Hall (Fig. 22).⁷⁶

These essays testify to the widespread concerns over mega-building, the state’s emphasis on symbolism in urban spaces, and the destructive tendencies of capitalism that reappear in Miyamoto’s work. In this context, I make use of a group of literature and theory broadly referred to as “Against Architecture,” a common denomination for the work of Georges Bataille as explored by Denis Hollier in his 1989 book of the same name.⁷⁷ The material of the demolition site was fundamental to Bataille’s theory of a general economy, a “radical rethink of the nature

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⁷⁵ Urabe Shizutarō designed multiple buildings for the historic merchant quarters of Kurashiki over a period of four decades in a manner similar to Maki Fumihiko’s seven-phase approach to Hillside Terrae in Tokyo (1969-1992). Urabe’s designs for Kurashiki include the annex for the Ōhara Museum of Art (1961), The Kurashiki International Hotel (1963), Kurashiki Ivy Square (1974), and the Municipal Museum of Art and Culture (1993). Both Urabe and Maki took a regionalist, site-specific, and inward-oriented approach to these projects.

⁷⁶ Tange’s design does make vague references to traditional sources, such as the log-cabin style of the Shōsōin at Tōdaiji in Nara, but it makes no attempt to harmonize with its local environment.

of economy” and a “challenge to the Western civilizational fantasy that ‘the entirety of the world and of human experience can be made useful.’” For Bataille, an obsolete building, or better yet, a building in the midst of demolition, was to be celebrated precisely for its wastefulness, its lack of value and non-productivity. This is one of the foundational theories for Cairns’ and Jacobs’ inquiry into how the inevitable death of buildings might be harnessed as the temporal foundation from which to conceive, design, and inhabit manmade structures. They summarize, “By taking our vision away from architecture as the solid output of creativity, acquisition, utility, and conservation, [Bataille] reconnects architecture to its base materialism.”

Scholars who pursue a similar line of thinking and inspire this study include Mark Wigley, Neil Harris, Jacques Derrida, and Antoine Picon. At one level, Miyamoto’s photographs of ruinous structures foreground the base materialism of architecture, equating its replaceability to any other product under capitalism. In addition, by emphasizing the materiality of the ruined commodity, he grants the ruins that he photographs value – not use-value, but a value based in their status as unplanned and unpredictable structures open to interpretation.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter, “Temporary Ruins, Recurring Memories,” focuses on Miyamoto’s earliest and most enduring project, *Architectural Apocalypse*, a photobook that catalogues demolition both in Japan and abroad. I emphasize the significance of the demolition site in the context of the rapidly redeveloping Japanese metropolis during the economic “bubble” period of the 1980s. Working from Miyamoto’s characterization of these photographs as “temporary

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79 Ibid., 63.
ruins” (tsukanoma no haikyo), I examine the allegorical relationship of Architectural Apocalypse to memories of the widespread destruction of the Japanese landscape during World War II.

As demonstrated by Architectural Apocalypse, Miyamoto has been drawn to marginal and ephemeral forms of architecture throughout his career. The second chapter, “Concrete Slums and Cardboard Houses,” focuses on two distinct instances of what he calls “handmade architecture” (tezukuri kenchiku). The first, photographs of Kowloon Walled City, the notorious 2.7-hectare, self-governed slum in Hong Kong that was demolished in 1993, is an example of a photographer looking abroad for alternative, bottom-up approaches to urban planning; the second focuses on cardboard houses, shelters assembled by the homeless in Japan from scraps of cardboard and other materials found on the street. Both are representative of Miyamoto’s protracted interest in structures that are in a perpetual state of formation or deformation, a state that recalls the status of ruins, as well as the near continuous rebuilding of Japan’s cities in the modern era. In his consistent focus on the structures themselves, I argue that these types of informal architecture serve as metonyms for the marginalized populations who occupy them. In visualizing their presence, Miyamoto’s photographs incorporate them as indispensable aspects of the late-modern, global city.

The third chapter, “Documenting Disaster, Living with Ruins,” deals with Miyamoto’s most explicit engagement with ruins in the form of post-disaster landscapes. Exactly fifty years after the end of World War II, the devastation wrought by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995 forced architects and urban planners to reconsider the country’s relationship to ruins. In the aftermath, ruins took on a new, productive role in processes of memorialization and reconstruction, and Miyamoto’s photographs of the wrecked city of Kobe were central to visualizing the logic behind this methodological turn. Likewise, his documentary film of the
2011 tsunami in Northeast Japan explores the role of the ruined landscape in how survivors have coped with memories of the event.

The photography projects discussed in the first three chapters all engage with theories of urban space that ran counter to the dominant buildings trends in postwar Japan, where progress was understood as perpetual renewal in the form of urban redevelopment, slum clearance, and post-disaster rehabilitation. Chapter Four, “Deconstructing the Camera, Burying the City,” examines Miyamoto’s use of a life-size pinhole camera as a means of visualizing those alternative approaches to urban space. I argue that viewing the city from inside a wooden box – the most primitive version of the camera – generates a new method for reconstituting space in the late-capitalist Japanese city.

Finally, in the epilogue, I use Miyamoto’s experience in the blacked out space of the pinhole camera to reflect on the theme of darkness that runs through his work. From the seedy underground world of Kowloon Walled City to the tragic devastation of Kobe, here, darkness is understood as an instrument of edification. I address the myth that “there are no ruins in Japan” and harness the ruin as a jumping off point for a new narrative of postwar Japanese history that emphasizes destruction rather than creation, repetition rather than progress, and waste rather than growth and prosperity.
Chapter 1: Temporary Ruins, Recurring Memories

“Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world.” – Fredric Jameson, “Future City,” 2003

The theme of ruins was developed in Miyamoto’s earliest and perhaps most enduring project, *Architectural Apocalypse*, a photobook that catalogued modern ruins from across the globe. From the abandoned Nazi flak towers in Vienna to the deteriorating slums of Hong Kong, this photobook works from an expanded definition of the ruin, chronicling multiple types of ruins in various states of deformation. However, there is one state of ruination that largely outweighs the others in the pages of *Architectural Apocalypse* – the demolition site. Beginning with Hans Poelzig’s Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin, *Architectural Apocalypse* documents the final days of historic early-twentieth-century buildings, traces of the past that had been deemed inefficient, out of place, and unnecessary in the globalizing metropolis (Fig. 1.1).

From the celebration of the post-apocalyptic landscape in Otomo Katsuhiro’s science fiction manga series *Akira* (serialized in *Young Magazine* from 1982 to 1990), to Kawamata Tadashi’s installation of barrack-style dwellings across the contemporary metropolis, the aesthetic of decay emerged in an array of Japanese media in the 1980s. The curator Hasegawa Yuko describes this fondness for ruins as a “corrective reaction to the violent changes in the cityscape that had become the status quo.” The urban conditions that Hasegawa describes are

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the premise of *Architectural Apocalypse*, but I complicate her explanation of Miyamoto’s work as signs of a “longing for traces of the past.”⁴ Miyamoto’s aesthetic approach demands a critical investigation of the social function of these demolition sites beyond the realm of nostalgia. As Norma Field has rightly pointed out: “If nostalgia is useful, it must be so as a tool of history.”⁵ These photographs are certainly tools of history, but it takes more than nostalgia to captivate and sustain an audience to the extent that these images have managed to do. In 1988, Miyamoto received the Kimura Ihee Award for *Architectural Apocalypse*, and since 1986 these photographs have been featured in more than fifty individual and group exhibitions. The photobook was republished in 2003 with additional images, and it was a centerpiece of Miyamoto’s 2004 retrospective exhibition at the Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo. I argue that the enduring power of these photographs stems not from nostalgic revelry in a changing landscape, but from their allegorical relationship to that most ruinous event in recent history – World War II.⁶

This chapter opens with an introduction to Miyamoto’s demolition photography, a description of the inception of the project and its development into a photobook (*shashinshū*). In this section, I discuss the reception of *Architectural Apocalypse* in the context of postmodernism to expose how Miyamoto’s work simultaneously adheres to and deviates from various readings of postmodern space. I then conduct an extended analysis of Miyamoto’s stylistic approach by comparing his work to other documentary photographers both in Japan and abroad. A consideration of his career in architectural journalism – and particularly his participation in

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⁴ Ibid.


⁶ Although the majority of what follows focuses on the implications of *Architectural Apocalypse* for a Japanese audience, in this chapter, I use the designation “World War II” because of the global scope of the photobook and its potential to conjure up memories of ruined cities in the west as well.
multiple design surveys – further contextualizes his encyclopedic style and choice of subject matter. Establishing an understanding of Miyamoto’s early career at this point is critical for the chapters that follow, as he rarely deviates from a reserved, documentary approach to photography. Finally, I engage the work of Walter Benjamin to think about Architectural Apocalypse as an allegory that demonstrates the multiple meanings that can be derived from images of modern ruins. Just as Benjamin used the (by then) run-down Paris Passages as the material basis for his construction of a philosophy of history in The Arcades Project, these photographs also “bridge the gap between everyday experience and traditional academic concerns.” Here, those concerns are specific to the postwar period in which the ruins of Japan’s modernity became an important trope for artists, writers, and intellectuals as they attempted to reconceptualize the trajectory of modern history.

I argue that Miyamoto’s photography of demolition sites, what he calls “tsukanoma no haikyo,” or “temporary ruins,” speaks to the conditions of the Japanese urban experience in the 1980s while simultaneously opening up an allegorical space for the narration of individual memories of World War II and its aftermath, memories that were necessarily rendered irrelevant in the process of Japan’s postwar rehabilitation as a peaceful, modern, cosmopolitan nation. A case study of one of the ruined buildings that appears in Architectural Apocalypse reveals the layers of meaning that are unintentionally unearthed and self-consciously created in the process of building demolition. As the primary visual record of these events, Miyamoto’s photographs continue to spark memories and to spur discussions, while the framing of the photographic content as ruins is imperative to the potential for these images to engender historical, social, and political critique.

An Introduction to *Architectural Apocalypse*

In 1983, Miyamoto was contracted by the pictorial journal *Asahi Graph* to document the demolition of the notorious Nakano Prison, built by the Meiji government in Tokyo in the first decade of the twentieth century. In accordance with his assignment, Miyamoto initially aimed to capture all-encompassing views of the site while it was still intact, and it was these shots of long cellblocks and the façade of the infamous main gate that appeared in the final article in July (Fig. 1.2). The redbrick building overgrown with weeds, the pile of padlocks removed from the cells, and the emptied interiors all attest to the site as a ruin – abandoned buildings robbed of their original function that nonetheless continue to evoke a ghostly past.

Miyamoto returned to the prison on his own throughout the demolition. As the interiors were dismantled and wall after wall came crashing down, he felt as if the materials that comprised the buildings were being released from their role as “Architecture” dictated by humans. Miyamoto now recalls the experience as an epochal moment in his career; after this project he sought out other demolition sites in an effort to capture the materiality of these “temporary ruins,” which, he says, spoke to him “like a living thing” (*ikimono*).⁸ In contrast to popular understandings of buildings as “life-giving” – what Cairns and Jacobs refer to as architecture’s “creative natalism” – for Miyamoto, architecture gains its agency precisely in its death, in the moment when it is freed from the strictures of human intention.⁹ The ruins at demolition sites are deviant, asserting an existence that is independent of both human and nature’s influences. In a photograph of the London Pavilion Theater, a gaping hole in the wooden molding of one wall reveals pipes, brick and steel beneath the façade – a violent

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⁸ Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with author, February 8, 2016.

unfurling of compositional elements previously hidden from view (Fig. 1.3). Miyamoto accords these layers of material wreckage with records of the building’s identity. He writes, “The site where a building is being demolished is like a time-tunnel that releases individual structures from their original purpose, and thus brings the buildings into existence. One after another, walls, ceilings are dismantled, and a mysterious sense of existence is accorded to the structures.”

The rapid redevelopment of urban Japan during the real-estate “bubble” period of the 1980s made for an overabundance of demolition sites. Miyamoto recounts of that time: “Everywhere, the streets were different, made new, everything was subordinated to efficiency, and perverted into a colorless space. Inconvenient old buildings were replaced with astounding speed; there was no time for them even to fall into decay. Ruins were not left around for long. Now, the demolition site has disappeared from the city, replaced by temporary ruins.” For Tokyoites in the 1980s, this cycle of demolition and reconstruction was a daily encounter. So much so, that Hasegawa Yuko identifies construction sites as “the first thing that gives Japanese returning from a stay abroad the feeling that they have truly come home.” Focusing on those encounters, Miyamoto’s photographs document the increasing commodification of land and architecture. As such, they open up a space for the creation of meaning in a world increasingly defined by the arbitrary and indifferent nature of the commodity. As curator Kōmoto Shinji has pointed out: “No one any longer believes in the power of photography to restore or define the

10 Miyamoto, “Temporary Ruins,” 50.

11 Ibid., 51. Emphasis mine.

12 Hasegawa, “Pleasure in Nothingness,” 16.
world,” and Miyamoto makes no pretense to such a project. Nonetheless, his photographs can – and have – “serve[d] as humble mechanisms for perceiving the world.”

In 1988, Miyamoto compiled his images of “temporary ruins” into a photobook provocatively entitled *Kenchiku no mokushiroku* (hereafter, *Architectural Apocalypse*). The binding resembles cardboard in color and touch, covered in raised gravel-like modulations over which a series of three broad swaths of ink have been printed (Fig. 1.4). Over this, a rectangular recess contains a black metal plate with the title and author’s name written in English that has been oriented vertically and to the left, reiterating the vertical orientation of the Japanese title that adorns the right-hand side of the book. In the end, details such as this belie the high quality of production employed to achieve an otherwise grainy, dirtied aesthetic. The term “*mokushiroku*” in the title conjures up images of the biblical apocalypse. However, in the repeated images of architectural destruction, Miyamoto comes closer to Jameson’s observation of the potential “to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world.” Here, the ravages of capitalism are commensurate with an apocalypse.

Once inside, the frontispiece is followed with an essay by the eminent postmodern architect, Isozaki Arata, first printed in Japanese and then reproduced in English. “Haikyo ron,” or, “On Ruins,” outlines the potential for these unexpected, disorienting images to unsettle one’s day-to-day existence. In their mangled and incoherent form, Isozaki tells us, ruins are a clear threat to narratives of progress, linear historical development, and ultimately, modernity. This


14 Hasegawa, “Pleasure in Nothingness,” 16.

15 Jameson, “Future City,” 76.
essay is a longer meditation on Isozaki’s enduring obsession with images of ruins. As a youth of war-torn Japan and a member of the self-described “Charred Ruins School” of architects, Isozaki claims that he has never been able to design a building without first thinking of ruins, and they have remained a consistent part of his design process. For example, during the planning process for the Tsukuba City Center (1979-83), Isozaki composed a rendering of the complex’s own ruination; the roofs have fallen in, walls crumble, and cracks run through the central plaza (Fig. 1.5). The land itself is fractured, threatening to split in two and tear away the final remnants of the site. In the completed design, the multiplicity of forms and the disjunctive ways in which they connect recalls the anatomy of the ruin, a form that Isozaki uses to come to terms with the requisite durability of architecture and to question claims to everlasting permanence in his own design (Fig. 1.6).

16 Isozaki Arata, “Ruins,” in Arata Isozaki, ed. Ken Oshima, trans. John D. Lamb, (London: Phaidon, 2009), 28. Isozaki’s obsession with ruins is indicative of a lifelong struggle with his role as creator despite the desolate landscape of his youth. As a student of Japan’s most celebrated postwar architect, Tange Kenzō, Isozaki was peripherally affiliated with a group of architects called the Metabolists. As the biological name suggests, the Metabolists emphasized the purposeful life forces that govern urban space. Employing permanent structural towers with modular capsules that could be plugged in, replaced, and reconfigured as needed, these architects designed utopian megastructures that could adapt to the rapid growth of contemporary cities. For a time, Isozaki was also caught up in the fantasy of the megastructure. In his unbuilt “Project Shinjuku,” he made use of the typical Metabolist joint-core system to picture a single building on the scale of an entire city. However, two years later in a rendering entitled, “Incubation Process,” we can already sense Isozaki’s skepticism over building with such bravado. In this futuristic rendering of the city, towers rise above and emerge out of classical western ruins. Ant-like people and cars testify to the existence of life in this bleak environment, despite evidence that pieces of the megastructure already lie in a ruined heap in the foreground of the image. “Incubation Process” visualizes Isozaki’s struggle with the vanity of the Metaboists’ optimism in a world that he saw as governed by destruction. Isozaki’s references to destruction are many: the destruction of sixty-six Japanese cities by Allied firebombing in 1944 and 1945; the total annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by two atomic bombs; the destructive redevelopment of Japanese cities for laudatory events such as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the 1970 Expo in Osaka; or the destruction of university campuses in the student movements of the late 1960s. In contrast to the Metabolists, Isozaki’s understanding of a city’s life cycle “emphasized death and decay over growth and expansion.” Cho, “Competing Futures,” 128. Isozaki’s dark, pessimistic view of urban planning and urban life became more explicit in his 1968 photomontage, “Re-ruined Hiroshima,” created for the fourteenth Milan Triennial. Here, his earlier megastructures lie in crumbled heaps that disrupt the well-known panoramic photograph of Hiroshima, flattened after the atomic bombing. This work marked Isozaki’s break with the ostentatious visions of the Metabolists, his wariness over the potential for technology to solve problems in urban design, and his commitment to resurrecting ruins as a challenge to historical narratives and designs that celebrated the progress, growth and peace of Japan in the postwar period.
Isozaki was an apt choice to set the tone of the photobook. His musings on the global history of ruins, from the dignified marble fragments of the Parthenon to the scorched remains of Hiroshima, encourage viewers to consider the multiple forms that ruins take, thus opening up the photographs to a variety of interpretations. On the other hand, as Japan’s premier postmodernist architect, his introductory text also situates the project in a specific realm of theory in which the fragmentary form of the ruin stands in for the fragmenting of history that Isozaki and others pursued in their pastiche architectural designs. Metaphorically, the lack of correspondence between form and function that characterizes postmodern space parallels the fragmented, labyrinthine spaces of ruins. In both ruins and postmodern space, the traditional relationship between inside and out, form and function, has been turned on its head to create a new language of forms disconnected from any singular system of meaning or representation. For example, in Isozaki’s design for the Tsukuba City Center a postmodern approach resonates in the allusion to multiple historic monuments in a single design; Claude-Nicholas Ledoux’s Saltworks of Arc + Senans (1775-79), the ancient pyramids of Giza (2589-2350 BCE), Louis Sullivan’s tripartite plan for the skyscraper (1890s), and Michelangelo’s Capitoline Plaza (1536-46) are all referenced – a pastiche of world monuments that have been fragmented, inverted, and recast into a ruinous, irregular, and anachronistic composition in which they all “lose their original meaning and generate new meanings with an effect resembling the concentric circles rippling around a stone thrown in a body of water.” 17 As a manifestation of the suspension of time, ruins are thus anachronistic. They point simultaneously to the past and to the ruins of the future and thereby have the power to generate new meanings. In this way, the ruin became a potent metaphor for the challenge to history posed by postmodernism.

In flipping through *Architectural Apocalypse*, however, Miyamoto’s photographs resist Isozaki’s characterization of the ruin as a mere metaphor for postmodern theory. As I explore later in this chapter, many of the buildings represented in *Architectural Apocalypse* are celebrated modernist designs. Miyamoto pictures them individually with an intense focus on the material decomposition of the structure. This approach means that the history of each building can never be undermined completely by the fragment, as is the case with Isozaki’s design.

Hayashi Michio has nuanced the social function of these photographs by describing them as documenting not simply postmodern culture, but the *transformation* of Japan’s cities from modern to postmodern spaces. The buildings that Miyamoto photographed in the midst of their demolition represent a range of industries geared towards popular entertainment, such as cinemas, breweries, department stores, and the remnants of international expos. Hayashi describes these buildings as “significant gathering places for the masses in the modern city, spaces of pleasure where they enjoyed themselves while dreaming utopian dreams.”

Beyond the role of these buildings in facilitating life in modern metropolises around the world, the architectural designs themselves represent a range of iconic modernist forms in the process of dismantlement. The cruciform design of the main cellblock at Nakano Prison was based on Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, famously established by Michel Foucault as the structural archetype of modern observation and self-discipline (Fig. 1.7). Echoes of Guy

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19 Ibid.

20 Bentham first theorized and designed the panopticon building in the late eighteenth century. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) Foucault sees the panopticon model in a variety of modern institutions, such as factories, barracks, schools and hospitals, where the fan-shaped architecture affects a form of discipline in which the inhabitants, or prisoners, themselves become the monitors of their own behavior. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 200.
Debord’s “society of the spectacle” appear in the stadium seating of the numerous theaters represented in *Architectural Apocalypse* (Fig. 1.8).\(^{21}\) Meanwhile, the photographs of Expo ’85 undergoing disassembly in Tsukuba marks one of modern society’s most perverse displays of progress, the international exposition, built to “communicate the value of a culture, the image of a civilization,” only to be torn down and erased weeks later (Fig. 1.9).\(^{22}\) Just as Charles Jencks used the demolition of the mass housing complex Pruitt-Igoe to herald “the death of modernism and the birth of postmodernism,” these sites and the modernist myths that they once enabled are literally being brought to an end in these images.\(^{23}\)

Yet, Miyamoto’s consistently formal, reserved aesthetic approach ultimately resists any characterization of these photographs as a total endorsement of the fragmentation of postmodernism. Miyamoto’s approach is indebted to his early years working as an architectural photographer, a field dominated by the so-called objective style of reportage photography (*hōdō shashin*).\(^{24}\) A comparison between Miyamoto’s photograph of a cellblock at Nakano (Fig. 1.10)

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\(^{24}\) The practice of reportage photography cohered in Japan alongside public debates on the role of the camera in modern society. Was it to be used as a form of artistic expression in line with painting? Or was there something inherently modern about the camera as a machine that made it ideal for representing the spirit of the times? Kimura Ihee and Natori Yōnosuke are the two figures most associated with the establishment of photojournalism in Japan. Together with Ina Nobuo, the three established the photography group Nippon Kōbō, or Japan Studio, in 1933 to “define the social nature of photography.” They worked from the social realist approach of German-influenced reportage photography, which Ina translated to *hōdō shashin* (literally, “news photography”) for an exhibition in
and Hirayama Chūji’s photograph of the veranda of Tange Kenzō’s residence illustrates this point (Fig. 1.11). Hirayama was one of the most prolific architectural photographers of the postwar period and someone with whom Miyamoto would have been acquainted through his work at the journal Toshi Jūtaku. In fact, Ueda Makoto, the chief editor of Toshi Jūtaku during Miyamoto’s tenure there, claims that he “learned how to look at architecture” from Hirayama. In this comparison, both photographers make use of the building’s structural frame to bring order to the geometric forms that make up their subject matter. For example, in Miyamoto’s photograph the rows of cells and the contours of the hallway recede to an illuminated doorway in the distance. The undulating contrasts of light and dark along the passageway dynamize the single-point perspective to create a carefully composed image of geometric forms. In particular, the skylight that runs the length of the roof forms an intricate pattern with its supporting framework in shadow on either side. This formal style of image making favors a direct but distanced approach to the subject, so that the forms never reach the point of total abstraction. With this approach, Miyamoto takes us through the urban centers of Japan, to Berlin, Vienna, and New York City, in an encyclopedic cataloguing of the typology of the demolition site.

The cataloguing effect of Architectural Apocalypse warrants comparisons to the work of Hilla and Bernd Becher in Germany and the New Topographics photographers in the United States. All three can be related in terms of their formal qualities, subject matter, and seriality.


25 Hanada, Ueda Makoto, 29.

26 In surveys of the history of photography, it is not uncommon for Miyamoto’s work to appear next to that of the Bechers. For example, photographs from Architectural Apocalypse were exhibited alongside the Becher’s photographs of defunct silos in the exhibition, “30th Anniversary: Selected Works from the National Museum of Modern Art, Osaka,” in 2007, and both are treated as architectural photography in Robert Elwall’s Building with Light: The International History of Architectural Photography (London; New York: Merrell, 2004).
Formally, these photographers all adhere to a strict compositional regimen consisting of sharp focus with little to no grain; a straight-on, frontal perspective; regular depth of field; and even lighting. There is little tolerance for mood, atmosphere, or evidence of the hand of the photographer. Analyzing the significance of this puritanical approach to the camera, Armin Zweite praises the Bechers for pioneering a new form of photographic vision, that “differ[s] appreciably from the way the human eye perceives things” and “presents a clearly demarcated section of reality […] in a considerably intensified form.” He goes on, “The latter mechanism serves to upgrade the status of the world of things in an unprecedented manner and to a degree not known before the invention of photography.”

In this world of things, the Bechers, New Topographics photographers, and Miyamoto have all devoted themselves to the documentation of specific types of objects in the built environment – not monumental feats of engineering and design, but structures or sites that commonly fall under the category of the “everyday.” For New Topographics photographers, it was the everyday structures of American suburbia, such as gas stations and tract houses, that served as “a critical outlet for those who had lost faith in the grand plan” during the Cold War era (Fig. 1.12); for the Bechers, it was the machine-like buildings at industrial complexes – silos, blast furnaces, or gasometers – many of which had been permanently closed and awaited demolition in the 1960s and 70s (Fig. 1.13); and for Miyamoto, demolition sites were a regular,

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everyday occurrence in the rapidly redeveloping city of Tokyo in the 1980s (Fig. 1.14). In all three, human presence is absent or obscured. Zweite observes the effect of this feature for viewers: “Bereft of humans, purpose, or meaning, the structures mutate into anomalies.”  

This surreal effect is compounded by the serial presentation of the photographs, exhibited one after another in rows, stacked in grids on gallery walls, or printed in bulk in photobooks. As such, the viewer is drawn to the commonalities and variations that can be traced in the formal composition of the objects being catalogued. Their everydayness falls away as they are elevated to the realm of aesthetic contemplation; hence, the Bechers’ description of these industrial objects as “anonymous sculpture.”  
The Bechers, in particular, have been criticized for “reduc[ing] the specific aspects of capitalist industrial society to landscape and sculpture,” but the serial presentation of these structures is also an acknowledgement of the economic and political systems that governed and benefited from their existence.  
Britt Salvesen’s argument for the efficacy of New Topographies imagery holds true for the work of Miyamoto as well: “Serial presentation may underscore the repetitive nature of the mass-produced subjects […] but more importantly it demonstrates the artist’s power, through style, to endow those subjects with meaning.”  
That meaning may be playful and imaginative, primarily engaged with visual forms and uncanny resemblances, or it may relate to the history of the subject, as an emblem of patterns of obsolescence and the extreme forms of redevelopment required to sustain capitalist systems.

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30 Ibid.

31 Elwall, Building with Light, 161.

32 Ibid.

To endow their images with meaning, it was necessary for all of these serial photographers to approach their subjects as objectively as possible. The Bechers, New Topographics photographers such as Frank Gohlke, and Miyamoto have all acknowledged the importance of Walker Evans’s work as a guide to the “depersonalization of style.” The emphasis on objectivity was also part of a larger shift away from the photoaestheticism and subjective approaches that dominated the world of photography in the 1950s and 1960s.

In Japan, beginning in the early 1970s the photographer Nakahira Takuma worked rigorously to come up with an alternative to expressive photography, which he saw as a failed attempt to define a new reality based on the apprehension and documentation of “the world in its naked state.” In the final analysis, Nakahira’s work from this era appears strikingly different from that of Miyamoto, the Bechers, and New Topographics. However, a common focus on seriality as a mode of objectification can be identified in the work of these various groups and Nakahira’s own theoretical approach, methods, and chosen subject matter to reveal a larger

34 Most historians and critics, myself included, acknowledge the limits and pitfalls of any approach to photography that claims to be entirely objective. Zweite summarizes these limitations well: “How factual the images of the gasometers, winding towers, blast furnaces, etc., may be, essentially the choice of objects, the distance, the angle taken, the handling of lighting, the depth of field, and the choice of cropped section are all the product of subjective decisions. The same applies to a certain extent to the choice of apparatus, of lenses, of film material, of filters and not least to how the negatives are processed in the darkroom as well as the ways the photos are disseminated, for example through exhibitions and publications (although here other elements inevitably come into play).” Zweite, “Bernd and Hilla,” 8.

35 Frank Gohlke, tape recording, October 14, 1975, Richard and Ronay Menschel Library at George Eastman House. Quoted in: Salvesen, “New Topographies,” 17. The entire quote reads: “In regard to tone or inflection, or the apparent depersonalization of style, … Walker Evans is most important. The attempt to make a photograph from which the photographer seems to be absent is a strategy whose value and power all of us I think primarily have learned from him.” On the influence of Walker Evans on the Bechers, see: Zweite, “Bernd and Hilla,” 18. Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, November 6, 2016.


picture of major concerns and debates in the world of photography at this time. A prolific writer, Nakahira appended essays to many of his published images, thus providing much-needed theoretical groundwork for younger photographers, such as Miyamoto, who were searching for alternatives to the *are, bure, boke* (rough, blurred, and out-of-focus) aesthetic of the Provoke collective in Japan.

A member of Provoke, for a time Nakahira employed their self-consciously informal, off-kilter approach to photography in order to “captur[e] moments that bare the violent, erotic face of ‘things’ in the midst of the urban landscape” (Fig. 1.15).\(^{38}\) For Nakahira, the appearance of this aesthetic in inaugural advertisements for the National Railways’ “Discover Japan” (*Disukaba Japan*) campaign in 1970 heralded the end of the usefulness of the approach for exposing the violence underlying the destructive redevelopment of the country into a pristine and peaceful global metropolis.\(^{39}\) Beginning in 1971, Nakahira shifted his focus from a concern with the constitution of the landscape to the relationship between people and objects in urban space. He continued to engage with the urban landscape by searching for cracks, fissures, and crevices that might reveal concealed possibilities for a radical new way of seeing and being. This search necessitated a new, decidedly objective approach to the medium. Franz Prichard explains:

> The transformed contours of Japanese social space and the intensifying violence sustaining the reconstructive vision of nation-state and capital […] not only implicated the very construction of representational space (how we ‘see’ the world and our place in it), but also necessitated a remaking of the methodological givens of representational media that sought to contest these novel forms of violence.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{38}\) Ibid.


\(^{40}\) Ibid., 141.
Nakahira’s photographs and essays from this period constitute a major contribution to this larger search for a new form of representational media suited to the times.

Nakahira used language strikingly similar to that of the Bechers to explain his new methodology: “The camera objectifies everything and places me at a distance, changing the world into an object. It cuts reality into rectangular frames. It consolidates everything into a single point.”

Seriality and repetition were central to Nakahira’s strategy to overcome his own subjective perspective. In a series created for the Seventh Paris Biennale in 1971 entitled, “Circulation: Date, Place, Events,” Nakahira presented a plethora of photographs taken on the streets of Paris during his time there. He updated the selection of photographs every day in an attempt to cancel out the perspective contained in any single image. He wrote of the project: “I tried to overcome the perspective provided by each individual photograph, by producing vast amounts of photographs. Although it was not possible to overcome perspective altogether, I moved in a direction that would invalidate each individual perspective.”

Nakahira’s project thus articulated the efficacy of seriality for an approach to objectivity.

Two years later, Nakahira published his influential essay, “Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?” (Naze shokubutsu zukan ka), a manifesto and defense of this new methodology. In it he writes:

The most important function of the illustrated dictionary is to refer clearly to the object in a straightforward way. The illustrated dictionary sets aside all nuance and insidious emotion – there are no illustrated dictionaries of ‘sad’ cats, for example. If the illustrated dictionary is even slightly ambiguous at any point, its inherent function is not fulfilled. Enumeration or juxtaposition of all things is the characteristic of the illustrated dictionary. An illustrated dictionary does not grant

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42 Ibid., 126.
priority to a particular thing, and structure an entirety from that prioritized thing. Specifically, a part existing in the dictionary remains just that, a part, without being infiltrated by the entirety. Nothing is supposed beyond it. The method of the illustrated dictionary is mere juxtaposition. This juxtaposition method should also be my method. Further, the illustrated dictionary traces only the glossy surface of the thing. The illustrated dictionary exhaustively rejects vulgar curiosity, or my own presumptuousness in trying to delve into the thing or search for meaning behind it; the illustrated dictionary proves itself only by clarifying that the thing is a thing. This should be my method also.43

A street sign, stained concrete, burning rubbish by the seaside – these are the types of straightforward color images enumerated and juxtaposed in Nakahira’s illustrated dictionary (Fig. 1.16). As interpreted by Prichard, these photographs and the accompanying text work “to capture this dynamic energy of fragmentation [and] redeploy it against the subjective induction of coherence that secured the ordered functioning of capitalist state power.”44 In the Japanese context, evidence of fragmentation and ruin was an effective tool for challenging the image of progress central to the narrative of the country’s miraculous rehabilitation in the postwar period.

Miyamoto also focused on the motif of fragmentation to give permanent visual form to the destruction deemed necessary to sustain that narrative of rehabilitation, and he did so with an encyclopedic approach that mirrors Nakahira’s repetitive formula for the illustrated dictionary. Like Nakahira, Miyamoto was also concerned with the “thingness” of his subject matter, speaking about the buildings as if they had agency in their ruined state. Unlike Nakahira, however, while he did not presume any one meaning for his images of “temporary ruins,” neither did he deny the possibility of extrapolating meaning from their fissures and gaps. A look at Miyamoto’s career leading up to Architectural Apocalypse further contextualizes his approach and concerns, which extended well beyond the world of photography.

43 Ibid. 130.

Surveying Demolition

In his consistently formal approach to the sites photographed for *Architectural Apocalypse*, Miyamoto took on the supposedly neutral role of the reporter, or, as Hayashi puts it, “the surveyor.” In fact, the design survey (*dezain sābei*) – the systematic study of human patterns in urban space – had a prolific presence in many of the architectural publications that Miyamoto spent years working for and subsequently contributing to as an independent photographer. While working at *Toshi Jūtaku*, Miyamoto was exposed to discourse on urban redevelopment, preservation issues, and the maintenance of urban communities in the context of the design survey, a method of analyzing urban space that offered bottom-up, community-based approaches to planning with frequent recourse to vernacular forms under threat of extinction. Whether used to create a compendium of specific urban typologies or to document the state of a particular neighborhood at a certain moment in time, photography was central to the visualization of this discourse and, eventually, became the discourse itself.

A consideration of the history of the design survey in Japan not only contributes to our understanding of Miyamoto’s thinking with regards to compiling a visual compendium of demolition, but it also enhances our understanding of the context in which the photographs in *Architectural Apocalypse* were viewed and received. While *Architectural Apocalypse* was immensely influential in the world of photography, before it became a photobook the images were published in architectural journals such as *SD* (Space + Deisgn), *Toshi Jūtaku* (Urban Housing), and *Shitsunai* (Interiors) at the same time that they were appearing in the journals *Asahi Graph* and *Bijutsu Techō* (Art Notes). In some cases, such as the Nazi flak towers in Vienna, maps, design plans, drawings, and commentary by architects such as Takamatsu Shin

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accompanied Miyamoto’s photographs (Fig. 1.17). Thus, the following examination of Miyamoto’s early career in architectural journalism suggests an origin for his interest in historic architecture and contextualizes his choice of serial photography as a form of preservation.

When Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of the City* was published in Japanese translation in 1968, historians and architects in Japan celebrated his methods of sketching, mapping, and fixed-point observation as an impetus to rethink understandings of urban space. In response to megalomaniacal urban redevelopment projects, Lynch provided concrete strategies for those planners hoping to incorporate a human perspective in their designs by placing particular emphasis on the visual legibility of an environment and the mental images that people create for comprehending cities. As historian Jordan Sand has shown, Lynch’s theory validated postwar approaches that “championed” traditional uses of space in Japan, such as the theory of kaiwai – a reading of Japanese urban space as organic, spontaneous, and irregularly composed.

This conceptual shift was codified in the form of the design survey, the systematic study and graphic representation of patterns created by humans based on their physical and psychological experiences in urban space. Scholars typically point to the November 1966 issue

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49 There are several precedents that contributed to the understanding of the design survey as it evolved in the Japanese context. In the 1920s, the sociologist Kon Wajirô developed an important precedent for analyzing the psychology of urban space in the context of a modernizing Japan. As architectural historian Izumi Kuroishi has shown, Kon’s creation of what he dubbed “Modernology” (kogengaku) advocated “social perspectives toward the relationship between people, objects, and space.” Izumi Kuroishi, “Urban Survey and Planning in Twentieth-Century Japan: Wajiro Kon’s ‘Modernology’ and Its Descendants,” *Journal of Urban History* 42:3 (2016), 565. In 1921, Kon took the westernized entertainment district of Ginza as his case study, meticulously documenting everything from hybrid fashion trends to pedestrian strolling patterns and abandoned objects found on the streets. In this way, he attempted to understand “the physiological and psychological meanings imposed on urban spaces by
of the journal *Kokusai Kenchiku* (International Architecture) as the first design survey published in Japan: a study of the remote town of Saiwaichō in Kanazawa prefecture. Here, the spatial composition of the village center is represented through an array of visual strategies, such as mapping, meticulous line drawings, building plans, cross-sections, and photography. But, as the authors point out, to get a clear picture of life in Saiwaichō, the building types and layout of the community had to be analyzed alongside exactly that – the community – as evinced in the “life and everyday activities of the people.”

Thus, a map cataloguing the types of buildings and shops that line the central streets of Saiwaichō is followed by photographs of children playing in an alleyway, a couple leaving a temple, a man pushing a cart down a small street, and finally, the sketch of a small plaza drawn from an aerial perspective that captures the relationship between people, objects, and space.

Itō Teiji, the Japanese architectural historian who coordinated the project with Richard A. Smith of the University of Oregon, described the goals of the design survey as follows:

> It is a methodology to observe and survey an area by real scale measuring, and to visualize and objectify it in drawings in order to analyze the physical elements of architecture, lifestyle, and custom, as well as the psychological elements of history and people’s mental conditions in order to clarify and organize the existing spatial mechanism of that area. It aims to examine and materialize the autonomous interrelationships being created by a human group as objectively as individual people.”

Ibid., 564. Perhaps most significant for the world of architecture was Kon’s analysis of “the trajectories and rhythms of pedestrians on the street or in buildings, which were examined in sketches, in maps, and in statistics through time based on fixed-point observation.” Ibid., 562. Kon also studied building types, charting the percentage of houses in one neighborhood built in a “Japanese style,” “cultural style,” or “western style,” and further subdividing these categories according to their roofing material. Kon Wajirō, *Kōgengaku nyūmon*, ed. Fujimori Terunobu (Tokyo: Chikuma bunten, 1987), 187. In the Tokyo neighborhood of Asagaya, he drew a map illustrating the types of buildings and shops that lined the main street leading up to the station in 1925, creating a snapshot of this residential area as it had been revived after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. Later design surveys continued to use the ideas and methods laid out by Kon to visualize relationships between urban space and the humans who occupy it. Kuroishi, “Urban Survey,” 569. Ken Tadashi Oshima, “Rediscovering Japanese Urban Space in a World Context,” *Journal of Urban History* 42:3 (2016), 629.

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50 Richard Alan Smith, “Gairo wo jiku to shita chōnai sentā” (The Neighborhood Street Center: An Experiment in Environmental Surveying), trans. Ōe Tatsuo, *Kokusai Kenchiku* 74 (November 1966), 22.
possible, to investigate its inner structure with organized data, and to utilize the findings as one of the core ideas for the creation of designs.\(^{51}\)

As Itô articulates, the design survey differed from previous top-down approaches to urban planning in its emphasis on human experience. A thorough understanding of the patterns created by humans in enduring towns like Saiwaichō, it was argued, could then lead to a more measured, human-scaled, and site-specific approach to urban planning back in the metropolis.

The design survey quickly became an explosive phenomenon.\(^{52}\) Between 1965 and 1971, ninety-one design surveys were conducted in Japan by university study labs, groups of architects, or individuals, while 200-300 smaller independent surveys were completed.\(^{53}\) These surveys were colorful, bold, and photographically ambitious. As the architect Miyawaki Mayumi recounts, already by the early 1970s this previously unknown and vaguely understood methodology had been fixed as a concept, stylized in format, and become mainstream in the academy to the point of receiving criticism.\(^{54}\) The widespread use of the design survey reflected growing concerns with the unchecked redevelopment of many Japanese cities and the depletion of the Japanese vernacular in the countryside in the postwar period. As such, hundreds of surveys published in the 1960s and 70s focused on the village, identified as the location of a purer “Old Japan” where traditional customs and values had yet to succumb to the hegemony of western capitalism.


\(^{52}\) Oshima, “Rediscovering,” 629.

\(^{53}\) For a comprehensive list of the design surveys conducted from 1965-1971, see: “Dezain sābei shō,” \textit{Toshi Jūtaku} 45 (December 1971), 30.

\(^{54}\) Miyawaki Mayumi, “Tsukuru kiban to shite no dezain sabei” (The Design Survey as a Foundation for Creation), \textit{Toshi Jūtaku} 45 (December 1971), 4.
Of the ninety-one design surveys conducted in Japan between 1965 and 1971, nearly a third were published in *Toshi Jūtaku*, the architectural journal where Miyamoto worked as a graphic designer and staff photographer after graduating from Tama Art University in 1973.\(^{55}\) Ueda Makoto, the chief editor of *Toshi Jūtaku*, was an avid practitioner and promoter of the design survey, devoting entire issues to surveys in multiple formats that covered a variety of urban forms and spaces. Well known surveys from *Toshi Jūtaku* include the architect Hara Hiroshi’s survey of the fishing village Aigae in Izu prefecture; Ueda’s survey of Gunkanjima (before it became a popular ruin), in which he and his team studied the human relationships within the cramped conditions of the notorious subterranean coal-mining island off the coast of Nagasaki; and a Lynch-inspired survey of the Motomachi Apartments in Hiroshima.\(^{56}\)

Ueda also supported projects that have been characterized as offshoots or avant-garde interpretations of the design survey. A survey of Ameyoko Street by the group Konpeito (“Star Candy”) was featured in the November 1969 and December 1971 issues of *Toshi Jūtaku*. Konpeito, formed by the architects Ide Takeshi, Matsuyama Iwao, and Motokura Makoto, surveyed the historic Ameyoko shopping street outside of Ueno Station in Tokyo, mapping out the types of stores and stalls that lined its narrow streets and matching those maps with

\(^{55}\) “Dezain sābei shō,” 30.

\(^{56}\) Hara’s survey appeared in the July 1971 issue of *Toshi Jūtaku*, while Otaka’s Motomachi Apartments were featured in July 1973. The Gunkanjima survey, which appeared in the May 1976 issue, was an important achievement for Ueda, as the site was shut down and abandoned in 1972, leaving many of the buildings in ruin. Design surveys had become popular for documenting the rapidly disappearing villages of Japan. In this context, it is fascinating that Ueda characterized Gunkanjima also as a village. In his memoires he writes, “This island was physically organized as urban space, but the human relationships are like those in villages. Individual buildings are four sided, but the crevices in between are not; in other words, open space has been interiorized.” Ueda Makoto, *Toshi Jūtaku kuronikuru II* (A Chronicle of Urban Housing II), (Tokyo: Kabushiki kaisha; Misuzu shobō, 2007), 53.
photographs that narrate bustling life among the street stalls (Fig. 1.18). Like Itō Teiji, the group believed that “[t]he physical presence of urban space is the reflection of the lifestyles of the various people in it.” They used Ameyoko to study the patterns created by people in an area that maintained characteristics of what they saw as a “village” lifestyle in the middle of Tokyo: low-profile buildings, narrow alleyways, and the organic flow of foot traffic.

Another example of a survey that detected a village in the middle of Tokyo was featured in the April 1973 issue of Toshi Jūtaku entitled, “The Geography of the Dwelling” (Sumai no chirigaku), the very first issue to which Miyamoto contributed. In this case, the geographer and economist Takahashi Junjirō led the Keio University Research Center for Measured Geography (seiryō chirigaku) in a ten-year survey of the historic Yanaka neighborhood in eastern Tokyo known for its unusual state of preservation. They worked directly from the strategies of Lynch and other American specialists concerned with the relationship between human behavior and space in a study that falls somewhere in between the design interests of strict architectural

57 Konpeito, “Ameyoko wa Tokyo no mura” (Ameyoko is a Tokyo village), Toshi Jūtaku 45 (December 1971), 57-60. Incidentally, Matsuyama Iwao is the same architect who worked with Miyamoto on the Asahi Camera article on the demolition of Nakano Prison in 1983.


59 Miyamoto interviewed at Toshi Jūtaku in the spring of 1973 when he saw that there was an opening for an editorial staff position listed in the back of the journal. During the interview, Ueda asked Miyamoto if he knew how to take photographs. Miyamoto had experimented with photography in college and replied yes. Ueda then instructed Miyamoto to meet him in the Yanaka neighborhood the following weekend and to bring his camera. They spent half the day walking around and taking pictures. The next day, Miyamoto made about thirty prints and brought them in for Ueda to look over. After sorting through them, Ueda decided that he could use the photos. This is how eight pages of Miyamoto’s photographs appeared in the April 1973 issues of Toshi Jūtaku. Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, December 13, 2015.

60 It should be noted that this survey was conducted ten years prior to the birth of the machizukuri, or “town-making,” movement in the Yanaka, Nezu, and Sendagi neighborhoods documented by Jordan Sand in Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 54-87. Sand notes how Yanaka survived the fires of the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake, the 1945 Allied bombing raids, and the 1960s construction boom “by dint of chance and neglect rather than intent.” It wasn’t until the 1980s that it, along with the neighboring areas of Nezu and Sendagi, became the object of preservation activism. Sand, Tokyo Vernacular, 55.
surveys and the phenomenological interests of groups like Konpeito. Takahashi was particularly focused on the movement of humans and objects and the ways in which they occupied space. He wrote, “A successful investigation of these outlined principles is divided into three levels: 1) things that are created according to the activity of the earth itself; 2) things that are created by living things; and 3) things that are created by humans (artifacts).” A thorough understanding of these three levels would thus reveal the “order” of the Yanaka neighborhood.

To illustrate this order, the survey featured what was labeled a “photobook” (shashinshū), eight consecutive full-page spreads of photographs by Miyamoto. Naming the eight pages a “photobook” (or, more literally, a “collection of photographs”) speaks to the importance placed on the photographs as a coherent set of images chosen to represent what the Keio Research Group understood to be Yanaka.

The first image was taken from inside a cemetery, a common sight in Yanaka given the high concentration of temples in the area (Fig. 1.19). The open space of the cemetery allows for an unobstructed view of the residential buildings beyond the gates of the sacred space. This wide view of tiled rooftops and the upper stories of low-rise wooden buildings stands in contrast to those photographs that stress the compact space of the neighborhood, such as the oblong views down stretches of backstreets on pages 34-35. While some photos are clearly meant to relay the

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61 Takahashi was particularly interested in Lynch’s The Image of the City, Edward T. Hall’s The Hidden Dimension (1966), and Robert Sommer’s Personal Space: The Behavioral Basis of Design (1969). Takahashi Junjirō, “Kenchiku to chirigaku no aida” (Between Architecture and Geography), Toshi Jūtaku 63 (April 1973), 4. The group’s work appeared in Toshi Jūtaku two years into the survey, which was intended to last ten years.


63 Ibid.

64 Takahashi Junjirō, et al. “Go-chōme no fūkei” (The Landscape of the Fifth District), Toshi Jūtaku 63 (April 1973), 30.

65 For a history of Yanaka as a “temple town” (monzenchō), see: Sand, Tokyo Vernacular, 56.
atmosphere of neighborhood, with children running down an alleyway towards the viewer (Fig. 1.20), others, such as the final photograph on page 38, present an unusual perspective that reveals an interest in the compact composition of space. Here, Miyamoto has cut off a row of buildings at the first floor, with a sliver of one roof just penetrating the upper portion of the image (Fig. 1.21). The tightly packed line of wooden storefronts creates a dark band across the top of the image, blocking out any opportunity for perspectival depth. The solid, boxy shadow that demarcates the bottom third of the image suggests that a similar string of buildings line the other side of the street. Save for the calligraphic markings of motorcycle tires that bisect the page, the middle of the photograph is given over to the blank street, a spatial respite where sunshine may seep into what appears to be a densely packed neighborhood. This graphically composed photograph conveys information about the use of space in Yanaka that is reiterated in the group’s findings, the contiguous storefronts implying a sense of tightknit community as one might find in a traditional village.

Miyamoto’s informal approach deviates from traditional forms of architectural survey photography in which large-format cameras, bellows, and wide-angle lenses are used to capture the entirety of a structure or to correct the bowing of vertical and horizontal lines. In contrast, Miyamoto used a 35-mm format single-lens Nikon F, a lightweight, handheld camera with a mobility suited to the needs of the design survey. The use of smaller handheld cameras became more widespread in architectural journalism in the 1970s with the support of visionary editors such as Taira Keiichi and Ueda Makoto. The architectural photographer Ōhashi Tomio identifies Taira’s other publication SD as “groundbreaking” in terms of introducing the 35-mm format camera to formal architectural photography, and, like Miyamoto, he praises the flexibility of the
format and its suitability to new forms and materials in contemporary architecture. According to Ōhashi:

If the architecture moves, you have to move. You have this with a 35 mm camera. It changes with time; just a little light can reveal or hide spaces. In that momentary encounter, it becomes a different thing. It’s not that if the weather is good there are no problems: it’s fine if it snows, there is still architecture in the rain, and it’s fine in the wind. More and more recent architecture is made of materials that create reflections, so it changes in a moment.66

As concerns shifted from the clean lines and grandiose plans of Modernism to more adaptable, site-specific, and human-scaled design, the means of visualizing those designs also changed.

“[B]efore [1970], if it wasn’t a 4 x 5 [large format] camera, it wasn’t architectural photography,” claims Ōhashi.67

I argue that the philosophy of the design survey, with its emphasis on the human-scaled building, played a major role in this photographic revolution within architectural journalism.

According to Miyamoto, the Nikon F reproduces “how humans actually experience architecture,” making it well suited to Lynch’s notions of imageability and mental mapping.68 Just as lightweight, handheld cameras – conceived as a physical extension of the photographer’s eye and

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67 Ibid., 89.

self by Nakahira and others—became essential to the rhetoric of street photography in Japan, they also had a democratizing effect in the world of architectural journalism.\(^6^9\)

The January 1975 issue of *Toshi Jūtaku* entitled, “Eki mae sukōpu” (Station Front Views), is emblematic of Ueda’s systematic use of street photography to study the enduring premodern character of the city.\(^7^0\) Save for the first two pages that introduce the yearly theme, the issue is made up entirely of photographs depicting the street views of major train lines and station fronts in Tokyo.\(^7^1\) The title page announces the goal of the issue: a “presentation of photographs of 221 station fronts as towns (machii).”\(^7^2\) The photographs have been stitched together in rows of two, three or four that run across two-page, full-bleed spreads (Fig. 1.22). The issue alternates between black-and-white and color images, with the occasional accordion insert that can be extended out from the main body of the magazine to create an interactive experience for the reader as she or he unfolds and flips through the pages. Miyamoto was responsible for photographing the Yamanote and Chūo train lines, and he was heavily involved in the editing process for the entire issue.

\(^6^9\) Taira Keiichi was heavily influenced by the writings of Henri Lefebvre, proclaiming that the city “belongs to everyone.” Taira Keiichi and Nishimura Yukio, “Kenchiku jānarizumu to toshi dezain” (Architectural Journalism and Urban Design), *Chiiki kaihatsu* 467 (August 2008), 59.

\(^7^0\) The first *Toshi Jūtaku* issue of purely visual information was the January 1973 issue entitled, “Chōkanteki – Tokyo ni sunde iru hitobito no basho” (A Bird’s Eye View of Places of People who Live in Tokyo). “Eki mae sukōpu” was the second. Hanada, *Ueda Makoto*, 66.

\(^7^1\) Beginning in 1970, *Toshi Jūtaku* shifted its focus from merely reporting on the latest designs and trends in residential architecture to dealing directly with social issues related to housing. Each year was assigned a theme related to a social problem selected by Ueda and his editorial staff. The theme for 1975 was “Machidukuri no shuhō” (Town-making techniques). Hanada, *Ueda Makoto*, 9-60.

Despite the importance of photography to the representation of architecture, an issue of an architectural journal made up solely of photography was unprecedented.\(^73\) With little by way of paratext, one’s reading of the issue might shift from that of a survey to a work of art, or, as Miyamoto describes it, a photobook.\(^74\) On the other hand, a typology of the station front might cohere for those viewers accustomed to the goals and visual strategies of design surveys, as must have been the case for many readers of *Toshi Jūtaku*. For instance, the small plazas that reappear in front of many stations suggest a space ripe for public gatherings or spontaneous encounters with the local community, much like the function of temple grounds in the premodern era. Outside of many stations we find shōtengai, or covered shopping arcades like Ameyoko Street where food stalls, tea shops and fish markets exist alongside variety stores, ceramic shops, restaurants, and grocers, maintaining the traditional atmosphere of the village center examined in the original Saiwaichō survey. In this perspective, station fronts take on characteristics of kaiwai, spaces where spontaneity, irregularity, and village-like community flourish in the face of those large-scale monuments to postwar recovery and progress, many of which were themselves train stations constructed as evidence of Japan’s viable presence in the world economy.\(^75\) In this way, we might understand the language of *kaiwai* as a factor that contributes to our understanding of

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\(^{73}\) As Claire and Eve Zimmerman have noted, “The habit of perceiving new and remote architecture chiefly through photographs in professional publications grew in the years before and after the Second World War, in Japan as elsewhere, so that postwar audiences could expect to ‘read’ architecture through photographic images.” Claire Zimmerman and Eve Zimmerman, “Ethnographic Architectural Photography: Futagawa Yukio and *Nihon no minka*,” *The Journal of Architecture* 20:4 (2015), 721.


\(^{75}\) Sand, Tokyo Vernacular, 31.
the ruin as it was developed in Miyamoto’s photography of the irregular structures at sites of demolition and informal housing, discussed later in this dissertation.

Ueda produced “Station Front Views” as a kind of visual encyclopedia of the prewar townscape that he saw lingering in the relationship between humans, objects, and the spaces around train stations in Tokyo. As a mode of preservation and reproduction, photography was particularly well suited to the project, and the informal manner in which the photographs were shot from the street and stitched together reinforces the human perspective championed by the journal. In this way, Ueda deployed understandings of village dynamics established by past design surveys to renegotiate ideas and images of centrality without ever leaving the center.

76 The historian Hanada Yoshiaki reads this issue as “a reflection of Ueda’s obsession with the prewar Tokyo that had disappeared.” Hanada, Ueda Makoto, 66.

77 The formal properties of “Station Front Views” invite comparisons to the work of Ed Ruscha. The panoramic views taken at street level and stitched together into bands mimic the movement of passing along the street, just as Ruscha’s panoramic views in Every Building on the Sunset Strip (1966) suggest the trajectory of a car driving along the famous boulevard. Jaleh Mansoor, “Ed Ruscha’s ‘One-Way Street,’” October 111 (Winter 2005), 127-142.

While Ruscha’s work was known in Japan through art and photography journals, another likely source for the format of “Eki mae sukūo” may have been the photo album, Ginza Hacchō, a visual codex of the eighth district of the Ginza neighborhood in Tokyo photographed by Suzuki Yoshikazu in 1953-54. Both albums were printed on an accordion fold, unfurling panoramic views of the built landscapes that line these well-known streets in two centers of capital, Los Angeles and Tokyo. In the end, the same format was applied to radically different goals. While Ruscha was a conceptual artist employing photography and the scroll format to question contemporary systems of representational logic, Ginza Hacchō was a study of place. Ibid., 136. The album was a compendium to the volume Ginza Kaiwai (The Ginza Neighborhood), written and edited by the artist-author Kimura Shōhachi. Ginza Kaiwai is one of many essays that Kimura wrote “on Tokyo in which urban space is explored at street level and city history, personal memory, and reflections on the passage of time as embodied in the transformation of meisho [famous places] are neatly tied together.” Evelyn Schultz, “Walking the City: Spatial and Temporal Configurations of the Urban Spectator in Writings on Tokyo,” in Urban Spaces in Japan: Cultural and Social Perspectives, ed. Christoph Brumann and Evelyn Schultz (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 191. At times, Kimura reproduced his own paintings of the Ginza to illustrate the text. However, he believed that there were fundamental differences between painting and photography and emphasized photography’s one-to-one relationship with the world as a medium built with light. Kimura Shōhachi, “E no me to shashin no me” (The Eye of Paintings and the Eye of Photography), in Sairoku: Shashinron 1921-1965 (Recordings: On Photography 1921-1965), ed. Oshima Hiroshi (Tokyo: Tankōsha, 1999), 137-8. Thus, certain tasks, such as the Ginza Kaiwai album, were suited only to photography. Kimura spells out his motivations for the systematic photographic documentation of the area in his introduction to the album: “We are lucky that there was no disaster, such as a fire, on the main strip during the time in which we organized this project. For a short while at least, this is the appearance of our ‘Ginza.’ However, fires are always lurking in the shadows of the boulevard, so we have been busy re-surveying the individual areas destroyed by fire…. ” Kimura Shōhachi, “‘Arubamu Ginza hacchō ni tsuite” (On the ‘Ginza Hacchō Album), Ginza Kaiwai/Ginza Hacchō (Tokyo: Tōhō Shobō, 1954), n.p. Here, Kimura alludes not only to the firebombing of Tokyo by Allied forces in 1945, but also to the fires sparked by the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. In both events, the Ginza was almost entirely flattened, and so the area has become symbolic of the ever-changing face of Tokyo and an important
Participating in the production of “Station Front Views” was a watershed moment for Miyamoto. In 1975, he left architectural journalism to focus on photography, and the surveying of typologies in urban spaces remained a persistent theme in his practice. In one of his first works as an independent artist, Miyamoto created a 16 mm, 32-minute film entitled, *The Crossing* (1975), in which he shot panoramic views at successive crosswalks along Broadway in Manhattan. The film begins in Battery Park looking out towards the Statue of Liberty and progresses up the avenue, cutting from one crosswalk to the next.

Just as Ueda produced “Station Front Views” as a kind of visual preservation of the “townscape” that he saw lingering in the atmosphere around train stations in Tokyo, Miyamoto also speaks about *The Crossing* in the context of preservation. He had Theo Crosby’s work in mind when he visited New York, five years after Crosby published *The Necessary Monument: Its Future in the Civilized City* (1970), which proposed a theory of urban planning based on the preservation of nineteenth-century monuments, understood as “enormous examples of an alternative mode of perception, of another set of priorities, an alternative to our accommodation to the industrial system.”

Crosby used the 1963 demolition of the original Pennsylvania Station touchstone for those seeking to understand the character of the city at any given moment in time (recall that Kon Wajirō also began his Modernology studies here). In this same vein, Ueda turned to station fronts in order to capture scenes of a “prewar Tokyo that had disappeared.” Hanada, *Ueda Makoto*, 66. In both cases, the cool, neutral rhetoric of the photographic scroll was central to the surveying of place.

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78 Miyamoto, interview with the author, May 8, 2017.

79 While the film recalls the conceptual strategies of Edward Ruscha and the documentary aim of *Ginza Hacchō* (in fact, all three were exhibited together in an exhibition entitled, *On the Road*, held at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo in 2011), Miyamoto cites his experience with “Station Front Views” as a direct inspiration for the project. Ibid.

in New York as a case study to demonstrate the systematic replacement of architectural monuments with “poor architecture” built “to make huge profits.”

He writes:

In such a cultural situation, monuments carry a subversive message, of conspicuous consumption, of lost erudition, of values beyond the mundane. They are reminders of our better selves, our communal responsibilities and of our present slavery to the requirements of the production process. It is no wonder that there is so much pressure to replace them with plastic packs for conveniently processed people.

Miyamoto was inspired to create a document that – in the spirit of “Station Front Views” – created a snapshot of an urban space that was subject to ongoing destructive violence in the name of progress and technology. Years later, the demolition sites documented in Architectural Apocalypse carried that same “subversive message” warning against “conspicuous consumption.”

Miyamoto has never actively advocated for the preservation of historic buildings, nor do his reserved photographs in Architectural Apocalypse reveal any sort of anxiety over “cultural forms that seem to be slipping away.” However, he has participated in multiple projects that speak to the importance of preservation, adaptation and the repurposing of historic buildings in a world where urban monuments increasingly succumb to fears of obsolescence. Moreover, he

81 Ibid., 85. In the case of Penn Station, Crosby decries the new Madison Square Garden built on the land above the station.

82 Ibid.

83 In their discussion of ethnographic architectural photography and the work of Futagawa Yukio, Claire and Eve Zimmerman identify this as a “central component of modernity around the world: the idealization of knowledge contained in cultural forms that seem to be slipping away and a concomitant sense of anticipation and anxiety regarding the present.” Zimmerman and Zimmerman, “Ethnographic Architectural,” 734.

84 In fact, a year before they worked together for the Nakano Prison article, Miyamoto and the architect Matsuyama Iwao created another piece for the Asahi Graph entitled, “Shōwa shonen no shomin no yume: Tokyo/Shitamachi no kanban kenchiku wo miru” (Dreams of the Masses in the Early Years of Shōwa: Looking at the Signboard Architecture of Tokyo’s Shitamachi Neighborhood). The fifteen pages of color photographs in combination with Matsuyama’s text create a kind of walking tour to reveal the “memories of Shōwa-era modernism” that still remain in the Shitamachi neighborhood. Matsuyama Iwao and Miyamoto Ryūji, “Shōwa shonen no shomin no yume: Tokyo/Shitamachi no kanban kenchiku wo miru” (Dreams of the Masses in the Early years of Shōwa: Looking at the Signboard Architecture of Tokyo’s Shitamachi Neighborhood), Asahi Graph 3114 (November 12, 1982), 31-45.
has been commissioned to photograph buildings just before their demolitions on countless occasions. For example, in 1988, he was the photographer for a twelve-part series in the journal *Shōten Kenchiku* (Shop Architecture) entitled, “Sariyuku mono e no rekuiemu,” or, “A Requiem for Lost Things,” in which academics from Fujimori Terunobu’s research lab at Tokyo University memorialized the history and innovative design aspects of late-Meiji and Taishō-era buildings slated for demolition. While the photographs depict the buildings in various states of disrepair, the inclusion of maps and diagrams to explain certain design features suggest that there is still much to learn from these modern works on the brink of elimination.85 On another occasion, Miyamoto participated in the exhibition “Emotional Site,” held at the Saga-chō Shokuryō Building in the weeks leading up to its demolition. A wholesale market built of iron and steel in 1927, the Shokuryō Building had been converted into a gallery space in 1983, but it was eventually demolished in 2002 due to maintenance issues. Most of the artists who participated in the final exhibition used their art to engage with the building in some way as a means of marking its existence. Not only did Miyamoto take photographs of the Shokuryō Building with his handmade pinhole camera (see Chapter 4), but after the exhibition he documented the multiple phases of the demolition.86

As these projects and the sites represented in *Architectural Apocalypse* testify, architecture’s “creative destruction” is a widespread phenomenon under capitalism.87 As Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs describe, “Under capitalism, architecture’s productive attributes – as

85 The series was featured in volume 33, numbers 1-12 of *Shōten Kenchiku* in 1988. The architects Kujihara Keiyō and Nishizawa Yasuhiko were the most frequent authors, with Tada Yoshiaki and Aoki Nobuo also contributing one essay each.

86 Shirasaka Yuri, “Toshi wo karu: Miyamoto Ryūji ga mita Shokuryō Biru no saigo” (Searching for the City: The Final Moments of the Shokuryō Building as Seen by Miyamoto Ryūji), *Bijutsu techō* 834 (May 2003), 106-9.

87 The term “creative destruction” was coined by Joseph A. Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy* [1942] (New York: Harper, 1950).
creative expression and material form – are at the same time commodities. Architecture’s creative and material value is, to use Marx’s words, ‘resolved into’ exchange value and subsumed into a market as ‘price.’” They conclude, “Architecture in capitalist contexts is foundationally bound to destruction.”

Japan – and more specifically, Tokyo in the 1980s – is consistently pointed to as the poster child of creative destruction in literature on the topic. The rampant redevelopment of Japanese cities surged with the astronomical rise in land prices during the economic “bubble” period of the 1980s, with the standard price for residential and commercial properties rising by

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88 Cairns and Jacobs, Buildings Must Die, 54. They elaborate, “…real-estate architecture is subject to cycles of investment and disinvestment, the churn of creative destruction. Sometimes its cycles are slow, but at other times they are shockingly quick. Even buildings can be subject to the kind of fast-paced obsolescence that we nowadays normally associated with electrical products or fashion. In fact, architecture, unlike many other products, can suffer a painful variant: an instant or premature obsolescence that leaves behind incomplete architectural carcasses.” Cairns and Jacobs, 104. A well-documented contemporary example of the latter phenomenon is the economy of construction that produces “ghost architectures” in China and other developing Southeast Asian countries. See: Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika, and Erik Swyngedouw, “Urban Political Ecology,” in Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism, ed. Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika, and Erik Swyngedouw (London: Routledge, 2006), 1-19. Cairns and Jacobs elaborate on building obsolescence: “The story of building obsolescence is inevitably one of political economy. Architectural design plays but a small part in whether a building’s duration is stretched or shortened. The cycles of capital investment and disinvestment that operate as primary forces in the fate of buildings are uneven. Fredrich Engels knew this when we reported upon the housing conditions of the English working classes.” Cairns and Jacobs, Buildings Must Die, 111. Here, they refer to Engels’ The Housing Question (1872), which, incidentally, was the subject of Taira Keiichi’s graduation thesis, prepared under the guidance of Tange Kenzō at Tokyo University in 1949. Taira and Nishimura, “Kenchiku jānarizumu,” 57. David Harvey has drawn connections between Engels’ observations about workers’ housing in late-nineteenth-century Britain and globalizing cities in Asia in the 1980s. He begins with a quote from Engels: “‘The growth of the big modern cities gives the land in certain areas, particularly in those areas which are centrally situated, an artificially and colossally increasing value; the buildings erected on these areas depress this value instead of increasing it, because they no longer belong to the changed circumstances. They are pulled down and replaced by others. This takes place above all with workers’ houses which are situated centrally and whose rents, even with the greatest overcrowding, can never, or only very slowly, increase above a certain maximum. They are pulled down and in their stead shops, warehouses and public buildings are erected.’ Though this description was written in 1872, it applies directly to contemporary urban development in much of Asia – Delhi, Seoul, Mumbai – as well as gentrification in New York. A process of displacement and what I call ‘accumulation by dispossession’ lie at the core of urbanization under capitalism.” David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” New Left Review 53 (Sept-Oct 2008), 34. Harvey gives the examples of Delhi, Seoul, and Mumbai, but an argument can also be made for drawing a connection to the circumstances of urban renewal in Japanese cities in the 1980s and 1990s, in which “life for those unwilling to sell was made miserable by gangsters acting on behalf of property developers using tactics varying from threats to physical violence.” Paul Waley, “Tokyo: Patterns of Familiarity and Partitions of Difference,” in Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order?, ed. Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), 142. For a case study of the redevelopment of the Roppongi area of Tokyo, see: Roman Cybriwsky, Roppongi Crossing: The Demise of a Tokyo Nightclub District and the Reshaping of a Global City (Athens; London: The University of Georgia Press, 2011).
76% in Tokyo in 1987. Paul Waley succinctly summarizes the causes for this turbulent period of “upheaval” in urban history:

Driving these changes were three closely interlocked developments. First, as a result of a coincidence of economic circumstances, Tokyo property became a favored outlet for speculative investment. Secondly, a number of restrictions on planning and construction were lifted, and political blessing was given to the use of urban land as a vehicle of corporate investment. And thirdly, an ideological imprimatur was placed on the restructuring of Tokyo through the burnishing for the Japanese capital of a new image as international city.

The major name associated with the reimaging of Tokyo as an “international city” is Suzuki Shunichi, governor of Tokyo from 1979 to 1995. Suzuki implemented multiple policies that encouraged corporate expansion in Tokyo, namely the allowance of land speculation, the elimination of building restriction codes, and the construction of large-scale development projects. These projects and policies pushed people and communities further from the center, as corporations came to own and occupy a majority of the city. In this environment, “Tokyo came to be described as a city with an empty center, teeming with workers and shoppers during the day, but relatively empty of people at night.” The effects on the built environment were equally distressing. With the value of land exceeding the value of any construction project that might be built on it, buildings in Japan were typically torn down and rebuilt within twenty years of

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completion, if not sooner. Taki Kōji, one of the most prolific theorists of urban space in the postwar period, has written of the Japanese city, “Ironically, despite its density, it is vacant; it has no continuity or depth. Although more and more buildings are constantly being built, no sense of urban fabric ever develops; the result is a kind of ruin. In this sense, the power to create a city is ironically the power that destroys it.”

In a short essay on Miyamoto’s photographs of demolition sites, Ueda Makoto reflected on the state of the Japanese city in the 1980s:

Lately, when I walk around the city, I am continuously shocked at how quickly old architecture is disappearing. As long as we think that the strength of the Japanese economy is demonstrated by destruction rather than construction […] we are returning to an expressionless land where we see nothing but rubble. I cannot remember what used to stand there.

Miyamoto’s work documents this return to rubble that Ueda lamented, the wastefulness and dangers of unchecked redevelopment. In this way, Architectural Apocalypse can be understood

94 Shiomi, Hōkai suru, 8. Quoted in: Shioda, Toshi to gendai, 125. In one case, land speculation led to a single lot being re-sold four times in the span of ten months. Shunji Fukuoka, “The Structure of Urban Land Administration during the Bubble Economy: Control Systems and Their Operations,” in Comprehensive Urban Studies no. 62 International Symposium on Urban Problems: Urban Land Policies and Land Use Systems: Frameworks and Effects, (Tokyo: Center for Urban Studies, 1997), 165. Cairns and Jacobs report that “in Japan the average number of years before a house is demolished is around 30, which is significantly shorter than the United States at 55 years and the UK at 77 years.” Meanwhile, “the proportion of total investment in building work allocated to maintenance and renovation is a mere 25 percent. In Western Europe, including Britain, it is about 50 percent. Surprisingly, the pace of building loss in Japan is more rapid when it comes to steel structures – mainly commercial and industrial buildings. Researchers estimate that in less than 30 years over 50 percent of steel-framed buildings will have been demolished, with their average life being just 30 years…” Cairns and Jacobs, Buildings Must Die, 127. Surprisingly, the bursting of the economic bubble in 1991 did not curb these patterns of redevelopment for long, based as they are on a “logic of replacement.” For example, “In Tokyo in the 1990s city builders were daily demolishing 12,339 square meters (132,644 square feet) of buildings, and newly constructing 62,861 square meters (675,755 square feet).” Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Tokyo Metropolis: Facts and Data, 1994, 16. Quoted in Cairns and Jacobs, Buildings Must Die, 200.


96 Ueda Makoto, “Shunkan’ no eien no sō” (The Look of an Eternal ‘Moment’), in Toshi Jūtaku kuronikuru II (A Chronicle of Urban Housing II) (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 2007), 11. This essay was originally published in the December 1988 issue of SD.
as a *survey* of urban conditions endemic to any globalizing country, but particularly familiar to Japan. It is a visual meditation on the typology of the demolition site – the unexpected, curious spaces that are birthed by the wrecking ball – the encyclopedic cataloguing of which speaks to the superfluity and pervasiveness of these circumstances.

A reading of *Architectural Apocalypse*-as-survey comes through most potently in those parts of the photobook that feature multiple photographs of the same building. In the case of the Negishi Race Course in Yokohama, we can retrace the steps of Miyamoto as he approaches the building at a distance; examines the grandstands at the threshold between interior and exterior; circumnavigates the building to view those sides that are in the process of being turned inside out; and finally enters the building at the ground floor, where a bright light pierces through the windows to reveal the gutted interior frame (Figs. 1.23 to 1.26). With this formulaic approach we never lose a sense of Miyamoto’s clear eye for the visual play of forms in varying degrees of light and shadow. For instance, as the viewer flips from a photograph of the Negishi Race Course directly to an interior shot of the swimming pool at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium, the columns in each building appear in almost the exact same location on both pages (Figs. 1.26 and 1.27). This reveals a great deal about Miyamoto’s approach to his subject matter: in this case, his persistent search for perspectives that lead the eye into the depths of the building. A comparison such as this also evinces how the book itself was composed, with attention to forms that are at once repetitions and variations of one another.

This is precisely where an understanding of Miyamoto’s early career in architectural journalism – and particularly his participation in numerous influential design surveys – converges with so-called objective approaches to photography (exemplified by the Bechers and New Topographics photographers) to suggest a way in which meaning is made in the pages of
Architectural Apocalypse. To repeat Britt Salvesen’s observation on the importance of style in the creation of meaning, “Serial presentation may underscore the repetitive nature of the mass-produced subjects […] but more importantly it demonstrates the artist’s power, through style, to endow those subjects with meaning.”97 Both the design survey and documentary photography were used to develop specific visual styles that endow their subjects with meaning. Miyamoto’s approach is an amalgamation of the two that “communicate[s] through reference” to aspects of both of these traditions and develops a new form of commentary in the process.98 In the next section, I elaborate on the potential meaning that might be drawn from this stylistic approach when considered in conjunction with the photographic content of Architectural Apocalypse – ruins.

Allegory

Miyamoto was not the first to use photography to document an urban landscape in the process of rapid transformation; nor was his generation the first to realize that the loss of architectural monuments meant “losses to social memory.”99 The story of Tokyo in the 1980s possesses some remarkable similarities to the traumatic redevelopment of Paris under the direction of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann in the second half of the nineteenth century, what Susan Buck-Morss describes as a “newly constructed urban phantasmagoria with its promise of change-as-progress.”100 The photographers Charles Marville and Henri Le Secq


95 Ibid., 51.

99 Neil Harris, Building Lives: Constructing Rites and Passages (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), 120.

100 Buck-Morss, Dialectics of Seeing, 178. On the relevance of Benjamin’s writing on the city to representations of modern and contemporary Tokyo, see: Schultz, “Walking the City,” 184-202.
documented early instances of the demolition work, which, according to Cairns and Jacobs, “inaugurated a genre of demolition photography that remains vital to the present. Their (and other) photographs did not simply capture manifest buildings, but architecture in the event of urban transformations.”101 Shelley Rice is quick to point out, however, that much of Le Secq’s work, such as the photographs collected in the Album Berger from 1853, was created years before the major transformations to the urban fabric of Paris had taken place.102 The majority of the damage that Haussmann inflicted – the annexation of suburbs, complete annihilation of medieval neighborhoods, and construction of a new network of boulevards – occurred in the late 1850s and 60s, with criticism mounting by the 70s. Despite the fact that the majority of the photographs in the Album Berger date from the early 1850s, Shelley argues that “Le Secq’s work is nevertheless a dirge: filled with demolitions, with destructions, with ruins, it is an elegy to a disappearance that, in historical terms, had not yet occurred on a widespread scale” (Fig. 1.28).103 These photographs, then, are an extrapolation; from the serial collection of evidence they project a doom-laden future that we now eulogize with the contemporaneous poetry of Charles Baudelaire, as when he wrote, “Old Paris is gone (no human heart / changes half so fast as a city’s face).”104

101 Cairns and Jacobs, Buildings Must Die, 197.

102 Shelley Rice, Parisian Views (Cambridge; London: The MIT Press, 1997), 12. Le Secq took the photographs in the Album Berger between 1849 and 1953, when “Haussmann was just taking office; the survey map that would be the basis for the construction process was still to be done, and it would be quite some time before Napoleon III’s plan would start to redefine in a global way the physical spaces and lifestyles of the City of Light.” Ibid.

103 Ibid.

The great interpreter of Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, responded to this sentiment, “Anything about which one knows that one soon will not have it around becomes an image.” Following the logic of Benjamin, Shelley goes on to categorize Le Secq’s images as allegories, signs that point to something other than themselves. By preserving this historical moment of urban transition, the photographs also enable a larger reflection on the future of a fully redeveloped Paris. Indeed, Benjamin identified a preservationist impulse in times of transformation as one of the central aspects of allegory, described in *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* (1928) as “an appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity.” Craig Owens rightly draws an explicit connection between this impulse and photography, calling the latter “an allegorical art, […] a desire to fix the transitory, the ephemeral, in a stable and stabilizing image.”

After *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* (1928), Benjamin elaborated his understanding of allegory in *The Arcades Project*, an enormous collection of essays that he began in the 1930s and left unfinished with his death in 1940. The central location of Benjamin’s inquiry in *The Arcades Project* was Paris in the late nineteenth century and, more specifically, the Paris Arcades, commercial shopping galleries that had also undergone a great transformation, having been emptied of all human activity by the time of his writing. These hollow structures were the equivalents of allegories for Benjamin. Deprived of their function, the passageways and

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emptied stores turned into signs devoid of their original meaning. Awaiting demolition, they pointed to the transience of consumer culture. Likewise, in Haussmann’s Paris, where “formerly stable objects, social symbols, and behavior patterns become floating signs,” Le Secq’s photographs of building demolitions served as allegories, unstable signs that point in multiple temporal directions (the building’s past, its present state of obsolescence, and the future landscape after its disappearance) by virtue of their photographic preservation in a fragmentary state of transition.  

Herein lies the complementary relationship between allegory and ruins. As Benjamin noted, “Allegory is in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things.” In this way, we can also understand Miyamoto’s temporary ruins as allegories.

Miyamoto values ruins precisely because of their semiotic instability and temporal fluidity. The bizarre spatial arrangements encountered in his images often confound the viewer’s attempt to visually rectify the structure. This, claims Miyamoto, imbues the forms with a sense of agency: “buildings in the process of demolition detach themselves from human expectation or plan as the building itself asserts its own sense of existence.” A photograph of the demolished

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109 Shelley, Parisian Views, 18.


111 Two esteemed Japanese photographers of the generation preceding Miyamoto’s hinted at this connection to allegory in their review of Miyamoto’s work for the Kimura Ihee Award in 1988. Ishimoto Yasuhiro wrote of Architectural Apocalypse: “There is a great accumulation of history that has been buried in those ruins. Looking at this photobook makes your heart stop a moment, as if you can hear shouts from the past. Moreover, there are shouts of warnings and prophecies for the future.” Ishimoto Yasuhiro, “Haikyo kara no messeji ni kyōkan” (Empathy for the Message from the Ruins), Asahi Camera 724 (April 1989), 144. Similarly, the photographer Watanabe Yoshio credited Miyamoto with the ability to weave “illusions” in his photographs. The illusion of a ruined world – an architectural apocalypse – is just as likely to refer to the actual ruinous landscape of Japan’s recent past as it is to the present and potentially ruinous future. Watanabe Yoshio, “Meikenchiku no kaitai ni aiseki no omoi” (Thoughts on Missing Famous Architecture), Asahi Camera 724 (April 1989), 143.

Sapporo Brewery has an eerie, almost frightening quality to it, as the I-beams – one of the ultimate visual signifiers of modernist order and functionalism – violently strike out from the left and curl around the building’s foundation (Fig. 1.29). The new form resembles a giant, mechanical insect, perhaps an ant or a centipede, flipped on its back and withering in the sun.

In the essay that accompanies Miyamoto’s photographs in *Architectural Apocalypse*, Isozaki describes the effects that such surreal images have on the imagination: “Although they can never give us an accurate image of the complete structures to which they testify, none of this can diminish the fascination of ruins, nor the temptation to speculation they offer. They have hidden effects on us, stimulating fantasies, visions, and illusions.” He goes on: “those fallen bits and pieces formed an invitation to fill in the gaps, to make connections, to shore them up, and where necessary, to replace them.” This corresponds to Owens’ reading of the undervalued power of allegorical imagery:

> Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (*allos* = other + *agoreuei* = to speak). He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image.\(^\text{114}\)

In their mangled and incoherent form, the disjunctive gaps of ruins become spaces for viewers’ imaginations, spaces for the creation of meaning in an all-encompassing consumer culture where, it seemed, everything had lost its originary meaning. That meaning may be playful and imaginative, primarily engaged with visual forms, uncanny resemblances, and the aesthetic of the sublime, or it may relate to recent history, as a clear threat to narratives of progress and linear modern development. What sorts of “fantasies, visions, and illusions” did these photographs


\(^{114}\) Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse,” 69.
inspire in viewers when they were first exhibited and published in the 1980s? If we are to understand *Architectural Apocalypse* as an allegory, what exactly is the alternate meaning that Miyamoto adds to these images?

**Recurring Memories of Ruins**

It is clear that memories of the early postwar years have been a constant point of return for Miyamoto in conceptualizing his work. He remembers the neighborhood where he was raised in Shinjuku as “a hilly area with municipal housing projects and elementary schools curiously interspersed among concrete ruins…a typical view of Tokyo in the years just after World War II had ended.”\(^{115}\) This devastating landscape of Tokyo flattened by American firebombing would not remain around for long. Japan’s remarkable physical and economic recovery after the war has been the subject of historical debate and fascination for decades, and the politics of Miyamoto’s photographs are inextricably linked to the specific circumstances of redevelopment as it was practiced throughout the postwar period.

The postwar spirit of recovery and progress was epitomized by major international events such as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the first Olympics to be held in Asia and the first in which non-white countries participated. Often referred to as the “Trillion Yen Olympics,” this was the opportunity for Japan to demonstrate its viable presence in the world economy less than twenty years after defeat in the Asia-Pacific War.\(^{116}\) With the construction of new roadways leading out to the suburbs and raised highways above the city’s many rivers, vast improvements were made to transportation infrastructure. Moreover, 1964 witnessed the opening of the Tokaidō *shinkansen*, the first bullet train designed to transport visitors from Tokyo to Osaka, along with

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\(^{115}\) Miyamoto, “The Silence of Photographs,” 77.

the Tokyo Monorail connecting Haneda International Airport to the city center. New athletic facilities were constructed in Komazawa Park in addition to Tange Kenzō’s monumental stadia at Yoyogi, the National Stadium used for the opening and closing ceremonies in Meiji Park, and numerous other theaters and halls for additional events. It is for this reason that the Tokyo Olympics has been called “the biggest event to change the landscape of Tokyo in the postwar period.”

And yet, as Yoshikuni Igarashi has pointed out, despite the role of the Tokyo Olympics in Japan’s “narrative of recovery,” the extensive redevelopment of the city deemed necessary for hosting the Games evoked widespread memories of wartime destruction. Ichikawa Kon’s documentary film *Tokyo Olympiad* begins with a sustained shot of what resembles an inverted *hi no maru* flag, the shimmering sun bleached out by the neon orange sky surrounding it. Soon, the orb of the sun is replaced by that of a wrecking ball, suspended at first, and then dropped into a column before the screen pans back to capture the entire wall of a four-story, concrete building crashing to the ground. Upon returning to Tokyo in 1963, the literary critic Etō Jun wrote how, “Seeing the major construction going on day and night, I felt the Japanese were fighting a war.”

Years later, the student uprisings of 1968-9 were also characterized by ruination. At university campuses across the country, students went on strike, occupied buildings, tore down

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118 Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory*, 144-5.


120 Etō Jun, “‘Heiwa no sainen’ no hikari to kage: gen’ei no ‘Nihon teikoku,’ *Bungeishunjū* (December 1964), 174. Quoted in: Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory*, 144.
police barricades and transformed school grounds into “warzones.”\textsuperscript{121} The final blow to the New Left movement was spectacularized in the media by a wrecking ball demolishing the Asama Sansō mountain lodge where the remaining members of the radical United Red Army holed up with a hostage during a ten-day siege by police forces in 1972.\textsuperscript{122} Disillusioned by the failure of the movement, in 1969, Miyamoto and three other students at Tama Art University formed the Bijutsuka Kyōtō Kaigi (The Artist Joint Struggle Council, or Bikyōtō), a resistance group united by the pledge that “contemporary art [and its institutions] must be made into ruins.”\textsuperscript{123} While all four founding members went on to have productive artistic careers, it is telling that what they did create consistently echoed that earlier commitment to destruction, ruination, and fragmentation.\textsuperscript{124}

As detailed earlier in this chapter, the destructive violence of urban redevelopment picked up tremendous momentum again with the spike in land prices in the 1980s. Thus, despite the erasure of wartime ruins from the physical landscape, their memory was invoked repeatedly throughout the postwar period. In this seemingly endless cycle of destruction and reconstruction the potential for memorialization was also re-created and re-destroyed. Indeed, during the Anpo debates (sparked over the passing and subsequent renewal of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the U.S.) and demonstrations against the Vietnam War in the

\textsuperscript{121} Patricia G. Steinhoff, “Memories of New Left Protest,” \textit{De Gruyter} 25:2 (2013), 143.


\textsuperscript{123} Kanesaka, “‘Haikyo to shite,” 73.

\textsuperscript{124} Miyamoto maintained relationships with the other three founding members of the group – Hikosaka Naoyoshi, Hori Kōsai, and Ishiuchi Miyako – and in 1998 they reunited for an exhibition at Tokyo Gallery entitled, “AIR – Art in the Ruins,” that displayed their commitment to a ruinous aesthetic since the late 1960s.
1960s, narratives of the war “also functioned as peace promotion.” Significantly, the development of *Architectural Apocalypse* occurred at a moment when those few ruins that did remain from the war were under threat. During the 1980s, a number of architectural relics that had survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima were razed and removed from the city’s landscape, leading to debates over the importance of these sites as “living witnesses.” As Lisa Yoneyama has shown, for many *hibakusha*, witnessing the destruction of representations of their memories induced a painful process of secondary loss. The loss of these structures meant the loss of clues that allowed the public to reflect critically on the past. The preservation campaign in Hiroshima sparked a critical resurgence in individual efforts to speak out or write about memories of the wartime and postwar years in Japan.

The demolition of many of the buildings featured in *Architectural Apocalypse* also inspired preservation and memorialization movements. Unlike the cases in Hiroshima, however, it was the event of the demolition, rather than the threat of it, that proved conducive to memory, and Miyamoto’s photographs are the primary visual record of these events. At least one – Nakano Prison – hinged on its relationship to wartime memories. Beyond its legacy as an early work of expressionist architecture in Japan, Nakano Prison (formerly known as Toyotama Prison) is perhaps most well known for those that were incarcerated there as “thought criminals” (*shisō hannin*) from the late 1920s through the end of the war. The arrest of thought criminals began in earnest after April 12, 1925, when the Peace Preservation Law was enacted against

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125 Akiko Takenaka, “Memory, Trauma, Art,” in Beyond Hiroshima: The Return of the Repressed – Wartime Memory in Contemporary Japanese Photography and Video Art (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2015), 46.


127 Ibid.
“anyone who organizes a group for the purpose of changing the national polity (kokutai).”

This led to the widespread arrest and incarceration of socialists, communists, and anarchists throughout Japan and colonial Korea. The list of legendary prisoners to pass through Nakano earned it the nickname, “The Tokyo University of the Prison World.”

Nearly every article that was published on Nakano Prison at the time of its demolition in 1983 mentions its seasoned list of prisoners and many include quotations taken either from memoirs or letters written from within the prison walls. In the article that accompanied Miyamoto’s original photographs of Nakano Prison in Asahi Graph, Matsuyama Iwao reproduced a former prisoner’s letter that he found in the overgrown weeds while wandering the prison grounds. While the content of the letter is unremarkable, the retrieval of this historical voice is representative of the multiple ways in which the very event of the demolition provided an opportunity to revisit the recorded memories of those who were imprisoned, tortured, and, in many cases, coerced into a renunciation of their belief systems there. For instance, in a series of poems that he wrote about the demolition site, Sasaki Mikirō combined extended quotations from prisoners with his own contemporary impressions of the crumbing spaces that once contained them. These quotations are primary sources of the dark political history that


129 Matsuyama Iwao, “Torikaesareru Taishō kenchiku no kessaku: Miki Kiyoshi ya Haniya Yutaka ga shūyō sareta Nakano keimushō” (A Masterpiece of Taishō Architecture Destroyed: Nakano Prison, Where Miki Kiyoshi and Haniya Yutaka Were Imprisoned), Asahi Graph no. 3148 (July 1983), 61. The seasoned list of Nakano prisoners includes the author Haniya Yutaka, the labor leader Arahata Kanson, literary critic Kamei Katsuichirō, the proletarian literature author Kobayashi Taki, the anarchist Ōsugi Sakae, author and Communist party leader Nakano Shigeharu, Marxist economist Kawakami Hajime, peace activist Toda Jōsei, and the philosopher Miki Kiyoshi, who died there in 1945.

130 Ibid.

131 The poems were originally published in a larger collection of poetry on lost architecture in Tokyo entitled, Otomi no hikari, which was reprinted in Sasaki Mikirō shishū (Sasaki Mikirō Poetry Anthology) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1996).
culminated in Japan’s imperial aggression in the Asia-Pacific War, and many of these sources had not been recounted since the immediate postwar years.

Tellingly, the first edited volume of accounts from Nakano Prison was published in 1986, just three years after the completion of the demolition. The project originated in 1982 when a group of local politicians, citizens, and academics gathered out of a common concern for the loss of the prison as an historical artifact. They called themselves the *Toyotama (Nakano) keimusho wo shakai undō shiteki ni kiroku suru kai*, or the Group for the Recording of Toyotama (Nakano) Prison as a Historical Social Movement. For five years they worked by hearsay to track down the survivors and family members of those who spent time in Nakano. The group collected diaries, letters, poems and memoirs written by former prisoners and compiled them into an eight-part book that tells the story of roughly one hundred individuals.

According to the leader of the group, the law scholar Kazahaya Yasoji, the goal of the publication was two-fold:

> Our documentation of the reality of the prisoners in Toyotama Prison under this law is at once an indictment of the evil role played by the Peace Preservation Law from the perspective of its victims, the living witnesses of the prison, and at the same time something that carries historical consciousness which clarifies the reality of the persistent struggle of these victims against oppression.

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134 Kazahaya, “Honsho,” 362. Specifically, the group was concerned with the Tokyo Preventive Detention Law (*Tokyo yobō kōkin hō*), which was appended to the Peace Preservation Law in 1941 and allowed for the detainment of prisoners past their sentence. Nakano Prison was the primary site for the enforcement of the law. According to Ozawa Tetsuo, a local city council member involved with the group, there was little by way of actual records related to the law, but the few political reports and incident reports that they were able to uncover were shocking. Ozawa, “Henshū atogaki,” 387.
Kazahaya stressed the importance of bearing witness to this history, particularly when the physical markers of it were being erased. He wrote of the project: “We must not erase the reality of the struggles of these victims on the occasion of the demolition of the buildings at Nakano Prison.”

This sort of narration of the aspects of the prewar and wartimes years from the perspective of personal experiences and memories became more widespread in the 1980s with the growing loss of many of those old enough to remember. It is not that this history of the prison or other wartime atrocities had gone undocumented. However, in the case of Nakano Prison, the history had yet to be told from the sole perspective of those who had experienced its injustices. The members of the Group for the Recording of Toyotama (Nakano) Prison recognized the urgency of their work, so much so that in his conclusion to the publication, Ozawa Tetsuo, a local city council member, listed the names of those members of the group who had passed away before their work was completed.

Beyond the case of Nakano Prison, the potential for Architectural Apocalypse to participate in a dialogue on memories of the war is consistent with efforts by many in the late 1980s to rethink the narrative of the wartime and postwar years according to personal experiences. It is significant that Architectural Apocalypse was published in 1988, the year that the Shōwa Emperor collapsed and the public began its nearly four-month-long period of state-mandated “self-restraint” in recognition of the emperor’s impending death. As Norma Field has

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shown, unpleasant and so unofficial and unacknowledged memories of the war “festered at the heart of [this] ‘self-restraint.’”\textsuperscript{137} This was the year that the mayor of Nagasaki publicly admitted his belief in the emperor’s war guilt. And it was only one year after Chibana Shōichi burned the \textit{hi no maru} flag in protest against its mandated presence at a national athletics event in Okinawa. These events and the extensive media attention that they garnered are prime examples of the extremes that otherwise “restrained” individuals would go to in order to address publicly enduring issues of the war and its legacy in the contemporary political system.

One of the most profound examples of this widespread need to share was certainly the \textit{Sensō} series of letters-to-the-editor published by the Asahi Shinbun in 1986-87. Originally intended to last only three months, the series was extended for over a year, as more and more individuals, prompted by what they read from others, were encouraged to share experiences that they had not spoken of in decades. In 1987 the letters were published in a two-volume book that immediately became a best seller. As Frank Gibney has noted, many of the letters were “extraordinarily frank” and “shocking,” inciting public controversy over their place in contemporary society.\textsuperscript{138} One reader wrote to the Asahi: “Why did you dig up the old evils now? Just when we are trying to expand our friendship with neighboring countries, raking up what happened in the past can be very destructive. We are trying to forget this past. Don't be so cruel as to write about it. Please don't let our memories come alive again.”\textsuperscript{139} Such a reaction speaks to the severe extent to which individual memories of the war had been suppressed in Japanese

\textsuperscript{137} Norma Filed, In the Realm of a Dying Emperor: Japan at Century’s End (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 183.


\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
society, as well as the fear associated with their revival, as when this reader writes, “Please don’t let our memories come alive again.”

Miyamoto’s photographs contributed a critical visual component to the dialogue on memory rising to the surface in Japan in the 1980s, and they continue to have the potential to draw out, elucidate, and visualize those memories that previously had been suppressed in both the public and private spheres. Public institutions in Japan have long recognized the power of photography to let memories “come alive again.” Famously, in 1964 the Ministry of Education banned Ienaga Saburō’s textbook series on the history of Japan. This was in part because of the photographs that he intended to use in the section on the Asia-Pacific War, images with captions such as “Air-raid on the Mainland” and “Damages of the War.” According to the Ministry’s report, “only dark pictures are included and on the whole the impression is too dark.” Ienaga interpreted this as a sign of the “political intent to preclude the dark side of war from the content of education, to keep the ideal of abolition of war in the present constitution from permeating into people’s minds, and thus to remove all barriers to rearmament.” At a time when rearmament in Japan is once again a charged topic for debate, Ienaga’s apt observation of the potential for photography to complicate these issues should be critically reexamined.

As Miyamoto readily admits, many of his images of temporary ruins resemble a postwar world in their shared temporal and spatial indeterminacy. Without reference to the labels, the time and place depicted in most of the photographs in Architectural Apocalypse is wholly unclear. For example, in Figure 30 there are no contextual landmarks, and the nearly bleached-

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141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.
out background makes the building in the distance seem like a mere continuation of the pile of debris in the foreground. The ruin extends in all directions, even out towards the viewer. Certain elements that are legible, such as the ceiling panel that hangs down at an angle towards one of the few surviving columns, encourages viewers to search for more signs of the structure that once was, while the pyramid of disfigured debris below confounds any such prospect. The same sublime awe and terror that pervades many images of bombed-out cities reappears throughout Architectural Apocalypse. It does not take much to see the iconic remains of the A-Bomb Dome (Fig. 1.31) in the skeletal frame of the dome at the apex of the cellblock at Nakano Prison (Fig. 1.32).

In this line of interpretation, it is the physical process of losing the buildings – their temporary existence as ruins – that is conducive to collective remembering. The allegory’s “capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear” extends the loss from that of the building to the memories conjured by the viewing of that building in ruins. In capturing these buildings as ruins, Miyamoto enshrines memory in a new form: the photograph. The photographic preservation of buildings in ruins was necessary precisely because of the fleeting nature of these moments for memorialization in the Japanese landscape. Miyamoto claims to find something jarring, or even unnatural, about the absence of actual ruins from the war in the postwar landscape of Japan. He wrote of Tokyo after the war: “After those shacks and small cardboard houses and the ruins have been eliminated, the space of the city cannot fully

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143 Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse,” 68.

144 In a way, Miyamoto’s creation of ruins through photography is reminiscent of the proliferation of so-called “artificial ruins” in eighteenth-century western Europe. Beatriz Jaguaribe has suggested that this “ruin mania” represents “the need of the modern present to ground and contrast itself to a previous historical trajectory.” Beatriz Jaguaribe, “Modernist Ruins: National Narratives and Architectural Forms,” Public Culture 11:1 (1999), 311. While in England and France that modern present was intimately bound up in the rampant nation-building and imperial conquests of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, having witnessed the destructive results of such a trajectory, ruins were part of a related but fundamentally different project in the postwar and postmodern periods.
ripen; there is an unnaturalness to all of these new buildings, which give the skyline such an air of desolation.”\textsuperscript{145} Miyamoto’s photographs re-imprint ruins on to the Japanese landscape in a visual and aesthetic challenge to the vacuity of consumer culture and myths of modern progress, questioning how far the Japanese city has really come since its widespread annihilation in the 1940s. Could urban redevelopment really be justified under the tenets of progress and prosperity if the environment that it created could not be visually differentiated from the bombed out landscapes of forty years before? Unlike the hollow, metaphorical ruins that Taki Kōji and other cultural critics see in the cyclical reconstruction of the late-modern cityscape, Miyamoto’s allegorical ruins disrupt those spaces and open them up to multiple, interrelated critiques: critiques of the past, of a celebratory postwar narrative sustained by the erasure of ruins from the landscape; critiques of the present, of top-down urban planning and ceaseless redevelopment throughout the postwar period; and, finally, critiques of modernity’s false claims to a utopian future.

In his introductory essay to \textit{Architectural Apocalypse}, Isozaki describes two contrasting modes of time: absolute and imaginative time. Absolute time is the usual way of thinking about history as a “linear axis from the past linking it through the present to the future.”\textsuperscript{146} Imaginative time, on the other hand, is comparable to Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history,” in which time is understood as a constellation of moments all equidistant from each other. In Isozaki’s words, “Imaginative time generates only collections of instants of remembrance. It is arbitrary and indeterminate.”\textsuperscript{147} The enduring power of \textit{Architectural Apocalypse} comes from its ability –

\textsuperscript{145} Miyamoto, “Temporary Ruins,” 51.

\textsuperscript{146} Isozaki, “On Ruins,” 12.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
through allegory – to draw a connection between these two disparate modes of time. The images of “temporary ruins” both visualize and enable those instants of remembrance, the memories of the war that recurred over and over again with the continual redevelopment of Japan’s cities throughout the postwar period. Those instants can then be drawn together in a narrative that, while linear, is also a narrative of destruction rather than creation, of repetition rather than progress, of waste rather than growth and prosperity. The ability of these images to make connections between mundane scenes of destruction at urban demolition sites and memories of vast devastation unsettles one’s day-to-day relationship with history while simultaneously opening up a space for the critique of the contemporary city.
Chapter 2: Cardboard Houses, Concrete Slums

“Thus, the cities of the future, rather than being made out of glass and steel as envisioned by earlier generations of urbanists, are instead largely constructed out of crude brick, straw, recycled plastic, cement blocks, and scrap wood. Instead of cities of light soaring toward heaven, much of the twenty-first century urban world squats in squalor, surrounded by pollution, excrement, and decay.” – Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 2006

As demonstrated by *Architectural Apocalypse*, Miyamoto has been drawn to marginal and ephemeral forms of architecture throughout his career. This chapter focuses on two distinct instances of what he calls “handmade architecture” (*tezukuri kenchiku*). The first is cardboard houses, shelters assembled by the homeless from scraps of cardboard and other materials found on the streets of the Japanese metropolis. The second – Kowloon Walled City, the notorious 2.7-hectare, self-governed slum in Hong Kong – is an example of a photographer looking abroad for alternative, informal approaches to urban planning. Miyamoto pursued both of these projects in tandem with the photography of demolition sites. While the cardboard house and Kowloon photographs are strikingly different in terms of their visual content, I argue that both are representative of Miyamoto’s sustained interest in structures that are in a perpetual state of formation or deformation, a state that recalls the materiality of the ruin, as well as the near continuous rebuilding of Japan’s cities in the modern era.

As Jordan Sand articulates in *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects* (2013), one manifestation of a postmodern impulse in late-twentieth century Japan was the widespread turn to an urban “vernacular heritage,” as artists, architects, historians, and urban geographers attempted to uncover and reanimate “a city constructed and inhabited

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according to terms other than those dictated by capitalism and state-led development.”

The design survey, discussed in Chapter 1, was one manifestation of that impulse. Another was the flurry of activity surrounding informal, cooperative, and nomadic forms of housing that developed in the world of architecture in the 1960s and 1970s, including the study of vernacular histories, the theorization of principles of spontaneity, and the construction of lightweight, translucent, mobile homes. Before assessing Miyamoto’s own photographic investigation of the informal, I examine three early encounters from his time at Toshi Jūtaku that fostered an interest in and shaped his perception of handmade architecture: a trip to Hiroshima to photograph the genbaku (atomic bomb) slums, the documentation of hand-built residences in Tokyo, and the publication of the Japanese translation of Bernard Rudofsky’s *Architecture Without Architects* (1966). Lessons from all three of these projects reappear in my subsequent analysis of Miyamoto’s photobooks *Cardboard Houses* (2003) and *Kowloon Walled City* (1988).

I begin the section on *Cardboard Houses* with an introduction to the growing homeless problem in Japan in the 1990s in order to frame the public reception and interpretation of Miyamoto’s photography. Avoiding the presence of the actual homeless population and focusing instead on the handmade ingenuity of their temporary homes, Miyamoto’s images can be read as an aestheticization of the “primitive” homeless lifestyle. However, when considered as a group in the photobook format – alongside contemporary events in the world of homelessness and Miyamoto’s own statements – the visual contemplation of the houses in their larger urban setting reveals the political potential of their existence, particularly when visualized in photography. The

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2 Sand, Tokyo Vernacular, 4.

houses reformulate systems of capital and stand as a contradiction to narratives of economic growth and shared prosperity in the contemporary Japanese city.

As an ungoverned slum, Kowloon Walled City is a space of extraterritoriality that has served as a source of social, structural, and aesthetic inspiration for urban planners in Japan looking for an “alternative” approach to building a global metropolis. My discussion of Kowloon Walled City focuses more explicitly on the human element that haunts these otherwise people-less photographs. While Miyamoto maintains a focus on the infrastructure and accumulative materiality of the architecture, ideas about the actual community who built up and lived in the Walled City creep into discussions of the space in both problematic and restorative ways, revealing a new development in the conception of the ruin in Miyamoto’s photography.

In this chapter, I ascribe to Ananya Roy’s definition of urban informality to frame Miyamoto’s photographs of cardboard houses and Kowloon Walled City as metonyms for the invisible populations whose labor sustains the economic success of global cities. She writes, “Informality […] is not, to once again use Agamben’s terminology, the ‘chaos that precedes order, but rather the situation that results from its suspension.’ The planning and legal apparatus of the state has the power to determine when to enact this suspension, to determine what is informal and what is not, and to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear.”

This definition acknowledges the roles and responsibilities of poor and marginalized communities in the processes of global capitalism and repositions their informal residences – cardboard houses and concrete slums – as inevitable, not remarkable, spaces in the late-modern city. As we shall see, in both cases the state has indeed acknowledged the existence of these

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informal urban communities and at different junctures allowed them to thrive or demanded their clearance. Miyamoto’s photographs testify to their controversial presence, whether they remain hidden in the cracks of the city or alive in public imagination.

**Early Encounters with Tezukuri Kenchiku**

In 1973, Miyamoto and the editorial staff of *Toshi Jūtaku* traveled to Hiroshima to complete a survey of the highly anticipated Motomachi High-Rise Apartments, the first multi-block, high-rise public housing project of its size funded by the national government (Fig. 2.1). It was a giant project that included 9.81 hectares of 20-story high-rise apartment blocks (*kōsō danchi*) with 4,566 homes, 19-hectares of parkland, and the creation of a greenbelt along the Ōtagawa River to the west. The Metabolist architect Ōtaka Masato (1923-2010), who had worked on the Harumi Apartments in Tokyo under Maekawa Kunio, engineered the design. The apartments were constructed according to a “three-dimensional block” spatial design, raised up on massive *piloti* to create open space underneath the buildings with rooftop gardens on top. The design team intended for the Motomachi Apartments to become “a model for the rest of the country,” and in the July 1973 issue of *Toshi Jūtaku* they introduced the project under the appellation, “Super Architecture” (*chō kenchiku*).\(^5\)

The issue of *Toshi Jūtaku* devoted to detailing the design and construction of the apartments included a statement by then-Mayor of Hiroshima, Yamada Setsuo, in which he elaborated on the conditions necessary for the redevelopment of the Motomachi area and its larger symbolism for the city of Hiroshima:

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Of my public commitments when I was elected major in April 1967 was the promotion of the public management of housing and construction, and the establishment of a good living environment. At that time, more than twenty years had passed since Hiroshima lifted itself from the disaster of the atomic bomb, and it had approached the end of its war disaster revival project. Accordingly, the population reached 540,000, the majority of the roads had been completed, and the demolition of illegal housing was continuing. However, the emergency housing that stood in the middle of the plans for the central park in Motomachi had deteriorated considerably, and the poor housing area of Motomachi – what became known as the “genbaku slum” – had not been resolved. Thus, Hiroshima’s disaster revival was not truly complete.\(^6\)

One of the first places where survivors constructed temporary barracks in the wake of the atomic bomb in 1945, the genbaku slum covered a nearly 2-kilometer stretch of land along the east side of the Ōtagawa River. What began as about 60 wooden residences grew to 892 households with 3,015 residences by 1960.\(^7\) The genbaku slum residents consisted primarily of economically marginalized populations who did not own land to build on during the postwar housing shortage: Koreans who were brought to Hiroshima as labor during Japan’s colonial rule, migrants and squatters evicted from other parts of the city during redevelopment, and repatriates who had returned from the former colonies with no place to live.\(^8\) The name genbaku slum (genbaku suramu) was not based on a description of the population (only about a third of the residents were hibakusha, or, atomic bomb survivors), but derived from the proximity of the illegal housing to the A-Bomb Dome and Peace Memorial Park, located just down the river. Lisa Yoneyama has shown how “the economic thrust of postwar reconstruction prioritized the city’s ceremonial center.” Thus, “establishing the Peace Memorial Park received far more

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\(^8\) Tomoko Ichitani, “‘Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossom’: The Renarrativation of Hiroshima Memories,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 40:3 (Fall 2010), 368.
consideration than rebuilding and maintaining the equally devastated everyday sections of the city,” even as squalor proliferated nearby.\(^9\) As articulated by Mayor Yamada, once the city’s ceremonial center had been established, visible remnants of postwar poverty and ruin, such as the genbaku slum, needed to be eliminated for the full and successful transformation of the city into a global center for peace.

When Miyamoto visited Motomachi in 1973, the residents of the slums were being prepared for eviction so that the land could be transformed into a greenbelt to be enjoyed by the new residents of the apartments.\(^10\) He was on assignment to photograph the nearly completed high-rise apartments, but he found himself drawn to the “human-scale” and “organic space” of the ramshackle slums.\(^11\) Those spatial interpretations come through in the photographs themselves. In multiple instances, doorways and passageways snuggly frame human bodies to suggest an equivalency in scale (Figs. 2.2 & 2.3). Meanwhile, the unusual configurations of wood, corrugated metal, and earth that make up the houses rarely yield linear, straightforward compositions. Instead, Miyamoto pictures an unplanned montage of structures that seem to have sprouted out spontaneously and irregularly from one another like a living organism (Fig. 2.4). In one example, the expanse of grass and wildflowers in the foreground make it seem as if the wooden barracks are a mere extension of the brush, rather than artificial additions to the landscape (Fig. 2.5).

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\(^10\) As documented by the activist-photographer Fukushima Kikujirō, “the city offered to rehouse the people that were being evicted from the slums” in the new public housing, “but the rent and the costs of moving were prohibitive for them.” Fukushima, *Utsuranakatta sengo*, 224.

In addition to Miyamoto’s photographs, the slums garnered public attention through the photography of activist Fukushima Kikujirō, as well as a design survey completed by two architectural students and published in *Toshi Jūtaku* in June 1973, just one month prior to the issue that debuted the Motomachi Apartments. It became clear that those responsible for the redevelopment of the area would have to account for the clearance of the slums. Thus, the second and final issue of *Toshi Jūtaku* devoted to the Motomachi Apartments (August 1973) included a section entitled “Motomachi Past and Present,” in which the architecture group LANDIUM, led by Ishii Kazuhiro, paired Miyamoto’s photographs of the *genbaku* slums with his photographs of the apartment complex to demonstrate how the slums could be understood as the “pre-story” to the Motomachi Apartments. Opportunities for collective living were emphasized in both. For example, a section on “privacy” reads: “The merits of what can be called un-private, open socializing might have existed in the slums. But, these are probably the words of an outsider. You could say that the spaces in between units in the high-rise apartments have maintained this. In these two types of absolutely cramped publics, individual privacy cannot be maintained. With this established, let’s create the first true collective.” Here, a photograph of two homes facing one another across a crowded alleyway in the slums is compared with an image of the narrow hallways in the apartment buildings (Fig. 2.6). In this way, the ideal of fundamental, communal living that Miyamoto had sensed and attempted to photograph in the *genbaku* slums was

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12 Chiba Kenji and Yano Masakazu spent three months leading a design survey of the *genbaku* slums in which they measured each house (718 households in total) and inquired about the living conditions of the residents. Chiba emphasizes how they wanted to “reexamine the city from the origins of housing, the origins of architecture,” in which regular residents became builders and self-made houses became towns. They also felt the need to “document these slums that would disappear.” Sunamoto, et al. “Kenchikuka wa,” 17. Miyamoto was motivated by similar factors.

13 Ibid., 18.

14 LANDIUM, “Motomachi konjaku” (Motomachi Past and Present), *Toshi Jūtaku* 68 (August 1973), 69.
established as the legacy of the Motomachi area, now reborn in the new public housing project. While Miyamoto himself did not engage with this narrative, it can also be read onto his most monumental photograph from the trip to Hiroshima: a four-part composition that traces the history of housing in the Motomachi area from the genbaku slum at the bottom, to more conventional wooden housing, followed by an earlier version of low-rise public housing, and, finally, the giant high-rise blocks, or danchi, towering over the landscape (Fig. 2.7).15

Miyamoto describes working on projects such as this as a revelatory time in his early career: “It was the first time I looked at and paid attention to certain things, such as housing and architecture and different ways of living.”16 His experience in the genbaku slum was fundamental for stimulating an interest in informal architecture, a movement that he engaged with again when he photographed self-built homes for publication in Toshi Jūtaku. For example, in 1974, the architectural student Kujirai Isamu built a house for himself as a graduation project. With the assistance of carpenters (daiku), he constructed the entire house out of materials repurposed from demolition sites. The editor of Toshi Jūtaku, Ueda Makoto, wrote about how these haphazard materials combined to express “the true nature of a handmade house”:

By using what was there before and old materials as they were, parts of the project followed traditional methods, but in its entirety the house was not traditional. It was not modern either. It is something that produces an interior space all of its own making. Each room has been unified into a singular system. The oya stone, the wood grains that come through in the kitchen and bathroom door, the storehouse stairs, even the handrail – each of these things independently determines the space.17

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15 Miyamoto says that he took this photograph to capture “the various types of communal housing of the era in one photograph.” Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, December 13, 2015.

16 Sanada Reiko and Miyamoto Ryūji, “Danbōru no ie wo satsuei suru hito Miyamoto Ryūji” (Miyamoto Ryūji: The Person Who Photographs Cardboard Houses), Shitsunai 482 (February 1995), 61.

The diverse materials become the evidence of Kujirai’s handmade approach to architecture, and Miyamoto’s color photographs illustrate the rich materiality of the house celebrated by Ueda. In one photograph, for example, readers can begin to imagine how the various pieces of wood were built into and around the stone foundation, revealing a process that remains opaque in a building constructed of a single material, such as concrete (Fig. 2.8). This method grants a degree of agency to the materials themselves. The architect is forced to build according to what is at hand, resulting in an irregular design that stands in contrast to typical rectangular floorplans (Fig. 2.9). For Kujirai: “The value of the house is the process of hand-making (tezukuri) it,” and the resulting physical makeup creates a permanent record of that process, similar to the organic, unplanned, and irregular compositions that Miyamoto identified in the slums.18

The improvised, spontaneous process evinced in Kujirai’s self-built house was representative of a rising interest in informal approaches to architecture as a challenge to cultural homogenization and consumerism both in Japan and abroad. In this vein, in 1976, Ueda published the first Japanese translation of Bernard Rudofsky’s *Architecture Without Architects: An Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* as the second book in the newly inaugurated *Toshi Jūtaku* monograph series.19 While Miyamoto was no longer working for *Toshi Jūtaku* at this time, he was aware of the translation project, and he continues to reference Rudofsky’s work as emblematic of the widespread valorization of informal, self-built architecture in the 1970s.20

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18 Ibid., 5. Miyamoto photographed another hand-built house in the summer of 1975, the so-called “Crow Castle” by Yamane Eiji. For more on this house, see: Yamane Eiji, “Yachiyo: Karasu-jō” (Yachiyo: Crow Castle), *Toshi Jūtaku Quarterly* 10 (Summer 1975), 27-42.


20 Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, December 13, 2015.
An adaptation of Rudofsky’s successful 1964 exhibition of the same name at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the book champions the “true functionalism” of vernacular architecture from all over the world with a particular emphasis on non-Western societies. In the preface, Rudofsky introduces readers to this under-appreciated category of architecture: “Architecture Without Architects attempts to break down our narrow concepts of the art of building by introducing the unfamiliar world of nonpedigreed architecture. It is so little known that we don't even have a name for it. For want of a generic label, we shall call it vernacular, anonymous, spontaneous, indigenous, rural, as the case may be.”21 He laments the lack of documentary resources related to this “anonymous architecture,” thereby establishing his photographs as the primary, visual archive on the subject and preparing readers to search for signs of the “spontaneous, indigenous, [and] rural” contained therein.

Rudofsky takes readers through an astonishing array of vernacular forms, many of which are represented through aerial photographs that abstract the structures so that they appear less architectural than sculptural – an artistic molding of the topography (Fig. 2.10). He categorizes the vernaculars by form and function – nomadic, aquatic, primeval, to name a few – and proposes that “many audacious ‘primitive’ solutions anticipate our cumbersome technology; that many a feature invented in recent years is old hat in vernacular architecture – prefabrication, standardization of building components, flexible and movable structures, and, more especially, floor-heating, air-conditioning, light control, even elevators.”22 Thus, the goal of Architecture Without Architects was not to offer an alternative to modernism, but to challenge its

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22 Ibid., 5.
contemporary commoditized manifestations. This was no doubt the reason that Rudofsky’s polemic was translated by Ueda, who was particularly concerned with re-establishing a sense of village-life community in the Japanese metropolis and would have been drawn to Rudofsky’s claims to an architectural wisdom that offers “primitive” solutions to the “increasingly troublesome problem of how to live and let live, how to keep peace with one’s neighbors.”

In addition to the study of vernacular forms, Miyamoto values *Architecture Without Architects* for its documentary function, for, now, he says, many of these structures no longer exist. This comment hints at Miyamoto’s own motivations for photographing the cardboard houses and slums of Hong Kong. In addition to a preliminary interest in the so-called organic compositions that he identified in the *genbaku* slum, handmade houses of young architects in Tokyo, and the vernaculars pictured in *Architecture Without Architects*, it was imperative that he preserve these ever-changing, temporary structures in the form of serial documentary photography. Not only have government authorities in Japan forcibly removed villages of cardboard houses on numerous occasions since the 1990s, but the total demolition of Kowloon Walled City was completed by 1994.

**Cardboard Houses**

There exist many widespread misconceptions about the complex reality of homelessness in Japan that must be taken into account if we are to understand the context in which Miyamoto’s photographs of cardboard houses have been displayed and received by the public. For one, there

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23 As Felicity Scott has shown, it worked: Rudofsky’s “presentation of vernacular architecture was persistently understood as proposing formal and aesthetic models for designers.” Felicity Scott, “Bernard Rudofsky: Allegories of Nomadism and Dwelling,” in *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture*, ed. Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 220.


25 Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, December 13, 2015.
continues to be a widespread misconception that there has not been a significant homeless problem in Japan since the housing shortage crisis in the immediate postwar years. Since 1958, the government has conducted annual surveys to assess how Japanese people perceive their own social status. In the 1980s, 90 percent described themselves as “middle class.”

The existence and visualization of homelessness, thus, “challenges well-established notions of Japanese identity, which locate that identity in the sedentary spheres of the home and work.” Those who do not have a home or stable work, then, are perceived as lazy, unmotivated, and antisocial. This is related to another myth that has been exacerbated by entertainment media in Japan, the myth that the homeless choose their vagrant lifestyle.

Aoki Hideo has shown how the terminology used to refer to the homeless contributes to such misconceptions. The official name for the homeless used by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is rojō seikatsusha, which can be translated to “people living on the street.” This designation fails to take into account how people

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26 As Tony D. Guzewicz reports, “The reports are based on a subjective evaluation; no standard for the concept of ‘middle class’ is provided, and there is no hint concerning differences in income.” He goes on to say that this is one “manifestation of the homogeneity myth” in Japan. Tony D. Guzewicz, Tokyo’s Homeless: A City in Denial (Huntington: Kroshka Books, 2000), 25.


28 Guzewicz explains, “For a variety of personal, intellectual and political reasons many people believe that homelessness is a product of individual choice. It is often framed as a personal choice in that people choose not to abide by society’s rules or a mistaken choice due to a limited understanding of the full consequences of their actions. In spite of the often noble intentions, a pathological view of homelessness disempowers homeless people and limits the parameters of the debate because it often strips people of their unique identity, replacing it with a negative stigma.” Guzewicz, Tokyo’s Homeless, 84. See also: Shingo Tsumaki, “Preference for Homelessness Categorized as ‘Refusing a Decent Civic Life’: A Critical Perspective,” Shindai shakaigaku (The Annals of the Sociological Association, O.C.U.) 5 (2004), 26. On the role of popular media in perpetuating the myth that homelessness is a “personal choice” in Japan, see: Alisa Freedman, “The Homeless Junior High School Student Phenomenon: Personalizing a Social Problem,” Japanese Studies 31:3 (December 2011), 387-403.
reach the point of being homeless and how difficult it is to reverse the situation once one has been forced onto the streets in Japan.29

A major factor that has contributed to misconceptions about the reality of homelessness in Japan is a lack of visibility. As is typically the case with rapid economic growth and urban development, a vast population of economically and socially marginalized workers served as the invisible foundation for Japan’s financial and infrastructural growth throughout the postwar period. As Tony D. Guzewicz forcefully states:

> It may seem ironic that Japan’s population of poverty-ridden, unskilled day laborers was spawned and grew in numbers during precisely those decades when the nation’s GNP was growing by leaps and bounds. Beneath the seeming paradox lies the stark reality of Japan’s ‘economic miracle,’ with its underpinnings in a vast domestic force of sub-contract laborers of various types: day laborers, seasonal laborers and temporary laborers.30

These laborers acquired work through informal day labor markets, or yoseba, officially designated districts on the periphery of the metropolis where workers congregate and seek out temporary subcontracts primarily in the construction industry.31 As long as one was employed, one was granted accommodations in cheap lodging (doyagai) also located in the yoseba and owned by the construction companies. Thus, temporary homelessness was always a reality for day laborers in the postwar era, especially during seasons when construction activity slowed.32


30 Guzewicz, Tokyo’s Homeless, 52.

31 The Meiji government designated the yoseba districts of Tokyo in 1887, the most notorious of which is San’ya, in the northeast corner of the city near Ueno. Edward Fowler, San’ya Blues: Laboring Life in Contemporary Tokyo (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 39.

After the bursting of the real-estate bubble in 1992, the construction industry temporarily faltered, manufacturing jobs went overseas as the economy shifted to focus on the service industry, and many of the men who had worked to build up Tokyo in the 1970s and 1980s grew too old to continue daily manual labor. On top of this, a large number of white-collar workers lost their livelihoods in the prolonged economic recession of the 1990s and early 2000s: “Between 1991 and 1996, more than 83,000 firms went bankrupt. [...] The rate of unemployment rose steadily from 2.1 percent in 1992 to 5 percent in 2001.”[^33] The urban redevelopment that had spurred the economic boom of the 1980s also led to the gentrification of urban centers, stamping out affordable housing options for lower-income individuals.[^34] The number of homeless in Japan grew accordingly with an estimated population of 16,000 in 1998, 24,000 in 2001, and 30,000 in 2012.[^35] Under these circumstances, many of those who became homeless beginning in the 1990s “had never had contact with yoseba before they became homeless.”[^36] In 1993, the media in Japan began to report on a new type of homeless population, one that did not restrict itself to the easily overlooked urban periphery.[^37]

[^33]: Ibid., 45.
[^34]: Ibid., 36.
[^35]: Ritu Vij, “Time, Politics and Homelessness in Contemporary Japan,” *ProtoSociology* 29 (2012), 122. Vij takes these statistics from a white paper report completed by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare in 2006. Compounding these rising numbers is the fact that it is very difficult to get off the street once one becomes homeless in Japan. Abby Margolis explains, “Since there is little work opportunity without a fixed address, and since most landlords demand six months’ rent to be paid in advance for an apartment, once homeless there are very few possibilities for gaining steady employment or obtaining a permanent residence.” Margolis, “Subversive Accommodations,” 354.
[^36]: Hasegawa, “We Are Not Garbage!”, 7. Guzewicz, Tokyo’s Homeless, 73.
[^37]: Tamara Swenson and Brad Visgatis, “Changing Representations of Homelessness in Japanese Newspapers,” *Osaka Jogakuen Daigaku Kiyō* 5 (2008), 22. At this point, the popular terms used in the media to refer to the homeless also shifted from furōsha, which can be translated as “vagabond,” to hōmuresu, a Japanese pronunciation of the English word, “homeless,” which had previously been used to refer to the issue of homelessness in the west. Ibid., 33-4. Vij points out that the term hōmuresu “is notable for its elision of a prior suppressed history of poverty and homelessness in Japan,” as I have attempted to detail in the history of yoseba above. Vij, “Time,” 122.
The homeless became more visible in Japanese cities, primarily Osaka, Tokyo, and Nagoya, in the 1990s in part because they needed the city to survive. The city center is where they can easily access food, water, and public lavatories. It is also where they gather the materials to make temporary shelters, which typically take the form of cardboard “houses” and blue plastic sheets (burū sheeto) pitched into tents. With the spike in research on the homeless that began in the 1990s came an understanding of just how endowed with meaning these makeshift structures are to the people who create and reside within them. To one homeless man in Ueno Park, his tent “stood as a testament to an effort and willingness to persevere.” Public awareness of the homeless problem in Japan grew in step with the visibility of cardboard and blue-sheet houses, which sprouted up like villages in public parks and underground passageways, underneath overpasses and along riverbanks.

Miyamoto first noticed these cardboard structures in 1983 under a bridge near the Tsukiji fish market, and later, proliferating around Shiodome, the old Akihabara produce market, and the Tokiwa Bridge over the Nihonbashi River (Figs. 2.11 & 2.12). Many of these areas are located near important centers of commercial transportation and product distribution on Tokyo Bay, where cardboard packaging is discarded daily as products are unloaded and sent to their final destinations. This material excess has become a provocative symbol of modern consumerism and systems of distribution. According to Miyamoto, he found the houses primarily “in the gaps of

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40 Miyamoto Ryūji, Cardboard Houses (Kobe: Bearlin, 2003), 3.

41 Iizawa Kōtarō includes a short history of cardboard in his review of Miyamoto’s photography: “[F]rom the 1950s on, cardboard replaced wooden boxes, and it came to be widely used as the packaging material for the transportation of things like food supplies and manufactured goods. In the space of twenty years since 1968, the production of
the city (*machi no sukima*), in the areas in between buildings and under bridges […] in the places that are unplanned and unintentional in the city, the places that are out of the public gaze.”

In fact, it was the locations – not the houses themselves – that initially inspired Miyamoto’s curiosity. He understood the choice of location somewhat romantically as a reflection of human instinct and comfort, “as if someone had sought out hidden seams and buffer zones in the constructed urban fabric in which to stake individual claims and hide away unseen.”

Miyamoto also photographed Nakano Prison in 1983, thereby beginning his five-year engagement with demolition sites. At times, he shot both cardboard houses and demolition sites on the same role of film. Each represents a disparate point in the typical life course of a building: cardboard houses encompass the minimal beginnings, or, as Miyamoto describes it, the “primal origins” of architecture, while, as ruins, buildings reach their inevitable demise. The quiet and secrecy of the cardboard houses were a counterpoint to the clamor and spectacle of the demolition site. He recalls, “Just around the time that run down cinemas and dysfunctional old buildings were being demolished one after the next to make way for ranks of towering glass

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Japanese cardboard grew by twenty times. Needless to say, that growth corresponds to the development of Japan’s rapid economic growth. Cardboard is the symbol of the circulation of money and food and the production of commodities, as it were. When commodities move, cardboard boxes also move along the route of the distribution of those goods.” Iizawa Kōtarō, *Tokyo shashin* (Tokyo Photography), (Tokyo: INAX, 1995), 9.


43 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Miyamoto Ryūji no intabyū: ‘Toshi no muishiki’ wo toru” (An Interview with Miyamoto Ryūji: Shooting the “City’s Unconscious”), *Kenchiku bunka* 645 (July 2000), 106.

44 Miyamoto, *Cardboard Houses*, 3.


46 Miyamoto, *Cardboard Houses*, 3.
skyscrapers, in the shadows of these major changes there appeared pockets of these makeshift dwellings. In this way, Miyamoto’s focus on the cardboard houses throws into stark relief the reality of homelessness amidst a larger urban fabric characterized by excess and waste.

Like the cardboard houses themselves, Miyamoto kept his photographs of them “in the shadows” for nearly a decade. In 1990, he exhibited a work entitled “Tokyo’s Cardboard Houses” (Tokyo no danbōru no ie) in the group show “TOKYO,” organized by Itō Toshiharu at the Yurakuchō Seibu Art Forum. For the show, he compiled nearly 1-ton of cardboard to create four square mounds to which he attached his photographs of cardboard houses. The eminent photography critic Iizawa Kōtarō saw the exhibit and interpreted the cardboard houses as “symbolic structures of Tokyo.” Four years later in June of 1994, Miyamoto revived this strategy at the Yokohama Portside Gallery in his first solo exhibition devoted to the cardboard houses. To view the photographs, visitors passed through a 1-meter opening in a cardboard wall that Miyamoto constructed out of approximately 4,000 cardboard boxes gathered from the port area in Yokohama (Fig. 2.13). He likened the installation to climbing into a teahouse, as visitors were forced to bow down in order to enter. While the crouched entrance into a teahouse in

47 Ibid.

48 Miyamoto did publish an article on the cardboard houses in Asahi Graph in 1984, but, as Iizawa notes, the article was markedly different from how Miyamoto would later present the material. He notes: “[T]he photographs from that time are in the reportage style, even including a ‘commemorative photograph’ of the people living there, and they do not have his highly accomplished style. It seems that he was not able to continue that photography for long.” Iizawa, Tokyo shashin, 186. Still, the article is noteworthy as evidence of Miyamoto’s earliest impressions of the cardboard houses and also documents how he interacted with the homeless whom he photographed. See: Miyamoto Ryūji, “Yōki na Tōkyō no jiyū hito-tachi: Ojisan no shiro wa danbōru da zo!” (The Free People of Cheerful Tokyo: The Old Man’s Castle is a Cardboard House!), Asahi Graph 3194 (April 1984), 108-13.

49 Iizawa, Tokyo shashin, 187.

Japan is symbolic as a sign of deference to the sanctity of the ceremony and the generosity of the host, it is unclear whether Miyamoto intended for this gesture likewise to inspire reverence for the cardboard houses and/or their creators. Most reviewers interpreted it as a forced shift in perspective, stating that in passing through the cardboard wall they experienced “the feeling of entering one of the cardboard houses.”

If visitors briefly identified with the perspective of the homeless, that illusion was quickly shattered by the presentation of the photographs themselves. Inside the gallery, Miyamoto mounted the images on the bottom half of the walls in order to reproduce the daily phenomenon of urbanites “‘looking down’ at the houses of the homeless.” Hayashi Michio notes how “this positioning of the photographs disturbs the comfortable state of mind that we usually enter when viewing ‘works of art,’ partially reconstructing our lost memories of the city inside the white cube.” By “lost memories,” Hayashi refers to the common phenomenon of “regular” people walking by the homeless everyday while taking little notice of their circumstances. Indeed, another popular response to the exhibition was shock at seeing “these structures that are normally hidden from view.” Thus, by documenting and exhibiting images of cardboard houses, Miyamoto attempted to recover the presence of the homeless in the Japanese city.

While Miyamoto denies any direct political motivations for his cardboard house photographs – he has never participated in activism for the homeless and claims a primary

51 Jibiki Yūichi, “‘Miyamoto Ryūji shashinten danbōru no ie’ Yokohama Pōto Saida Gyaraři de kaisai” (The Opening of the Exhibition at Yokohama Portside Gallery of ‘Miyamoto Ryūji’s Photography Exhibition Cardboard Houses), Music Magazine 26:8 (August 1994), 194.

52 Hayashi, “An Eye Open,” 203.

53 Ibid.

54 Fukagawa Masafumi, “Shin yūtopia ronri no keisei wo shisa: Miyamoto Ryūji shashinten ‘Danbōru no ie’” (Hints at the Formation of a New Utopian Logic: Miyamoto Ryūji’s Photo Exhibition “Cardboard Houses”), Asahi Graph 3767 (July 29, 1994), 101.
interest in the houses, not the people – the timing of this first exhibition in 1994, more than ten years after he began photographing the structures, is telling of his awareness of the potential for these photographs to participate in a larger social movement.\(^{55}\) On February 17, 1994, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government performed the first forced removal of homeless people and their houses from the underground passageway connecting the west exit of Shinjuku Station with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Buildings (Fig. 2.14). At the time, this meant the removal of approximately 300 cardboard houses inhabited by 600 to 800 people, which had become conspicuous due to their large numbers and location.\(^{56}\) The event “gave birth to a remarkably resilient social movement, the first ever seen among homeless people in Japan.”\(^{57}\) A number of smaller activist organizations combined forces to form the Shinjuku Renraku Kai (SRK; literally, the Shinjuku Coordination Association). As documented by David A. Malinas, the two major concerns of the SRK were the petitioning to the Shinjuku Ward authorities to “abandon its homeless eviction policy and its participation in the eviction policy of the [Tokyo Metropolitan Government],” along with a “community building process” among the homeless residing in the underground passageway.\(^{58}\)

A major component of the community-building effort was the elaboration and aestheticization of the shelters themselves, what Malinas calls a “‘gentrification’ of homeless space.”\(^{59}\) Thus, in 1995, art school dropout Take Junichirō, his friend Yoshizaki Takeo, and

\(^{55}\) Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, November 6, 2016.


\(^{58}\) Ibid., 45-6.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 46.
Yamane Yasuhiro joined together to paint the exteriors of the cardboard houses in Shinjuku. Photographers set up exhibitions, mounting photographs of the houses to the pillars in the underground passage. Many scholars who have studied the homeless in Japan underscore how the construction and maintenance “of a makeshift dwelling is a fundamental element in homeless life.” This explains why when the second eviction was carried out on January 24, 1996, one homeless person chained himself to the pillar that he had constructed his house around, what Malinas reads as evidence of “the strong link between homeless people and their dwelling place.” With news of the evictions gaining attention in the media, it would have been difficult to view Miyamoto’s photographs of the cardboard houses outside of the context of this new, robust social movement that claimed the cardboard house as a signifier of homeless identity and perseverance.

Miyamoto continued photographing the homes of the homeless for another nine years, and, in 2003, he published the images in a photobook plainly titled Cardboard Houses. Again, 2003 was an important year for homeless awareness in Japan. 2001 saw the first provision of funding for the homelessness problem by the national government, followed in 2002 by the

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60 Take often painted faces and large eyes on the exteriors of the boxes. His most well-known painting must be Shinjuku’s Left Eye (Shinjuku no hidarime), a single large, bold eye that works to “resist the dehumanization suffered by the homeless” and return the gaze of passersby who stare but do nothing. Cassegard, “Activism Beyond,” 629.


63 Swenson and Visgatis report, “In 2001, the government made its first provision of funds to address homelessness, allocating 100 million yen, equivalent to US $850,000 at 2001 exchange rates.” Swenson and Visgatis, “Changing Representations,” 22.
first legislation to provide shelters and employment opportunities for homeless people in Japan.\textsuperscript{64} This law facilitated the first ever “National Survey of Homeless People,” which was conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare in January and February of 2003. The goal of the survey was to produce an estimate of the number of homeless nationwide and to assess their quality of life.\textsuperscript{65} In the end, the survey determined that there were 25,296 homeless people living in Japan; that most resided in Osaka and Tokyo; that the majority had once worked in the construction or manufacturing industry; and that they were predominantly men in their 50s and 60s who made a living by collecting recyclable materials while residing at a fixed location in a public park.\textsuperscript{66} While scholars have since identified methodological weaknesses in the survey, it did produce a general picture of the state of homelessness in Japan that then became a source for further much-needed research, analysis, outreach, and programming.\textsuperscript{67} For example, 2003 also saw the inauguration of \textit{Big Issue}, a magazine sold by the homeless on the streets as a source of income; the artist-activist Ichimura Misako’s establishment of the “Enoaru café,” a makeshift café where homeless people can gather and exchange goods in Yoyogi Park in Tokyo; and the publication of another photobook celebrating the architectural merit of homeless dwellings, Sogi


\textsuperscript{67} For example, Tom Gill estimates that “the true figure is probably at least double the official figure.” Gill, “Special Issue,” 3. One major reason for this discrepancy is that the survey was conducted during normal daytime working hours by government employees, while a number of homeless people are mobile during the day and only return to or set up their temporary shelters at night. Nobori Kondo, “Kotobukichō Rōdōsha Rengō” (The Kotobuki-chō Day Laborers Union), presentation, Japan Activist Tours of Kotobuki-chō, Yokohama, Japan, July 4, 2016.
Kanta’s *Asakusa sutairu* (Asakusa Style). All of these events garnered media attention and are pertinent to understanding the context in which Miyamoto’s own photobook was published.

*Cardboard Houses* includes photographs taken in Japan’s major urban centers, along with London, New York, and Paris, but the overwhelming majority of images come from the streets of Tokyo. The general impression fluctuates between a bleak view of post-bubble Tokyo and a veneration of the resourcefulness of those struggling to survive on its streets, an optimistic perspective that is reinforced by the glossy white slipcover and gold typeface that adorns the cover to the photobook (Fig. 2.15). Each two-page spread includes one black-and-white photograph, accompanied by a laconic label indicating the city and the year that the photograph was taken. As was the case with *Architectural Apocalypse*, Miyamoto employed a large 4 x 5 inch-format camera and monochrome film to produce an encyclopedic catalogue of the cardboard house over a period of twenty years. As Iizawa Kōtarō points out, the “sobering, objective gaze” of Miyamoto’s reserved approach provides a platform from which viewers can compare the architectural compositions and “validate” the differences and similarities in the cardboard houses.\(^69\)

Miyamoto’s photographs avoid the direct representation of the homeless, perhaps in an attempt to distance the photographer from the potential violence of so-called humanist projects that profit from representations of others’ suffering.\(^70\) Occasionally, we glimpse a pair of legs protruding from an opening, or an individual’s back as he enters the structure, but, in general, the compositions take distant, decidedly somber, but impersonal views (Fig. 2.16). The camera never

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\(^{69}\) Iizawa, *Tokyo shashin*, 187.

\(^{70}\) Hayashi, “An Eye Open,” 201.
enters these homes, and it rarely comes close enough to reveal their interiors. Despite this unaffected resolve, there is never any doubt that we are looking at man-made shelters. Signs of human life are everywhere, from the shoes inevitably placed outside of the entryway, to the constructedness apparent in the details of the structure itself. Such inclusions are far from humanizing, but their presence ensures that the human element of the cardboard houses is not erased entirely. These details prompt questions about their creators, such as: “What is the personal history of the owner? How long have they lived here? What is inside? What is one day like [in their life]? Where do they gather [material] from?” (Fig. 2.17).

The degree of sentimental detachment in Miyamoto’s photographs is striking in comparison to a similar and perhaps more publically-recognized project by the artist Sakaguchi Kyōhei. While Sakaguchi graduated from architecture school, he is insistent that he is not a designer, architectural historian, nor a professional photographer. He describes himself simply as “someone who is engaged in architecture,” and, as such, he is interested in cardboard houses as examples of “architecture designed by non-specialists,” echoing Rudofsky’s valorization of non-pedigreed architecture. His 2004 publication Zero en hausu (Zero-Yen House) is, similar to Cardboard Houses, primarily a collection of photographs. In the accompanying captions, Sakaguchi describes the houses in architectural terms, calling one “streamlined” and identifying another as in the style of a “Japanese restaurant.” He calls readers’ attention to particular points of ingenuity and characteristics that one might identify with more typical homes, such as the use of reed screens and skylights (Fig. 2.18). The shots range from distant to more intimate views.

71 Sanada and Miyamoto, “Danbōru no ie,” 63.

inside the homes, as he poses questions such as, “How much space does a human being really need?”

In contrast to Miyamoto’s collection, Sakaguchi’s project self-consciously features not only the inhabitants but the *lifestyle* of cardboard houses. In one image we see a man’s kitchen, complete with all of the spices and tools one would expect to find in any well-stocked Tokyo apartment (Fig. 2.19). In fact, the resident is an ex-cook who has equipped his self-made home with a gas range and electricity. Another unexpected view reveals an interior with a framed portrait of the imperial couple on the wall above a couch. Read in combination with Sakaguchi’s own romantic advocacy of unconventional living quarters, images such as this serve to normalize the setting and the lifestyle, enabling viewers to forget that this is, in fact, a home of the homeless. This kind of slippage is nearly impossible in Miyamoto’s photographs, where the makeshift home is always seen in relation to its surrounding landscape, and there are no interpretive captions.

While Miyamoto is careful not to disclose information about the personal history of the residents, the photographs reveal a great deal of information about the process of constructing a handmade house, what Hayashi calls, “the architectural event of the cardboard house.” Iizawa’s analysis encapsulates many viewers’ reactions: “The care with which the seams of the cardboard are fixed together, the treatment of the face of the box with what seems to be an aesthetic sense, the infinite variety of forms – you become attuned to these kinds of details the more you look.”

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73 Ibid., 158.
74 Ibid., 96.
75 Hayashi, “An Eye Open,” 201.
76 Iizawa, *Tokyo shashin*, 186.
For example, in one photograph, a tent has been fabricated from a tarp and rope tied between two trees (Fig. 2.20). Umbrella handles serve as stakes to secure the tent to the ground. Inventive details such as this allow for elements of surprise or pleasure, leading critics to “appreciate” the houses as “public art,” “minimal collages or assemblages.” The use of monochrome facilitates such aesthetic reactions, as Miyamoto’s skillful handling of light and dark elevates these objects to a realm beyond that of the everyday.

At times, the aestheticization of these structures can reinforce the widespread misconception in Japan that homelessness is a personal decision rather than a circumstance. One critic in ART iT wrote of Cardboard Houses: “Towels or umbrellas tied onto houses with plastic twine, cushions to sleep on made from piles of comics. The impression is less one of misery than of a sort of homely comfort.” Miyamoto himself encourages this romantic perspective when he comments that the cardboard houses are “like a little shelter, a place that embraced you. The people who lived there (whom we call homeless), seemed to exist at their own pace, as part of the greater scheme of things, going with the flow of nature instead of fighting it.”

77 Murata Makoto uses the verb kanshō suru, meaning to appreciate something in aesthetic terms. Murata Makoto, “Ato wo koeta ienaki hito no ‘ie’” (“Houses” of the Homeless Surpass Art), BRUTUS 317 (May 1, 1994), 112.

78 Hayashi Yōji, “Miyamoto Ryūji Yokohama Pōtosaido Gyararī” (Miyamoto Ryūji at the Yokohama Portside Gallery), Bijutsu techo 693 (September 1994), 148.

79 Hayashi Yōji writes that in Miyamoto’s hands the cardboard houses become “sanctified objects.” Ibid. Tsutsumi Yukihiko’s film My House (2012), based on the work of Sakaguchi Kyōhei, was shot in black-and-white for a similar reason. According to the filmmaker, “If I had used color I would have been playing into images people already have of the homeless – they’re dirty, they stink and so on. I didn’t want to do that. I thought I could avoid it by using black-and-white. The same went for Suzuki’s house. In color it might have looked shabby, but not in black-and-white.” Mark Schilling, “‘My House’ Takes Tsutsumi Home: Blockbuster Director Returns to Indie Roots with Homeless Flick,” The Japan Times, June 8, 2012, accessed August 18, 2016, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2012/06/008/films/my-house-takes-tsutsumi-home/.

80 Shirasaka Yuri, “Cardboard Houses: Miyamoto Ryūji,” ART iT (Fall/Winter 2003), 65.

81 Ibid. There are, in fact, some who do choose to live on the street and advocate a homeless lifestyle. See: Carl Cassegard, Youth Movements, Trauma, and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 144-9.
There are strategic moments in the photobook, however, when the environment surrounding the cardboard house resituates the structure in its larger social context, thus temporarily shattering any purely aesthetic response to the work. In one of his earliest and perhaps most provocative images, Miyamoto captured one shelter, less visually coherent and organized than most, in front of the Bank of Japan in Nihonbashi (Fig. 2.21). The Bank of Japan was completed in 1896 by Tatsuno Kingo, who employed recessed pediments and ionic pilasters on the facade to signal the power and monumentality of the institution contained within. It is a decidedly unwelcoming building, with guard gates flanking the central entrance and walled-off facade. The austere and formidable edifice stands closed off and indifferent to those who have failed to participate in “the circulatory system of capital,” a position signaled by the cardboard house, threatening the financial institution from below.\(^8^2\) Miyamoto has written of this photograph: “[T]he profound ambience that comes with the dignity of imperial Nippon overwhelms the surrounding buildings. The only architectural structure that can be said to oppose this dignity is the cardboard castle of the free people.”\(^8^3\) This is an unusually forward political statement for Miyamoto that reveals an underlying notion about the potential that he sees in cardboard houses as a challenge to the authority of the state. It is telling that this is the first image he chose for viewers to see when they open Cardboard Houses.

A little more than halfway through the book another photograph holds in check any overly romantic sense of admiration for the structural ingenuity of the cardboard houses (Fig. 2.22). Here, Miyamoto has captured a compelling image of a makeshift structure that stands in contrast to the Umeda Sky Building, a landmark of Osaka, hovering in the background. Despite

\(^{8^2}\) Hayashi, “An Eye Open,” 200.

\(^{8^3}\) Miyamoto, “Yōki na Tōkyō,” 111.
their obvious differences in origin and function, the two buildings almost mimic one another in this surreal composition. For instance, the wooden planks balanced across the top of the cardboard resemble the floating roof garden that connects the two towers atop the Sky Building.

Yet, the differences between the two are much more apparent than their similarities. The cardboard house resides in a dark, unruly landscape, while the Sky Building echoes its own name against the stark white, unembellished skyline. The latter exists as a whole, completed project, while the former seems to be in a state of continual becoming; against a wall, additional boxes and crates have been stacked, extra material to reinforce, or perhaps expand, the structure.

Images such as this that draw comparisons between a well-known architectural monument and an unknown and unnamed cardboard shelter throw into stark relief the overshadowed existence of the homeless in the larger urban fabric.

Hayashi argues that Miyamoto’s “honest and accurate views,” such as Figure 2.22, stem from his early career as an architectural photographer.\(^{84}\) I agree and specifically point to his experiences photographing the \textit{genbaku} slum and handmade homes of architects such as Kujirai Isamu as formative moments for cultivating not only his so-called objective approach to the photographic subject, but also his interest in handmade architecture. For Kujirai’s house, Miyamoto documented the \textit{process} of its construction, as well as what is more typically understood to be the focus of the architectural photographer – the finished project. To this day, Miyamoto will not describe himself as an architectural photographer precisely because he has no interest in the pristine and composed state of a recently completed building.\(^{85}\) Instead, he is

\(^{84}\) Hayashi, “An Eye Open,” 200.

\(^{85}\) Miyamoto, interview with the author, December 13, 2015.
drawn to structures that appear to be in the process of formation or deformation, as was the case with the genbaku slum in Hiroshima and the cardboard houses.

Materiality plays a major role in the identification of these types of organic structures. The dilapidated materials of the genbaku slum spoke to their origin as atomic ruins, and the mismatched components of Kujirai’s house testified to the process by which he intermittently gathered and repurposed materials from other sites. Materiality is also a motif central to the images in Cardboard Houses. Beyond the significance of cardboard as a container for product circulation, the other materials that bind together and fill in the cardboard houses are also capitalism’s leftovers. By recovering wooden planks, tarps, tape, rope, umbrellas, crates, plastic bags, transistors, batteries, rice cookers, mattresses, generators, and even bicycles from trash left on the street, the homeless practice more than recycling: they “reformulate notions of property and ownership,” and Miyamoto’s photographs witness that reformulation.

In the one-page essay that serves as the primary paratext, or textual framework, for Cardboard Houses, Miyamoto outlines his idea of the contemporary “urban hunter-gatherer” (toshi no shuryōsaishūmin), a figure embodied by the homeless who builds his own house. In seeing the cardboard houses as evidence of man’s primal instinct to survive, Miyamoto gives their inhabitants a forceful agency. He writes: “…these dwellings attest to the consummate skill of their builders, persons alienated from both society and family working today in exactly the

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86 Miyamoto underscores the fact that throughout the twenty years he spent photographing the homes of the homeless, cardboard remained the primary material of which they were made. Miyamoto, “Tokyo – Osaka – New York,” 26.


89 Miyamoto began speaking about the houses this way as early as 1994, when he described them as “the embodiment of human fundamentals.” Miyamoto, “Tokyo – Osaka – New York,” 27.
same mode as humans in primeval times who gathered their own materials to build their own shelters in the wild.\footnote{Miyamoto, Cardboard Houses, 3.} Here, Miyamoto’s equation of the homeless with primeval hunter-gatherers reveals a concern that is common to most primitivist discourse, namely the search for some sort of essential truth about the human condition in the study and evaluation of the material culture of an Other. Whether it is the homeless in Japan or, as discussed below, the Chinese migrants who built up Kowloon Walled City, a marginalized population that exists separate from that of the author (here, Miyamoto) is required for the “discovery” – or, projection – of essential truths about humanity. At times, Miyamoto’s decided distance from these populations allows for an abstraction of their lived realities that can lead to problematic conclusions.

Clearly, the homeless in cities such as Tokyo and Osaka are not working in “primeval times.” One of the most characteristic aspects of cardboard houses is precisely their reliance on the material detritus of the late-modern city. As such, Hayashi notes how Miyamoto’s “hunter-gatherer” is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s “most provocative figure of human misery” – the “ragpicker,” which he recovered from Baudelaire for The Arcades Project.\footnote{Hayashi, “An Eye Open,” 207.} Benjamin quotes Baudelaire:

\begin{quote}
Here we have a man whose job it is to pick up the day’s rubbish in the capital. He collects and catalogues everything that the great city has cast off, everything it has lost, and discarded, and broken. He goes through the archives of debauchery, and the jumbled array of refuse. He makes a selection, an intelligent choice; like a miser hoarding treasure, he collects the garbage that will become objects of utility or pleasure when refurbished by Industrial magic.\footnote{Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999). This excerpt comes from section [J 68 4] of Benjamin’s filing system. He is quoting: Charles Baudelaire, “Du Vin et du haschisch,” in Oeuvres, vol. 1 (Paris: La Pleiade, 1932-35), 249-250.}
\end{quote}
Here, debris represents the transitoriness and ambiguity of capitalist culture, gathered together as meaningless fragments that, when combined, have the potential to reveal an alternative, less optimistic (but more meaningful) vision of the modern, industrial city. But, beyond the ingenuity of the ragpicker, Miyamoto grants the very garbage that he collects agency as the material that inspires the “unconscious and spontaneous” process by which the homes are constructed. By using the word “unconscious,” Miyamoto intends to highlight the fact that “[p]eople are not making these houses for themselves as a form of expression or to show them to other people. In the end, they are making their own shelter.” He continues, “Thus, I think that the shape that they take is certainly something that is unconscious.”

Miyamoto’s description of the “unconscious and spontaneous” processes by which these homes are constructed seems a romantic leap, particularly when we consider just how coherent, organized, and unexpectedly systematized their design process has become. Sakaguchi Kyōhei has gone to great lengths to document the meticulous process of designing and constructing a cardboard house. Working in the legacy of Kon Wajirō, Sakaguchi’s 2008 publication *Tokyo zero en hausu zero en seikatsu* (*Tokyo Zero-Yen House Zero-Yen Life*) is filled with drawings that chart the typical possessions and layout of a cardboard house, from the organization of the kitchen to suggested storage spaces for the living room. *Zero en hausu* even reproduces a blueprint for a cardboard house shared with him by one of his many homeless acquaintances.

Despite this deep engagement with the lives of the homeless, however, Sakaguchi shares in

93 As I explore in Chapter 4, Miyamoto employs the cardboard house to a similar end.


95 Miyamoto, “Miyamoto Ryūji no intabyū,” 107. As one critic observed on the occasion of the 1994 exhibition: “The accumulation of things and ideas that have been born from necessity, that express the unconscious scheming of the person who lives there, carry a great power.” Fujiwara Erimi, “Toshi no shuryōsaishūmin no ie wo ou shashinka Miyamoto Ryūji no manazashi” (The Gaze of Photographer Miyamoto Ryūji on the Houses of Urban Hunger-Gatherers), *BRUTUS* 321 (July 1, 1994), 17.
Miyamoto’s primitivist tendencies, identifying the houses as evidence of “an instinctive way of lifestyle design that man has carried with him since the origins of time.”⁹⁶

Despite the origins of the houses’ materials in the specific circumstances of the post-industrial, global city, labeling the houses “archetypal dwellings” blurs the contemporary context, opening one’s reading of the photographs up to other historical moments when humans have been reduced to the fundamentals of survival and forced to build their own homes. In light of Miyamoto’s simultaneous engagement with “temporary ruins” at demolition sites, many art critics and curators in Japan have been quick to draw a connection between the cardboard houses and ruined landscapes. Sakai Tadayasu suggests that cardboard houses actually “begin their life as ‘ruins’,”⁹⁷ while Hayashi Yōji calls them “the ruins of consumer culture.”⁹⁸ Iizawa Kōtarō envisions the cardboard houses coming out of the wreckage of past disasters:

While I did not witness it myself, I am reminded of a scene of the city that is like an illusion. The city has been completely destroyed by fire and air raids, like in the Great Kantō Earthquake or World War II; it is a scene of ruins, of burnt fields. Even in this landscape marked by the scent of death, the activity of human life returns immediately. People collect various materials from the ruins of the fires; they probably attempt to build a home before anything else. Those groups of barracks demonstrate that “dwelling,” the first thing to be built in a city, is the archetypal activity. They are poor, but they are also the outcome of having gone on living to the best of one’s ability with the materials at hand. This kind of illusory scene has now become extremely real more than before.⁹⁹

Iizawa wrote this in 1995 after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake ravaged the city of Kobe, reminding Japanese society of its own fragility (see Chapter 3) and exposing the issue of

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⁹⁶ Sakaguchi, Tokyo zeroen houso zeroen seikatsu, 3.


⁹⁸ Hayashi, “Miyamoto Ryūji,” 149.

⁹⁹ Iizawa, Tokyo shashin, 190.
homelessness as a long-term reality for many of the earthquake refugees.\textsuperscript{100} In this context, it is not a leap for Iizawa to draw a connection between cardboard houses and barracks, the first structures to be built from the wreckage of Japan’s modern disasters with whatever material remained in the ruins. A comparison between Nakamura Rikko’s head-on shot of a barrack in the Shinagawa area of Tokyo from 1946 and one of Miyamoto’s photographs of a cardboard house in London in 1994 reveals how the handmade-ness of both structures generates an absorbing pattern of textures and shapes, a montage of reassembled material from two categorically different types of deteriorating cityscapes (Figs. 2.23 & 2.24).

The term barrack (\textit{barakkai}) first came into widespread use in Japan in the wake of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, a 7.9-magnitude trembler that flattened 44 percent of Tokyo and devastated the surrounding areas. In the aftermath, “barracks” referred to “a diversity of structures that included ephemeral tentlike shelters and huts of iron sheet metal for refugees and businesses as well as sturdier, sometimes elaborately decorated wooden edifices designed to stand for several years until permanent reconstruction could be completed.”\textsuperscript{101} Barracks are not the same as temporary housing for refugees constructed by the government or relief organizations. They are informal and provisional shelters built by survivors out of the material remnants of ruins on illegally occupied land (Fig. 2.25).\textsuperscript{102} They reappeared \textit{en masse} after every air raid on Japan in 1944 and 1945 and grew to the size of villages – or “barrack towns,” as they

\textsuperscript{100} Swenson and Visgatis, “Changing Representations,” 29.

\textsuperscript{101} Weisenfeld, \textit{Imaging Disaster}, 191. Weisenfeld continues, “Undoubtedly, the unprecedented number of like structures assembled in long repetitive rows was visually reminiscent of military and workers’ barracks, and this association was most likely the first inspiration for the term, but it also came to refer to individual structures, implying their provisional status.”

\textsuperscript{102} Motooka Takuya, “1950 nendai gōhan no Tōkyō ni okeru ‘fuhō senkyo’ chiku no shakai, kūkanteki tokusei to sono ato no henyō” (The Social and Spatial Characteristics of “Illegally Occupied” Settlements in Tokyo in the Late 1950s and Their Subsequent Transformation), \textit{Chiragaku hyoron} 88:1 (2015), 25.
were known – during the severe housing shortage in the immediate postwar years. The architectural historian Kawazoe Noboru refers to this period as “an era of self-construction,” when “an enormous amount of small-scale building was carried on in the ruins by the citizens themselves.”\(^{103}\) The genbaku slum in Hiroshima is one example of a self-built barrack town.

But, as Iizawa points out, until the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, scenes of barracks being constructed in burnt fields seemed like an illusion. It was illusory not only because a major disaster of that scale had not occurred since 1945, but also because, by the 1990s, most illegally occupied settlements in Japan had been demolished. In Tokyo, for example, extensive slum clearance began in 1957, the majority took place between 1960 and 1967 – the years surrounding the Tokyo Olympics – with continued efforts in the 1970s and 80s and complete eradication in the early 2000s.\(^{104}\) Those slums located in the city center and areas that required urgent maintenance were cleared relatively early in this timeline, while demolition continued piecemeal over longer periods of time in less symbolic, peripheral areas of the city.\(^{105}\)

While acknowledging their differences, Miyamoto sees cardboard houses as the contemporary iteration of slums in an otherwise slum-less country:

> The cardboard houses are different from the slums that have become problems in the cities of developing countries. They haven’t been formed as dense settlements, and they have little of the energy that you find in slums. I have never seen a family living in a [cardboard] house with children. Single people build separate

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\(^{104}\) See Motooka’s chart on the transformation process of illegally occupied settlements after the late 1950s: Motooka, “1950 nendai,” 42.

\(^{105}\) Ibid. It is important to note that the slum clearance that took place post-1945 also included slums that existed in Japan prior to the devastation of the Asia-Pacific War, some of which could trace their heritage to the barrack towns constructed after the Great Kantō Earthquake. For more on the history of prewar slums in Japan: André Sorensen, *The Making of Urban Japan: Cities and Planning from Edo to the Twenty-First Century* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 70-94. Jordan Sand, *House and Home in Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space, and Bourgeois Culture, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 145.
private rooms that are scattered around. They inhabit the gaps and unexpected spaces of the city. [...] While megabuildings stand close together in the city center and redeveloped areas creating giant silhouettes, the cardboard houses have been turning into slums and filling in the city’s blind spots.  

These various iterations of informal settlements – barrack towns, slums, and cardboard houses – can be related in terms of their piecemeal construction, repurposed materials, and handmade-ness. Moreover, the communities that create and inhabit them – the disenfranchised, economically disadvantaged, and victimized – dwell in contradistinction to the monumental spaces of the megacity as they renegotiate and reformulate the meaning of living in the late-modern city. As Miyamoto forcefully concludes in his introductory essay to Cardboard Houses:

“Existing within the contemporary city whose every spatial assignation is determined by economics and politics, they stand wholly apart from considerations of efficiency and power. Each individual cardboard house has a presence like a wedge driven singlehandedly into the urban mass, exposing diverse contradictions and social issues therein.”

Beginning with the

106 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Suramu kara danbōru sumai e” (From Slums to Cardboard Houses), Kokusai kōryū 72 (July 1996), n.p. This short essay appears in the front matter of the journal.

107 Miyamoto, Cardboard Houses, 3. Interestingly, leftist artists and academics also identified the potential for social transformation in the barracks built in the wake of the Great Kantō Earthquake. For example, Weisenfeld recounts how the sociologist and architect Kon Wajirō (1888-1973) “found profound spiritual meaning in the stripped-down state of the barracks, idealizing the simplicity of poverty and affirming the sublimity of a subsistence-level existence. [...] His invocation of the simple life in responding to the barracks was also rooted in his idealization of communal living, which accorded with the socialist political values infused into simple-life philosophy.” Weisenfeld, Imaging Disaster, 207. One way in which this theory was materialized was in the artistic decoration and elaboration of the barracks, events that were covered by the media. Thus, in both the original barracks of 1923 and the contemporary cardboard houses we can detect an idealization and aestheticization of the structures as a means of political activism. Significantly, in the 1970s and 1980s, a number of Japanese architects turned to barracks as inspiration for designs in their search for the “generative state of architecture.” Vladimir Krstić, “Ryōji Suzuki: The Margins of Architecture or the Architecture of Margins?” in Bushitsu shikō 49: Suzuki Ryōji sakuhinshū 1973-2007 (Experience in Material 49: The Complete Works of Ryōji Suzuki, 1973-2007), Suzuki Ryōji, et al. (Tokyo: INAX, 2007), 219. For example, Ishiyama Osamu’s (who would later collaborate with Miyamoto on the exhibition for the Japan Pavilion at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale) Gen-an Houses of the 1970s were constructed from everyday materials such as sheet metal. He also published a number of essays on “grotesque architecture” (igyō kenchiku), of which example is the barrack. Ishiyama Osamu, “Igyō e kugurinuke 5: BARRACK” (Passing Through the Grotesque 5: BARRACK), Kenchiku 164 (May 1974), 39-49. Ishiyama recently published these essays in book form as: Ishiyama Osamu, Mozuna Kinō, and Satō Kengo, Igyō kenchiku junrei (Grotesque Architecture Pilgrimage) (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 2016). Meanwhile, Suzuki Ryōji completed a number of “barracks models”
image of the single cardboard house “opposing the dignity” of the Bank of Japan from below, the serial presentation of the sixty-six individual houses in Miyamoto’s photobook reinforces that contradictory presence with every turn of the page. In the second half of this chapter, I consider another project of Miyamoto’s that challenges the homogenized, consumer-driven megacity – the photographs of Kowloon Walled City.

**Kowloon Walled City**

On January 14, 1987, the government of Hong Kong made the official announcement that Kowloon Walled City, the notorious 2.7-hectare slum on Kowloon Island, would be demolished and the land turned into a park before sovereignty of the territory was transferred to China in 1997.108 Miyamoto read about the clearance in a small newspaper article; it was the first he had heard of Kowloon Walled City. Given his interest in the demolition of modern architecture, he made the decision to go and see the slum before its clearance and visited Hong Kong in May of that year. He traveled with the perspective that places like the Walled City no longer existed in Japan, as most informal settlements, such as the genbaku slum, had been demolished in the 1960s and 70s. He was compelled to photograph the Walled City before it, too, disappeared, but that he used to study the process of building. His affinity for the piecemeal, fragmentary form of the barrack can be seen in designs such as the “Azabu Edge” Building from 1987.

108 Gordon Jones, “The Kowloon City District and the Clearance of Kowloon Walled City: Personal Recollections,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch* 51 (2011), 274. Then-governor of Hong Kong, Sir Edward Youde, decided that Kowloon Walled City had to be cleared for two main reasons: “First, sufficient public housing stock had become available in the public housing estates in the adjacent Wong Tai Sin District to re-house the inhabitants of the Walled City. […] Second, and most importantly however, it was considered that, if the Walled City in all its appalling squalor was not cleared during the remaining years of British sovereignty over Hong Kong, it had the potential for creating significant anti-British propaganda after the resumption of Chinese sovereignty as an ‘example’ of what had happened under British colonial administration.” Ibid., 273.
in the process he became interested in the slum as another instance of an archetypal, communal architecture.\textsuperscript{109}

The history of Kowloon Walled City as a military fort dates back to the fifteenth century. In the nineteenth century, the land served as a strategic defensive site for the Qing Dynasty. When Britain colonized Hong Kong at the end of the First Opium War in 1842, Qing forces established a walled military fortress on the neighboring island of Kowloon. After the Qing ceded Kowloon Island to the British in 1899, the status of the walled city was left unsettled. As both British and Chinese governments (including the Nationalist and Communist governments that succeeded the Qing Dynasty) continued to claim jurisdiction over the land, “the City itself gradually became a kind of diplomatic black hole existing in limbo between the two countries.”\textsuperscript{110} After 1899, the City began to fill with Chinese squatters, and until the Hong Kong government took steps to demolish it in 1940, it “remained a tourist attraction” where “[foreigners came to seek ‘a little bit of Old China.’”\textsuperscript{111} After the Japanese invaded Hong Kong in 1941, they continued with the demolition of the Walled City, preserving the original

\textsuperscript{109} Miyamoto Ryūji, “Kyūryū jōsai ni ‘toshi no genkei’ wo miru ‘Kyūryū jōsai’ Miyamoto Ryūji-sama” (Seeing the “Archetypal City” in Kowloon Walled City: Mr. Miyamoto Ryūji’s Kowloon Walled City), Gekkan hyakka 417 (July 1997), 66. I employ the operational definition of the word slum adopted by the UN in 2002: a settlement “characterized by overcrowding, poor or informal housing, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, and insecurity of tenure.” Davis, \textit{Planet of Slums}, 23.


\textsuperscript{111} For example, in the 1920s and 30s, “guidebooks to Hong Kong recommended it for nostalgic, historical sightseeing.” And, “[local residents found it worthwhile photographic material.” Elizabeth Sinn, “Kowloon Walled City: Its Origins and Early History,” \textit{Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch} 27 (1987), 39. Sinn cites two guidebooks as examples of this phenomenon: R. C. Hurley, \textit{Handbook to the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong and Dependencies} (Hong Kong: Kelly and Walsh, 1920), 130; Samuel H. Peplow and M. Barker, \textit{Around and About Hong Kong} (2nd revised and enlarged edition, 1931), 10.
magistrate’s building (the yamen, built in 1843) and using the materials from the old city walls for the construction of Kai Tak Airport.112

Sovereignty over Hong Kong and Kowloon Island was restored to the British after the surrender of the Japanese in 1945. The subsequent civil war in China and establishment of the socialist People’s Republic of China in 1949 led to a large number of refugees fleeing the mainland. Many headed for Hong Kong, and “[a]s a political vacuum free of control from any government the Kowloon Walled City became the perfect refuge for people who wanted to avoid taxation or legal interference from the colonial government.”113 The 1960s and 1970s saw another major influx of migrants during the Cultural Revolution in China. This is the era when “squatter huts gave way to high-rise buildings, which seemed designed to break every conceivable construction regulation. Built with no open space between them, but with passages connecting each other like rabbit warrens, they [were] fire and health hazards and perfect criminal hide-outs.”114 The high-rise buildings were constructed one on top of the other, creating “a kind of rampart and barrier to the outside world.”115 The Walled City became notorious for its opium dens, prostitution, gambling run by the Chinese Triad Societies, the offices of dentists and doctors from the mainland who did not possess a license to practice legally in Hong Kong, meat processing and food manufacturing workshops, toy and textile factories, and the total absence of taxes or legal regulations. As such, “it was able to bear the brunt of the severe housing shortages and skyrocketing real estate prices which resulted from Hong Kong’s own sudden population

112 Jones, “The Kowloon City,” 266.
113 Ōhashi, “Kyūryū jōsai,” 155.
114 Sinn, “Kowloon Walled City,” 40.
In 1982, a survey conducted internally by the Kowloon Walled City Kai Fong Association estimated that there were approximately 12,000 households and 40,000 residents in this hyper-condensed space of extraterritoriality.\textsuperscript{117}

By 1987, the Walled City was no longer the crime-ridden den of vice that had made it so infamous in the 1960s and 1970s, with a population estimated at 33,000 people.\textsuperscript{118} Still, the names that preceded it – the “Kasbah of the East,” a “den of thieves,” the “city of darkness” – made Miyamoto apprehensive. He spent his first day in Hong Kong photographing only the exterior of the Walled City: the irregular conglomeration of cramped apartments stacked one on top of the other; the curious patterns created by the illegal caged terraces attached to the facade; and the columns of signboards stretching up the side of the buildings – advertising for the illegal doctors and dentists who practiced inside the city’s walls (Figs. 2.26 & 2.27). On his second day, Miyamoto hired a local guide and entered the Walled City. His first impressions are worth quoting at length:

There are few entrances to the interior and those that are there are shockingly small. These small narrow passages continue to the back. I entered up an alleyway that was irregularly inclined and followed it to the end. It was dark even in the daytime. Countless pipes – were they the water supply, electricity, or telephone wires? – stretched around the ceiling and walls, looking like exposed organs. Water was constantly dripping from above. The streets were used for drainage, and wastewater flowed along them. It was like walking through a sewer with the humidity and odor. In various places, spider webs creepily covered the florescent lights. Near the center of the fort was an old rusted cannon together with garbage. The maze-like streets that discharge sewage are like a medieval city. Or, it is the chaotic street corners covered in acid rain from the movie \textit{Blade Runner}, which is said to depict the most realistic prediction of the future city.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{116} Ōhashi, “Kyūryū jōsai,” 157.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} Jones, “The Kowloon City,” 274.

\textsuperscript{119} Miyamoto Ryūji, “Monokurōmu no sekai Kyūryū jōsai, kyokugen no kōsō suramu” (The Monochrome World of Kowloon Walled City, The Limits of the High-Rise Slum), \textit{Jūtakuki kenchiku} 155 (February 1988), 40.
Miyamoto claims that photography was the only way for him to approach the Walled City, and we can read his initial impressions in the photographs themselves.\(^\text{120}\) Florescent lights pierce through bundled webs of sewage pipes and hoses, illuminating the puddles of wastewater that lie stagnant in the narrow alleyway below (Fig. 2.28). The makeshift sewage, water, and electrical systems create mesmerizing compositions of infrastructure rarely made visible in the contemporary city (Fig. 2.29). The occasional shot facing directly skyward reveals long, narrow cracks, the rare gap in between buildings that allows in a sliver of natural light to illuminate the bowels of the Walled City that are otherwise engulfed in darkness (Fig. 2.30). The narrow “streets” appear completely irregular, winding right and left, inclining up and down to accommodate new additions as the slum was constructed piece by piece (Fig. 2.31). Most of the photographs that Miyamoto initially published of Kowloon are made up of these alleyways, revealing perspectives and sightlines that are continually cut off by the circuitous routes that delinieate the Walled City (Fig. 2.32).

When Miyamoto first exhibited these photographs at INAX Art Gallery in Tokyo in February of 1988, they – like his first published images of cardboard houses – were interpreted in the context of ruins. Iizawa Kōtarō, who contributed a short essay for the exhibition pamphlet, called these photographs *memento mori*. For him, the aesthetic of corruption and collapse evinced in the dirtied, weathered walls of the city signaled the inevitable death of things, people, and architecture.\(^\text{121}\) The perception of Kowloon Walled City as an example of “ruined

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\(^\text{121}\) Iizawa Kōtarō, “‘Haikyo’ no kankaku” (The Sensation of “Ruins”), *INAX ART NEWS* 69 (February 1988), 2. The exhibition was held February 4-28 at INAX Art Gallery. To Iizawa’s credit, he acknowledged that he was only able to read the Walled City as ruins because of his safe distance from the site. He wrote, “[F]or the people that reside there it is first and foremost a place to live and a reality from which they cannot escape. They probably would not call their own environs ‘ruins.’”
architecture” was reinforced when Miyamoto included eight of these photographs in the publication of *Architectural Apocalypse* later that year. The photographs appear at the end of the photobook as if to expand the chaos of the demolition site to the scale of an entire city, thereby completing architecture’s future apocalypse.

In 1988, Miyamoto also published a photobook solely devoted to the photographs of Kowloon (Fig. 2.33). The dust jacket is the color of cardboard. Its cover displays one of the exterior shots of the Walled City, an oblique view gazing up at the misshapen fortress that snakes its way from the upper-right to the bottom-left of the frame, revealing a dark night sky in the other half of the composition. The roman text “KAU LUNG SHING CHAI” (the Chinese name for Kowloon Walled City) and Miyamoto’s name appear in bold red typeface across the middle of the cover. A loose piece of literature falls from the front matter of the book: a short essay by the urban historian Muramatsu Shin on the history of the Walled City, translated into Chinese, Japanese, and English. It is printed on thin, cardboard-like paper that recalls the cover of *Architectural Apocalypse*. Muramatsu’s text, also printed in a red tone that reads as the color of “China,” evokes the multisensory stimuli that pervade the Walled City: “Alleys become tunnels of a labyrinth; walls of damp dark concrete; a cacophony played on the machine tools of 600 workshops; 100 unlicensed dentists and fifty clinics, false teeth set out for display in front of their shops; an old woman with bound feet treading step by step up 11 flights of an elevatorless building.” Such vivid descriptions work to enhance the viewer’s visual experience of the forty-five plates that follow in the photobook.

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122 “Hito no sumu haikyo ‘Kyūryū jōsai’ wo totta Miyamoto Ryūji” (Miyamoto Ryūji Who Photographed the Inhabited Ruins of “Kowloon Walled City”), *Geijutsu shinchō* 459 (March 1988), 87.

While the aesthetic of decay that pervades the photobook is comparable to the subject matter of *Architectural Apocalypse*, I understand Miyamoto’s engagement with Kowloon Walled City in connection to his photography of cardboard houses. At least in its earliest iteration, Miyamoto was concerned with “the architectural event” of Kowloon. Unlike other projects which attempt to humanize the community within, such as Ian Lambot and Greg Girard’s *City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City* (1993), Miyamoto was less concerned with the lifestyles of the 35,000 inhabitants of the Walled City than with the structure that housed them – its off-kilter passageways, elaborate webs of water pipes, and rooftop forest of antennas (Fig. 2.34). Employing a large-format 4 x 5-in camera with 6 x 9-cm film required a long exposure time so that those humans who do appear in *Kowloon Walled City* are imaged as specters. These blurred effects are an endorsement of the “staggering energy” that Miyamoto sensed in the core of the slum (Fig. 2.35). Even more than the cardboard houses, for Miyamoto, Kowloon realized the organicism, energy, collectivism, and unconscious aspects of urban life that he had witnessed in the *genbaku* slums.

Over and over again, biological rhetoric is used to describe Miyamoto’s photographs of the Walled City: the walls have “weathered over the years like an elderly person;” it grows

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124 Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, February 8, 2016.

125 Ibid.

126 Miyamoto, “Utsuro na machi,” 88.


128 Tanigawa Kōichi, “‘Makutsu’ no naka ni aeka na hikari to yami no dorama egakidasu Miyamoto Ryūji ‘Kyūryū jōsai’” (Miyamoto Ryūji’s *Kowloon Walled City* Delicately Expresses the Drama of Light and Dark in a “Den of Thieves”), *Asahi Journal* 1520 (February 1988), 43.
continuously as “a living thing like coral or barnacles;” it has “pipes like veins” and “alleys like a womb;” the water pipes are compared to snakes and the electrical wiring, a spider’s web. It is striking how closely these scenes can resemble Miyamoto’s photographs of ruins at the Angkor Archaeological Park in Cambodia from 1994. The web of electrical cords at Kowloon warp into the twisted masses of vines and roots that climb the Khmer temples; slim gaps between concrete apartment blocks mirror fissures in the ancient masonry ruins; and both present architectural compounds characterized by layers – layers of passageways, building blocks, dirt and grime, and inscriptions (Figs. 2.36 & 2.37). Close visual comparisons such as these can clarify what Miyamoto means when he refers to the “organic” or “unconscious” elements that he sees in manmade structures such as Kowloon Walled City.

When Miyamoto returned to photograph Kowloon again in the fall of 1987, he paid for a helicopter to take him above the Walled City so that he could capture birds-eye-views of the fortification (Fig. 2.38). While numerous shots of the internal alleyways testify to the organic “unevenness” (dekoboko) of the buildings, it is these all-encompassing aerial views that reveal Kowloon as a veritable city, “built individually and unconsciously bit by bit to create something larger.” Just as the privileged vantage point of the helicopter aided Rem Koolhaas in his search for order in the urban chaos of Lagos, so too did it “[reveal] a city pushed to its material limits”

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129 Yamazaki Kōichi, “Toshi wa ningen ga tsukuridashita saisho no seibutsu na mono ka mo shirenai” (A City That Might Be the First Living Thing Created by Humans), Popeye 13:7 (April 20, 1988), 163.

130 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Hon Kon, Kyūryū jōsai no shōmetsu” (The Disappearance of Hong Kong’s Kowloon Walled City), SPA! 2358 (September 15, 1993), 148.

131 Itō Toshiharu, “Ajia goshikku” (Asian Gothic), in Kyūryū fūtsuinden: Seishiki nyūmonsho: Kūronzu getō kāshiki gaidobukku (Kowloon Feng Shui Instructions: The Official Introduction: The Formal Guidebook to Kowlon’s Gate), ed. Hamamura Hirokazu (Tokyo: ASCII, 1997), 36. Miyamoto’s photographs were used as inspiration for the setting in a video game set in a dystopic world, called Kowloon’s Gate.

132 Miyamoto, “Utsuro na machi,” 90.
in Kowloon, while simultaneously precipitating “a celebration of the creativity and agency of its citizens.” The 1997 edition of the Kowloon Walled City photobook includes more than twice as many plates as the first version, and the additions – some of which include humans – produce a more thoroughgoing picture of Kowloon as a living city. For instance, in this edition, the viewer is privy to the contents of stores, the interiors of apartments, the production of silk, and the processing of pigs (Figs. 2.39 & 2.40). Humans are at work; the city is alive.

More so than with the discrete and individualized cardboard houses, the ideal of communal living and collaboration has been emphasized in the rhetoric surrounding Miyamoto’s photographs of Kowloon Walled City. Miyamoto romanticizes Kowloon as the archetypal city:

Actually, walking through the slums, despite it being an inferior environment, there are many strange and miraculous things that have survived, left behind and ignored by modernity. Deep human relationships, the minimum equipment for living, and organic, human-scaled spaces have been protected here. Even though the setting has completely changed, the basic form of life is the same – an assemblage of housing created by people. We might expect a magnificent village if this were set in the abundant natural world, but when it comes together in the cracks of a city, it becomes a slum.

Just as the cardboard houses provided an opportunity to glimpse the creative results of the so-called primal human will to survive, so too did Kowloon Walled City inspire Miyamoto to question the meaning and parameters of dwelling in the contemporary city from the perspective of its disadvantaged populations. In both the cardboard houses and the Walled City, he identified an “urban unconscious” that demonstrated the human potential of urban dwellings when they are built collectively and out of necessity from the detritus of the city rather than as part of a

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135 Miyamoto, “Monokurōmu no sekai,” 40.
wholesale economically-drive redevelopment plan. The humanity of hand-built housing – the relationships it fostered, the human-scale to which it conformed – was also a point emphasized by Rudofsky in *Architecture Without Architects*.

Even more specifically, Kowloon Walled City has been interpreted according to a problematic Orientalist perspective that sees the space as evidence of a “Chinese unconscious.” As was the case with the homeless “hunter-gatherers” in *Cardboard Houses*, positioning the residents of the Walled City in a space of extraterritoriality, a space operating according to an internal logic that was seen as markedly foreign to those viewing photographs of it, allowed for an abstraction and romanticization of the history of the structure, and by extension, its population. In this abstraction, essential truths about the history of housing in China were gleaned. Given its origins in the Opium Wars, as well as the waves of Mainland refugees that built up and inhabited the city, Miyamoto sees Kowloon as a “place that condenses the history of modern China.”

Urban historian Muramatsu Shin, who contributed the essay to the first version of the *Kowloon Walled City* photobook, goes further in describing the city as “evidence of the strength of traditional Chinese housing in the face of westernization by colonial forces.”

By “traditional Chinese housing,” Muramatsu refers to a history of communal dwelling as opposed to living separately in detached houses. It is not just dwelling, but the fact that “shrines, factories and shops are all in one place,” an unzoned spatial condition that is understood as the foundation of the pulsing energy that Miyamoto sensed in the alleyways of the Walled City.

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136 Ibid.


138 Miyamoto, “Monokurōmu no sekai,” 40.
In 1992, the architectural journal SD (Space+Design) published an issue devoted to Hong Kong, in which the typology of the “walled city” is celebrated as a vernacular form persisting in the outskirts of an otherwise rapidly changing city. The authors compare Kowloon Walled City to the smaller walled village of Tsang Tai Uk, first constructed in 1850 in the New Territories, and emphasize high-density living within protective walls as characteristic of the Hakka dwelling (associated with the Lin Lan region in China) (Fig. 2.41). This is part of a larger argument by the Ōno Laboratory at Tokyo University that champions the whole of Hong Kong as “one possible alternative for urbanism.” They contend, “Urban design should not be merely the design of scenery, but rather a methodology of realizing the city as a place for communication and activity.” The village is identified as the paradigmatic “place for communication and activity,” and their survey of the city’s plan and architectural features – including its street markets, illegal structures, use of vertical space, and urban blocks, to name a few examples – reveals that “[i]n Hong Kong, each building can be regarded as a village. The city of Hong Kong consists of the accumulation of such villages.” In their analysis, Tsang Tai Uk and Kowloon Walled City are both examples of these contemporary villages, as are recently completed superblocks and Hong Kong’s characteristic beehive architecture.

This publication is representative of how the territory of Hong Kong gripped the fascination of urban historians, photographers, and architects as a counterpoint to urban Japan in

139 “Tsang Tai Uk – Walled Village,” SD 330 (March 1992), 58-9. All of the text in this special feature appears in both Japanese and English. Here, and in the next four quotations, I am using the English translation. The name of the translator was not published.


141 Ōno Hidetoshi, “Alternative Metropolis Hong Kong,” SD 330 (March 1992), 77.

142 “Tsang Tai Uk,” 58.
the late-twentieth century. Miyamoto’s photographs were displayed and circulated in the context of this problematic history that repeats patterns of colonialism in its framing of the space as “Other.” Ōno Hidetoshi recounts, “Ten members of our laboratory left Japan for Hong Kong in December 1990. Upon our arrival, we discovered streets crowded with people, plenty of goods on sale, high rise buildings, a busy and a thorough mass transportation system. Hong Kong revealed itself to us in various unexpected aspects, and we found it impossible to explain Hong Kong fully using the standard vocabulary of urban design.”143 With regards to Kowloon Walled City, Miyamoto similarly described being at a loss for words; in order to comprehend the city he approached it through a photographic survey, rather than an architectural one. Often, the inexplicability of Hong Kong is clarified by contrasting its noise, dirt, and activity to the “hygienic” and “inactive” city of Tokyo.144 Hong Kong is Tokyo’s “Other,” and Kowloon Walled City is the paragon of that difference. In a published conversation between Miyamoto and the filmmaker Yamamoto Masashi, the two decry the contemporary skyscrapers of Tokyo, claiming that it no longer feels like an “Asian city.” On the other hand, Hong Kong – and, in Miyamoto’s opinion, Kowloon Walled City – is “nonsensical,” “human-like,” and, therefore, “Asian.”145 Thus, Miyamoto’s exhibitions of the Walled City photographs are often touted as revealing an environment “that you absolutely could never see in Tokyo.”146

143 Ōno, “Alternative Metropolis,” 76.

144 Ibid., 77.

145 The two concede that Osaka is still a Japanese city with an “Asian feeling.” Miyamoto Ryūji and Yamamoto Masashi, “Taidan Miyamoto Ryūji x Yamamoto Masashi” (A Conversation Between Miyamoto Ryūji and Yamamoto Masashi), Nikkei imēji kishō kansoku 40 (September 1990), 6-7.

146 Kuronuma Katsushi, “Hon Kon saidai no kōsō suramu, Kyūryū jōsai ga kiete iku!” (The Huge High-Rise Slum of Hong Kong, Kowloon Walled City, Is Going to Disappear!), Men’s Non-no 22 (March 1988), 155. See also: Yamazaki, “Toshi wa ningen,” 163.
Such characterizations of the Hong Kong environment, a megalopolis that has “maintained the highest formal residential densities in the world,” as an energetic “Asian” village, demonstrates no real understanding of the disparate lived realities or uneven social structures that constitute and sustain this urban space. As has been well documented, in Hong Kong “the monumental space of global capital congested with grand office buildings and hotels is made possible through compressing the living space of ordinary people.” Thus, “[t]he high-rise skyscrapers with corporate names in [the financial district of] Central in a sense are not built with glass and metal but with the space taken from anonymous high-rise buildings whose majority inhabitants have no easy access to the global monumental space or the information flow.”

The indifference of certain members of the urban studies community in Japan to this reality is troubling, particularly considering the concurrent history of corporations pushing the housing of Japanese workers further and further from the city center of Tokyo in the 1970s and 1980s. Their focus on Hong Kong as an “alternative” metropolis reveals the extent to which they understood the Japanese city to have been westernized and their anxious search for a model that maintained a sense of “Asian” identity while still participating in global capitalism. In Miyamoto’s case, the brief moment in his career when he chose to emphasize the human origin of architecture over the structure itself risked an abstraction of the realities of this urban community, effectively aestheticizing the world of the slum instead of humanizing it. Still, there are ways in which that...

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147 Davis, *Planet of Slums*, 63. Indeed, while Hong Kong is well known for its public housing program, which has been able to absorb such large numbers of migrants from Mainland China, Davis shows how “the former Crown Colony’s success in rehousing squatters, tenement-dwellers, and civil war refugees is new public apartment blocks is not quite the humanitarian miracle often depicted.” He clarifies the situation: “The challenge was to reconcile a continuing supply of cheap labor with soaring land values, and the preferred solution was not high rents – which would have forced up wages – but peripheralization and overcrowding.”

aestheticization has been put to critical use in the context of reimagining the contemporary and future city in the wake of Walled City’s demolition.

Othering the Walled City in this way frames it as a space of extraterritoriality that functions according to its own rules, culture, and energy. As that space becomes aestheticized in Miyamoto’s photographs and idealized in studies such as the one conducted by the Ōno Laboratory, its otherness is displaced from the moment in which these observations occurred and projected into an alternate time-space that is just as unimaginable and “unreal” – the future. Over and over again, Kowloon Walled City is described simultaneously as an archetypal Chinese city and the future city. Just as Miyamoto makes recourse to the chaotic streets of Blade Runner to describe his initial impressions of Kowloon, many viewers rely on science fiction films set in future dystopic urbanscapes to frame their reactions to the photographs. In fact, the science fiction author William Gibson has turned Miyamoto’s “documentary reality into a cyberpunk illusion.” According to Gibson, his interpretation of the Walled City via Miyamoto’s photographs “provided most of the texture for the Bridge” in his novel Virtual Light (1993), and it was the basis for a virtual world built from the wreckage of a great earthquake in Idoru (1996). Also in 1996, Kimura Nakaji created the computer game Kowloon’s Gate, which then

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149 Viewing Miyamoto’s photographs, one critic commented, “While it is thrilling to wander the unfamiliar labyrinth, there is also something that feels unreal (higenjitsuteki) about it.” Tanigawa, “‘Makutsu’ no naka,” 42.

150 For example, see: Morita Seirō, “Hon Kon ‘Kyūryū jōsai’ sennyū dokyumento: 20-seiki saigo no makutsu, hōkai!!” (The Infiltration Document to Hong Kong’s “Kowloon Walled City”: The Last Den of Thieves of the Twentieth Century, Demolished!!), Playboy 150 (December 1987), 105; Tanigawa, “‘Makutsu’ no naka,” 42.

151 Konno Yuichi, “Kau Lung Shing Chai, Miyamoto Ryūji” (Kowloon Walled City, Miyamoto Ryūji), WAVE 19 (September 1988), 3.

152 In the preface to Idoru, Gibson writes, “Sogho Ishii, the Japanese director, introduced me to Kowloon Walled City via the photographs of Ryuji Miyamoto. It was Ishii-san’s idea that we should make a science fiction movie there. We never did, but the Walled City continued to haunt me, though I knew no more about it than I could gather from Miyamoto’s stunning images, which eventually provided most of the texture for the Bridge in my novel Virtual Light.” William Gibson, Idoru (New York: Berkeley Books, 1997), n.p. For more on Gibson and Kowloon Walled City, see: William Gibson, Larry McCaffery, and Tatsumi Takayuki, “‘Nyūromansa’ kara ‘Aidoru’ e: Wiriamu
was marketed by Sony in 1997. In the game, a feng shui master’s attempt to restore equilibrium to the world is jeopardized by the eruption of a virtual/unreal Kowloon Walled City (the yin) into the real world of the yang. As the nonfiction writer Yoshioka Shinobu concludes, “Weirdly nightmarish as it seems, the city of darkness still keeps jeopardizing the critical boundary between reality and virtual reality, thereby questioning the foundation of our sense of reality as such. This is the reason why Miyamoto Ryūji’s legendary photographic theater of the Kowloon Walled City still continues to appeal to a variety of contemporary artists and writers.”

Nostalgic and futuristic, natural and unnatural, human and inhuman, “Asian” and “global” – as suggested by Yoshioka, in its image-form Kowloon appears as a city of paradoxes. It is precisely this plurality and unpredictability that stands as a counterpoint to the flattened image of internationalizing cities that Miyamoto and others criticized, a process that was documented in Architectural Apocalypse. In Miyamoto’s experience:

In Tokyo, new buildings are steadily being built, and they are basically all created according to a plan. They are created ahead of time by anticipating how they will be seen. They have the feeling of being contrived, of being lies. In my subconscious, I feel like there is no method involved in photographing something like this. But this is not the case for places like demolition sites. Slums are similar, where the architecture itself exists because there is no planning. Kowloon Walled City is the classic example. Slums and ruins deviate from everyday conventions.\(^{154}\)

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153 Yoshioka Shinobu, “Shizen to han-shizen no paradokkusu: Miyamoto Ryūji ‘Kyūryū jōsai’” (The Natural-Unnatural Paradox: Miyamoto Ryūji’s Kowloon Walled City), Asahi Camera 845 (October 1997), 119.

154 Miyamoto Ryūji, “‘Kyūryū jōsai’ wo toru Miyamoto Ryūji no me” (The Eye of Miyamoto Ryūji Who Photographed Kowloon Walled City), Kenchiku chishiki 359 (March 1988), 68.
When eventually its demolition was completed in 1994, Kowloon Walled City no longer existed as a reality (Fig. 2.42). However, it lives on as a spatial concept of the “unplanned” that continues to be probed for insight about the current state and future prospects of the city in a global world. Miyamoto’s photographs continue to be an effective resource in this larger project; hence, the republication of the Kowloon Walled City photobook in 1997, 2009, and again in 2017.

New Claims in Global Cities

In her research on the postwar redevelopment of Hiroshima, Lisa Yoneyama recalls an encounter with a woman who worked in the promotional office for the redevelopment of the Motomachi neighborhood, where the genbaku slums and new high-rise apartments that Miyamoto photographed were located. She reflects:

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155 The eviction process was carried out from October of 1991 to March of 1993, and then the entirety of the Walled City was clear in just ten months. With roughly 350 concrete apartments as tall as 16-stories on a site of 30,000 square meters, it was the largest demolition job in Hong Kong’s history. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Hon Kon wo shōchō suru kōso suramukan Kyūryū jōsai ga kowasarehajimeta” (The Demolition of Kowloon Walled City, the Group of High-Rise Slums and Symbol of Hong Kong, Has Begun), SPA! 2342 (May 26, 1993), 29. The former yamen and remnants of the South Gate from the original military fortification were preserved and remain central features of the Kowloon Walled City Park. Today, one can visit a permanent exhibition on the history of the Walled City that is located inside and around the yamen. Of particular note is the reproduction of a 2.4-meter-long cross-section of the Walled City drawn by the illustrator Terasawa Hitomi. To complete the drawing, Terasawa worked from the information gathered in a design survey conducted by the Kyūryūjō Tankentai (The Kowloon Walled City Exploration Party) in February, 1993 after all of the residents had been evicted and before the demolition work began. The survey group later published their original sketches and photographs, along with Terasawa’s cross-section, as: Kyūryūjō Tankentai, Daizukai Kyūryūjō (Kowloon Walled City Illustrated), (Tokyo: Iwanami shōten, 1997). This work is representative of the spike in interest in Kowloon Walled City among Japanese architects on the eve of its demolition.

156 In addition to Miyamoto, many other Japanese photographers and architects have been drawn to the Walled City. Notable examples include the work by the Kyūryūjō Tankentai, mentioned above, as well as another survey focused completed by Watanabe Shun’ichi and Ibayashi Masahiro from the Watanabe Urban Planning Research Group at Tokyo University. They were particularly concerned with how the spatial structure of the slum was formed without land use restrictions and published their findings as: Watanabe Shun’ichi and Ibayashi Masahiro, “Hon Kon Kyūryūjō suramu no kōkan kōsei” (The Spatial Structure of the Kowloon Walled City Slum), Toshi keikaku ronbunshū 28 (1993), 439-44. One of Watanabe’s and Ibayashi’s graduate students, Nakamura Shintaro, went on to publish two photobooks with the photographs that he took while working on the survey: Nakamura Shintaro, Saigō no Kyūryū jōsai (The Last of Kowloon Walled City), (Tokyo: Shinpōsha, 1996) and Saigō no Kyūryū jōsai, kansenhan (The Last of Kowloon Walled City, Complete Edition), (Tokyo: Shinpōsha, 2003), which includes additional photographs of the Kowloon Walled City Park.
In the newly recrafted urban imaginaries […] even memories of poverty can create moments in which mundane scenes become exotic and exciting. Another worker in the promotion office, a woman in her mid-twenties – bright, gifted, and full of energy – expressed her fascination with making new discoveries from the familiar and explained how she tries to exploit surprising analogies in advertisements. When looked at carefully, she said, scenes of barracks and figures of the homeless on the riverbanks near the railway station “almost remind me of Southeast Asia, maybe Hong Kong, or could it be Venice?”

This encounter demonstrates the slipperiness of visual analogies, particularly when it comes to scenes of modern poverty. The encounter with the genbaku slums in the summer of 1973; the numerous trips to Hong Kong to document Kowloon Walled City before, during and after its clearance; and the twenty years spent photographing cardboard houses in the cracks of global cities are all discrete events in Miyamoto’s career that were nonetheless motivated by a similar aesthetic encounter with a new form of the ruin. These structures were all composed of weathered, patchwork, heterogeneous materials that evoked a larger ideal for Miyamoto as unplanned, handmade alternatives to the corporatized, consumer-driven, monumentalized metropolis. Moreover, they can all be connected through their illegality; the fact that they were self-built according to the spontaneous accumulation of materials; their materiality that consists of the “urban unconscious” – capitalism’s leftovers reconfigured in irregular compositions; and their sense of perpetual formation and unpredictability.

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158 When I asked Miyamoto about a potential relationship between these three projects, he confessed, “It wasn’t in my consciousness at the time, but I think there is a connection. What they all have in common – the cardboard houses and the homeless, the genbaku slum, and Kowloon Walled City – is their illegality, their unlawful, war-like situations. And then they are all self-built (seerufu birudo) and handmade. They are in different places, but in that way they are connected. They are not architecture that was planned, but places to live that were built by people naturally and spontaneously (hasseiteiki ni). So they also have that in common. I thought that was really interesting, and tried to photograph it.” Miyamoto, interview with the author, December 13, 2015.
Miyamoto equates the unexpected elements of these informal structures to the unexpected details that inevitably appear in a photograph without the creator’s awareness. He finds motivation in such moments when the particular character of photography and the conditions of the city meet. In this case, the documentary function of photography is also well suited to the rapidly changing conditions of informal architecture in the late-modern city. Similar to the demolition sites in *Architectural Apocalypse*, today, all of these structures exist only in photographs. Miyamoto photographed the *genbaku* slums in their final days; only a plaque remains in the green space next to the Ōtagawa River to commemorate the community that subsisted there in the wake of utter devastation and decades of discrimination. It is highly unlikely that any of the handmade houses pictured in Miyamoto’s photobook still stand in the same form today. Even when authorities allow the homeless to reside in groups in public parks or underground passageways, their material makeup and location is rarely stable due to any number of uncontrollable factors (weather, theft, the availability of new materials, or a better environment). Moreover, since municipal governments began distributing blue plastic tarps to the homeless in the late 1990s, the blue sheet (*buruu shiito*) has come to replace cardboard as the major signifier of makeshift dwellings in Japanese cities. Finally, Miyamoto’s photographs from 1992 and 1993 of the Kowloon Walled City demolition pay homage to its disappearance, as slice after slice was cut away leaving a layer of crumbled concrete topsoil in its wake (Fig. 2.43).

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159 In this way, we might think of Miyamoto’s notion of the “urban unconscious” as similar to Roland Barthes’ concept of the punctum: “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).” Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard with an introduction by Geoff Dyer (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 27.

160 Miyamoto, “Utsuro na machi,” 112.

161 Abby Margolis explains how the homeless also acquire blue sheets from construction sites or in parks after the influx of picnickers during cherry blossom festivals. Abby Margolis, “Samurai Beneath Blue Tarps: Doing Homelessness, Rejecting Marginality and Preserving Nation in Ueno Park” (PhD diss. University of Michigan, 1993), 36.
The cardboard house and Kowloon Walled City photographs evoke visual similarities to categorically different types of ruins – postwar barracks and a post-apocalyptic dystopia, respectively. Taken together, however, they expand the idea of the ruin in Miyamoto’s work. In their emphasis on human ingenuity, both incorporate a force that Miyamoto first identified in the emergent agency of architecture at demolition sites. When the wrecking ball released buildings from their original function, the materials gained agency as they created new compositions that stood apart from the efficiency and logic of human design. As structures composed piecemeal by thousands of individuals over protracted periods of time, Kowloon Walled City and the cardboard houses are on the opposite end of this spectrum of ruination. Ruined through wear and the haphazard accumulation of material, they gain agency as ruinous structures by a different means. In Kowloon Walled City, it was precisely the overabundance of people that had contributed to its becoming, the human-ness of its experimental construction, and the intensity with which life continued to thrive within its walls (at least when Miyamoto first photographed it in 1987) that grants the resulting ruin new potential as a form that might be life-giving rather than a sign of life’s ending in Miyamoto’s photographs.

While in general Miyamoto avoids the literal depiction of the human populations who hand-built these structures, he nonetheless “captures human activity through architecture.”\(^{162}\) One critic interprets the distinct compositional details of each cardboard house as the “skin” of its owner,\(^{163}\) while another acknowledges that the emptied alleyways of Kowloon are, in fact, “revived as nature” in those photographs that illuminate “things clearly made by people.”\(^{164}\)

\(^{162}\) Jibiki, “Miyamoto Ryūji,” 194.

\(^{163}\) Hayashi, “Miyamoto Ryūji,” 148.

\(^{164}\) Yoshioka, “Shizen to han-shizen,” 119.
Claire and Eve Zimmerman designate photographs of “buildings standing in for the populations that occupy them” “ethnographic architectural photography.”\textsuperscript{165} It is ethnographic because the way of a people is presumed from the study of an architectural type collected through serial photography. They name Rudofsky’s \textit{Architecture Without Architects} “the extreme version of this kind of publication,” where manmade structures in an otherwise people-less landscape stand in for a supposedly unspoiled way of living projected onto that space by the outsiders who photograph it. In his focus on “the architectural event” of disappearing handmade structures, Miyamoto’s photobooks \textit{Cardboard Houses} and \textit{Kowloon Walled City} might also qualify as ethnographic architectural photography.\textsuperscript{166} The individuality of the cardboard houses serve as metonyms for the individual stories of perseverance that led to the creation of each home, and Kowloon Walled City serves as a metonym for the community that gave life to this mythologized space of extraterritoriality. In each case, informal, handmade architecture is a proxy for larger ideals related to the essence of dwelling that Miyamoto and others sought to understand, uncover, and visualize in the late-twentieth-century urbanscape.

As prefaced in my introduction to informal architecture at the start of this chapter, the architectural depth, infrastructural details, and layers of personal or collective history that viewers identify in \textit{Cardboard Houses} and \textit{Kowloon Walled City} are seemingly invisible but \textit{necessary} aspects of the late-modern city. The late-modern city is characterized by global compression: the “process of eliminating our sense of history and creating a homogenized space” through the construction of monumental buildings that signify a “global city status,” which is


\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
considered part and parcel of generating economic success.\textsuperscript{167} This is the process that Miyamoto and others such as Ueda Makoto or the Ōno Laboratory decried as they witnessed the international redevelopment of Tokyo in the 1980s. Saskia Sassen has shown how in such events there must be an unrecognized or unrepresented population of urban dwellers that work outside of international corporations to facilitate this process of globalization and monument-building.\textsuperscript{168}

In Japan, this population was the marginalized group of day laborers who subsisted in the yoseba and then on the streets in cardboard houses when homelessness became more pronounced with the bursting of the economic bubble in 1992. In Hong Kong, they were the illegal migrants from Mainland China who made a living in manual labor and manufacturing, contributing to the globalization of the city while finding haven in extraterritorial spaces such as the Walled City.

Including these populations, if only through metonym, in images of contemporary urban space upends simplified understandings of the late-modern city when it is described the “information-age city,” to which all users are presumed to have equal access. In this sense, we might understand both Cardboard Houses and Kowloon Walled City as both a challenge to the homogenized global city, as well as a complication and rounding out of the late-modern city’s multiple components. In carving out a space for themselves and repurposing the leftovers of capitalism, the occupants of these two markedly different residences are examples of communities that have “reconstituted strategic spaces of the city in their image.”\textsuperscript{169} According to Sassen, in doing so they make “new claims” on the global city.\textsuperscript{170} In making these claims visible

\textsuperscript{167} Michell, Walking Between, 17, 18.


\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 220.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
to a large, multifarious audience that includes the worlds of art, urban planning, and science fiction, Miyamoto’s projects suddenly appear markedly political. For, as he himself argues, if it doesn’t have cardboard houses, slums, or ruins, “it’s not a city at all.”171

Chapter 3: Documenting Disaster, Living with Ruins

“I clung to this refusal of understanding as the only possible ethical and at the same time the only possible operative attitude. […] Because the act of transmitting is the only thing that matters, and no intelligibility, that is to say no true knowledge, preexists the process of transmission.”

– Claude Lanzmann, “The Obscenity of Understanding,” 1990

In 1989, the Emperor Akihito ascended to the throne, announcing the new era of Heisei, or “Achieving Peace.” As the 1990s progressed, however, there was little that was peaceful about it. 1995, in particular, was a disastrous year for Japan: the recession that began with the bursting of the economic bubble in early 1992 showed no signs of abating; the government received criticism from abroad “for its waffling apologies for wartime atrocities, its indecisiveness in Asian regional diplomacy, and its ineffectual management of fiscal policy;” anti-American sentiments raged after the rape of a Japanese schoolgirl in Okinawa by U.S. servicemen; on January 17, an earthquake rocked the Hanshin region in the first major urban disaster in the postwar period; and on March 20, the cult Aum Shinrikyō conducted a deadly sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway. These events generated widespread feelings of uncertainty, leading David Lu to label the 1990s, a “decade of reflection” for Japan.

This chapter focuses largely on the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and how the ruins of the Hanshin region and the port city of Kobe served as a formidable rhetorical device in that process of reflection. As Gennifer Weisenfeld has pointed out:


Ruins connote more than devastation and loss; they also bear witness to the relationship between life and death – the dialectic of destruction and construction – and thereby prompt meditations on this tentative balance. Ruins represent the sublime power of nature in all its terrifying magnificence; they also embody the fragility of modernity’s gamble.  

Miyamoto Ryūji’s photographic documentation of the ruins of Kobe addressed this dialectic of destruction and construction. Moreover, these images can be understood as a form of preservation, serving as a constant reminder of that tragic moment when Japanese society was reminded once again of its own fragility.

Well before the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, Miyamoto’s photography succeeded in exposing the Benjaminian contention that “the foundation of modernity is ruins.” Kobe was the natural result of this trajectory, the dissolution of modernity into ruins again nearly fifty years after the end of the Asia-Pacific War. As Haruno Ogasawara has argued, many “discourses on the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995 became a critique of Japanese society. Many people saw the quake disaster as revealing the illusory nature of Japan’s seemingly successful transformation during the postwar period.” For those critics who ascribed to an ideology of ruins in the wake of the earthquake, Miyamoto’s photographs of Kobe became a poignant visual foundation from which to launch an attack against the violence and vanity of modern building, as well as against progressive narratives of history that generated modernity’s cycle of creative destruction.

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4 Weisenfeld, Imaging Disaster, 133.


This chapter begins with an overview of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and documents public reactions to the disaster both within and outside of the affected areas. I consider why the earthquake was so shocking to the nation, the disillusionment that spread in its wake, and how local and national government authorities attempted to blot out public anxiety with an ambitious and comprehensive rebuilding program. On the other hand, Miyamoto’s photographs of the destroyed city of Kobe, published in a photobook later in 1995, are a reminder of those early days after the disaster when the future of the city was still open to debate. In these photographs, we can identify the major themes and points of discussion that emerged in the wake of the earthquake. These images force us to consider questions such as, “How has the symbolic power of the built environment been used as both a magnet for attack and as a signal of recovery? What does [the] particular process of recovery reveal about the balance of power in the society seeking to rebuild? Whose vision for the future gets built, and why?”8 And ultimately, “What place is there for visionary architecture and long-range planning?”9

Beginning with Miyamoto’s photobook, ruins were approached as a tool with which to question the premise of rebuilding, to serve as a source for memorialization, and to educate future generations on the necessity of disaster preparedness. After 1995, architects, artists, and cultural critics accepted the fact that “the future city lies in ruins.” I examine multiple examples of the creative ways in which these designers and thinkers approached the ruins of Kobe as a necessary aspect of reconstruction and memorialization, rather than as debris to be quickly and completely eradicated from the landscape. Exhibitions, memorial museums, and disaster


9 Ibid., 13.
education centers played a major role in the perpetuation of this commitment to ruins. Alongside photographs, actual ruins from the disaster were preserved or entire ruinous environments were recreated. I consider why the preservation of ruins became such a popular approach to representations of the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. In the end, the ruins of Miyamoto’s photographs worked in conjunction with other media representations to serve simultaneously as a symbol of the fractured lives of survivors, as a source for the critique of productivist narratives of recovery, and as guidance for future conceptions of the city.

In the conclusion to the chapter I turn to one of Miyamoto’s recent works, the documentary film *3.11 TSUNAMI 2011* that he co-authored with three survivors of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of March 2011. In this case, Miyamoto elected not to photograph the ruins of Tōhoku (Northeast Japan). Instead he shifted his focus from the architectural and infrastructural effects of disaster to the human experience of it. The film combines documentary footage of the tsunami and interviews with the three survivors who recorded the tragedy. In this case, Miyamoto sees himself as a mere facilitator providing a means for these experiences to reach a larger population and complicate the abstracted narrative of the disaster produced by the media. I use psychic trauma theory to show how, ultimately, the film unveils the nuanced processes of traumatic experiences and the role of images – or, more precisely, image-making – in coping and living with trauma. In the end, this film represents a more subtle approach to documenting catastrophe, one that does not presume to “understand” or convey the “truths” of the disaster. Instead, it witnesses the impossibility of understanding.\(^\text{10}\)

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake

On January 17, 1995 at approximately 5:45AM an earthquake of immense magnitude occurred in the Hanshin region of Western Japan. Reports documented over 6,000 deaths, more than 200,000 collapsed homes, and approximately 390,000 newly homeless. In a matter of twenty seconds, much of the port city of Kobe was reduced to a pile of rubble, only to be followed by hundreds of fires sparked by the tremors. It was the worst and costliest natural disaster in Japan since the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, estimated at about 9.9 trillion yen in cost of damages. It was the first major urban disaster in Japan in the postwar period, occurring as the country prepared to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War.

Today, the event is remembered for the inadequate and poorly managed response of the central and local governments, which compelled the media to label it a “man-made disaster.” While in pre-modern Japan natural disasters were linked to a perceived decline in man’s moral rectitude, by 1995, the widespread understanding of a man-made disaster was more in line with Barry A. Turner’s definition – “the failure of systems in which social and technical agencies interact.” In the immediate aftermath of the quake, social agencies failed the citizens of Kobe, the most affected urban area. The local governments of Kobe and Hyōgo Prefecture were “censured, mainly for not taking immediate control over key emergency routes (to avoid traffic congestion), for the general shortage of water for fighting the post-earthquake fires, and for having no immediate means to call in firefighting units from nearby cities unaffected by the disaster.”

11 As David W. Edington notes, the final cost of damages was “at the time equal to nearly 1 percent of the asset value of total private and public infrastructure in Japan.” David W. Edington, Reconstructing Kobe: The Geography of Crisis and Opportunity (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 10.

Meanwhile, reports of the earthquake’s magnitude and the extent of the damage were slow to reach Tokyo, the arrival of the National Defense Forces to the Hanshin region was delayed, and the national authorities initially denied international aid.

All of these factors signaled the need for new research in emergency preparedness and disaster relief in Japan. This was shocking to the nation for multiple reasons. First, although the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake was of a lesser scale (magnitude 7 on the Japanese scale; 7.2 on the Richter scale) than the Great Kantō Earthquake, it occurred at an unusually shallow point in the Nojima fault line in an area that previously had not been considered a serious threat. Up until 1995, the major concerns for Kobe in terms of disaster were typhoons, the flooding of rivers, and landslides from the Rokkō Mountains. As Kaji Hideki, Director of the United Nations Centre for Regional Development at the time, responded:

The news that Kobe was directly hit by an earthquake had major repercussions throughout Japan, particularly because of the enormity of the damage and, at the same time, due to the fact that even Kobe could be struck by an earthquake. During the 1,500 years that earthquake occurrence has been recorded in Japan, not once has Kobe been directly hit by an earthquake and it has always had the image of being a city safe from earthquakes.

Since the opening of Kobe as an international port in 1872, it flourished as a center of modern cosmopolitanism. The city rebuilt quickly after much of it was destroyed by firebombing in the war and quickly became an “industrial giant” of postwar Japan. Before the earthquake, Kobe was the largest port in Japan and one of the top industrial producers in the country, handling 30 percent of foreign trade. Seeing this symbol of prosperity, growth, and internationalism

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13 Edington, Reconstructing Kobe, 51.

14 Ibid., 1.

15 Quoted in: Edington, Reconstructing Kobe, 35.

destroyed so quickly and so violently was a shock to the national narrative of the city’s successful modernization and rehabilitation in the postwar era.

Not only was it shocking that “even Kobe” could be destroyed by an earthquake; in 1995, it was unthinkable that an earthquake could decimate any city in Japan. Once the incompatibility of masonry building and seismic land was fully realized after the Mino-Owari earthquake struck the Nōbi Plain in 1891, the engineering and architectural community became dedicated to constructing “an earthquake-proof Japan.”\textsuperscript{17} Professors of Architecture at Tokyo Imperial University such as Sano Toshikata focused on the development of highly resilient buildings with the use of rigid ferro-concrete frames.\textsuperscript{18} The rhetoric of \textit{taishin} (literally, “against earthquakes”) was again invoked in the rebuilding of Tokyo and Yokohama after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, and by 1995, the Japanese government had implemented some of the most stringent criteria for aseismic building in the world. As Haruno Ogasawara has shown, any time an earthquake devastated an area outside of Japan, the Japanese media perpetuated the belief that a similar event could never occur in Japan because “Japanese buildings are designed and constructed to withstand even earthquakes of the magnitude of the Great Kantō Earthquake.”\textsuperscript{19} After Kobe, however, “people’s confidence in Japan’s civil engineering technology was

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\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 212-13. Sano studied with Ōmori Fusakichi, the pioneer seismologist in Japan, and “even accompanied him on an official tour of postdisaster San Francisco in 1906.” Ibid. Sano’s devotion to ferro-concrete manifested in the development of the Marunouchi business district of Tokyo in the early twentieth century. Marunouchi became “the flagship of the resist-earthquakes regime,” and, indeed, the majority of the district survived the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923. Ibid., 222.
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\textsuperscript{19} Ogasawara, “Living with Natural Disasters,” 102.
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shattered.” The author Komatsu Sakyō, a native of nearby Osaka, encapsulated public sentiment:

What had failed was my faith in the construction techniques and earthquake-proof technology that we had been so proud of – the best in the world, we thought – and in the safety standards that we had been told were the toughest in the world. I had also lost all faith in our supposedly world-class knowledge of seismology.21

The failure of the local and national governments to respond swiftly and effectively to the crisis further exacerbated this loss of faith in an “earthquake-proof Japan.” Not only had the most advanced aseismic technology in the world failed, but it also became clear that in their overwhelming focus on “strength” and “resilience,” the Japanese did not have adequate systems in place for disaster relief and emergency response.22

The strongest tremors in the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake occurred in the center of Kobe, creating a 25 x 3 km “damage strip” that ran southwest to northeast between the Rokkō Mountains to the north and Osaka Bay to the south (Fig. 3.1).23 This area is where the greatest loss of life, buildings, and infrastructure occurred. Two-thirds of the 6,443 people who died in the quake were crushed by older wooden housing that collapsed with the initial trembler. The majority of this housing stock consisted of pre-1945 buildings constructed before modern building codes had been implemented.24 These neighborhoods had escaped bombing during the

20 Edington, Reconstructing Kobe, 50.

21 Komatsu Sakyō, “The Day the Big One Struck,” Japan Echo (Summer 1995), 11. Quoted in Ogasawara, 102.

22 Edington, Reconstructing Kobe, 27.

23 Ibid., 49.

24 Ogasawara explains in detail how so many of these wooden buildings failed: “In older homes, many framing members had been weakened by wood rot. Soil failures exacerbated the damage, because the foundations had virtually no strength to resist settlement and connections between the above-ground structures. Impacts between buildings occurred often in Kobe’s residential areas. This interaction would involve a lateral collapse of a traditional housing unit impinging upon a neighboring structure. The heavy roof from one collapsing house often caused the
war as well as demolition during the land readjustment programs that rebuilt much of Kobe in the 1960s. In 1995, they consisted of low-rent housing for blue-collar workers and senior citizens who made up over 50 percent of the death toll, leading the geographer David Edington to characterize the organization of Kobe by its “uneven distribution of vulnerability.” The narrow winding alleyways of these dense timber neighborhoods could not accommodate emergency response vehicles, and much of the Nagata, Higashi-Nada, and Suma wards in the west of the city succumbed to the hundreds of fires that spread throughout the day.

The city’s rail and highway infrastructure were also severely damaged. Most notably, 20 kilometers of the elevated Hanshin Expressway that connected Kobe to Osaka collapsed. The scene of a bus dangling halfway off the edge of a broken section of the expressway was featured repeatedly in news coverage of the event and quickly became “one of the Great Hanshin Earthquake’s defining images” (Fig. 3.2). This frightening image encapsulated the simultaneous collapse of faith in the supposedly advanced aseismic technology used to design elevated highways, tunnels, bridges, and railways in Japan.

A popular reaction among the citizens of Kobe was to describe the earthquake as a form of divine retribution for the city’s development-centered policy in the postwar period. In the high economic growth period of the 1970-80s, Kobe’s expansion as an industrial port city coincided

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25 Edington, *Reconstructing Kobe*, 53. As Edington reports, “During the 1960s land readjustment in Kobe reorganized much of the Sannomiya central business area as well as suburban streets in the eastern wards (Chūō, Nada, and Higashi-Nada wards). The city’s plans at this time also identified that the cramped inner wards of western Kobe – the ones with older wooden housing – were vulnerable to fire disaster. Because the local communities in parts of Nagata and Hyōgo wards were unable to cooperate with one another or with the municipal planners, the city gave up its plans for land readjustment in these areas.” Ibid., 40.

26 A total of 83 hectares of Kobe was lost to fire. Ibid., 50.

27 Ogasawara, “Living with Natural Disasters,” 140.
with its “emerg[ence] as an energetic public developer, as reflected in the oft-used term ‘Kobe Inc.’ (kabushiki gaisha Kōbe).”28 Particularly in the 1980s, the local government embarked on a number of large-scale building projects to expand the port and suburban areas, which in turn “earned Kobe’s city government a reputation as Japan’s foremost public developer.”29 According to Ogasawara, in the wake of the earthquake, “a consensus formed among local Kobe citizens emphasizing that city planners had not put people at the center of development: the city had pursued economic growth as an end and not a means, and traditions and history had been trampled unwisely in the city’s quest for ‘progress,’ defined as ‘internationalization of the port city.’”30 This policy of internationalization and development meant that low-income, elderly, and immigrant communities were left behind. It also explained the lack of relief measures and preparations in place for citizens in the event of a major disaster.

The reconstruction of Kobe and the Hanshin region was the “largest reconstruction effort through urban planning projects in the nation’s history,” and plans for rebuilding went ahead according to the established “Kobe, Inc.” mentality.31 As is often the case with cataclysmic urban disasters, planners, government officials, and building corporations frame post-disaster reconstruction as an opportunity to embark on building projects that had long been envisioned for the city but were not possible due to local protest or financial constraints. The government of Kobe was no different in its opportunistic approach to rebuilding. As Edington explains, “[T]he ensuing fires that devastated parts of Kobe provided opportunities to rebuild districts that city

28 Edington, Reconstructing Kobe, 41.
29 Ibid., 42.
30 Ogasawara, “Living with Natural Disasters,” 141.
31 Edington, Reconstructing Kobe, 11.
planners had been unable to touch before, and to secure funds from the national government for novel infrastructure projects.”32 He calls this the “geography of opportunity,” and, indeed, local officials aimed to revitalize the region and make Kobe competitive with nearby cities in Japan, China, and Korea through a number of high-profile, symbolic building projects.33 The ten-year “Hyōgo Phoenix Plan” included: strict controls over the redevelopment of the older inner city areas through the widening of streets and the creation of more open spaces to act as fire breaks; a number of symbolic projects that had been on the drawing board before 1995 and now served as an “index of resurrected power,” such as a new health science center, an entertainment and media zone, a fashion center, and an enterprise zone; a new airport for Kobe despite the protest of local citizens; and the creation of a new waterfront area called HAT (Happy Active Town) Kobe, home to municipal housing, the Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Art, international research and health facilities, local schools, and a permanent memorial museum and disaster preparedness research center.34

Just as Gennifer Weisenfeld forcefully argues for a “productivist narrative” of the Great Kantō Earthquake, so too did the image of a phoenix rising from the ashes of Kobe serve as a “forceful reiteration of modernity’s logic of creative destruction – aimed at legitimating urban redevelopment and renewal.”35 The focus on infrastructure over people came under harsh criticism by local citizens who accused the Kobe government of being stuck in an outmoded

32 Ibid., xv.
33 Ibid., 14.
35 Weisenfeld, Imaging Disaster, 217.
“‘bubble-era’ mentality of building.”36 As Edington reports, “People still in grief were appalled that a drastic overhaul of their city was being forced on them in haste.”37 Despite the protests at city council meetings and in publications, or the more measured approaches to redevelopment proposed by likeminded architects (discussed later in this chapter), the “Phoenix Plan” went on as planned. Ten years after the earthquake, there was little evidence of the catastrophe left in the landscape. Once again, architecture was used to “bury trauma.”38

Kobe 1995

Fueled by shock and interest from afar, or the need to cope with the trauma on site, the creation, proliferation, and consumption of images is an essential part of the human response to disasters.39 With the proliferation of collotype printing in the late-nineteenth century, photography quickly replaced woodblock prints as the primary means of representing disaster and calamities in print media in Japan. In fact, the first photograph ever to be printed in a newspaper in Japan was that of a natural disaster.40 On August 8, 1888, the Yomiuri Shimbun printed a photograph of Mount Bandai erupting in Fukushima Prefecture, attesting to the early importance placed on photography “as a touchstone of ‘the real’ to provide visible evidence” of disaster (Fig. 3.3).41 Just a few years later, in the wake of the Mino-Owari Earthquake, the

36 “Kobe Airport Too Pricey, Suit Claims,” Japan Times (September 2, 1999), 4. Quoted in: Edington, Reconstructing Kobe, 201.

37 Edington, Reconstructing Kobe, 108.

38 Wigley, “Insecurity by Design,” 85. For a report on the state of Kobe ten years after the earthquake, see: Edington, Reconstructing Kobe, 209-211.

39 Weisenfeld, Imaging Disaster, 81.


41 Weisenfeld, Imaging Disaster, 33.
western seismologists John Milne and W. K. Burton published their photobook, *The Great Earthquake in Japan, 1891*. A study of the collapse of both western masonry and native wooden buildings in Japan’s Nōbi Plain, the photobook also pictures images of the survivors among the wreckage, thus “showcasing the destructive power and human pathos of a major earthquake.”

This dual focus helps to explain the odd description of the book that appeared in the *Japan Weekly Mail*: a document of disaster that is also “a handsomely bound volume suitable for the drawing-room table.”

In the wake of the Great Kantō Earthquake, too, photojournalists snapped photographs that were reproduced not only in newspapers and magazines, but also in commemorative photography books, survivors’ accounts, and postcards. Even in this earlier instance of the use of photography to document disaster, there is evidence of the seemingly contradictory impulse to generate what Elizabeth Cowie calls “the spectacle of actuality” – “a desire for the real not as knowledge but as image, as spectacle.” Weisenfeld notes how these spectacular photographs of the Kantō region in ruins “functioned as both news and souvenirs, rendering their consumers/viewers, inside and outside the devastated locale, into both witnesses and voyeurs.”

Miyamoto’s photographs also need to be viewed with this dual function in mind.

In Kobe, where the debris and damaged buildings were removed at a remarkable rate, the immediate photographic documentation of the city in ruins was necessary in order to visualize and confront the vast complexity of the destruction, the scale of which had been unthinkable in

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43 Ibid., 277.


contemporary Japan. According to Miyamoto, just one year after the earthquake Kobe “had really been cleaned up and any traces of the disaster were miraculously gone.” For him, “This is the power of photographs – that you can still try and convey what it was like to people who did not have direct contact with the scene.”  

However, the photographs that Miyamoto published in *Kobe 1995* do more than convey the post-disaster atmosphere to those outside of the tragedy. In the strict focus on building damage and urban devastation, Miyamoto’s photographs engaged with mounting criticisms against the development-driven mentality of “Kobe, Inc.,” as it had conditioned the city for the disaster and then continued to drive the rehabilitation process. The visual documentation of the failure of this building regime proved essential to the multiple and interrelated critiques of local Kobe authorities, the hubris of postwar Japan, and, more generally, the trajectory of economically-driven urban redevelopment.

In the first few days after the earthquake, Miyamoto was encouraged by an acquaintance in publishing, Suzuki Akira, to journey to the disaster zone and photograph the city of Kobe. With the publication of *Architectural Apocalypse* and *Kowloon Walled City* in 1988 followed by *Angkor* in 1994, Miyamoto had become known as the “ruins photographer” (*haikyō shashinka*) of Japan. It was natural, then, that Suzuki would think of him to document the ruins of the Hanshin region in 1995.  

Miyamoto first visited Kobe just ten days after the earthquake struck. He took the high-speed train to Osaka and then traveled to Kobe by boat, where he spent one day walking around the city center of Sannomiya, barely photographing, merely looking. He returned to Kobe three weeks later and stayed for five days. He traversed the city on foot and by bicycle, photographing the devastating scene that lay before him.

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47 Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, July 10, 2016.
As Miyamoto quickly realized, these ruins were not the same material that he had dealt with at demolition sites, in slums, or in the Cambodian jungle. Even though the landscape of his childhood in Tokyo was also gone, it had changed slowly and incrementally throughout his life. In Kobe, however, the city was erased in seconds: “Without warning, the sudden and overwhelming destructive power of nature momentarily jolted and sent the urban landscape flying in the extinction and death of a city.”

As opposed to the planned and systematic alteration of a city over time which created a series of events to be documented, he realized that the reality of the scene in Kobe would be much more difficult, if not impossible, to convey. On the differences between the ruins in Architectural Apocalypse and what he found in Kobe, Miyamoto has explained, “Demolition is an activity planned by humans that takes place in one corner of the city. But the earthquake blew away such things at once. What is more, it was not just a corner, but the entire city was destroyed. Walking around and around, the rubble went on. To be honest, I didn't know how to photograph it.”

Perhaps it was the very confounding nature of the devastation in Kobe that forced Miyamoto to make comparisons to his previous work with other forms of ruins. In the end, the demolition site provided him with a framework with which to approach an otherwise inaccessible subject. For Miyamoto, photographing Kobe meant producing another “record of

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48 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Toshi no henyō no sokudo” (The Speed of Urban Transformation), in Seija to shisha no hotori: Kobe daishinsai / Kioku no tame no kokoromi (Near the Living and the Dead: The Great Kobe Earthquake / An Attempt to Remember), ed. Kasahara Yoshimitsu and Kimura Toshio (Kyoto: Jinbun shoin, 1997), 114. This essay originally comes from the catalogue for the exhibition in the Japan Pavilion at the Sixth Venice Biennial Architecture Exhibition in 1996, discussed later in this chapter.

49 Mikami Kimio, “Shashinka Miyamoto Ryūji-san / Shinsai chokugo no sanjō kiroku / ‘Chinmoku no huke’ ni atara na imi sagaru / Kaigai de takai hyōka ima, hisaichi ni tou” (Photographer Miyamoto Ryūji / Documentation of the Disastrous Scene Immediately Following the Earthquake / Groping for New Meaning in a ‘Silent Landscape’ / Questioning the Affected Area Now with His Overseas Reputation), Asahin shinbun (June 19, 2004), 2.
urban transformation” (toshi no henyō no kiroku).\textsuperscript{50} Determined to maintain his photographic style even in the face of a disaster area, he employed the same methods that he had used to photograph demolition sites, cardboard houses, and Kowloon.\textsuperscript{51} He traversed the city with a large-format 4x5 camera and set up his tripod to photograph the exteriors of buildings, streets filled with debris, and overturned trains in an attempt to create a “total survey” (maru de sokuryō) of the disaster.\textsuperscript{52} At no point did he enter a building, push his way through rubble, or tread on the destruction. In effect, he tried to maintain physical and emotional distance from the tragedy while systematically documenting the face of it. At one point, he was even mistaken for an official surveyor.\textsuperscript{53}

Miyamoto’s well-established documentary approach helped him to avoid – or at least cope with – the many challenges that accompany the documentation of a disaster zone. The fact that he used a large-format camera with a long exposure time meant that those humans who were moving through the rubble rarely appear in his photographs. This gives the effect of what Miyamoto calls a “silent landscape.”\textsuperscript{54} Of course, the actual post-disaster landscape would have been anything but silent, filled with the sounds of demolition machinery at work, the chanting of prayers at funerals, or loudspeaker announcements by the emergency authorities. But Miyamoto chose not to focus on the human element of the disaster. Perhaps as a form of self-preservation, or out of reverence for the actual victims, Miyamoto restricted himself to the effects of the event.

\textsuperscript{50} Homma Takashi and Miyamoto Ryūji, “Homma Takashi no kyō no shashin: Toshi no kiroku to shite no shinsai shashin” (Homma Takashi’s Photography of Today: Disaster Photography as Urban Documentary), Asahi Camera (April 2013), 197.

\textsuperscript{51} Mikami, “Shashinka,” 2.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Homma and Miyamoto, “Homma Takashi,” 196.

\textsuperscript{54} Mikami, “Shashinka,” 2.
on the urban environment. As the journalist Mikami Kimio interpreted it: “Sometimes that optical instrument called a camera rejects human sentimentality and narration. It is this cool-headed side of photography and ‘the bare facts’ that Miyamoto says he wants to see.” Indeed, from issues of architectural journals devoted to the rebuilding of Kobe to edited volumes narrating the many dimensions of the disaster, on numerous occasions Miyamoto’s photographs of Kobe have been used to illustrate the “bare facts” of the event.

Even without portraying actual people, photographing any aspect of the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake had ethical implications, for a natural disaster in an urban setting is always also a human disaster. The architect and critic Mark Wigley powerfully noted in the case of the Twin Towers: “Damaged buildings represent damaged bodies. And it is the representation that counts.” Thus, in the misshapen, gaping holes of one building one might picture mouths crying out for help or gasping for air (Fig. 3.4), and when confronted with one of the many photos of buildings that buckled with the shocks, one cannot help but think of those who were unfortunate enough to be in these structures on the morning of January 17 (Fig. 3.5). Miyamoto is fully

55 Ibid.

56 Just four months after the earthquake, the May, 1995 issue of the architectural journal Kenchiku bunka (Architectural Culture) carried a feature article entitled, “Reconstructing After the Kobe Quake.” An astonishing twenty-four of Miyamoto’s photographs introduce the feature as full-page, full-bleed spreads. The images are framed as a “document of the quake damage” that sets the stage for a series of articles on the history of Kobe, the challenges it faces in reconstruction, and proposals for temporary housing projects. See: Ryüji Miyamoto, “Hanshin Daishinsai no kiroku” (A Record of the Great Hanshin Earthquake), Kenchiku bunka 583 (May 1995), 55-79. In another instance, Miyamoto’s photographs were used for the cover and front matter of the seminal book on remembering the earthquake, Seija to shisha no hotori: Kobe daishinsai / Kioku no tame no kokoromi (Near the Living and the Dead: The Great Kobe Earthquake / An Attempt to Remember), edited by religious studies scholar Kasahara Yoshimitsu and the poet Kimura Toshio in 1997. This edited volume includes texts by Miyamoto himself, the close friend of Miyamoto, poet Sasaki Mikirō, and the architect Miyamoto Katsuhiro, introduced later in this chapter.

57 Wigley, “Insecurity by Design,” 72.
aware of such associations, and, to that end, he does not sell his disaster photographs in fine art galleries and refuses to give them to museum collections.58

Miyamoto’s resulting photobook, on the other hand, stands as a testament to Wigley’s contention that urban disasters painfully reveal the responsibility of architecture-as-perpetrator. On the occasion of 9/11, he wrote:

Yet amidst the obvious horror, there is another level of trauma that is even more challenging because we are unwilling to acknowledge it, let alone comprehend it. For what might be really horrifying in the end is precisely what was already there. The collective sense that everything changed that morning may have more to do with no longer being able to repress certain aspects of contemporary life. Things that we have been living with for some time were disturbingly revealed. The everyday idea that architecture keeps the danger out was exposed as fantasy. Violence is never a distant thing. Security is never more than a fragile illusion. Buildings are much stranger than we are willing to admit. They are tied to the economy of violence rather than simply a protection from it.59

Of course, an act of terrorism is not the same as the involuntary movement of the earth’s crust. In both cases, however, the threat of buildings to human life became terrifyingly apparent. This was a painful reality in Kobe, where the extent of such violence may have been avoided with more human-minded development schemes, such as the rebuilding of the Nagata, Suma, and Higashi-Nada areas according to up-to-date construction codes. Miyamoto’s photographs, then, contained in one small book, serve as a powerful visual testament to Wigley’s argument, an argument that, as we shall see, was at the forefront of architectural critique in Japan after the events of 1995.

Suzuki Akira, who originally recommended that Miyamoto visit Kobe, published the photographs at the small press Telescope Workshop for Architecture and Urbanism in 1995, the

58 The one exception was in 1999 on the occasion of an exhibition of his photographs of Kobe at the Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art. Miyamoto says that he felt okay donating one of his photographs to the museum after the fact because time had passed since the event and because it was a museum in Europe. He says, “I got the sense that people in Europe were looking at the photos with other things in mind besides the suffering of people.” In this setting, the photographs were more “records of the city” (toshi no kiroku) than records of disaster. Homma and Miyamoto, “Homma Takashi,” 197.

same year as the earthquake. The graphic designer Akazaki Shōichi, who also worked on 
*Architectural Apocalypse*, was responsible for the design of the small and understated photobook (Fig. 3.6). It has a royal blue slipcover with deep pink text centered on the cover that reads plainly in English: “KOBE 1995 After the Earthquake,” followed by attributions to Miyamoto as the photographer and Suzuki as the author of the introductory text. The simplified title is significant. By not using more typical language such as “The Great Kobe Earthquake” or “After the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake,” Miyamoto and his editors direct their readers’ focus to the geographical entity and urban zone of Kobe. As historian Gregory Clancey has noted, the Japanese term often used to designate a “great earthquake disaster” (*daishinsai*), “puts greater emphasis on the human nature of the catastrophe” by naming it as a disaster, not merely an earthquake. Here, Miyamoto once again subtly draws our attention to the architectural and topographical consequences of the earthquake – the state of buildings and urban space immediately following the trembler.

Suzuki reiterates this goal in his introduction to the photobook, a short two-page text, first printed in English translation followed by the Japanese. Suzuki begins with the basic facts and statistics of the earthquake. Interestingly, the numbers he cites for the death toll and loss of housing are in fact far lower than the final statistics, attesting to the speed with which the photobook came together. In this sense, the book itself is an artifact from the early aftermath of the earthquake, evidence of the state of (mis)information well before a metanarrative of the quake had been constructed. After this, Suzuki sketches a picture of Kobe, its geographic location, urban landscape, and notable institutions. Then comes the chaos, an account of the

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60 The coloring seems an unusual choice on the part of Akazaki, as it works to lighten the impression of the book’s somber contents. Miyamoto, interview with the author, July 10, 2016.

severe damage that the tremblers inflicted on the city and its infrastructure. “The earthquake has rendered Kobe unrecognizable,” he claims, “as if to tell us that the city as it was will never return.” Finally, he addresses the photographs: “The photographs collected here show Kobe as it was just after the earthquake. Both in their overall aspect and in their finer details they give us some idea of the magnitude of the force that assailed Kobe’s buildings and the way whole districts were destroyed.” Here, Suzuki frames the photographs as documents that demonstrate the specific and complex ways in which buildings in the Hanshin region failed.

In the conclusion, while discussing the prospects for reconstruction in Kobe he suggests one more important function of these images:

No doubt the wasteland will soon be replaced with a city that rivals what was there before. Tokyo, where I live, has done this many times over. But once that new city is built and all of its activities are resumed, it will lose the strange vitality of the wasteland. Indeed, once a city is built, its past as a wasteland is inevitably forgotten.

The loss of the city creates a void. A void in which people move with a strange vitality. But inevitably we suppress the memory of the void and its vitality by covering it over with yet another modern city. Can we allow ourselves to remain ignorant of all but this option?

Take a close look at Kobe just before its reconstruction began. It may hold some clues to help us toward a reevaluation of our investment in the city and what we look for there.

Beyond the importance of these photographs as documents that enable the study of failed tectonics, Suzuki implores readers to remember the state of Kobe in the immediate aftermath of the quake before those failures were erased from the landscape. The photographs are a reminder

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63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.
of that post-disaster moment when visions of the future were open to interpretation. Claiming the post-disaster *tabula rasa* as a rare moment of dynamic human thought and action, Suzuki asks what alternative urbanisms might be possible. As we shall see in the second half of this chapter, his was not an isolated inquiry, and, again, Miyamoto’s photographs played an essential role in visualizing this critical moment for reevaluating the modern city and its capacity for ruination.

Ruins in various forms are the theme of *KOBE 1995*. Like *Architectural Apocalypse*, *Kowloon Walled City*, and *Cardboard Houses*, all of the fifty-six photographs featured are monochrome. Vertically-oriented photographs are printed one to a page, while horizontally-oriented photographs are spread across two pages. There are no captions, but a list in the back of the photobook identifies the specific buildings or areas pictured by page number. The occasional blank page serves as a visual break that signals the transition to a new group of photographs that can be organized into the following general typologies: 1) Major public buildings, such as Kobe Station, the Kobe City Hall, and the main department stores in the central Chuo and Sannomiya districts; 2) the backstreets of Sannomiya; 3) ruins of the railways and the Hanshin Expressway; 4) Public institutions, including a church, shrine, bank, scenes of the harbor, and the well-known Sumitomo rubber factory in the Chuo ward; and 5) the heavily destroyed residential areas of the inner city’s “damage strip,” mainly the Nagata, Suma, Nada, and Higashi-Nada wards. The final photograph is a two-page spread of temporary refugee housing in the seaside town of Ashiyahama on the outskirts of Kobe. The regularity and unremarkable nature of the uniform rows of housing stand in stark contrast to the visual chaos and complexity that precedes them (Fig. 3.7).65

65 The distant locations of many of the sites for temporary shelters (and later, more permanent housing projects) outside of the city center was a major source of frustration among refugees who wished to stay close to their former homes, neighborhoods, and places of employment. “[T]he isolation of many victims in faraway housing contributed to a sense of distrust and dismay among citizens vis-à-vis the public authorities,” resulting in the persistence of
Relegating the captions to the back of the book places the focus on the photographs themselves, and, indeed, a close look at the very first image orients the viewer in the central district of Kobe despite the lack of text (Fig. 3.8). We stare up at the disrupted grid of a steel-and-concrete building faced with brick and tile. The damage runs up the façade at three clear points of dislocation, leading the eye directly to the upper half of three kanji characters that peak out over the top of the building: kō – be – eki, or, “Kobe Station.” This is the first of many large-scale buildings with serious but visually subtle structural damage. In this initial section, the buildings have not been burnt, nor have they entirely collapsed. Many of them appear perfectly normal at first glance, until we realize that a single floor in the center of the structure has been sandwiched between the top and bottom halves (Fig. 3.9). Buckling was a common issue in the Kobe quake, and Miyamoto pictures this structural failure from multiple perspectives and in multiple types of building materials, attesting to the widespread nature of the problem (Figs. 3.10 & 3.11). These introductory photographs, in which “all of the straight lines of manmade construction had been warped,” reiterate Suzuki’s preliminary critique of the modern city.66

This introductory group of photographs stands out from what follows for another reason: the extent to which the area has been cleaned. Miyamoto himself was shocked at how drastically different this central area appeared one and four weeks after the earthquake.67 Because of the symbolic and functional significance of buildings such as Kobe City Hall, the surrounding area was cleared of all debris and rubble and blockaded by fences within weeks of the event (see Fig.

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66 Sasaki Mikirō, Yawarakaku, kowareru: Toshi no horobikata nit suite (Gently, Ruining: The Ways Cities Are Destroyed), (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 2003), 176.

67 Miyamoto, interview with the author, July 10, 2016.
3.11). While the building itself remained structurally compromised and uninhabitable, the blurred figures that pass in front of the long stretch of the building and the vehicles surrounding it hint at the resilience of the institutions it houses, as local government officials swiftly went about planning for the wholesale reconstruction and rehabilitation of the city.

Roughly a fourth of the way through the book the photographs transition to more detailed street views. Instead of gazing up at or looking down the length of monumental buildings, the perspective shifts to the level of the street, where the viewer peers down alleyways and smaller roads that are not traversable for the amount of rubble that remains untouched (Fig. 3.12). In contrast to the scenes of the Hanshin region aflame or in ruins that were circulated in the media (Fig. 3.13), these are more somber, less “spectacularized” photographs of disaster. Gennifer Weisenfeld has argued that photographs of disaster with a ground perspective “reduce the city to a human scale, thereby acquiring emotional resonance and allowing the viewer to identify with the plight of the survivors.” While Miyamoto is careful not to picture any actual survivors, such emotional

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68 Edington reports how “Tokyo and the rest of the world became absorbed by the scenes of destruction as helicopter and small planes relayed initial pictures of the fires and building damage.” Edington, *Reconstructing Kobe*, 4.


70 Weisenfeld, *Imaging Disaster*, 43.
resonance is certainly possible considering the grounded perspective and wealth of detail in these photographs, which, according to viewers, “make you feel as if you’ve understood.”

By contrast, the following section engages more with those visual tropes of the event that were codified in the media and online – those images that “form[ed] an enduring visual lexicon of the disaster.” Here, Miyamoto pictures trains tipped on their sides, elevated railways with entire sections missing, and telephone lines atilt (Fig. 3.14). In one particularly surreal image, a section of the elevated Hanshin expressway has become dislodged at one end while remaining intact up above (Fig. 3.15). Descending to the ground level, it almost appears to be an off-ramp leading down to the waterway below. Despite the fact that the subject matter of these photographs can be related to those scenes frequently pictured in the media, Miyamoto self-consciously avoided directly reproducing any of the standardized images of the disaster, such as the spectacular image of a bus dangling off one edge of the expressway (see Fig. 3.2). Instead, he offers alternative views of these more familiar scenes, in a sense rounding out the perspective for viewers on the outside. This speaks to the fact that all photographs, while serving as historical records, are always also a form of entertainment.

The next group of photographs depicting Kobe institutions in ruins contains more apparent connections to what would become the metanarrative of the earthquake: the threat that the disaster posed to Kobe’s identity as a cosmopolitan port city. Here, we see a dislodged lighthouse leaning into the harbor, the formidable Dai-ichi Kangyō Bank in the midst of its

71 Hachikado Akihito, “Shinsai ato no Kobe no machi de shashinka ga miidashita mono: Benisu biennäre kenchikuten ni shashin wo shuppin suru Miyamoto Ryūji” (Things Noticed by a Photographer in the Town of Kobe After the Disaster: Miyamoto Ryūji Will Display His Photographs at the Venice Biennale Architecture Exhibition), *déjà-vu bis* 4 (September 1996), 2.

dismantlement, and a completely collapsed wing of the Sumitomo Rubber Factory (Fig. 3.16). We now know that Kobe’s port never returned to its pre-quake production levels; the financial institutions of Kobe suffered a major blow with the failure of the Hyōgo Bank later in 1995; and the rubber factory, once a major employer of the blue-collar workforce in Kobe, became a ghost town. These were the realities that local officials attempted to move past and cover over with their optimistic plans for reconstruction, and Miyamoto’s photographs remind us of those anxieties when they were still fresh in 1995.

The final section shows viewers what they would not have seen repeated in newspapers, on the television or Internet – detailed street views of those residential areas that suffered the most extensive damage from collapse and fires.73 These photographs are physically dark, as burned and crumpled structures seem to comprise every detail of the environment (Fig. 3.17). Buildings are charred or have entirely vanished in the scorched landscape, generating an uncanny resemblance to images of wartime destruction (Fig. 3.18). Some streets have been cleared, but the disaster zone remains an uninhabitable mess. Not one, but every single building in these photographs has collapsed, the roads are fractured, and those wooden residences that did not burn lie in heaps of splinters. These are some of the most disorienting and disturbing images in the photobook, and for that reason they are also the most often reproduced. The devastation is vast, and viewers begin to understand Miyamoto’s initial hesitation in attempting a photographic survey of the event.

“What in the world are these photographs good for? I don’t even know the answer to that. Perhaps they stand as facts. There is also the possibility that if we keep looking at them,

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73 Miyamoto, interview with the author, July 10, 2016.
new meaning will appear.”\textsuperscript{74} This is Miyamoto, still perplexed, reflecting on the potential meaning or usefulness of his Kobe photographs almost ten years after the earthquake. In fact, many architects, artists, and other leading cultural figures have turned to Miyamoto’s photographs in their own attempts to grapple with the earthquake as an urban disaster, to challenge contemporary building practices, and, ultimately, to question the basis of modernity.

Viewing Miyamoto’s photographs of Kobe, the architect Isozaki Arata reflected, “In them, I see visions of my once unquestioned faith in ‘construction,’ now strangely humbled, coming to the surface again.”\textsuperscript{75} Isozaki, who wrote the introduction to \textit{Architectural Apocalypse} and approached all of his designs with the understanding that “the future city lies in ruins,” was, however unfortunately, vindicated by the events in Kobe. Following the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, other cultural critics aligned themselves with his thinking in a practical way, asking how the world could go on rebuilding itself with the knowledge that it would all eventually return to ruins.

The poet Sasaki Mikirō long admired Miyamoto’s work and used his photographs of Kobe in a collection of essays that he published in 2003 entitled, \textit{Yawarakaku, kowareru: Toshi no horobikata ni tsuite} (Gently, Ruining: The Ways Cities Are Destroyed). Four months after the Kobe earthquake, Sasaki wrote the essay that gives the book its name. Based on the large number of deaths that resulted from collapsed buildings, Sasaki called for urban planners and architects to forgo their focus on strength and stability and instead generate a design philosophy based in ruins. His thinking is representative of the disillusion that many experienced after the failure of Japan’s supposedly superior aseismic engineering, as when he writes, “Until now, we have

\textsuperscript{74} Miyamoto quoted in Mikami, “Shashinka,” 2.

\textsuperscript{75} Isozaki Arata, “Frattures” (Fractures), \textit{Lotus International} 93 (1997), 41.
created an image of cities prepared for disaster as if everything will be okay even in the event of an earthquake. We ought to overturn this way of thinking. All types of cities will one day certainly be ruined.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, Sasaki asks how buildings can be ruined more \textit{gently}:

\begin{quote}
The important thing is that someday all buildings will fall. Thus, how to reduce the damage of the collapse should be the design philosophy of the future. When buildings collapse, minimize the damage to human beings. Moreover, minimize the damage to the surrounding area. I am now calling for this new type of design philosophy. How can buildings and cities be ruined gently? This is the enduring lesson of the Great Hanshin Earthquake.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Sasaki’s charge to architects in the wake of the earthquake is strikingly similar to Mark Wigley’s idea for an architecture that is self-conscious of its relationship to trauma: “\[T\]he only architecture that might resist the threat of the terrorist,” or any disaster, Sasaki would add, “is one that already captures the fragility and strangeness of our bodies and identities, an architecture of vulnerability, sensitivity, and perversity.”\textsuperscript{78}

It is significant, then, that the architect Ban Shigeru rose to fame on the occasion of the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Ban, who worked for Isozaki’s architecture firm before entering graduate school and claims Isozaki as an important influence, built many projects in Kobe in the wake of the earthquake – the Takatori Church, temporary “Loghouses,” and the more permanent, “Furniture Apartments” – \textit{all in paper}. Ban advocates building in paper for multiple reasons: it can be made waterproof and fireproof; it is light, mobile, and inexpensive; and it is sustainable. Just like Sasaki, Ban points out, “It is rare for people to die from the earth shaking beneath them.

\textsuperscript{76} Sasaki, \textit{Yawarakaku, kowareru}, 188. This comes from the essay, “Ki to tsuchi to mizu to” (Trees and Earth and Water and…), which Sasaki originally published in the March 24, 1995 issue of the Yomiuri Shimbun.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid. Sasaki originally published this essay, “Ika ni, yawarakaku kowareru ka” (How To Be Gently Ruined?) in the May 1995 issue of \textit{Tokyojin}.

\textsuperscript{78} Wigley, “Insecurity by Design,” 85.
People die because they are crushed to death underneath collapsed buildings."\textsuperscript{79} Ban had attempted to rethink building materials in Japan long before 1995, but the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake confirmed his conviction that “the strength of material and the strength of a structure are unrelated.”\textsuperscript{80}

Ban thus demonstrated a new understanding of “strength” in his paper designs for the Kobe area after the earthquake. He designed the temporary “Loghouses” to be “cheap, constructible by anybody, well-insulated against heat and cold, and beautiful.”\textsuperscript{81} A beer manufacturer donated empty beer crates that Ban and volunteers filled with sandbags to serve as the housing foundations. They used 4-mm thick paper tubes stuck together with waterproof sponge tape for the walls and attached plastic tarps to the ceilings and roofs (Fig. 3.19). Each house measured sixteen square meters and cost approximately 250,000 yen. The Takatori Church was also made of paper tubes, and like the refugee housing, it was intended to be a temporary structure (Fig. 3.20). Not only did the paper church remain standing in Kobe for ten years, but in 2005 it was dismantled and moved to Puli, a city in the Taomi region of Taiwan that had also suffered a major earthquake in 1999. In Puli, the church was renamed the “Paper Dome,” and it served as a community center and tourist site for the area, which was still attempting to recover economically from the earthquake.\textsuperscript{82} The structure is still standing in Puli and maintains its original appearance. In fact, the Paper Dome community in Taiwan purposefully decided to


\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 27.

\textsuperscript{82} Cairns and Jacobs, \textit{Buildings Must Die}, 158.
leave the stains and tears that had appeared over the years, as they understood these marks to be “the most original memories and performance” of the building. In this way, Ban’s Takatori Church stands both for the strength of the gentle materiality of paper and for the notion of architecture – and a blemished architecture, at that – to serve as a container of memory.

**Exhibiting Ruins**

One young Kobe-based architect who lived through the earthquake and witnessed the destruction of his own home became particularly committed to an ideology of ruins in the wake of the disaster. Miyamoto Katsuhiro was struck by how everything around him had turned to *koppa*, or “splinters,” leaving only the original topography of the land. He wrote of the event: “Immediately after the earthquake, wandering around the city, I had the impression that the landscape was comforting me. Walking or cycling over this ground I was able to accept, inside me, the earthquake.” Miyamoto describes an internalization of the landscape that goes beyond a visually-oriented experience to understand – or “accept” – the reality of the disaster. His therapeutic wanderings recapitulate the undoubtedly visceral experience of the event itself, as when he writes, “inside me, the earthquake.”

Miyamoto Katsuhiro conceived a memorial to the disaster based off of these experiences of wandering through the ruined landscape. Entitled *Topographical Healing*, he proposed to pile heaps of actual rubble along a 2.5-kilometer stretch of the Ashiya riverbank in Kobe (Fig. 3.21). The deposit of ruins would connect the Rokkō Mountains in the north with Osaka Bay in the

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83 For Miyamoto Katsuhiro’s vivid account of his experience, see: Miyamoto Katsuhiro, “Gekijin hisaichi to shūhen hisaichi no hazama” (The Threshold Between Areas Severely Struck by Disaster and the Outskirts), *Kenchiku zasshi* 1432 (January 1999), 56-9.

84 Miyamoto Katsuhiro, interview with the author, June 15, 2016.

south, forming a natural embankment “with the feeling of an avalanche coming down the river from the mountains – a topographication, or, rather, an architecturalization – of those sentiments as a memorial to the earthquake and [past] flood disasters.” The embankment would also function as a moving walkway, providing a much-needed north-south passage in a city where the transit systems and roadways are primarily oriented east to west.

Miyamoto had three primary goals for the project:

1. To elucidate and pass on a means of being with unavoidable natural disasters as architectural memory

2. To create a structure that will architecturally complement the issues with north-south transit that are caused by the topographical features of the Hanshin region

3. To redefine architecturally the idea of community, which is believed to have lost its efficacy

With *Topographical Healing*, Miyamoto was engaging with many of the major concerns of reconstruction: how to memorialize the disaster, how to organize civic zones and transit in the city more efficiently, and how to rebuild a sense of community. However, the major difference between Miyamoto’s plan and that of the local government was his reliance on the ruins of the disaster as the foundation for all three of these goals.

Ruins are anathema to reconstruction. Weisenfeld emphasizes this point in the case of the Great Kantō Earthquake: “If successful, reconstruction would wipe away the conflicted memories embodied in ruins and replace them with a coherent commemorative narrative of the tragedy.” In addition to the construction of temporary shelters for the newly homeless, in the

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87 Ibid. Emphasis mine.

88 Weisenfeld, *Imaging Disaster*, 159.
immediate aftermath of the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake the main priority was the removal of ruins. Edington reports that the earthquake produced 15.5 million cubic meters of rubble: “Public funds were used to tear down old buildings, and roughly 80 percent of buildings were demolished and removed by the end of May 1995.” Miyamoto’s proposal was in part a response to this incredibly rapid removal of all visible traces of destruction, for with the debris went actual experiences and memories that were contained in the ruined architecture itself. Certainly, the fractured state of the architecture, infrastructure, and communication systems mirrored his – and many others’ – own fractured state of mind in the months following the earthquake. In this sense, ruins take on a restorative role for coming to grips with the unfathomable destruction of the region. Miyamoto’s proposal suggests an unwillingness to let go of these material remnants, along with a desire to re-live, re-experience, or re-embody the tragedy through the communal collection and preservation of ruins.

Though not in Kobe, a form of Miyamoto’s memorial was constructed one year later in the Japan Pavilion for the Sixth International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale. In 1996, the directors of the Architecture Biennale organized the exhibition around the theme, “Sensing the Future: The Architect as Seismograph.” François Burkhardt, one member of the exhibition’s Committee of Experts, described the theme as “oriented towards the future through

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He goes on: “The waste then had to be sorted; debris disposal was completed in March 1998, more than three years after the disaster.” Edington, *Reconstructing Kobe*, 125.


Often referred to as the “Modern Art Olympics,” the Biennale has been held in Venice, Italy every two years since 1895. The architecture division was added in 1991, and, in 1996, the Sixth International Architecture Exhibition was held from September 15 to November 17.
the recognition of the value of individual research” with a focus on “the innovating architect.”

Here, the term “seismograph” had little to do with the instrument that measures the force and duration of earthquakes. Rather, “seismograph” served as a metaphor for the architect’s responsibility to sense stylistic shifts and experimental tremblers in contemporary design.

Provocatively entitled “Fractures,” the exhibition in the Japan Pavilion was a blunt denouncement of such brazen optimism. A line of mannequins simulating emergency volunteers welcomed visitors to the exhibition (Fig. 3.22). Adorned in orange jumpsuits and waving neon green flags, these robots ushered crowds ahead into the unembellished building, as if the visitors themselves were survivors of the earthquake, fleeing the disarray of the city for shelter in a designated evacuation area. The entrance to the pavilion offered little by way of explanatory text, displaying only the title and names of the project designers: the head commissioner Isozaki Arata; architects Miyamoto Katsuhiro and Ishiyama Osamu; and photographer Miyamoto Ryūji. A pamphlet handed out to visitors read:

The moment the earthquake struck, fractures rushed into this world. Fractures appeared in the surface of the roads, and overpasses collapsed. Faults were exposed in the earth’s surface. Fractures came into high-rise buildings, they lurched, and the floors compressed. Communications networks were interrupted. Tons of public transportation became impassable, and operations were brought to a complete standstill. The wharfs fell to pieces, and the harbor ceased to function. The lifeline supplies of gas, water, and electricity were disabled. Families that became refugees in public buildings lost all privacy. The cases of family ties being split apart mounted. It left psychological wounds.

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94 The pamphlet text is reprinted in: Isozaki Arata, “‘Furatture’: Benisu bienäre 1996 nen no tenrankai no keikaku” (Fractures: The Plan for the 1996 Venice Biennale Exhibition), Kenchiku jūnaru 904 (August 1997), 54.
This introduction made it clear: here, “Fractures” referred not only to the physical terrain of the Hanshin region, but also to the social and psychological disjunctions that escalated in the wake of the earthquake.

The interior of the pavilion failed to reveal any further signposts or discursive framework. The space was flooded with nearly thirty tons of material wreckage and architectural debris lifted directly from the streets of Kobe into a world of high art, aesthetic display, and national exhibition (Fig. 3.23). The plan itself was relatively simple: a square room, sixteen-by-sixteen meters, with four additional walls jutting out from the periphery to break up the space.95 Twenty-two of Miyamoto Ryūji’s photographs of Kobe after the earthquake were blown up into giant 5 x 1.2-meter murals that covered the walls. A path of flattened cardboard boxes guided the flow of traffic, but there were also points at which visitors might stumble through the wreckage, stirring up whirls of dust and unpleasant odors as they went.96 The designers made no attempt to preserve or highlight specific artifacts found among the debris. The unusual plan of the pavilion itself – designed by Yoshizaka Takamasa in 1956 – was actually well suited to the exhibition’s aesthetic. Yoshizaka had left permanent holes in the ceiling and roof of the building, which exacerbated the exposure of the rubble to the natural elements (Fig. 3.24).97 The rain and humidity of summer in Italy heightened the lingering stench of the wreckage.98 An audible telecommunications and safety support system developed by architect Ishiyama Osamu was


piped into the space through a series of odd robots stationed among the rubble, further contributing to the multisensory stimuli.

Wooden beams, roof shingles, pieces of fences, broken chairs, webs of electrical cords and rebar, even a moldy mattress – these are but a few of the things that were arranged throughout the Japan Pavilion. Rather than selecting a single piece of mangled furniture or any other personal object to stand in for the experience of the earthquake, Isozaki and his team gathered as much material evidence as possible, without apparent preference or discrimination. And yet, Miyamoto Katsuhiro’s account of the design process reveals just how constructed and intentional this environment was. He reports that with the help of fifteen student volunteers, the entire space was meticulously laid out in Japan before being measured, photographed, deconstructed, boxed up, and shipped to Venice in late June.  

There is something peculiar about the intentional design of an ostensibly accidental, naturally-dictated environment. And yet, troubled by the speed with which the authorities had erased all material signs and evidence of the earthquake in Kobe, as if it had never happened, survivors such as Miyamoto yearned for that environment as a part of the healing process. As discussed in Chapter 1, ruins have the potential to become representations of memories, and their erasure from the landscape can incite a painful process of secondary loss. Miyamoto’s challenge, therefore, was to make the earthquake “something that existed,” to avoid death denial through the preservation and public presentation of the material that he saw as “indelibly stained with meaning.”

99 Miyamoto, “Mō hitotsu,” 239.

100 We can almost think of Miyamoto Katsuhiro’s project as a self-conscious performance of Freud’s psychic trauma theory, in which the patient repetitively returns to the moment of the trauma in order to master his or her own suffering. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961).

101 Miyamoto, “Mō hitotsu,” 240. Mark O’Neill has described the distancing effects of most museum displays as an engagement with “death denial.” By presenting objects in heavily-fortified glass casings, museums maintain a
Miyamoto Katsuhiro perceived the city of Venice as a particularly appropriate setting for the “Fractures” exhibition. Italy is also a “graveyard of architecture” (kenchiku no hakaba), he contends. Beyond the layers of ruins in historic sites such as the Roman Forum, there is the natural preservation of ruins at Pompeii and Herculaneum, where life in the first century was carbonized with the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. Earthquakes continue to ravage Italy, and Miyamoto was impressed by the artist Alberto Burri’s work in Gibellina, where he encased the ruins of the city in concrete after it was completely destroyed in the 1968 Belice Earthquake. Moreover, Miyamoto points out that the location of the Biennale itself – the Giardini – is a park built from the remains of Venice’s St. Mark’s Square bell tower after it collapsed suddenly in 1902. Thus, the designers of the exhibition understood that the debris from Kobe was only the most recent in a layering of world ruins, an inevitable result of civilization’s modern trajectory.

In 1995, the Japan Pavilion was also in a state of degradation. On working with Yoshizaka’s building, Miyamoto Ryūji recalls, “It is not a neutral space, so it is very difficult to distance between objects and individuals by literally containing the emotional and tragic nature of the artifacts on display, thereby reducing the potential for moments of resonance. Mark O’Neill, “Essentialism, Adaptation and Justice: Towards a New Epistemology of Museums,” Museum Management and Curatorship 21 (2006), 102. The memories attached to these ruins were potent for many who worked on the project. According to Miyamoto Katsuhiro, the daily proximity to the “timber that may have actually crushed people to death” weighed on his own psychological state while working on the project. At one point, he referred to the site as a “graveyard of architecture,” and later, “a necropolis.” He reports that many of the volunteers gradually broke down, overwhelmed by the aura of death that haunted the material. In his records he quotes from one volunteer’s journal: “August 18. It is a place that is missing the feeling of gravity. It has the feeling of killing the dead twice.” Miyamoto, “Mō hitotsu,” 242-3.


103 The town of Gibellina was rebuilt seven miles away from its original location, leaving the former site completely in ruins. Burri’s project preserved the original network of streets, so that when viewed from above the large-scale work of land art resembles a city of tombs.

104 Miyamoto, “Haikyo wo tsukuru,” 102.
exhibit there. […] [T]he entire thing is like an obstacle course. When I went to see the walls, there are parts that were collapsing from the previous year’s exhibition. What is interesting is that we left them as is and then also ripped the edges of the photographs and exhibited them that way.”

Miyamoto’s photographic murals that enclosed the space – the one consistent and potentially stabilizing element of the exhibition – were also manipulated to reiterate the sense of disorder. In an interview on the exhibition, Miyamoto confessed, “I didn’t want it to be pretty. I just wanted to line the photos up on the wall. […] The photos are themselves ruins on paper.”

Thus, the edges of some the murals were ripped or burnt to imitate the aesthetic of the ruin (Fig. 3.25).

When asked why he chose Miyamoto’s photographs for the Pavilion, Isozaki pointed to the crucial difference between these images and those circulated by the media. While documentary photographs taken from helicopters and small airplanes have the advantage of providing expansive and ostensibly more complete views, they still fail to tell the whole story. Isozaki doubts whether any group of photographs could ever convey a complete picture of the event, but he admired Miyamoto’s images for their direct and intimate perspectives, taken as they were standing amidst the rubble at the level of the street. In Isozaki’s words: “You can never truly capture it. But he makes you feel as if you have understood.”

No doubt the life-size scale of the photographs also contributed to their sense of reality. Miyamoto recalls that expanding the pictures to the size of a wall felt like he was “returning the photographs to the

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107 Ibid., 2.
world.” In creating space rather than a flat image, he had the “impression that they had been completely separated from his own hand” as a photographer. Moreover, the thirty tons of debris that was hauled into the building covered nearly half of some of the photographs, undermining their status as individual artworks and incorporating them into the collective disarray (Fig. 3.26).

Significantly, in the context of an international exhibition of architecture, there was no architecture on display as such: no models, design proposals, elevations, or photographs of completed projects. There were no proposals for the reconstruction of Kobe, nor were there examples of recent experiments in aseismic engineering. Isozaki was adamant that this material wreckage represent the current state of architecture in Japan. With the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, the ominous prediction that Isozaki laid out in his introduction to Miyamoto’s *Architectural Apocalypse* – that “the future city lies in ruins” – was realized, and it would continue to be realized again and again in the cyclical ruination that constitutes and sustains modernity.

The Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake was a “symbolic event” for Isozaki. Not only did it confirm the validity of his commitment to an ideology of ruins, but it also occurred at a charged historical moment as the country prepared to celebrate its prosperous rise from the ruins of the Asia-Pacific War. Gavan McCormack explains:

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109 This is in stark contrast to the recent approach taken by Itō Toyoo, commissioner of the 2012 Japan Pavilion at the Architecture Biennale. In response to the devastating earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in the Tōhoku region of Japan in March, 2011, Itō and his cohort presented proposals for post-disaster housing solutions for evacuees. The exhibition, entitled, *Architecture: Possible Here? Home for All*, like “Fractures,” also received the Golden Lion Award for Best National Pavilion.

Three hundred and ten thousand people were made homeless, suddenly plunged back into the world of 1945, where survival, shelter, and sustenance outweighed all other considerations. As in a nightmare, the citizens of the economic superpower watched scenes etched in its collective memory from fifty years before—of a city devastated, its people digging desperately in the ruins for their relatives or belongings, cold and hungry, without food and water.111

Even if the disastrous landscape from fifty years before had not been on the public’s mind and increasingly present in the media and popular exhibitions, similar visual tropes link images of war and natural disasters, particularly in modern urban contexts. According to Weisenfeld:

“Sharing both the spectacular actuality of landmark historical events and the motifs of death and destruction, images of war and natural disasters appealed to the same spectators by highlighting the ever-increasing national stakes of modernity.”112 Thus does the dislocated telephone pole that dramatically bisects the composition in one of Miyamoto’s photographs of the Nada Ward in Kobe (Fig. 3.27) recall Yamahata Yōsuke’s tragic image of a lone utility pole aslant in the barren landscape of Nagasaki on August 10, 1945 (Fig. 3.28). Or, when placed side-by-side, one might not be able to distinguish the temporal distance that separates the bombed out shell of Nagasaki’s Urakami Cathedral (Fig. 3.29) from the crumbling masonry of the Shimo Yamate Catholic Church in Kobe (Fig. 3.30).

Disturbing though it is, the Kobe earthquake gave Isozaki the opportunity to materialize his theory of ruins, to make them tangible and thereby re-insert them concurrently into public memory and a dialogue on the future of architecture.113 He wrote of Kobe:


112 Weisenfeld, Imaging Disaster, 92.

113 Of course, there was also the risk that this emphasis on disaster could reinforce the discourse of a “national victimology and phantasm of innocence” that was cultivated throughout the postwar period and continues to be perpetuated in memorial museums and textbooks on the war. Yoneyama, Hiroshima Traces, 13. However, in my research I have not come across any reviews or responses to the exhibition that engage with this discourse. Perhaps the context of an international exhibition focused on architecture aided in distancing the exhibition from this rhetoric.
In the nineties, the real and the virtual have been reversed in the world of lived experience. [...] It seems that the accidents of 1995 represent a return of the virtual as the real. That is, the events of fifty years ago, the memory of which had come to survive only in images and which had turned into the virtual, have been reversed once more to form the world of the real.\footnote{The multiple accidents that Isozaki refers to are the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake on January 17 and the subway sarin gas attack by the extremist religious cult Aum Shinrikyo in Tokyo on March 20. Isozaki, “Frattures,” 40.}

Here, Isozaki recognizes that history as told through two-dimensional images and textual interpretation alone – what he refers to as “the virtual” – lacks the power to make the past present, or to make history a part of our own lived experiences. Thus, in order to preserve, translate and share the effects of Kobe, or even those of war, he turned to the incoherence, vastness, weight and density of the city’s ruined material self. In this way, architecture comes to play an active role in the narration of history. As Isozaki wrote of the exhibition: “We want to convert the relationship between people and buildings from one of utility to one where the very material becomes a source of memory.”\footnote{Isozaki Arata, “Haikyo ni tsuite” (On Ruins), Kenchiku jōnaru 904 (August 1997), 55.}

A kind of polemical trembler, “Fractures” was meant to engender an experiential shock to the international architecture community gathered in Venice. Far from ignoring the central theme, the Japan Pavilion forced a consideration of the future from the perspective of disaster: how to design for the future with the knowledge that it could – or will – all turn to ruin in an instant? How to respond when hundreds of thousands are left homeless? And just as significant, how to represent tragedy in architecture? Isozaki and his team answered this issue of representation with a presentation of raw material.

Despite Isozaki’s decidedly perverse interpretation of “Architect as Seismograph” (one French journalist reviewed it as “sinister”), the “Fractures” exhibition won the Golden Lion
Award for Best National Pavilion due to its conspicuous impact on visitors to the Biennale. Ruinous spaces are everything that the white cube is not – chaotic, disorienting, overcrowded, uncanny, and naturally dictated. Paradoxically, the reconstruction of an accidental space had the power to conceal the human influence and control that brought these objects to Venice in the first place. One visitor went so far as to describe the experience as a “momentary confusion at the border between truth and falsity.” In contrast to more conventional display techniques (framed photographs of the ruins, wall text listing statistics from the disaster), the construction of a total environment made for a palpable representation of the earthquake, or at least, the effects of it.

The focus on ruined material that characterized the “Fractures” exhibition was repeated in other memorials and displays related to the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. The preservation of ruined material is not new in the context of memorials to disaster in Japan. Indeed, the collection, preservation, and exhibition of charred, warped, or damaged personal objects and debris first began with the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923 and is one of the defining features of the Atomic Bomb Memorial Museums in both Nagasaki and Hiroshima. However, after the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, there was a notable shift in the sheer amount of items on display in addition to a commitment to either preserve or recreate entire ruinous environments.

In and around Kobe, there are many examples of prominent museums and exhibitions that have constructed environments to overwhelm the sensorium and effectively invite spectators to participate in reliving the disaster. The first – and most humble – of these environments to


117 Kinoshita, “A Celebration.”

appear was in Meriken Park on the waterfront in Kobe’s port area. Here, a section of the docks that were dislodged by the earthquake were roped-off and purposefully left in disrepair as a memorial to the disaster (Fig. 3.31). This scene of ruptured concrete and portions of the pier decaying in the water with streetlights still askew attests, according to a contemporary tourism guide, to the “tremendous destructive power” of the earthquake when it first struck Kobe.119 Meanwhile, The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Memorial, Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (Hanshin-Awaji Daishinsai kinen hito to bōsai mirai sentā; hereafter, the DRI) includes a section entitled, “Shinsai chokugo no machi,” or, “The city immediately after the earthquake.” Visitors walk through a life-size diorama of a post-disaster streetscape, complete with the sounds and smells of the catastrophe (Fig. 3.32).120 This is followed by a separate exhibition space where documentary footage and photographs, architectural models, dioramas, and recorded interviews mingle with the personal belongings and corresponding messages of earthquake survivors. In contrast to the isolation of objects in individual vitrines at other memorial museums, which creates an aura of “relic veneration,” here, the items are on display in mass (Fig. 3.33).121 On Awaji Island, which runs directly along the Nojima fault line, the Hokudan Earthquake Memorial Park includes the preservation of a length of the exposed Nojima fault (Fig. 3.34); a ruined wall relocated from Kobe; a house that survived the

119 “Merkien Park,” Japan-Guide, accessed November 17, 2017, https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3552.html. While this vivid presentation of destruction is certainly impressive, in the context of today’s port, completely rebuilt with the lofty Kobe Tower and the fantastical roof of the Kobe Maritime Museum in the background, the docks appear less as a memorial for contemplation and remembrance and more as evidence of the dire situation from which the city so rapidly and spectacularly rebuilt.

120 Today, the DRI functions as a museum and memorial to the earthquake, serves as the headquarters for an active research center on disaster reduction and response, and collects source materials for scientists and researchers. “DRI’s Missions,” The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Memorial Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution, accessed December 1, 2014, www.dri.ne.jp/english/center/mission.html.

121 Weisenfeld, Imaging Disaster, 247.
earthquake, in which the kitchen recreates how the room appeared immediately after the trembler (Fig. 3.35); and an earthquake simulation room in which visitors can experience the same degree of shaking as the Great Hanshin Earthquake for the same duration of time as the original trembler.¹²²

To be sure, visitors to all of these sites are subject to varying degrees of spectacle. But for the creators and directors of the DRI, this constructed spectacle contains an important participatory element. The emphasis on lived experience and a visceral engagement with the material wreckage of the earthquake is as much about passing on the lessons of the disaster as it is about creating a memorial for the survivors to visit. One of the sub-missions of the DRI reads:

_To ensure that the profound feelings of disaster victims and the lessons of the Earthquake do not fade from our memory, DRI works in association with local citizens and communities to continuously collect information on the Earthquake and disaster reduction, and to develop its database. DRI displays and disseminates this information in an easy-to-understand manner to citizens._¹²³

This is about coping, but it is also related to the very practical mission of preparing citizens for the next earthquake. Another sub-mission related to the exhibitions reads:

_In collaboration with disaster victims, local citizens and volunteers, DRI exhibits live experiences and lessons of the Earthquake to the people of the world as well as to the children who are to create the future. DRI motivates citizens and visitors to take a sincere interest in, deliberate upon, and understand the importance of disaster reduction, preciousness of human life, and the value of mutual dependence of people._¹²⁴

¹²² Visitors can now also experience the same magnitude of shaking as the level-9 earthquake that struck Northeast Japan on March 11, 2011.

¹²³ _Hanshin-Awaji Daishinsai kinen hito to bōsai mirai sentā zuroku_ (The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Memorial Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution Pictorial Record) (Kobe: The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Memorial Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution, 2005), 77. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 76. Emphasis mine. A major component to conveying the “lived experiences and lessons of the earthquake” at both the DRI and the Hokudan Memorial Park is the presence of _kataribe_ , or, “first-hand storytellers,” who roam the displays, eager to answer questions that visitors might have and share their own experience of the earthquake.
Post-1995, the rhetoric of *taishin* (“against earthquakes”) had given way to Miyamoto Katsuhiro’s more humble proposal that society learn to “live with” disaster. While I have not been able to find any evidence that indicates a connection between the “Fractures” exhibition and the displays discussed above, the lack of any direct influence is even more telling of this turn to ruins as a wider phenomenon in post-quake memorialization strategies.

In addition to these experiential museums, Miyamoto Ryūji’s photographs continue to convey a sense of the scale, scope, and complexity of the Hanshin region’s ruination. Not only does Miyamoto continue to exhibit the Kobe photographs (his disaster photography, in particular, has received wide acclaim internationally), but in 2006, just over ten years after the earthquake, Miyamoto republished his work in a photobook entitled, *Kobe: The Earthquake Revisited*. Once again, Akazaki Shōichi served as the graphic designer, but on this occasion he approached the cover and front matter of the book in a more somber manner. A matte black cover barely discloses the grey text “Ryuji Miyamoto” across the top of the book with the English text, “Kobe 1995: The Earthquake Revisited,” stretching across the center. Inside, the

125 While Miyamoto Katsuhiro’s *Topographical Healing* was never realized in Kobe, he continued to explore the notion of architecture as a “vessel of memory” in the salvaging of his own childhood home in the wake of the earthquake. Miyamoto, interview with the author, June, 15, 2016. He had planned to turn the residence into an office for his architecture practice, but after the quake “inspectors called the century-old and unremarkable abode entirely uninhabitable.” Buntrock, Katsuhiro Miyamoto, 19. The government offered him money to tear it down, but Miyamoto chose to salvage the compromised structure by reinforcing it with steel frames and cross braces. With a steel tube oriented diagonally through the first floor of the home, piercing the frame of a paper *shoji* screen to anchor it in place, the new design creates a subtle allusion to the structure’s ruinous past. Miyamoto named it “The Zenkai House” (The Completely Destroyed House) and completed the renovations in 1997. In defiance of the citywide policy to scrap and rebuild damaged structures, “Miyamoto’s intention to endure in the place of his birth” was “argued out in architecture.” Ibid. In acknowledgement of his creative use of ruins for architectural innovation, in 1998, Miyamoto was named the “New Architect of the Year” by the Japan Institute of Architects.

126 Before Miyamoto Ryūji’s retrospective exhibition at the Setagaya Art Museum in 2004, in Japan his photographs of Kobe had only been exhibited in Kawasaki City. On the other hand, they have received widespread international recognition with exhibitions in New York, Milan, and Berlin. Moreover, in 2002, they were included in the prestigious international art fair *Documenta 11* alongside other contemporary works related to 9/11. Although Miyamoto’s photographs were obviously of a very different type of disaster, they were exhibited one on top of the other in two long columns to resemble the twin towers. For more on the *Documenta* exhibit of the Kobe photographs, see: “Miyamoto Ryūji KOBE 1995 After the Earthquake,” *Bijutsu techō* 824 (August 2002), 39.
frontispiece repeats the theme of darkness with one of Miyamoto’s prints laid over with a faded grey tone (Fig. 3.36). That now familiar telephone pole leans across the page to frame the title of the photobook, repeated in miniscule white text with Miyamoto’s name in black. There are thirty-seven photographs in total (nineteen less than the original photobook), all printed on the right-hand page surrounded by a thick white border with the area identified in English and Japanese on the facing page. The photographs follow a similar flow as the original photobook, beginning with Kobe Station and concluding with the torched inner city neighborhoods.

The prominent cultural critic Taki Kōji, who was born in Kobe, provided the introductory text, an essay entitled, “Visible Destruction, Invisible City.” Taki, like Isozaki before him, frames Kobe as a part of the “irreversible crises” of history. This is not simply the photodocumentation of a single event, he tells us, but “studies by which to consider the city.”¹²⁷ He asks, “In looking at how an entire city was reduced to bare ruins, should we not turn our thoughts to how we humans have built cities, created cultures and spelled out history, and consider just what we’ve lost sight of in all that time? Does not the ‘invisible city’ consist precisely in these disregarded elements?”¹²⁸ For Taki, an “invisible city” appears when sudden, catastrophic events like the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake reduce formerly symbolic structures to rubble, thus releasing them from their socially-constructed meanings and opening them – and the entire city – up to interpretation. He ties his analysis directly to the calm “directness” with which Miyamoto photographed Kobe, and he encourages readers to use the destruction made visible in these photographs to seek out an alternative definition of the city, a definition that may not be visible or obvious under normal circumstances. Ultimately, Taki’s essay is evidence of how, ten


¹²⁸ Ibid., 7.
years later, Miyamoto’s photographs of ruins were still being used to question the status of the city.

Miyamoto preserved the murals that he created for “Fractures,” and when he exhibits them, he continues to emphasize the decaying materiality of the work. In a 2017 exhibition at the Centre Pompidou-Metz in France, “Japan-ness: Architecture and Urbanism in Japan since 1945,” the thin rectangular partitions do not overlap to form a single coherent photograph as they did at the Venice Biennale in 1996. Rather, they are hung side-by-side so that the edges curl up, revealing warping or ripping that has occurred since their original manipulation (Fig. 3.37). Moreover, by not aligning the panels together, the details at the edges of each partition are immediately repeated in the following image, giving the work a feeling of motion. For example, in one image from the Nada ward, a damaged telephone pole has fallen on cables that stretch down the length of the street (Fig. 3.38). The splitting apart of this photograph into panels with repeating details in the periphery of each reiterates the original shocks of the earthquake, making it seem as though the telephone pole is lurching across the street right in front of our eyes, thereby underscoring the theme of disjointedness.

It is significant that these murals were included in the Pompidou-Metz’s recent exhibition on the modern history of Japanese architecture. They appear between two sections, “Disappearing Architecture (1975-1995) Conceptual Architecture and Light Architecture” and the later, “Overexposed Architecture, Images and Narratives (1995-Present).” The dark, giant murals loom on the back wall of an open room that showcases otherwise lightweight, translucent, and luminous architecture of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries (Fig. 3.39). Their presence in this landmark international exhibition of Japanese architecture speaks to the fact that “Fractures” was not an isolated critique and that the questions posed by Miyamoto’s photographs
of Kobe in ruins defined the state of Japanese architecture at that moment in time. In 1995, a
progressive narrative of state-of-the-art technology, engineering, and design in Japan was no
longer viable. The Japanese city had once again succumbed to widespread destruction, and this
time the architectural community used the Kobe landscape to rethink design philosophy in
drastic ways. Destruction became a certainty, not a possibility or the focus of prevention. In the
process, ruins served as a source of inspiration for design, disaster preparedness, and
memorialization. The ultimate preservation of ruins in Miyamoto’s photobooks and murals
provides architects, critics, historians and curators with a visual archive that continues to be
probed for new and enduring lessons of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake.

3.11 TSUNAMI 2011

On March 11, 2011 at 2:46 PM, a magnitude-9 earthquake struck off the coast of
northeast Japan, triggering a tsunami that reached up to 40.1-meters high and inundated sixty-
two cities and towns across six prefectures. 15,874 people died, another 2,744 were pronounced
missing, and 325,000 became homeless. The tsunami destroyed 263 fishing ports and 129,642
buildings (another 266,512 were partially destroyed) and precipitated the explosion and
meltdown of three reactors at the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant. It was the largest
earthquake ever recorded in Japan and the costliest disaster in world history, with losses
estimated at 16-25 trillion yen.¹²⁹ In the wake of The Great East Japan Earthquake (hereafter,
3/11), modes of coping with, living with, and representing disaster were once again called into
question; the world of architecture underwent another existential crisis; and understandings of
the ethics of witnessing and the capacity for documentation were debated and honed by image-
makers both inside and outside of the triple disaster.

¹²⁹ Itō Toyoo, et al. Koko ni, kenchiku wa, kanô ka / Architecture. Possible Here? “Home-for-All” (Tokyo: TOTO
3/11 was a “photogenic” event “in the sense that it generated photographs.” In fact, as Marilyn Ivy reports, it was “the most widely photographed catastrophe in history.” The sheer volume and intensity of images and videos posted to the Internet in combination with nonstop coverage by the media affected those professional photographers and artists whose natural response would have been to document the events in some way. Miyamoto claimed that he “didn't know how to photograph” Kobe after the earthquake, but he still persisted in attempting to come to some understanding of the events that had occurred there. In the wake of 3/11, not only did he not know how to photograph the Tōhoku region; he found himself unable to do so. He had no real connection to the area and did not know anyone who had died in the disaster, unlike his contemporary Hatakeyama Naoya who had lost his mother and childhood home in the town of Rikuzentakata. In this sense, Miyamoto was keenly aware of his distance from the tragedy in a world of image circulation that otherwise worked to abstract the experiences of those at the center of the disaster. Hayashi Michio explains:

Nuanced differences among those at the center of the disaster were suppressed to make their situation more relatable to those outside its immediate experience; and this relatability engendered a more abstract (and possibly narcissistic) compassion for the victims’ sufferings. Such denial of internal degrees of distance was a precondition for abridging external distance and for producing a flattened-out image of unified national sentiment. The emergence of this constructed scenario of mourning opens up questions of the relationship between reality and fiction

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132 For example, the photographer Kitajima Keizō “has spoken of how the intensity of the media footage reverberated in his head, and he feared that it would influence his picture making.” Anne Nishimura Morse and Anne E. Havinga, “Reflections in the Wake of 3/11,” in *In the Wake: Japanese Photographers Respond to 3/11*, ed. Anne Nishimura Morse and Anne E. Havinga (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2015), 149.

133 Ryūji Miyamoto, interview with the author, July 10, 2016.
that have been raised, critically or uncritically, by many artists, writers, playwrights, filmmakers, and others after 3/11.\textsuperscript{134}

Miyamoto is one such artist who critically addressed “this constructed scenario of mourning” in a work that unravels the complex experiences of those at the center of the disaster and, in the process, evinces what filmmaker Claude Lanzmann calls “the obscenity of the very project of understanding.”\textsuperscript{135}

Miyamoto dealt with the “reality” of the catastrophe and avoided its spectacularization by relying on the experiences of actual survivors in a two-part documentary process that attests to the nuanced operations of trauma and memory. Two months after the triple disaster, a student of Miyamoto’s showed him video footage of the tsunami posted to YouTube by Seto Hashime, a survivor in the town of Kamaishi in Iwate Prefecture. Seto’s video is unusual for its thorough documentation of the entire event of the tsunami, beginning with the tide being pulled out before the first wave moves in to destroy the village’s fishery and port. Miyamoto was stunned by the film and decided to follow up with Seto. In June, he traveled to Kamaishi, found Seto, and inquired at the local city hall if there were any others who had filmed the tsunami. Two other survivors – Ikeda Moriko and Kobayashi Kenzaburo – agreed to share their footage and participate in an interview with Miyamoto.

The final film, \textit{3.11 TSUNAMI 2011}, is made up of three parts. Each section begins with approximately 15-minutes of completely unedited footage of the tsunami followed by a 15-minute interview with the survivor who filmed it. Seto, Ikeda, and Kobayashi were all unrelated


and filmed the tsunami from different areas of Kamaishi: Ryoshi, Arakawa in the Toni ward, and Kariyado in the Hakozaki ward, respectively. While cell phones with cameras were ubiquitous at the time, it is notable that Seto, Ikeda, and Kobayashi all filmed the tsunami with handheld camcorders. There is absolutely no embellishment in terms of transitions between scenes or editing. The context—the title of the film, locations, and names of the interviewees—are all presented as straightforwardly as possible with a stark white screen and black text (Fig. 3.40). All three interviews follow a similar sequence beginning with a description of the survivor’s experience of the earthquake and tsunami, followed by more general questions about their livelihoods, life in Kamaishi before the disaster, and their thoughts on the future of the area. Each segment ends with two sustained stationary shots of the landscape at the time of the interview. These final “photographic” shots are startling for numerous reasons: while all of the tsunami footage was filmed from the safety of the mountainsides above the disaster, these final images take the viewer down to the ground level, the ground that we just watched get wiped away, where grass is beginning to regrow and trucks drive by hauling debris. Miyamoto refuses to qualify the film as “art,” and instead describes it as a raw presentation of experience. He sees himself as a mere facilitator—or, to use the language of Lanzmann, a “transmitter”—and thus lists his name after each of the survivors in the final film.

Despite the singularity of each filmmaker’s experience of the tsunami, certain similarities arise that begin to point to a common mode of (im)perception. All three exhibit what the poet Hosomi Kazuyuki would call “the language of the tsunami”—the tsunami translated into human

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136 Miyamoto, interview with the author, July 10, 2016.

137 Hayashi, “Reframing the Tragedy,” 172.

language and action.\textsuperscript{139} This language manifests visually in the uncut and unedited imperfections of the footage – the shaking of the camera as the filmmaker runs to higher ground or the blurred attempts to zoom in on the landscape. It manifests in the language used to describe what is happening. All three narrate what the water is doing (“It’s receding again.” “Here comes the second wave!” “It’s taking everything away.”), and all three videos are filled with expressions of disbelief (“What is this? ... I had no idea a tsunami could be so big.” “I never imagined something like this could happen.” “I’ve never seen anything like this before. Who could have predicted this?”). In their inability to comprehend the totality of the event, all three tsunami survivors search for recognizable moments in an otherwise completely unrecognizable landscape (Fig. 3.41). Ikeda identifies the houses of friends as they float past (“Chie-san’s house is being washed away!”); Kobayashi scans the landscape with his camera – back and forth, back and forth – as if searching for something particular; and Seto reifies the scene by comparing it to Niagara Falls.\textsuperscript{140}

As viewers privy to the immediate moment in which these survivors experienced the 3/11 tsunami, we are witness to the pathology of trauma, the “impossibility of knowing that first

\textsuperscript{139}Hosomi uses Benjaminian linguistic theory to dissect the poet Kimura Toshio’s prose in Hibi no sumika (Daily Dwelling), a large collection of poetry that he wrote after surviving the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. “An utterly crippled highway, collapsed buildings, a foul stench that floats with the smoke, the backs of people hanging their heads” – this is what Hosomi calls “the language of the earthquake.” He goes on to describe Miyamoto’s film on the 3/11 tsunami in similar terms. Hosomi Kazuyuki, “Shinsai to Shoā: Kimura Toshio-san to Miyamoto Ryūji-san no sakuhin ni yosete” (Earthquakes and Shoah: Approaching the Works of Kimura Toshio and Miyamoto Ryūji), Yama kawa umi 6 (Fall 2012), 64, 66. Interestingly, Hosomi also draws a connection between Lanzmann’s acclaimed film Shoah and Miyamoto’s documentary film about 3/11. Hosomi, a native of Kobe, first saw Shoah in 1995 when it debuted in Japan (ten years after its European release). He worked on the Japanese translation of the film and thought that the disastrous events of 1995 made it a fitting time for its release. He thought of Shoah again when he saw Miyamoto’s film: “You hear the voices of the survivors recording the experience at the same time as you see the city being washed away by the tsunami, and after that the landscape that appears is all too quiet. I felt like I saw a glimpse of that same experimental quality of the film Shoah in that extreme difference.” Ibid., 66.

\textsuperscript{140}All three also attempt to quantify what they are witnessing by comparing it to past tsunamis: the wave breaches all of the defenses, so they reason that it must be larger than the Meiji Tsunami (1896), the Showa Tsunami (1933), and the Chile Earthquake Tsunami (1968).
constitute[s]” the traumatic event. In psychoanalytic theory, traumatic events can never be fully possessed in the moment in which they occur, hence, the unnervingly literal repetition of the event in the form of flashbacks or traumatic reenactments that the victim otherwise is unable to verbalize completely. That is why, as Cathy Caruth puts it, the flashback “conveys […] both the truth of an event, and the truth of its incomprehensibility.” Thus, the original footage in 3.11 TSUNAMI 2011 documents the basic, if incomplete, truth of the event (the fact that it happened); testifies to the incomprehensibility of the event for those experiencing and filming it; and demonstrates to viewers after the fact the improbability of ever understanding what it was like to be there.

Working from the theories of Pierre Janet, Caruth explains the differences between traumatic memory and narrative memory. While narrative memory is “integrated into a completed story of the past,” traumatic memory is “a history that literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood. In its repeated imposition as both image [the flashback] and amnesia [the inability to narrate], the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence.” If the “language of the tsunami” that comes through in the survivors’ footage points to the processes of traumatic memory, in which the “images and enactments” of the traumatic event “are not fully

141 Cathy Caruth, “I. Trauma and Experience: Introduction,” in Trauma: Explorations in Memory, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 10. According to Caruth, the pathology of trauma “consists […] solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event.” Ibid., 4-5.


143 Ibid.
understood,” then the subsequent interviews demonstrate the restorative processes of narrative memory. In all three cases, “the story can be told, the person can look back at what happened; he has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby the whole of his personality.”

Ikeda’s interview is particularly striking. She acts out her experience of the earthquake in astonishing detail, moving through a house that no longer stands, opening and closing doors and cabinets that no longer exist, as she relays to Miyamoto how she searched frantically for her video camera so that she could film the tsunami (Fig. 3.42). This is not a flashback, but a woman repossessing the traumatic day in which her entire world washed away and incorporating that experience into a larger narrative of life before and after 3/11.

Ultimately, in *3.11 TSUNAMI 2011*, we witness how the camera lens becomes both a literal and metaphorical screen through which these survivors attempt to access the inaccessible and protect themselves from the unknowable. None of these videographers pulled a camera phone out of their pockets to record the tsunami because they had been conditioned to do so by social media, and their narratives obfuscate any potential for their cameras to serve as a source of detachment. Instead, the camera seems to intervene in the traumatic process to help the victims possess their experiences and incorporate them into completed, socially constructed narratives of the tsunami just three months after the event. Modern neurobiologists use specific rhetoric to describe the pathology of trauma – “the unerring ‘engraving’ on the mind, the ‘etching into the brain’ of an event” – that recalls the language of photography when it is understood as an essentially chemical-mechanical process that records the “truth” of what lies before it.

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recording the tsunami, each survivor engraved their experience of the event on film, thereby creating a source to which they can return at will in order to relive, repossess, cope with and recover from the unknowability of the original experience. The deliberateness of this act of self-preservation comes through potently when, in her interview, Ikeda repeatedly expresses regret over the fact that she failed to capture the moment when the tsunami first struck her house and pulled it from its foundation.

In her study of image-making in response to the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, Gennifer Weisenfeld posits, “As a fundamentally visual experience, can disaster and its aftermath ever be divorced from the aesthetic, as uncomfortable as that fact may be?” KOBE 1995 and 3.11 TSUNAMI 2011 both attest to the necessary and multiple roles of images in processing these unthinkable disasters, while their content and formal contours reflect a larger shift in understandings of appropriate and ethical aesthetic responses to disasters. While the KOBE 1995 photographs and the exhibitions in which they were involved demonstrated an attempt to know and witness the earthquake through a sustained focus on ruined material, Miyamoto’s decidedly reserved and indirect approach to the events of 3/11 articulates a more nuanced understanding of the knowability of traumatic experiences. Taking the “obscenity of understanding” as a given, Miyamoto resorted to the “act of transmitting,” rather than documenting, one component of the triple disaster of 3/11. In both Kobe and Tōhoku, his work preserves some element of the original traumatic landscape that allows survivors and outsiders to continue to revisit the early aftermath and ask critical questions about our methods for living with modern disaster.

146 Weisenfeld, Imaging Disaster, 139.
Chapter 4: Deconstructing the Camera, Burying the City

“What kind of gaze does the city license? What kind of gaze does the city induce?” – Hubert Damisch, *Skyline: The Narcissistic City* (2001)

The photobooks, projects, and exhibitions discussed in the first three chapters all engaged approaches to urban space that ran counter to the building trends that dominated the trajectory of architecture and planning in postwar Japan. These approaches question notions of progress and interrogate the ever-shifting urban fabric of Japanese cities. This final chapter provides a more explicit focus on the role of photography in revisualizing the city according to these alternative approaches. If the subject matter of ruins as materialized in demolition sites, slums, cardboard houses, and disaster areas served as an impetus to question the prevailing logic of progress, then this final chapter considers how Miyamoto reconceived this message in the form of an actual strategy for perceiving the city differently – what I am calling ruins-as-method.

Inspired by his encounters with cardboard houses, in 2000, Miyamoto created his own small wooden box – a pinhole house (*pinhōru no ie*) – from which to view and photograph the urbanscape. His pinhole photographs have been portrayed as a “major change” from the three decades that he spent photographing ruinous structures, but I do not see it that way. Just as ruins represented the fractured status of signification in the late-capitalist city, the view from the pinhole house facilitates a complete semiotic leveling of the visual field that allows for a meaningful reconception of the urban landscape in which marginal architectures, such as

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cardboard houses, are no different from the monumental skyscrapers in whose shadows they reside.

This chapter begins with an explanation of the pinhole camera as professional and amateur photographers reengaged it in the 1990s and early 2000s. The boom in so-called “antiquarian” approaches to photography at the turn of the century was in part a reaction to the supposedly desensitized nature of digital photography, but it should also be understood in the context of a more widespread turn to craft and the materials of photography as sources of authenticity at a time of rapid social change.\(^3\) I analyze the discourse surrounding the contemporary pinhole movement to reveal its primary values and methods. I then describe how Miyamoto, along with the other well-known artists Yamanaka Nobuo and Homma Takashi, adhere to and diverge from these trends. While photographers of the larger vernacular movement underscore the multisensory experience of working with a pinhole camera, Miyamoto and others use it to occupy radically objective positions in their photographic practice. In doing so, they deconstruct and emphasize the basic mechanisms of the camera – a central tenet of the larger pinhole movement.

As is the case with most of Miyamoto’s projects, the conceptual parameters of his work with the pinhole camera has its basis in architectural discourse. Drawing connections to the architect Hara Hiroshi’s theory of “burying the city,” I explain the motivations and goals of Miyamoto’s pinhole photography. This necessitates a consideration of the position of the homeless in his work, as the pinhole house grew out of his original experience with cardboard

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\(^3\) In Japan, one form of change that plagued society at the turn of the century was a growing awareness of social divisions in light of the “lost decade” of the 1990s discussed in the introduction to Chapter 3. For more on this history, see: Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 310-16. The term “antiquarian” comes from the title of Lyle Rexer’s study of contemporary photographers who experiment with early photography practices. Lyle Rexer, *Photography’s Antiquarian Avant-Garde: The New Wave in Old Processes* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002).
houses. The novelist Abe Kōbō’s *Hako otoko* (The Box Man) from 1973 facilitates a semiotic reading of images that are produced from the peephole of a small, human-scale box on the floor of the city. The box man’s peephole is Miyamoto’s pinhole, and both offer a new mode of reading the city that operates outside of a capitalist value system.4

**The Rise of Pinhole Photography at the Dawn of the Digital Era**

From photograms to platinum prints, alternative approaches to automatic point-and-shoot photography spiked among professional and amateur practitioners around the globe in the late 1980s and continue to flourish in the present day. As Lyle Rexer recounts in his informative history, *Photography’s Antiquarian Avant-Garde: The New Wave in Old Processes* (2002), in the late twentieth-century, books on these alterative processes were published and early photography manuals reprinted; journals dedicated to the topic were circulated; exhibitions were held and new theses written – global events that “drew renewed attention to photography as a historic art.”5 The reasons for this primitivist turn are multiple: from the emergence of a postmodern culture that reengaged with historical imagery, to early photography’s “relegitimiz[ation] as art object” when the art market swelled in the 1980s.6 The most transformative event for the field of photography in the late twentieth-century, however, had to be the introduction and eventual proliferation of digital cameras in the mass market. Sony introduced the first electronic digital camera in 1982, and by the mid-1990s affordable digital point-and-shoot cameras were available to the average consumer. Ambivalence prevailed as

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4 I use *Hako otoko* in a complementary way to Jonathan Reynolds in his analysis of the “urban nomad.” However, while Reynolds focuses on mobility in the streets of Tokyo, I am concerned with vision. Reynolds, *Allegories*, 193.

5 Ibid., 24. For a list of important publications, exhibitions and events regarding antiquarian photography in the west, see Rexer, *Photography’s Antiquarian Avant-Garde*, 22–4.

6 Ibid.
photographers, academics, and the public decried the impending death of analog and attempted to delineate the differences – and dangers – of the digital format.\(^7\)

Simultaneously, “how-to” manuals, photobooks, workshops, and exhibitions of contemporary approaches to early photography appeared in increasing numbers, reaching a peak in the early 2000s when digital cameras succeeded in replacing analog on a large scale.\(^8\) In Japan, salient events from this history include the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography’s workshop series, “Koten Gihō,” or, antiquarian methods, begun the year the museum opened in 1990. Running continuously until 2011, the workshop covered everything from cyanotypes, albumen prints, gum prints, and calotypes. Students attended lectures, viewed the museum’s collections, and created a work of their own. On the value of one workshop on platinum prints, the instructor wrote, “From this personal experience of actually coming into contact with platinum prints, you will come to know the fascination of a kind of photography that differs from the everyday.”\(^9\)

Since the 1990s, photography enthusiasts have had more and more opportunities to encounter works that “differ from the everyday.” In recent years, Tokyo galleries and museums have experienced a boom in exhibits on the history of photography’s origins, along with shows of contemporary photographers experimenting with primitive methods.\(^10\) 2015 saw the opening

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\(^7\) For more on the details of these debates, see: Julia Breitbach, *Analog Fictions for the Digital Age: Literary Realism and Photographic Discourses in Novels after 2000* (Rochester: Camden House, 2012), 34-44.


\(^10\) I have observed this trend in museums and multiple types of commercial galleries. For example, in December 2016, Taro Nasu Gallery showed Homma Takashi’s latest camera obscura works at the same time that the IMA Gallery in Roppongi displayed a collection of platinum prints by multiple authors. Then, just a few months later in
of Monochrome Gallery RAIN, an exhibition space in western Tokyo devoted entirely to contemporary monochrome works produced with antiquarian techniques. The director, Amemiya Kazuo, stresses that the primary requirement for exhibiting in his gallery is that the final processing of the work is done with nineteenth-century methods. Contemporary practitioners of antiquarian photography all stress the importance of their processes, along with the components of time, labor and materials. While academics debated the threat of digital imaging to photography’s unfading claims to Realism, a peripheral, vernacular movement reengaged the fundamental processes of photography and the basic mechanisms of the camera.

As the practice most closely related to the origins of photography and most deserving of the characterization “antiquarian,” pinhole photography is one of the more far-reaching examples of this movement. Practitioners of pinhole photography rarely speak of indexicality when listing the benefits of their method. Instead, they celebrate the apparent “magic” of the medium and the “otherworldly atmosphere” that results from a long exposure time and the lack of a lens. Such rhetoric harkens back to the startled reactions of naïve viewers in the early days of photography, further underscoring the primitivist impulse behind these contemporary trends. Other antiquarian


12 As Julia Breitbach succinctly puts it, “In the end, the ambivalence of public and academic responses all boiled down to the medium’s salient, long-standing, and undying association with a superior kind of realism.” Breitbach, Analog Fictions, 36.

13 Throughout its history, the pinhole apparatus has been used to “create a reality separate from the everyday kind.” For example, in 1558 Giambattista della Porta published the book Magia Naturalis (Natural Magic), in which he “used the projected image as a way of appealing to people’s sense of mystery.” Tani Arata, “Nobuo Yamanaka: A World Revealed Through a Pinhole,” trans. Stan Anderson, in Yamanaka Nobuo zensakuhin (The Complete Works of Yamanaka Nobuo), ed. Yamamoto Kazuhiro (Utsunomiya: Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), 26.
methods, whether daguerreotypes or collodion prints, are described with a similar rhetoric that emphasizes the materials, the handmade-ness, the “slow time,” and the pleasure of the photographic process and resulting work.

There are three main components to a pinhole camera: 1) a completely sealed room that light cannot penetrate; 2) a small hole that light can get through; and 3) light-sensitive material inside the darkroom that reacts to the light entering through the pinhole. There is no lens, viewfinder, or mirror to correct the orientation of the image. Thus, the image that is fixed to the light-sensitive material appears upside-down and rotated 180 degrees (Fig. 4.1). Depending on the size of the box and the pinhole, the exposure time can last anywhere from minutes to hours to days. The fundamental principles of the pinhole apparatus were known in Ancient Greece and gained popular interest for the study of light throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. The pinhole was used to study solar eclipses without staring directly at the sun, to entertain in magic games, and as a sketch tool for artists. In 1685, Johann Zahn added a lens and a mirror to the pinhole to create the more precise camera obscura, famously used by painters such as Johannes Vermeer to accurately depict spatial perspective.¹⁴

Most articles and books on pinhole photography in Japan recount this history, but they also detail an instance of the phenomenon specific to the Japanese experience. The introductory paragraph to an article on pinhole photography from 1982 recounts:

One morning, I closed the shutter doors and slept late. When I awoke, the glittering scenery from outside was on the ceiling. It was a continuation of my dreams – the light from outside had filtered through the knothole in the shutters (amado no fushiana). I wonder if you have experienced this? […] It is a form of the pinhole phenomenon.”¹⁵

¹⁴ “Sekai saidai no pinhōru kamera jitsugen: Heya zentai ga kamera ni natta” (The Realization of the World’s Largest Pinhole Camera: An Entire Room Turned into a Pinhole Camera), Shagaku 3:10 (October 1982), 1775.

¹⁵ Ibid.
As Hokusai illustrated in one woodblock print from his acclaimed series *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*, it is a common occurrence in traditional Japanese architecture for a hole in the wooden exterior shutters to act as an aperture, projecting the view from outside onto the paper screens inside the building (Fig. 4.2). Hokusai’s depiction of an inverted Mount Fuji illustrates the fundamental principle of the pinhole apparatus – the capturing of light directly without the use of a lens.

The permanent capture of light on the surface of paper is what differentiates the pinhole phenomenon depicted by Hokusai from pinhole as a photographic practice. After the invention of the daguerreotype in 1839 followed by Fox Talbot’s calotype negative process in 1841, the pinhole could be used as a form of photography. While the word for photography in Japanese (*shashin*) does not translate to the English meaning of “writing with light,” many contemporary Japanese articles on pinhole photography make a point of explaining the etymology of the English word. They do so because embedded in the English word “photography” is the multisensory materiality that governs the way people think, talk, write about and learn from pinhole photography today. As Margaret Olin explains in her study, *Touching Photographs* (2012): “The word *photograph*, meaning ‘light-writing,’ evokes both vision and touch, and in exploiting the slippage between the two parts of its name, *photography gains power as a relational art*, its meaning determined not only by what it looks like but also by the relationship we are invited to have with it.”

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16 The term *shashin* can be translated as “true portrayal.” It was used as a term to signify verisimilitude in the Edo period until it was adopted as the Japanese word for photography in the nineteenth century. For more on the etymology of the word, see Satō Doshin, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty*, trans. Nara Hiroshi (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2011), 231-254.

relationship to their pinhole cameras and their work suggests a deeply haptic knowledge of the pinhole process that stands in stark contrast to the purely visual modes of interpretation so frequently used to discuss photography.

This includes Jonathan Crary’s analysis of the desensitized and decorporealized mode of vision facilitated by the camera obscura in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe. Crary writes that a “decisive function of the camera was to sunder the act of seeing from the physical body of the observer, to decorporealize vision. The monadic viewpoint of the individual is authenticated and legitimized by the camera obscura, but the observer’s physical and sensory experience is supplanted by the relations between a mechanical apparatus and a pre-given world of objective truth.” The amateur practitioners that I examine approach the pinhole more as craft than as “mechanical apparatus.” In doing so, they describe an attempt at a re-corporealization of vision in the late-modern urban environment.

There are multiple types of pinhole cameras, from those manufactured by Fujica and Ricoh to the pinhole photography kit “Pinhole 80” created by Polaroid. Some photographers choose to repurpose 35 mm single-lens reflex cameras by removing the lens and drilling a small hole into the camera cap. Ishii Akira and Hosaka Ken recommend these for amateurs who are “looking to have fun” with the pinhole camera. These cameras, however, can be looked down upon for “producing standardized photographs,” as well as for their lack of flexibility when it comes to achieving the individual photographer’s vision and goals. As such, the most popular

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20 Nakajima Masami, “Hariana shashin no miryoku” (The Fascination of Pinhole Photography), Ōsen 720 (March 2009), 12.
approach to the pinhole is certainly to build one’s own handmade camera. The most basic form is made from heavy paper such as cardboard, but, as any airtight container will do, photographers such as Ōte Kumi also make cameras out of things such as tin candy boxes. Miyamoto created a camera “the exact size of a human body” with a cardboard box, and, in its most extreme version, well-known artists such as Yamanaka Nobuo and Homma Takashi have transformed entire rooms into pinhole cameras.21

“How-to” guides on building your own pinhole camera appear in popular photography journals in Japan as early as 1951, but they picked up frequency in the 1990s and became commonplace in the early 2000s.22 The desire on the part of professionals to share and educate photo enthusiasts on the joys of pinhole is exemplified by the publications of the Japan Pinhole Photography Society (Nihon Hariana Shashin Kyōkai, hereafter, JPPS), established in 2005 in the midst of the pinhole boom in Japan. When it began, the JPPS had divisions in Tokyo and Kyoto that conducted workshops, symposia, classes and photography groups. In 2005, it consisted of 250 members across the country, “men and women, young and old who all joined to persistently contribute to the popularization and advancement of the culture of pinhole photography.”23

In these publications, four aspects of the pinhole camera receive repeated attention: the lack of expense, the simplicity of the method, the fact that it is handmade, and the pleasure that


22 In 1951, Nishimura Gakkan, co-founder of the Kōnan Camera Laboratory with Tanaka Harumi, published an article on the inexpensive alternative of a handmade pinhole camera in the early postwar years. Nishimura Gakkan, “Jyūen de satsuei wo tanoshimu pinhōru kamera” (Having Fun Taking Pictures for Ten Yen – The Pinhole Camera), Kagaku asahi (July 1951), 29-33.

23 “Hariana shashin no surō na miryoku” (The slow fascination of pinhole photography), examiner 213 (June 2005), 82. In 2017, there were 117 members of the JPPS. “Nihon Hariana Shashin Kyōkai shinchaku jōhō,” http://jpps.jp/web/index.htm, accessed August 11, 2017.
arises from the entire process. An article from 1951 by Nishimura Gakkan celebrates the fact that you can make your own camera for just ten yen.\textsuperscript{24} Writing seventeen years later, the designer Tomura Hiroshi speaks to the democratizing effects of the pinhole movement, calling it a “privilege” (tokken) to be able to practice photography with nothing but a cardboard box.\textsuperscript{25} And the cover page to an article from 2005 proclaims in English, “Cheap but miraculous!”\textsuperscript{26} The few modest materials that are required to make a pinhole camera are then also the grounds for its apparently simple construction and performance. Professionals such as Kitadai Shōzo insist repeatedly that “it can easily be picked up by anyone.”\textsuperscript{27} Nomura Hiroshi summarizes, “If you have an empty box or can, or even a single room, printing paper or film, you can easily make a pinhole camera.”\textsuperscript{28}

The pinhole camera is simple in theory, and so it has been billed as simple in practice. Yet, as Suzuka Yasu, President of the JPPS, points out, once you begin to refine your strategy – considering aspects such as exposure time, size of the hole, size of the box, type of paper or film, etc. – the entire process can become quite complicated and the results varied.\textsuperscript{29} However, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Nishimura, “Jyūn de satsuei,” 29.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Tomura Hiroshi, “Tanoshii zōkei Pinhole camera: Chō waido no hariana shashinkī” (Fun Design with a Pinhole Camera: The Ultra-Wide Pinhole Camera), \textit{Bijutsu techō} 300 (July 1968), 44.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Nomura Hiroshi, “Toi kamera to pinhōru kamera” (Toy Cameras and Pinhole Cameras), \textit{PHAT Photo} 3:27 (May–June 2005), 15.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Kitadai Shōzō, “Renzu nashi de shashin wo toru: Pinhōru kamera no sekai” (Photographing Without a Lens: The World of the Pinhole Camera), \textit{Kagaku asahi} (May 1972), 23.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Nomura, “Toi kamera,” 17.
\item \textsuperscript{29} “Hariana shashinkī no surō na miryoku,” 83. Nakajima Masami elaborates on the many variables to consider when practicing pinhole photography: “By changing the size of the hole and the thickness of the material, it is possible to adjust the resolution and the amount of peripheral light. In addition to copper and brass foil, others use beer cans and telephone cards. When the thickness of the material is large, an image can be obtained with a reduced amount of peripheral light. In addition to the thickness of the material, the angle of view also greatly affects the amount of peripheral light. For ultra-wide-angle cameras, the amount of ambient light may be too low, so use a thin material to adjust it.” Nakajima, “Hariana shashin,” 12.
\end{itemize}
time spent experimenting is also pitched as a value. As Suzuka puts it, “It’s fun that takes time and effort.”

In her book, *The Pinhole Photography of a Mother and Child* (*Haha to kodomo no hariana shashin*, 1993), Tadokoro Mieko also understands the labor involved as the foundation for potential “playfulness and inventiveness.” In the process of experimenting, one learns about the basic mechanisms of the camera and engages in a sustained multisensory activity that involves more than the simple loading of film, the clicking of a shutter, or the touch of a screen. As one member of the JPPS expressed, “The fun begins with the making of the camera to capture an image, rather than just having a camera to begin with.”

For Kitadai Shōzō, this was precisely the value of pinhole cameras: “In a time when everything is sped up and instantaneous […] one can take a perfect picture by just clicking the camera shutter closed, but the skill of the photographer to bring out the mechanisms of the camera no longer matters.” He goes on, “*Neither the photographer’s hands nor his legs become a part of the process.*” On the other hand, many pinhole photographers describe a highly sensitized, active body in their practice. Observe, for example, Sugimori Kanako’s description of her experience with her pinhole camera, lovingly named “Zero-kun”:

> Everyday walking around with Zero-kun, I feel a sense of excitement, like my antenna is out more than usual. What will happen if I turn my pinhole on this thing? Beautiful stairs, the fluctuations in the grass, floating clouds, the light from windows, the landscape seen from the window of an airplane… I sense my curiosity unfolding.

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30 Ibid. 84.


Sugimori refers to her camera as her “partner” (aibō). Here, the camera is a stimulant that enhances her experience in the world. Nishimura Gakkan aptly summarizes this relationship: “[T]he main benefit of [pinhole] is that the camera does not use human beings to photograph, but human beings use the camera to photograph.”

Many pinhole photographers celebrate the potential for a more primal experience based on their embodied and emotional engagements with the camera. Indeed, Sugimori’s naming of her camera “Little Zero” draws attention to the crude format of the device – the degree-zero of photography. As has often been the case with reactionary movements to modernization and rapid social change, with the pinhole boom, an embodied photographic practice was understood by many as a therapeutic return to a purer, originary form of being and learning. Practitioners often reference the “slow time” (surō jikan) of the pinhole camera, a central aspect of the process that has been described as affecting the mental and physical state of the photographer as well as the final aesthetic of the photograph. The long exposure time required by the rudimentary apparatus means that moving objects do not appear in the final images. Thus, photographs of the city are emptied of speeding cars and bustling crowds of people. As the photographer Ueda Koichirō describes it: “The flow of fast time in the city slows down and you discover a new world that is different from your everyday life. It is a world that can be expressed only through

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35 Nishimura, “Jyūen de satsuei,” 29.

36 As is often the case with modern primitivisms, the descriptions of these engagements can become problematic. At times, the supposed simplicity of the pinhole has been identified as a specifically feminine practice that “bewitches” “girl photographers.” “Hariana shashin ni bakaserarete” (Bewitched by Pinhole Photography), Camera Hiyori 2 (Spring 2005), 98. Meanwhile, others place it in the category of “children’s photography.” Ishii, Pinhole, 5.

37 It is common for photographers to present the long exposure time as a disadvantage of the pinhole camera, only to then celebrate the “superior works” that are possible by removing moving objects from the scenery. Tomura, “Tanoshii zōkei,” 49. See also: Nishimura, “Jyūen dde satsuei,” 33; Kitadai, “Renzu nashi de,” 23.
photography.” Indeed, in one of Ueda’s pinhole photographs of Shinjuku, the viewer has no sense of the bright and colorful signage, noisy stores, or bustling crowds of people that characterize this hub of entertainment, business, and commuter travel in contemporary Tokyo (Fig. 4.3). Here, Shinjuku is pictured as a ghost town, fading away under the soft focus of the pinhole camera.

The blurred edges, soft focus, and other visual distortions that are possible with the pinhole camera create aesthetic effects that have been described as “fantastical,” “mysterious,” and “otherworldly” (Fig. 4.4). These features can be pushed to extremes so that the final work is not immediately recognizable as a photograph at all. The soft, painterly aesthetic is comparable to the work produced by pictorialist art photographers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Arguing for photography’s status as a Fine Art, increasing numbers of amateur photographers in pursuit of the pure artistic character of photography formed groups to experiment with soft-focus and pigment printing techniques. For example, in Nojima Yasuzô’s photograph from 1910, Muddy Sea, he used the gum-bichromate printing process to replace the silver with layers of pigment that “produces a painterly effect similar to that of charcoal of conté crayon drawings” (Fig. 4.5). In both Ueda’s and Nojima’s


41 Ueda, “Tokyo sansaku,” 121.


43 Ibid.
works, the varying accumulations of monochromatic tones give the images a sense of expression. Moreover, as Lyle Rexer has pointed out, art photography “proposed photography as a handmade process, linking this essentially industrial mechanism with the arts-and-crafts movement of the late nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{44} Both movements, then, valued the “handwork” of the singular photographic artifact.\textsuperscript{45}

Central to pictorialist art photography was the realization of the artist’s own ideals – what the pictorialist Katō Seiichi called “idealistic photographs” as opposed to “realistic photographs.”\textsuperscript{46} However, the romantic aesthetic of pinhole, at least as it is practiced in the world of amateur photography, should not be understood as entirely disconnected from claims to reality. In its ability to “reveal worlds that we cannot see and erase worlds that we can see,” practitioners argue that the pinhole camera encourages a consideration of alternative, or invisible, realities.\textsuperscript{47} These alternative realities are not based in visual accuracy; rather, they are formed from those aesthetic merits that are particular to the pinhole medium.

Not only do photographers celebrate the impression of a tranquil world contained in the space of the pinhole photograph; they also describe a personal awareness of the slowing of time that accompanies a “long gaze.”\textsuperscript{48} Tadokoro encourages her readers:

> [O]bserve the subject carefully. Let’s imagine what kind of change is happening in the box from the time of opening the shutter to when it is closed. For example, “Now, parts of the sky are showing up.” “Next, the brightly lit leaves in that tree

\textsuperscript{44} Rexer, Photography’s Antiquarian Avant-Garde, 14.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Kaneko, “The Origins and Development,”107.

\textsuperscript{47} Tsukada Hiroshi and Edward Levinson, “Gendaijin no kokoro wo iyasu!? Pinhōru kamera no purimitibu na sekai” (Therapy For the Soul of Modern Man!? The Primitive World of the Pinhole Camera), Photo: Visual Bi-weekly Magazine 46:21 (November 1, 1999), 38.

\textsuperscript{48} Ishii, Pinhole, 6.
In Tadokoro’s description, imagining the processing of the image inside the camera facilitates the rigorous visual observation of the scene in front of her. Other photographers explain this kind of exercise in meditative terms. The busyness of modern life, they claim, creates “few opportunities for looking,” while the slow time of the pinhole enables a bodily awareness that allows one to “transcend the ages.” The English photographer Edward Levinson, who lives and works in Japan, goes so far as to claim, “In the soft light and slow time of the pinhole photograph lies a mysterious power to heal the soul of the busy modern person.” It is “therapy for the soul of modern man” (Fig. 4.4).

Pinhole Rooms

While framed in much less lofty terms, in practice, those who turn entire rooms into pinhole cameras visualize the heightened physical relationship between the perceiving body of the photographer and the photographic process. Miyamoto Ryūji designed a small, portable pinhole house; Yamanaka Nobuo used his own bedroom; and Homma Takashi turns hotel rooms into pinhole cameras. The transformation of a large space into a camera requires that the photographer be inside the camera to initiate the flow of light through the pinhole and then remain inside for the duration of the exposure time. The photographer’s body is submerged in the photographic process, and, indeed, many describe a “feeling like that of film” while waiting in the darkness to perceive the beam of light. According to Homma, it takes about seven minutes

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50 Tomura, “Tanoshii zōkei,” 49.

51 Tsukada and Levinson, “Gendaijin no kokoro ,” 35.

52 “Sekai saidai no pinhōru kamera jitsugen: Heya zentai ga kamera ni natta ,” 1778.
for one’s eyes to adjust to the darkness and perceive the cinematic scene of outside imagery that faintly appears on the surrounding walls. Then, the exposure time can last anywhere from thirty minutes to seven hours depending on the weather.\footnote{Takashi Homma, interview with the author, May 16, 2017.}

Of these three photographers, Yamanaka Nobuo (1948-1982) is perhaps most well known for his many iterations of the pinhole room. Yamanaka was of the same generation as Miyamoto; they attended Tama Art University at the same time and both participated in the activist group Bikyōtō.\footnote{While Miyamoto was a founding member of Bikyōtō, he quit the group after the failed student movements of 1969. Miyamoto, interview with the author, December 13, 2015. Yamanaka was not involved directly with Bikyōtō at the time when Miyamoto was a member. He only became affiliated with the group later in its second iteration, the First Bikyōtō Revolution Committee, organized by Hori Kosai in 1971. The Committee “was organized with the policy of showing the members’ art without using galleries or museums for a period of one year.” Tani, “Nobuo Yamanaka,” 23.} Yamanaka’s first experimentation with a pinhole apparatus resulted in a cinematic experience rather than a printed image. In 1972, he built a large pinhole box (2m x 4m x 4m) for the Fifth Exhibition of Contemporary Plastic Art held at the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art under the theme, “Expression in Film.” Visitors to the exhibition were invited to climb inside the box and “watch the image of the outside world through a pinhole.”\footnote{Ibid.} This work reinforces Yamanaka’s concern with experience first and foremost. Only after “hovering in the space between perceptibility and imperceptibility, where he could experience the fundamental nature of seeing and being able to see, literally, a phenomenological experience,” would Yamanaka begin to create records of those experiences with light-sensitive materials.\footnote{Ibid., 26.}

In 1973, Yamanaka made his first pinhole room by turning a room in his home into a pinhole camera. He created three works – or, “Revolutions” – with different exposure times...
ranging from thirty minutes to forty-eight hours and one week (Fig. 4.6). He covered the wall opposite the pinhole with sheets of lith film, creating a kind of screen to capture the projection of light. His most well-known pinhole work came two years later when he turned a room on the ninth floor of an office building in Shinjuku into a pinhole, capturing the skyline of this rapidly developing area of western Tokyo (Fig. 4.7). On this occasion, Yamanaka attached lith film to all of the surfaces in the room including the floor and ceiling. When he exhibited the resulting work at Nirenoki Gallery in 1976, he built a structure with the same dimensions as the room on the ninth floor so as to display the “the three-dimensional effect of bringing the whole outside world into the darkened box.” According to Yamamoto Kazuhiro, this was a means of challenging “the modern rationalistic way of seeing,” which has “only apprehended the one surface facing the pinhole in a pinhole room.” Here, Yamamoto hints at how, in the history of philosophy, tactility or embodied sensing was often demeaned as a primitive form of knowledge production in comparison to the more sophisticated realm of vision. In later iterations, such as Pinhole Floor & Wall from 1977, Yamanaka pushed further this emphasis on a multi-dimensional (as opposed to single-point perspective) understanding of perception by building paneled bridges that connected the walls to the floors of the pinhole room (Fig. 4.8). When exhibited, the final image extended out from the flat surface of the wall like a pop-up book, demonstrating the varying degrees of “gradational perspective.”

57 He did not attach film to the wall with the pinhole. Tani, “Nobuo Yamanaka,” 27.


59 Ibid.

60 Olin, Touching Photographs, 7-8.

61 Ibid.
Yamanaka continued to experiment with the pinhole camera, creating rooms for exhibition in New York, Paris, and Tokyo. In all these works, he typically moved around inside the cameras, creating vague, blurred shadows that occasionally suggest a human presence (for example, see the shadowy effects in Figure 4.6). However, the artist’s presence in these images should be understood as more than a simple “self-portrait,” as many critics have named them. These blurred, spectral markings are evidence of more than a mere presence; they image Yamanaka’s lived experiences inside the camera. In this way, the pinhole rooms exemplify Yamanaka’s persistent investment in materializing phenomenological experiences in concrete forms. As Tani Arata forcefully summarizes, “Yamanaka went far beyond the function of the pinhole as a tool, assimilating it as a part of his own eyes, and experiencing many moments of union with the world which was the object of his vision.” In this way, Yamanaka’s work plays with the objective/subjective scale of photography – an issue that I unpack in connection to Miyamoto’s pinhole work in the following section.

In his work, Yamanaka dealt with many of the issues central to pinhole photography as it has been practiced in recent years – issues such as experimentation, working by hand in longer durations of time, and physical engagements with the medium. While digital technology still belonged to the realm of space exploration in the 1970s, Yamanaka was nonetheless immersed in a rapidly developing high-tech media environment that privileged the eye to the detriment of

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62 Towards the end of his short life, Yamanaka also employed a handheld pinhole camera that he aimed directly at the sun at Machu Picchu, in New York and Tokyo. These series of sun pinholes reflect Yamanaka’s concern with light and, more specifically, his aim “to bring back a pristine image prior to the use of lenses.” Yamamoto, “A Thinker,” 37.

63 For example, Homma Takashi calls Pinhole Room: Revolution I a “self-portrait.” Homma Takashi, “Pinhōru kamera to Yamanaka Nobuo kankotsu dattai: Homma Takashi no eizō riterashii” (An Adaptation of Yamanaka Nobuo’s Pinhole Camera: The Pictorial Legacy of Homma Takashi), Geijutsu shincho 64:7 (July 2013), 139.

64 Tani, “Nobuo Yamanaka,” 29.
richer perceptual experiences. This context explains the recent resurgence in interest in Yamanaka and the relevance of his pinhole work for photographic culture in the present day. As Tani Arata argues:

> When we look back at Yamanaka’s work, it sounds a warning to modern human beings in the midst of their media environment. Of course, the progress of media technology has made possible a dramatic expansion of perceptual experience. However, a high-tech camera like the a7000, for example, would seem to have lost the original fascination of photography, and certainly there are respects in which our perceptive abilities have declined.\(^{65}\)

Indeed, recent enthusiasts look to Yamanaka as the luminary of pinhole photography.\(^{66}\)

In recent years, the acclaimed photographer Homma Takashi (1962- ) has recreated many of Yamanaka’s works, from *Pinhole on the 9th Floor* to his pinhole sun series produced in New York and Tokyo. Homma claims that he was never interested in pinhole photography (calling it a “cute thing”), until he encountered Yamanaka’s pinhole rooms at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.\(^{67}\) Perhaps seeing these works consecrated as art objects on the walls of the museum legitimized the primitive practice for Homma, who then proclaimed, “With a beginner’s mind I would like to return to being a student and try the pictorial methods from all times and places.”\(^{68}\) Homma’s thinking on the pinhole has evolved since his original encounter with Yamanaka’s work in 2013. He experienced many difficulties when making his own pinhole room and conducted numerous failed attempts before successfully capturing a legible image on

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\(^{65}\) Ibid., 26.

\(^{66}\) For example, Amemiya Kazuo, the director of Monochrome Gallery RAIN, considers Yamanaka to be the “peak” of pinhole work in Japan. Amemiya Kazuo, interview with the author, May 15, 2017.

\(^{67}\) Homma, “Pinhōru kamera,” 139.

\(^{68}\) Ibid.
the same type of lith film used by Yamanaka. In the process, he developed an appreciation for the complexities and potential of the medium.\(^69\)

Homma began to reconsider the basic structural concept of the pinhole and realized that he was using architecture (the room) to photograph architecture (the skyline).\(^70\) For Homma, the pinhole is a window and the camera a room. He became preoccupied with windows as one of multiple devices, along with the eye or cameras, that frame the world.\(^71\) Working from Yamanaka’s concern with theories of perception, Homma’s pinhole photographs are “framed scenes” that “question the act of seeing and what photographs are.”\(^72\) The aesthetic effects of his work further enable that questioning. While viewers can easily identify the subject matter in much of Homma’s work – Mt. Fuji, a water tower, the skyscrapers of Shinjuku, or the Empire State Building – the strong tonal contrasts of light and dark that are characteristic of lith film create “a world of shadows that is different from the world we are used to seeing” (Fig. 4.9).\(^73\) Homma refers to these shadows as “the unconsciousness of the city” (toshi no muishiki), provoking questions of visibility and invisibility in contemporary experiences of the city and the unique capacity of the camera to reveal those invisible worlds.\(^74\)

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\(^69\) Homma, interview with the author, May 16, 2017.

\(^70\) Homma Takashi, “Pinhōru kamera to Yamanaka Nobuo, hutatabi kankotsu dattai: Homma Takashi no eizō riterashii” (Another Adaptation of Yamanaka Nobuo’s Pinhole Camera: The Pictorial Literacy of Homma Takashi), Geijutsu shincho 64:9 (September 2013), 152.

\(^71\) In a symposium hosted by Miyamoto, “Is the pinhole photographic fundamentalism!?” Yamamoto Kazuhiro contended that what he believed pinhole photographers wanted to return to was not necessarily the fundamentals of photography, but the fundamentals of the camera itself – the parts of the camera. This, too, was understood as a reaction to digital technology: “With the advent of digital media, I feel like the camera has become something that is completely different from the fundamentalist box.” Kuraishi, et al., “Pinhōru,” 90.


\(^73\) Ibid.

\(^74\) Homma, interview with the author, May 16, 2017.
“Burying the city” in the Pinhole Camera

While Homma’s increased interest in the relationship between architecture and photography developed out of his work with the pinhole room, in 2000, Miyamoto came to the pinhole camera from an initial interest in architecture, specifically, the handmade cardboard houses of the homeless. As he describes it: “While photographing the cardboard houses, I was allowed to go inside them. When I did so, I felt strangely at home…. The architect Hara Hiroshi uses the phrase ‘burying the city.’ It stayed in my mind, and when I entered the houses, it immediately occurred to me that I should bury the surrounding scenery in the house.”

Originally, Miyamoto intended to transform a human-scale cardboard box into a camera that would “bury” the surrounding scenery in the space of the box. Similar to how the homeless constructed shelters from materials found in the city, the surrounding environment would also fill in the empty space of the camera-box. However, when Miyamoto realized that such a large-scale camera would require an equally large lens, he reconsidered and resorted to a camera format that functions without the use of a lens – the pinhole camera. Thus, just as Miyamoto initially identified the cardboard box as the “archetypal human dwelling,” here, he turned that box into the archetypal camera.

Miyamoto became acquainted with the architect Hara Hiroshi through his work at Toshi Jūtaku, where Hara often contributed articles. Concerned with the ongoing housing problem (jūtaku mondai) in Japan, Hara conducted a survey of villages around the world that were in the process of being demolished to see what contemporary architects and urban planners might learn from them. From the years 1974 to 1978 he published his findings in four installments in the

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76 Miyamoto, Kasahara and Terada, “Judō to shite,” 116.
journal Tenbō (Outlooks), and in 1987 he compiled the work into a single book entitled, *Shūraku e no tabi* (A Trip to the Village). Miyamoto recalls that through this survey, Hara concluded that every house, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, has a relationship to its environs, taking in aspects of the city in the items that families collected or in the material makeup of the houses themselves. While in Japan houses were thought of as “units of space on the periphery of the city,” in the places that Hara visited such as Mexico, Iraq, and the African Savannah, the houses themselves were the primary components that structured the layout of the settlements. Hara called for a reconsideration of the city in relation to housing, imploring architects to design residences as if they were designing something as large as a city and urban planners to design the city as if they were building something as small as a house. In this line of thinking, Hara set out to determine ways of incorporating aspects of the city into his designs for urban residences. He called this “burying the city in the house” (*toshi o jūtaku ni maizō suru*).

Why “burying”? Hara’s designs and theory should be understood in the context of mounting public concern over the deterioration of the city and the degradation of the natural environment in the 1970s and early 1980s in Japan. In response to the environmental crisis, Hara and his contemporaries (in particular, Ando Tadao, Shinohara Kazuo, and Hasegawa Itsuko) imagined structures that would protect urban inhabitants “against the physical and psychological

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78 Miyamoto Ryoji, interview with the author, November 6, 2016.


80 Ibid., 90.
interference from the outside.”  

Thus, Hara sought to “bury” those elements of the natural environment that could still be salvaged within a fortress that protected its residents from the unpleasant and unhealthy aspects of urban life. To do this, he inverted the inside-outside relationship of architecture. He writes, “The exterior will be just the spatial form of the building while the interior can express the entire outside world. The walls and other interior surfaces would become façades while the old concept of the façade would disappear – vanish into thin air!” 

In designs like that for the Niramu House, photographed by Miyamoto for the October 1983 issue of Jūtaku kenchiku (Residential Architecture), rather than a sleek glass curtain-wall, the façade of the residence is a solid barrier shutting out the harmful realities of the city (Fig. 4.10), while the interior plays with undulating, organic forms and patterns of light that have been described as “dream-like urbanscapes” (Fig. 4.11). According to Hara, his use of skylights represents an attempt to capture the one aspect of nature still available to the urban inhabitant – sunlight. Filling interior spaces with bright and sensuous light was a means of bringing new life to the city.

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84 Bognar, 10. Hara relates his theory to the traditional Japanese vernacular, in which a fluid relationship between interior and exterior is emphasized over protective barriers such as walls. Hara, “Toshi o maizō suru,” 90.

85 Tellingly, Hara’s point of departure for his creative use of light is his childhood experience in bomb shelters. He describes the halation from the bombing raids as a calming presence that would follow the utter bombardment, a “regular event that broke through the night and tore a hole in the veil of darkness.” The idea of halation became central to his development of interior spaces filled with “bright and sensuous light.” Hara, “Reflection and Inversion,” 61. His use of light took on new significance in the postwar period, however, with the rapid urban development and the environmental degradation of Japan’s cities.
Miyamoto began documenting cardboard houses in 1983 – the exact same year that he was commissioned to photograph Hara’s Niramu House. In their material makeup, cardboard houses literally bury the city. As Hayashi Michio conceives it: “All of the materials of the outer shell of the cardboard houses and all of the objects inside it are things rejected by the contemporary city, so it can be described as a ‘monad’ in which the city is buried.” Miyamoto had this theory in mind when he began photographing cardboard houses. His pinhole house, however, is a more complicated elaboration of Hara’s concept, as the camera buries the city indexically via the use of natural light. Just as Hara attempted to rejuvenate urban living by flooding residences with natural light, Miyamoto also harnesses light to generate uncharacteristically warm, dream-like images of the urban skyline. In both, the projection of natural sunlight is the material foundation for a new mode of perceiving and being in the city.

Miyamoto’s pinhole house is made of plywood (Fig. 4.12). It is 150-cm high with the footprint of one tsubō (the size of two tatami mats). A 1-mm hole is cut out of a piece of aluminum that he attaches to one wall, while the rest of the box is sealed with black tape to secure the interior darkness. When he is ready to photograph, he fixes the interior walls of the box with direct color printing paper and climbs inside. The use of positive photo paper means that a photographic negative is never created; rather, the resulting image prints directly on the paper. He has likened the interior of the box to a sauna – hot and suffocating because it is airtight and completely dark. For this reason, he typically uses the pinhole house only in colder months. Once he is comfortable inside the box, he removes a piece of black tape that covers the pinhole

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86 Hayashi, “An Eye Open,” 201.
88 At first, Miyamoto attempted to build the camera out of cardboard, but it was too thin. In order to secure the interior darkness of the box, he resorted to using plywood. Ibid.
and the scenery from outside begins to appear faintly around him. He has an assistant outside the box keep track of the time, as he cannot see his own watch inside. On a clear afternoon the exposure time typically lasts three to five minutes.

When he first began using the pinhole house to create photographs, Miyamoto went to places where he had seen cardboard houses, such as Shinjuku and Akihabara in the middle of Tokyo. He “wanted to see those places from the perspective of the house, from the perspective of those who lived inside.” He recalls how his first experience inside a cardboard house sparked this desire:

The inside had a strange sense of peace and comfort. Like I had been wrapped in a membrane. I think it definitely had a connection to the location, as it had been created in a place where normal houses hadn’t been made. They [the homeless] had created their own shelter in the center of the city. Moreover, it was almost directly on the ground. When you looked at the city from inside [the house], the landscape appeared completely different than I had ever seen it before. It looked different from all those times I had walked around it.

Discovering a sense of shelter in an otherwise nonresidential area seems central to the “peace and comfort” that Miyamoto experienced inside the cardboard house. Perhaps this is why he was so quick to draw a connection to Hara, an architect attempting to maintain connections to the urban environment in his residential designs while simultaneously shutting out its hostile elements. Descriptions such as this also point to how, from the beginning, Miyamoto has used the pinhole camera as a means of uncovering new perspectives from which to view the city.

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89 Kuraishi et al., “Pinhōru,” 92.

90 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Miyamoto Ryūji no intabyū: ‘Toshi no muishiki’ wo toru” (An interview with Miyamoto Ryūji: Shooting the ‘city’s unconscious’), Kenchiku bunka 645 (July 2000), 106.

91 Miyamoto, Kasahara, Terada, “Judō to shite,” 114.
In the bustling city center, Miyamoto found it increasingly difficult to secure sufficient room for the installation of his pinhole house. As a result, he sought out more spacious locations, such as the coastline, where the visual expansiveness of the waterfront contrasts with the compact density of the skyline. In one photograph from the Chuo ward in Tokyo, the geometric cityscape narrowly bisects the fluid, blue tones of the waterfront above and the sky below (Fig. 4.13). The saturated, glowing blue shades that characterize Miyamoto’s pinhole photographs imbue them with that same sense of mystery, or “unknowability,” that enthusiasts point to as an aesthetic merit of pinhole photography.

In other ways, too, Miyamoto’s work has connections to the larger goals of the pinhole movement. Unlike Yamanaka and Homma who moved around in their pinhole rooms, Miyamoto is cramped inside a small cardboard box and unable to move. A corpse-like shadow of the photographer appears in the bottom of an image that he is making of the outside world, a world that, in reality, he is cut off from in the confines of the pinhole house. This pseudo-self-portrait is evidence of the pinhole process and experience – an index of the photographer at work. Here, Miyamoto gives concrete visual form to the heightened sensory experience of “slow time” and the “long gaze” described by other pinhole photographers (Fig. 4.14). In this way, he

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92 Ibid., 117.

93 Beyond the expansive space of the coastline, there is another reason that Miyamoto is attracted to the sea and, more specifically, the waterfront in Tokyo. He explained in an interview that in William Gibson’s science fiction novel *Idoru*, a new Kowloon Walled City is built out in the middle of Tokyo Bay from the rubble of a great earthquake. As discussed in Chapter 2, Gibson was inspired by Miyamoto’s photographs of Kowloon for the writing of *Idoru*, among other works. This mutually influential relationship peaked Miyamoto’s interest in the history of Tokyo Bay, drawing him to the waterfront for his pinhole work. Ibid.

94 Kuraishi et al., “Pinhōru,” 91.

95 Miyamoto’s own pinhole practice is quite slow. He explains in an interview: “The entire process of choosing a site, assembling the camera, taking the photo, disassembling the camera, and transporting the printing paper to a place where you can develop it takes some time, so you can only do one photograph per day. Moreover, you aren’t using negatives, so there is only the one item.” Miyamoto, “Miyamoto Ryūji no intabyū,” 106. The interviewer tries
materializes the renewed relationship between the body of the photographer and the materials of photography that governs the amateur pinhole work discussed earlier in this chapter.

Miyamoto’s pinhole practice is representative of how the larger movement works to reorient viewers’ attention to the multisensory nature of the photographic process and to our tactile relationship with photographs.96 An interviewer once pointed out that inside his pinhole house Miyamoto is “witnessing with his entire body the imprinting of the image of the outside world on paper,” but Miyamoto corrected him, explaining that the experience amounts to more than witnessing; inside the pinhole, his “entire body is flooded with light.”97 Such claims to embodied encounters may be a reaction to the supposedly desensitized act of digital photography, and, indeed, Miyamoto has praised the “bodily sensation” of the pinhole that “you can’t get with a digital camera.”98 Ultimately, however, pinhole images are records of the pinhole process.99 For the photographers, their own exploration of that primitive process may unveil a “fantastical” world where they imagine “escaping” their modern reality.100 Meanwhile, in reorienting viewers’ attention to the process itself, the photographers of the pinhole movement literally put us “back in touch” with the basic principles of the medium as a “relational art.”101

to make a connection between the fact that Miyamoto only produces one photograph in a day to Benjamin’s theory of reproductive technology, but Miyamoto explains that, for him, it is not about generating an “aura.” Ibid., 108.


99 Rexer, The Antiquarian Avant-Garde, 23.

100 Ueda, “Tokyo sansaku,” 121.

101 Olin, Touching Photographs, 3.
As I have reiterated throughout this chapter, pinhole photography is understood largely as a process, one that “mobilizes and uses all five senses,” according to Miyamoto.\textsuperscript{102} The presence of Miyamoto’s body in the final photographic work reminds us of this experiential practice. Visually, however, his figure – an unmoving, expressionless silhouette – also forces viewers to consider the extent to which subjectivity can come into play when working with the very basic mechanisms of the pinhole camera. It has been argued that within the box Miyamoto occupies a radically passive position in terms of the subjective/objective scale that governs all photographic practice.\textsuperscript{103} Despite the physical labor required for the transportation, construction, positioning, and preparation of the pinhole house, in the final moment he relinquishes control to the basic mechanisms of the process itself, thereby diminishing his own expressive agency. Miyamoto has acknowledged that beyond choosing a location for the house, there is little by way of a photographic strategy or method once he is inside. He does not have a “shutter chance” or any control over who or what might pass by or stop in front of the pinhole aperture.\textsuperscript{104} Because pinholes generate a pan-focus, the photographer must abandon the idea of “aiming” the camera at any one detail in a larger scene. In the end, the immobile body of the perceiving subject replaces the hand of the photographer.\textsuperscript{105} He perceives the basic processes of the camera rather than dictating them. This process comes through in the final photographs themselves, which picture a blurred, diminished skyline, suggesting Miyamoto’s physical distance from his subject matter.

\textsuperscript{102} Miyamoto, Kasahara, and Terada, “Judō to shite,” 131.

\textsuperscript{103} Hayashi, “An Eye Open,” 206.

\textsuperscript{104} Kuraishi et al., “Pinhōru,” 92.

\textsuperscript{105} Miyamoto, Kasahara, and Terada, “Judō to shite,” 118.
Takanashi Yutaka (1935- ), a Provoke photographer of the generation preceding Yamanaka and Miyamoto’s, has described the subjective/objective tension in photography as a conflict between the personas of the hunter and the scrap picker. He writes, “One is a ‘hunter of images,’ aiming exclusively to shoot down the invisible [i.e. the subjective], and the other is a ‘scrap picker’ who can only believe in what is visible.”106 The “scrap picker” approaches the objective side of the photographic process – the moment that light enters a space of darkness to produce an image. Miyamoto admits that there are times when he is the “hunter,” “actively chasing something to photograph.”107 Increasingly, however, he values “the final moment of photography when the image reacts with light sensitive paper.” “In that moment of passivity,” he states, “it is as if time doesn’t move.”108 In the final instance, the active body of the pinhole photographer is rendered inoperative – but no less sensitized – as he orients his attention to the photographic process itself.

Scholars of Yamanaka Nobuo’s work go further in emphasizing the photographer’s objective position in relation to the pinhole camera. Yamamoto Kazuhiro recounts how Yamanaka “began to see the human-centeredness of the modern age, not just within the confines of art, but in the camera lens itself. His questioning of the system that makes art what it is led him to the pinhole camera, a device which apprehends what might be called a metavisual light, a light prior to lenses, including those of human beings.”109 Yamanaka tried to eliminate himself

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107 Miyamoto, Kasahara, and Terada, “Judō to shite,” 130.

108 Ibid.

from the photographic process, and the few opportunities for expressions of “personal intentions, emotion, personality, one’s own principles or position” made the pinhole camera ideally suited to this goal.\textsuperscript{110} In line with a performance-based practice, he took “randomness and anonymity” as his basic concepts.\textsuperscript{111} Like Takanashi’s “scrap picker,” Yamanaka had no one subject in mind – including himself – when he produced his pinhole images. Miyamoto, on the other hand, first created his pinhole house with a very specific subject in mind – the actual “scrap pickers” who composed their homes randomly and anonymously from material uncovered on the streets.

The origin of Miyamoto’s pinhole work in the perspective of the homeless has the potential to bring an important social awareness to the practice that is missing from most pinhole photography. In a symposium that Miyamoto convened on pinhole photography, the critic Kuraishi Shino warned against using photography for personal expression without taking into consideration history or contemporary social conditions. Meanwhile, Kuraishi was drawn to Miyamoto’s work because of how the photographer problematizes the “host/guest dynamic.” He stated, “When Miyamoto enters the house and enacts the position of the homeless, he abandons his individuality as the photographer and overturns the subject/object relationship inherent in photography. […] The perspectives are reversed.”\textsuperscript{112} Indeed, in turning the gaze of the imagemaker and the eye of the camera on himself, Miyamoto confronts the violence of voyeurism inherent in the practice of photography, an issue that became apparent in his documentation of cardboard houses and the post-disaster landscape of Kobe. In placing himself in this position, he “instigates an interest in such things as the homeless and society’s waste and excess – in other\

\textsuperscript{110} Kuraishi et al., “Pinhōru,” 87.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{112} Kuraishi et al., “Pinhōru,” 91-2.
words, things that cannot be integrated into a discourse of normative value: those that the naked eye overlooks or averts its gaze from.\textsuperscript{113} Atsuko Sakaki used these words to describe the function of the camera in Abe Kōbō’s novel \textit{Hako otoko} (The Box Man) from 1973. In the final section, I further examine the implications of Miyamoto’s position within the box by drawing from the lessons of Abe’s novel.

**Becoming a Box Man**

In her recent book, Atsuko Sakaki analyzes the work of Japanese novelists who “do photography.”\textsuperscript{114} An avid practitioner and critic of photography himself, Abe Kōbō is a prime example of an author who employs the rhetoric of photographic practice, vision, and theory in fiction. One of the results of this rhetorical framework in Abe’s novel is the confusion of the gaze, as “the reader/viewer’s perceived neutrality, along with the text’s perceived transparency, is effectively renounced as the positions of the reader/viewer and the book are no longer stable and call out for constant and eventually futile spatial adjustment.” Sakaki goes on, “This complicates the act of reading/viewing, generally considered an objective and scientific procedure, by redefining it as a corporeal and multi-sensorial activity that affects the conductor of the act.”\textsuperscript{115} Abe achieves this level of complication in \textit{Hako otoko} in multiple ways: through the main character’s own musings on the power of the gaze, but also through the structure of the book itself in the juxtaposition of object and text, the anonymity of the box man, and the persistent denial of a coherent narrative.


\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 60.
In *Hako otoko*, the box man – an ex-photographer himself – has chosen a life of invisibility by donning a cardboard box over his head. He observes the outside world through a peephole, reveling in his life as an inconspicuous voyeur and describing “the act of photo-taking as an assault by a power abuser.” The specific power behind his gaze is the exposition of what Abe calls “signs before signification,” a notion best expressed by the box man himself when he describes a typical view from the peep hole of his cardboard box:

...as one looks out of the box’s observation window, things appear to be quite different. The various details of the scenery become homogenous, have equal significance. Cigarette butts...the sticky secretion in a dog’s eyes...the windows of a two-story house with the curtains waving...the crates in a flattened drum...rings biting into flabby fingers...railroad tracks leading into the distance...sacks of cement hardened because of moisture...dirt under the fingernails...loose manhole covers...but I am very fond of such scenery. The distance in it is fluid and the contours vague, and thus perhaps it resembles my own position. The scenery has the gentleness of a garbage dump. One never wearies of looking at such a view as long as one is peering out from a box.

The peephole frames random, anonymous, disconnected scenes, all of which are granted equal value by nature of their “fluid” and “vague” reception. Abe elaborates on the effect of “framing” that he attempted to convey with the peephole mechanism in *Hako otoko*:

Under normal circumstances...only already signified images are revealed. However, by framing and thus equalizing scenery, those parts which one had no need to see for one’s primary purpose, those which have not been given meaning, are extracted. Then, an impulse to give names to them, to signify them, is awakened in the viewer. The object of observation becomes more actual. The term ‘frame’ is often used negatively, but it couldn't be further from the case.

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116 Ibid., 92.


119 Abe, “Toshi e no kairo,” 216. Quoted in Sakaki, 93.
Thus, it is through the homogenization of images that the world becomes interesting again for the box man. These fragmentary shots of the outside world can never become whole, at least not as they might have existed before, but that is precisely the value of this viewer experience, an experience that is contingent on the box itself.

Abe’s frame can be likened to the function of the camera’s viewfinder in the hand of Takanashi’s scrap picker, particularly in the context of a late-capitalist urban setting. As was the case with the images of ruins in *Architectural Apocalypse*, here, too, Kōmoto Shinji’s reflection on the effects of visual saturation in consumer culture relate to the role of photography in these urban conditions. He writes, “In a fluid situation where all values have become equal, where there are no longer even any differences in consumption, the production and consumption of images is critically revealed, and the practice of photographers seeking ‘psychological synthesis’ becomes a simple matter of personal taste.”¹²⁰ Just as the photographer is inclined to become a “scrap picker” in this urban milieu, forgoing intensely subjective interiorizing views for a more readily apparent, indiscriminate snapshot, the box man finds pleasure in the fact that, the small observation window of his box visually fragments the city so that all of its contents are granted equal value. In this world, things that may normally go unnoticed, or worse, things that are intentionally disregarded (such as the cardboard houses of the homeless or the box man himself), are no different from those vaunted monuments of the city.

For the box man, elucidating the visual (not experiential) perspective of the homeless is more than a humanitarian gesture; it flattens the viewer/reader’s perception of the city to the point of semiotic indifference. Then, from the scraps of undefined, decontextualized, fragmented images, viewers can begin to signify – to reconstruct the urban experience outside of those

monumental spaces that have been granted meaning by corporations or the government, and with images and objects that have no use-value in the capitalist sense. For Miyamoto, these spaces and objects are another instance of the “unconsciousness of the city” (toshi no muishiki). He explains, “Tokyo is a city of only economic concerns, and so things that are not useful, things that are unnecessary, and things without meaning are rejected. Because of this it is difficult to see this kind of unconscious.”121 Whereas cardboard houses and demolition sites were representations of that unconscious – those parts of the city that are not made to be looked at or to signify value – the pinhole house is a means of actually facilitating an unconscious gaze, the indiscriminate gaze of the scrap picker, or the mechanical gaze of the camera.

Homma Takashi also understands the shadow world of his pinhole photographs to represent “a city’s unconscious caught in a dark chamber.”122 This concept helps to contextualize the only text in Homma’s photobook The Narcissistic City (2016): a quote from Hubert Damisch’s book of the same name, given a full page at the end of the pinhole works:

What kind of gaze does the city license? What kind of gaze does it induce, determine, inform, program, organize? What kind of gaze, not only is the subject able to turn on itself, but does the city-machine turn on itself through the intermediary of the ‘subject’? What is the nature of the city as reality, as image and as symbol – at once near and ungraspable, fascinating and repulsive, attractive and intractable, necessary and unbearable, intimate and impenetrable, available and inaccessible? What is the nature of this object of desire, for the city itself, as well as for the man of the crowd, for the man of the street, for the many of the city, for those who inhabit it and those merely passing through it, for anyone who knows that it is a labyrinth and is eager to become trapped in it?123

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121 Miyamoto, “Miyamoto Ryūji no intabyū,” 107.


What kind of gaze does the city license? What kind of gaze does the city induce? These were the questions that Homma, Miyamoto, and others explored with the pinhole as a camera. Homma himself insists that the room (or in Miyamoto’s case, the box) is not simply a metaphor for the camera; it is a principle – the principle of photography. Like ruins, the view from cardboard or pinhole houses can open up deviant and alternative possibilities for readings of urban space. In addition to the aperture of the pinhole, peephole, or viewfinder, however, we find an emphasis on the physical space of the box that differentiates it from the experience of viewing ruins in *Architectural Apocalypse*. To repeat the box man, “One never wearies of looking at such a view as long as one is peering out from a box.”

Abe’s box man and Miyamoto both grant the interior of the cardboard box an unparalleled experiential value in the space of the late-capitalist city, and both make efforts to share this particular encounter with their reader/viewership. *Hako otoko* begins with an excerpt entitled, “Instructions for Making a Box,” in which the box man lists the materials and directions for constructing a portable cardboard shelter. He describes the ideal type of box for the job – a “quarto,” the type used for refrigerators or other large appliances – and takes special care to explain the creation of the observation window, which, significantly, he compares to the “expression of the eyes.” He clearly intends for his readers to recreate the experience so that they understand more fully the potential of the box.

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125 Abe, *The Box Man*, 42. Emphasis mine.

126 Ibid., 6. While not a pinhole house, Miyamoto has published an essay (similar to the other articles and books discussed previously) on how to make your own handheld pinhole camera. It is included in a volume that he co-edited in 2009. Miyamoto Ryūji, “Pinhōru shashin wo toru” (Taking Pinhole Photographs), in *Shashin: Gihō to kyōgen* (Photography: Techniques and Expressions), ed. Miyamoto Ryūji and Tanaka Hitoshi (Kyoto: Kyoto University of Art and Design, 2004), 8-13. In Sakaguchi Kyōhei’s *Tokyo zero-en hausu zero-en seikatsu* the homeless representative, Mr. Suzuki, instructs Sakaguchi on how to build a cardboard house in a description that closely parallels that of the box man. While he prefaxes his book as a documentary work, rather than a “how-to,”
Meanwhile, Miyamoto has used exhibitions to convey the material dimensions of the pinhole house to viewers. In an exhibition at Akiyama Gallery in Tokyo in 2000, he constructed six pinhole houses and displayed the photographs inside the structures as they would have appeared at the time of their creation (Fig. 4.15).\textsuperscript{127} Visitors were invited to crouch down and peer inside the boxes, giving them a sense of the tight space occupied by the photographer. On the many occasions that Miyamoto has exhibited his pinhole work without the boxes, he mounted the photographs on the wall upside down. This orientation, combined with the cruciform shape of the works, mimics the conditions in which they were produced; we can imagine the panels being folded back up into the shape of the box (Fig. 4.16).\textsuperscript{128}

The notion of a minimal, empty, box-like structure as the ideal space for generating meaningful experiences has a protracted tradition in East Asian cultures, beginning with the Buddhist figure Vimalakīrti, who was said to have “miraculously enlarged his small dwelling when a vast number of divine beings wished to visit him, the implication being that a modest structure could encompass all wisdom as embodied in a single wise man.”\textsuperscript{129} More relevant for Miyamoto’s generation was the poetry of the thirteenth-century author Kamo no Chōmei. His \textit{Hojoki: Visions of a Torn World} (1212) begins with scenes and stories of repeated disasters, which lead him to construct the ideal contemplative dwelling, his ten-foot-square hut. For Chōmei, his hut encompassed pure emptiness and contained the possibility for a simplified,

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\textsuperscript{127} Miyamoto, “Miyamoto Ryūji no intabyū,” 108.

\textsuperscript{128} Homma has also exhibited his photographs upside down at the Taro Nasu Gallery in Tokyo.

enlightened lifestyle. The regenerative potential for minimal spaces became a popular notion once again in the postwar period, as in the 1970s when the Metabolist architect Kurokawa Kishō championed Chômei’s hut as a “nativist origin for the capsule.”\textsuperscript{130} Sakaguchi Kyôhei also references Chômei’s philosophy in \textit{Tokyo zero-en hausu zero-en seikatsu}, in which he advocates for the supposedly simplified lifestyle of the homeless inside a cardboard box (see Chapter 2).

In his analysis of the pinhole camera series, Hayashi Michio contends that emptiness is precisely what allows for the passive, unaffected gaze of the photographer within the cardboard box. Elaborating on Miyamoto’s immobile position inside the pinhole house, he writes, “In a pinhole photograph, the only thing that can be properly regarded as being the ‘viewing subject’ is the box itself, a condition of emptiness.”\textsuperscript{131} However, is emptiness contradictory to Miyamoto’s aim to “bury the city” within the box? In fact, Hara Hiroshi also theorized the power of emptiness when he extended his notion of the disappearing facade in urban residences to his designs for skyscrapers. For one of his most renowned projects, the Umeda Sky Building in Osaka (1993), Hara sheathed the structure in mirrored glass that would reflect the sky and ostensibly make the supporting structure disappear. With this design gesture, he hoped to realize the Buddhist philosophy of \textit{shiki soku zeku}, meaning, “real nature is not materiality but emptiness.”\textsuperscript{132} Hara calls the Umeda Sky Building an “architecture of dreams,” and the building’s blue reflections of the sky are similar to the dream-like blue tones that saturate


\textsuperscript{131} Michio, “An Eye Open,” 206.

\textsuperscript{132} Hara, GA Architect 13, 194.
Miyamoto’s pinhole photographs. In both cases, the works are based in a theory or condition of emptiness that has been carved out in the overly material contemporary city.

It would be difficult to argue, however, that materiality – as the antithesis to emptiness in Hara’s interpretation of shiki soku zeku – is not important for Miyamoto. His interest in marginal and ephemeral structures found aesthetic expression in the fractured materiality of ruins and the constructed materiality of cardboard houses and slums. It is the fragments of the ruins at demolition sites and the scraps of the self-made shelters of the homeless that suggest new ways of perceiving the city. The pinhole camera, then, is the endpoint of this trajectory, a structure that facilitates this new method of perception. The emptiness of the box is what creates the condition for revealing the unconscious material of the city.

Moreover, the space of the consumer-driven city is itself always already empty. In Abe’s novel, the box man yearns for the barrier of the box as protection from the emptiness of the urban landscape where everything has been subjected to the ever-shifting fancies of the market. In his box, he is able to reengage with the contents of the city through his observation window – the “eyes” of the box – which scrap-picks images, operating as a sort of bricolage. Similarly, for Miyamoto, the pinhole house creates a space where he might contend with the semiotic emptiness of the city, reconceiving and reconstructing it through a reorientation with the landscape. Once again, the box man’s observations provide insight into how this reorientation works, as when he comments, “When I look at small things, I think I shall go on living: drops of rain…leather gloves shrunk by being wet…. When I look at something too big, I want to die: the Diet Building…or a map of the world…or….”

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133 Abe, The Box Man, 97.
In the pinhole house, as with the box man’s observation window, images of the city are reassembled according to a marginalized perspective that contains the potential to threaten prevailing systems of distribution and consumption. Miyamoto’s pinhole house produces large-scale photographs that minimize the cityscape so that its monumentality and symbolism seem overwhelmed by the emptiness of the sky below and the sea above (Fig. 4.16). As opposed to the literal tabula rasa anticipated by the ruins at demolition sites, with the pinhole house Miyamoto fabricated a space for encountering an imaginary tabula rasa of “signs before signification” without resorting to the apocalyptic rhetoric that haunts his images of ruins. His attempt at a more passive method for photographing and re-imagining the city suggests a new system of value, and the box was the original symbol of this: “Existing within the contemporary city whose every spatial assignation is deterred by economics and politics, [cardboard houses] stand wholly apart from considerations of efficiency and power.”

Miyamoto’s pinhole house inspired a number of other experiments that “challenge the boundaries” of primitive forms of image making. Those experiments include other forms of the pinhole camera, such as a handheld pinhole that he acquired in Switzerland (Fig. 4.17). It, too, is made of cardboard, but he uses 6x17-cm brownie film with it. In 2012, Miyamoto made a series of images of the port in Yokohama, enlarged the panoramic views, and exhibited the photographs as long panels at the BankART gallery (Fig. 4.18).

134 Miyamoto, Cardboard Houses, 3.

135 Miyamoto, Kasahara, and Terada, “Judō to shite,” 112.

compositions reference the original camera format. These photographs capture a surprising amount of information despite the compressed frame. The horizon line compartmentalizes the manmade world below and the natural elements above. Even here on the coast, however, ships, cranes, gates, and shipping containers encroach on the light emanating from the horizon – the light that Hara Hiroshi attempted to harness for his residential designs in a new approach to urban living.

After producing his first pinhole works, Miyamoto experimented with the photogram, the true degree-zero of photography:

A photogram is nothing more than an outline, a silhouette, registering where light falls and where it is obscured by some intervening object. According to the Roman historian Pliny, the longing to fix shadows is as old as the mythical desire for a representation so faithful that it might somehow come to life or recall a presence. [...] The X-ray is a photogram. A bathing-suit mark made by a sunburn is a form of photogram. So are the outlines of victims fixed by radiation on the walls of ruined buildings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. 137

For Miyamoto, the photogram is the “last possible thing you can do when simplifying photography.” 138 It is nothing more than an “encounter” between light and two objects: sunlight, bathing suit, and skin; atomic light, bodies, and buildings; or, in Miyamoto’s case, light in a darkroom, a blade of grass, and printing paper (Figs. 4.19 & 4.20). 139

The grass in Miyamoto’s photograms are not just any sprigs of grass; they come from the site of the former Aum Shinrikyo satyam, the training facility where the doomsday cult produced sarin gas for the deadly Tokyo subway attack carried out on March 20, 1995. Miyamoto describes his visit to the site in 2002:

137 Rexer, The Antiquarian Avant-Garde, 128.


139 Miyamoto defines the particularity of photography as its ability to make “accidents, one-time events, encounters.” Ibid., 129.
When I went to see the site of the Aum Shinrikyo satyam, it had already been demolished; there was nothing left. Only grass survived. Of course, I took photographs. It was nothing but new grass. […] As much as you try to photograph [the site], you can never really understand or see it. This is only a blade of surviving grass, but by making it a photogram, I wondered what we might be able to see. 140

What we see is frail organic matter. The stark contrast of black and white that characterizes the photogram highlights that fragility: the bits and pieces that flake off, the leaves that whither, and the roots that fade without water. These images have no obvious connection to the Aum Shinrikyo satyam, particularly when we consider their inconspicuous title – grass. They are the antithesis of the visual spectacle spurred by the media in the wake of the events: singular works that cannot be reproduced, the meager, unintended remnants of a historically charged site.

Kasahara Kazuto and Terada Masahiro have pointed out that while Miyamoto’s pinhole photographs and photograms are not ‘ruins’ per se, he is attempting to ‘deconstruct’ the expressive forms of conventional photography. 141 He does this by inverting our normal way of perceiving the world with the original camera format. 142 According to photography critic and historian Yasumi Akihito, if there is anything “fundamentalist” about the pinhole movement, this is precisely it: the “effort to regain the original power of photography.” 143 For Miyamoto and others, the original power of photography approaches what Walter Benjamin called the optical unconscious. Benjamin is worth quoting at length here:

Clearly, it is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. “Other” above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is a commonplace

140 Ibid., 127.
141 Ibid., 112.
142 Ibid., 126.
143 Kuraishi et al., “Pinhōru,” 89.
that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking (if only in general terms), we have no idea at all what happens during the split second when a person actually takes a step. We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or a spoon, but know almost nothing of what really goes on between hand and metal, and still less how this varies with different moods. This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual through psychoanalysis.\textsuperscript{144}

While the pinhole camera clearly does not access all of the resources listed by Benjamin, his description encapsulates the virtues of the frame to “disrupt and isolate” a visual world that is otherwise inaccessible to the human eye. The conditions of the late-capitalist city make this framing device all the more valuable to those photographers who search for alternative, invisible realities.

These alternative realities do more than offer new modes for visualizing the city; the process of capturing those realities with a handmade pinhole camera contributes to “the restoration of other sensual effects that have been obliterated in the modern scopic regime.”\textsuperscript{145} Miyamoto’s pinhole photography echoes the experiences emphasized by Yamanaka and the many photographers who have picked up the pinhole camera since his revolutionary practice in

\textsuperscript{144} Walter Benjamin, “Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version),” in \emph{Walter Benjamin Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940}, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 266. The interviewer in “Miyamoto Ryūji no intabyū: ‘Toshi no muishiki’ wo toru” also makes this connection to Benjamin. Miyamoto, “Miyamoto Ryūji no intabyū,” 108. A project that Miyamoto completed prior to his pinhole work – \emph{Sakasama, uragaeshi} (Inverted, Upside Down) – seems to make an oblique reference to this particular observation by Benjamin on the act of walking. In 1999, Miyamoto used a video camera to capture the inverted and upside-down reflection of images inside a camera obscura, which he placed directly onto the street in Venice, Italy. He commented on the project: “If you were to watch people in a normal way, you would not look at the walking itself; you would be looking at the people, observing what they look like, wondering if you know them, etc. But you are forced to observe walking itself when they are upside down. […] If you look at people walking upside down, it’s a strange way of walking. It is interesting.” Miyamoto, Kasahara, Terada, “Judō to shite,” 123-5. Miyamoto’s observation mirrors Benjamin’s point that new modes of observation are possible only with the camera. Miyamoto, however, extends Benjamin’s claim to the earlier camera obscura.

\textsuperscript{145} Sakaki, The Rhetoric of Photography, 5.
the 1970s. The optical unconscious cannot be separated from these modes of making and viewing that unite the corporeality of the photographer with the mechanism of the camera, for both are requisite components of Miyamoto and others’ attempts to experience the city anew. Moreover, both were seen as central components of the “original power of photography.”
Epilogue: A Country Without Ruins?

“In traditional landscapes, the productions of man, his constructions in particular, surrendered themselves progressively to nature in the form of the ruin. The ruin reintegrates, in successive stages, the traces of human activity into the cycles of nature. There is nothing of the sort in the contemporary city, where objects, if they don’t disappear all in one go, as if by magic, are instead relegated to obsolescence, a bit like the living dead who endlessly haunt the landscape, preventing it from every becoming peaceful again. We have gone from ruin to rust, from trace to waste.” – Antoine Picon, “Anxious Landscapes” (2000)

To say that Japan is a country without ruins is historically inaccurate. In addition to the now iconic ruinous sites preserved in Hiroshima and Nagasaki – not to mention the ruins of industrialization – there are numerous examples of ruins as defined by western standards that date to the premodern era in Japan. For example, in *Oku no hosomichi* (The Narrow Road to the Interior, 1694), a seventeenth-century literary travel journal, the poet Bashō hints at a theory of ruins by focusing on traces in the landscape that make the past present, most notably the former foundations and city walls of Hiraizumi in Northern Japan. Similarly, countless ruins of medieval castle foundations, city and defense walls, and the former stone bases of temple columns appear throughout the country. These structures have been the subject of serious historical inquiry since at least the Meiji period, and in some cases even serve as the basis for contemporary reconstructions of the original structures.

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3 Sawamiya Yū, *Haikyo to natta sengoku meijō* (Famous Castles of the Warring States Turned into Ruins), (Tokyo: Kawade, 2010).

4 For example, the stone bases from the original 7th-century Buddhist temple at Hōryū-ji that burned down in 670 were uncovered after another fire at the site in 1949 and used to re-date and re-construct a hypothetical mockup of the original structure. J. Edward Kidder, Jr. “Reviving the Burning Question: The Hōryū-ji Fires and Its
Yet, as I experienced firsthand in numerous conversations with artists, historians, and curators while conducting the research for this dissertation, the idea that Japan is a country without ruins persists in contemporary discourse. Even Miyamoto made this claim on at least one occasion.⁵ We might attribute this rift between reality and popular perception to the similarities that can be drawn between the flattened landscapes of premodern disasters and that of nuclear disaster, a historical event and scene that is unique to Japan. Both are described in the same language – *yakenohara*, or burned wasteland. To encapsulate the *yakenohara* of the premodern era, historians point to records such as Kamō no Chōmei’s *Hōjōki* (Ten Foot Square Hut) from the 13th century in which he memorialized the razed landscape of Kyoto after a series of natural disasters.⁶ In art history, there are numerous examples of works that picture the total devastation of cities that went hand-in-hand with disaster, such as the blazing fires that sweep through Kyoto in the 12th-century *Bandainagon* handscroll or Maruyama Ōkyo’s catalogue of disastrous events in the *Handscroll of Misfortunes and Fortunes* from 1765.

These masterpieces testify to the notion that disaster, while often promising complete annihilation, is also a *tabula rasa* and, thus, a “generative force in Japanese culture.”⁷ The Metabolist architect Kurokawa Kishō summarized this popular sentiment in writing about his hometown of Nagoya in ruins after the Asia-Pacific War:

> War helped me discover Japanese culture. As I stood amidst the ruins of Nagoya, the third largest city in Japan, there was nothing but scorched earth for as far as I could see. […] destruction usually levels Japanese cities to the ground. But even then the buildings

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⁵ Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, February 8, 2016.


and cities persist as vivid images in the minds and imaginations of the people. And it was in this sense that I first came into contact with several major characteristics of Japanese culture, after I had lost my hometown in the war.\(^8\)

The notion of the generative potential of destruction described by Kurokawa recalls the life cycle of one of the oldest works of architecture in Japan – Ise Shrine. In literature on ruins and Japan, Ise is often held up as evidence of the nonexistence and the irrelevance of ruins in Japanese culture. As markers of the past, what place do ruins have in a landscape where the paradigmatic work of architecture is ceremoniously torn down and rebuilt every twenty years? Indeed, many continue to employ the cyclical deconstruction and reconstruction of Ise to explain the entire history of the built environment in Japan. In the modern period, the erasure of masonry ruins was central to the narrative of Japan’s miraculous postwar rehabilitation. The supposed lack of ruins plays into essentializing explanations of the apparent speed at which the Japanese are able to recover from natural disasters; it reinforces narratives of victimization in evoking images of *yakenohara*; and a lack of historic structures justifies the incessant redevelopment of Japanese cities to this day.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I placed Miyamoto in a lineage of ruins photography conscious of this history and rhetoric that describes Japan as a country without ruins. The range and breadth of Miyamoto’s own engagement with different forms and iterations of fragmented, vernacular material proves otherwise and offers an expanded understanding of the ruin as it has appeared in the modern Japanese context. The ruins considered in this dissertation accord with Tanigawa Atsushi’s acceptance of the ruin as an ambiguous concept, not the ruin as it was once defined in nineteenth-century Japan according to western imperialist standards. They

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are not, for example, what Georg Simmel called evidence of “nature’s revenge.”

The closest that Miyamoto has come to this traditional form of the ruin is with his photobook, *Angkor* (1994), which stands as an outlier in his oeuvre for many reasons, most notably his use of color film. Nor are the subjects discussed in this dissertation the ruin as described by Hegel, a symbol that “the progress of the World Spirit has a purpose, direction, and ultimate goal,” that of “new life and a higher level of historical development.”

Miyamoto’s ruins lack the noble distinction and picturesque aesthetic that Hegel and others granted the ruins of ancient Greece and Rome. Quite the contrary, he pictures late-twentieth-century events of ruination as a challenge to modernist narratives of progress and late-capitalist development.

The primary difference between Miyamoto’s images and the ruin as defined by Simmel or Hegel is their impermanence and volatility. To be sure, the Parthenon, the Roman Acropolis, and the Khmer temples have been altered by centuries of weathering and human intervention, but in the end they endure. All of Miyamoto’s chosen subjects – the demolition sites, cardboard houses, Kowloon Walled City, post-disaster landscapes, even views of the city as seen through the pinhole house – were temporary. In addition to the fractured material composition of these architectures, what drew Miyamoto to all of them was their ephemeral existence in the landscape, which he felt the need to document and preserve in the photographic format. When viewed from a western perspective, then, the most ruin-esque aspect of Miyamoto’s work becomes this element of preservation – ruined material from the past that endures in the present, if only in image form.

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Ultimately, Miyamoto’s initial description of demolition sites as “temporary ruins” proves durable as a label for all of the architecture documented in his work. In their ephemerality, these architectures were invisible, yet essential, to the character of the late-modern Japanese city. At first it might appear that underscoring the ephemerality of these structures reinforces the idea that Japan is, in the end, a country without ruins. However, the content of the photographs undermines any essentializing conclusions of this sort. It would be difficult to reconcile the history of cyclical reconstruction at Ise Shrine with the violence and wastefulness of creative destruction as it was (and is) carried out in late-capitalist Tokyo. In this way, we can acknowledge the existence and endurance of ruination in the urbanscape of Japan, an event that—*in its ephemerality and reoccurrence*—reveals the violence of a history of repetitive, economically-driven redevelopment that isolates and desensitizes urban residents, overshadows the presence of the homeless, augments the trauma of disaster survivors, and eradicates spaces of memory from the landscape. In preserving these events and spaces of ruination in photographs, Miyamoto’s collected works visualize and connect multiple layers of violence in the contemporary urban experience. More affect than artifact, the ruin as it emerges in Miyamoto’s photography is a response to this trauma of incessant urban transformation. Moreover, the sheer number of photographs and their serial collection in the format of the photobook attests to the demolition site, the cardboard house, and the natural disaster as common aspects, or events, of urban life in Japan. Sites of ruination, however fleeting, become an essential trope in the history of urban development in postwar and contemporary Japan.

Miyamoto is keenly aware of urban transformation as a key theme that governs all of his work. In an essay from 1997 on the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, he wrote, “In the times and places where I have lived, there is nothing that hasn’t changed, nothing that has stayed the same,
and nothing that has gone on with unchanging value, and there never will be. Even the natural landscape and the existence of things that seem firmly set, such as the city or architecture, are subject to disappearance and transformation.”11 For Miyamoto, photography is the only medium that could ever come close to grappling with these transformations. Like the changing cityscape, photographs are also subject to disappearance and transformation depending on who is viewing them and in what context. As discussed in Chapter 2, Miyamoto equates the unexpected elements that appeared to him in ruins with the unexpected details that inevitably continue to appear in a photograph without the creator’s awareness. As a photographer, he is driven by such moments when the particular character of photography and the conditions of the city meet.12

In one of the final interviews for this dissertation, Miyamoto identified another point of convergence between the medium of photography and the ruin – darkness. His immersive experience in the blacked-out space of the pinhole camera forced him to focus on the condition of darkness as a foundational element of photography. “If you don’t have darkness,” he said, “light cannot be captured. You need light, but also darkness, in order to see.”13 From the seedy underground of Kowloon Walled City to the tragic devastation of Kobe, Miyamoto’s temporary ruins can also be united under the theme of darkness. Unlike the “fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths,” that Michel Foucault describes as haunting eighteenth-century Europe, here, darkness is understood as an instrument

11 Miyamoto, “Toshi no henyō,” 115.

12 Miyamoto, “Utsuro na machi,” 112.

13 Miyamoto Ryūji, interview with the author, November 6, 2016.
of edification.\textsuperscript{14} Darkness enables a clarity of sight, of memory, and, ultimately, of history. In its modern, artificial form, darkness is a “condition,” as Noam Elcott notes, a condition that confronts “the limits of representation.”\textsuperscript{15} The dark subjects made visible in Miyamoto’s camera reveal the temporary ruin likewise as a condition, a central motif in an alternative narrative of postwar Japanese history that emphasizes destruction rather than creation, repetition rather than progress, and waste rather than growth and prosperity. In this darkness, he helps us to see.


Figures

Figure 1. Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums and Motomachi High-Rise Apartments, 1973, printed in Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (July 1973)

Figure 2. Hayashi Shigeo, Panorama 2 from the Rooftop of the Chūgoku Newspaper Headquarters, Hiroshima, 1945
Figure 3. Kikuchi Shunkichi, *The A-Bomb Dome Stands Amid the Rubble Left by the Bombing (October 1, 1945)*, Hiroshima, 1945

Figure 4. Yamahata Yōsuke, *Nagasaki, August 10, 1945*, Nagasaki, 1945
Figure 5. Yamahata Yōsuke, *Nagasaki, August 10, 1945*, Nagasaki, 1945

Figure 6. Hayashi Tadahiko, “Living in a Collapsed Building, Edogawabashi,” *Kasutori jidai*, 1947
Figure 7. Nakamura Rikko, *The Reality of Postwar Life B (Shimbashi)*, Tokyo, 1948

Figure 8. Fukushima Kikujirō, *Pikadon: A Record of Life After the Bomb*, 1951-60
Figure 9. Fukushima Kikujirō, *Pikadon: A Record of Life After the Bomb*, Hiroshima, 1951-60

Figure 10. Tōmatsu Shōmei, *Ms. Kataoka Tsuyo 1 / Motoharamachi*, Nagasaki, 1961
Figure 11. Tōmatsu Shōmei, *Kataoka Tsuyo / Urakami Cathedral*, Nagasaki, 2007

Figure 12. Ishiuchi Miyako, *SCAR-1976, accident*, 1996
Figure 13. Ishiuchi Miyako, *Bay Side Courts*, 1988-89

Figure 15. Moriyama Daidō, *Midnight Accident*, Tokyo, 1969

Figure 16. Yanagisawa Shin, photograph of Tokyo from the period of 1964-70, published in *Toshi no kiseki* (Tracks of the City), 1979
Figure 17. Kobayashi Shinichirō, *Haikyo yūgi* (Deathopia), 1989-1997

Figure 18. Saiga Yūji, *Views of an Abandoned Island*, 1984-2003
Figure 19. Hatakeyama Naoya, *Rikuzentakata*, 2011

Figure 20. Tange Kenzō, *Hiroshima Peace Center Museum*, Hiroshima, 1955
Figure 21. Urabe Shizutarō, *Kurashiki Ivy Square*, Kurashiki, 1974

Figure 22. Tange Kenzō, *Kurashiki City Hall*, Kurashiki, 1958-60
Figure 1.1 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Grosses Schauspielhaus, East Berlin, 1985,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988

Figure 1.2 “Torikaesareru Taishō kenchiku to kessaku” (A Masterpiece of Taishō Architecture Destroyed), *Asahi Graph* no. 3148 (July 1983), essay by Matsuyama Iwao and photographs by Miyamoto Ryūji
Figure 1.3 Miyamoto Ryūji, “London Pavilion Theater, London, 1986,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988

Figure 1.4 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kenchiku no mokushiroku* (*Architectural Apocalypse*), photobook, 1988
Figure 1.5 Isozaki Arata, *Tsukuba City Center*, drawing, 1979-83

Figure 1.6 Isozaki Arata, *Tsukuba City Center*, 1979-83
Figure 1.7 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nakano Prison, Tokyo, 1983,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988

Figure 1.8 Miyamoto Ryūji, “London Pavilion Theater, London, 1986,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988
Figure 1.9 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Pavilion of Tsukuba Expo ’85, Tsukuba, 1985,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988

Figure 1.10 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nakano Prison, Tokyo, 1983,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988
Figure 1.11 Hirayama Chūji, *Tange Kenzō’s House*, 1953

Figure 1.12 Robert Adams, *Tract house, Westminster, Colorado*, 1974
Figure 1.13 Hilla and Bernd Becher, *Cooling Tower, Zeche Watron, the Ruhr*, 1967

Figure 1.14 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Asahi Beer Factory, Tokyo, 1985,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988

264
Figure 1.15 Nakahira Takuma, *Summer 1968.3* (from *Provoke*, no. 1), gravure-process magazine photograph, November 1968

Figure 1.16 Nakahira Takuma, *Shokubutsu zukan* (Illustrated Botanical Dictionary), printed in the *Asahi Journal* vol. 13 no. 32 (August 2-27, 1971)
Figure 1.17 Cover to *SD (Space+Design)* no. 257 with an article featuring Miyamoto’s photographs of the Nazi flak towers in Vienna, February 1986

Figure 1.18 Konpeito’s survey of Ameyoko Street, published in *Toshi Jūtaku* no. 45 (December 1971)
Figure 1.19 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Gochōme no hūkei” (The Atmosphere of the Fifth District), *Toshi Jūtaku* no. 63 (April 1973)

Figure 1.20 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Gochōme no hūkei” (The Atmosphere of the Fifth District), *Toshi Jūtaku* no. 63 (April 1973)
Figure 1.21 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Gochōme no hūkei” (The Atmosphere of the Fifth District), *Toshi Jūtaku* no. 63 (April 1973)

Figure 1.22 “Eki mae sukōpu” (Station Front Views), *Toshi Jūtaku* no. 87 (January 1975)
Figure 1.23 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Negishi Race Course, Yokohama, 1987,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988

Figure 1.24 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Negishi Race Course, Yokohama, 1987,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988
Figure 1.25 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Negishi Race Course, Yokohama, 1987,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988

Figure 1.26 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Negishi Race Course, Yokohama, 1987,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988
Figure 1.27 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium Swimming Pool, Tokyo, 1987,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988

Figure 1.28 Henri Le Secq, “Demolitions, Place de l’Hôtel de Ville,” *Album Berger*, 1853

Figure 1.30 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Asakusa Shōchiku Movie Theater, Tokyo, 1984,” *Architectural Apocalypse*, 1988
Figure 1.31 Hayashi Shigeo, Genbaku (A-Bomb) Dome, Hiroshima, October, 1945, Hiroshima, 1945

Figure 1.32 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nakano Prison, Tokyo, 1983,” Architectural Apocalypse, 1988
Figure 2.1 The Motomachi High-Rise Apartments under construction in 1973, from *Toshi Jūtaku* no. 66 (July 1973)

Figure 2.2 Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the *genbaku* slums, 1973, from *Toshi Jūtaku* no. 68 (August 1973)
Figure 2.3 Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums, 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)

Figure 2.4 Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums, 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)
Figure 2.5 Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums, 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)

Figure 2.6 Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums and Motomachi High-Rise Apartments comparing their “privacy,” 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)
Figure 2.7 Miyamoto Ryūji, photograph of the genbaku slums with the Motomachi High-Rise Apartments in the background, 1973, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 68 (August 1973)

Figure 2.8 Miyamoto Ryūji, Interior of Kujirai Isamu’s house Poulailler, 1974, from Toshi Jūtaku no. 79 (May 1974)
Figure 2.9 Miyamoto Ryūji, Irregular exterior of Kujirai Isamu’s house *Poulailler*, 1974, from *Toshi Jūtaku* no. 79 (May 1974)

Figure 2.10 An underground village near Dongguan in Hunan Province, from Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects*, 1964
Figure 2.11 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1984,” *Cardboard Houses*, 2003

Figure 2.12 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1988,” *Cardboard Houses*, 2003
Figure 2.13 Exhibition view, “Cardboard Houses,” Yokohama Portside Gallery, 1994

Figure 2.14 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1994,” Cardboard Houses, 2003
Figure 2.15 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Cardboard Houses*, photobook, 2003

Figure 2.16 Miyamoto Ryūji, “New York 1991,” *Cardboard Houses*, 2003
Figure 2.17 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1995,” *Cardboard Houses*, 2003

Figure 2.18 Sakaguchi Kyōhei, “A Japanese Restaurant!?” *Zero Yen Houses*, 2004
Figure 2.19 Sakaguchi Kyōhei, *Zero Yen Houses*, 2004

Figure 2.20 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1984,” *Cardboard Houses*, 2003
Figure 2.21 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Tokyo 1983,” Cardboard Houses, 2003

Figure 2.22 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Osaka 1994,” Cardboard Houses, 2003
Figure 2.23 Nakamura Rikko, “Togoshi 5-chōme,” Fall of 1946 or 1974

Figure 2.24 Miyamoto Ryūji, “London 1994,” Cardboard Houses, 2003
Figure 2.25 Taishō 12, September 1; Earthquake Refugee Huts in front of the Imperial Palace, 1923

Figure 2.26 Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1988
Figure 2.27 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1988

Figure 2.28 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1988
Figure 2.29 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1988

Figure 2.30 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1988
Figure 2.31 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1988

Figure 2.32 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1988
Figure 2.33 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, photobook, 1988

Figure 2.34 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1988
Figure 2.35 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1988

Figure 2.36 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Preah Kham,” *Angkor*, 1994
Figure 2.37 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Angkor Thom Bayon,” *Angkor*, 1994

Figure 2.38 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1988
Figure 2.39 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1997

Figure 2.40 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1997
Figure 2.41 The Ōno Laboratory, “Tsang Tai Uk – Walled Village,” SD no. 330 (March 1992)

Figure 2.42 Miyamoto Ryūji, Kowloon Walled City, 1997
Figure 2.43 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kowloon Walled City*, 1997

Figure 3.1 Map of the “damage strip” of the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake
Figure 3.2 A bus dangling off of a collapsed section of the Hanshin Expressway

Figure 3.3 Eruption of Mt. Bandai published in the Yomiuri Shimbun, August 8, 1888
Figure 3.4 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nagata-ku,” KOBE 1995, 1995

Figure 3.5 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Kobe City Hall, Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” KOBE 1995, 1995
Figure 3.6 Miyamoto Ryūji, *KOBE 1995: After the Earthquake*, photobook, 1995

Figure 3.7 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Temporary housing, Ashiyahama Seaside Town, Niihama-cho,” *KOBE 1995*, 1995
Figure 3.8 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Kobe Ekima Building, Chuo-ku,” *KOBE 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.9 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Meiji Life Insurance Building, Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” *KOBE 1995*, 1995
Figure 3.10 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” KOBE 1995, 1995

Figure 3.11 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Kobe City Hall, Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” KOBE 1995, 1995
Figure 3.12 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Sannomiya, Chuo-ku,” KOBE 1995, 1995

Figure 3.13 Aerial photograph of the areas destroyed by fire in Kobe
Figure 3.14 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Trainyard Ishiyagawa, Hanshin Railway, Higashinada-ku,” KOBE 1995, 1995

Figure 3.15 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Interchange, Hanshin Expressway 3, Nagata-ku,” KOBE 1995, 1995
Figure 3.16 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Harbourland, Chuo-ku,” *KOBE 1995*, 1995

Figure 3.17 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nagata-ku,” *KOBE 1995*, 1995
Figure 3.18 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nagata-ku,” KOB E 1995, 1995

Figure 3.19 Ban Shigeru, Paper Loghouses, Shin-Minatogawa Park, Kobe, 1995
Figure 3.20 Ban Shigeru, *Interior of the Paper Church Community Hall*, Kobe, 1995

Figure 3.21 Miyamoto Katsuhito, Conceptual model for *Topographical Healing*, 1995
Figure 3.22 Exterior of the Japan Pavilion at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale

Figure 3.23 Interior of the “Fractures” Exhibition in the Japan Pavilion at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale
Figure 3.24 Yoshizaka Takamasa, *Japan Pavilion*, view underneath the raised building with a hole in the first floor, 1956

Figure 3.25 Detail of the ripped edge of one of Miyamoto Ryūji’s murals in the “Fractures” Exhibition at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale
Figure 3.26 Detail of the wreckage piled up in front of Miyamoto Ryūji’s murals in the “Fractures” Exhibition at the 1996 Venice Architecture Biennale

Figure 3.27 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Nada-ku,” KOBE 1995, 1995
Figure 3.28 Yamahata Yōsuke, *Nagasaki, August 10, 1945*, 1945

Figure 3.29 Yamahata Yōsuke, *Nagasaki, August 10, 1945*, 1945
Figure 3.30 Miyamoto Ryūji, “Shimo Yamate Catholic Church, Chuo-ku,” KOBE 1995, 1995

Figure 3.31 The Great Hanshin Earthquake Memorial at Meriken Park, Kobe
Figure 3.32 “The city immediately after the earthquake” Diorama at the DRI, Kobe

Figure 3.33 Wall of photographs and material objects related to the earthquake at the DRI
Figure 3.34 A portion of the Nojima Fault that has been preserved at the Hokudan Earthquake Memorial Park on Awaji Island

Figure 3.35 A detail of the kitchen in the “Earthquake House” at the Hokudan Earthquake Memorial Park on Awaji Island
Figure 3.36 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Kobe 1995: The Earthquake Revisited*, 2006, frontispiece

Figure 3.37 A detail of the curling edges of Miyamoto Ryūji’s photo murals on exhibition at the Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2017
Figure 3.38 Miyamoto Ryūji’s photo mural on exhibition at the Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2017

Figure 3.39 Exhibition view, “Japan-ness: Architecture and Urbanism in Japan since 1945,” Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2017
3.11
TSUNAMI
2011

Figure 3.40 Ikeda Moriko and Miyamoto Ryūji, title screen, \textit{3.11 TSUNAMI 2011}, film, 2012

Figure 3.41 Seto Hashime and Miyamoto Ryūji, scene of houses being washed away by the tsunami, \textit{3.11 TSUNAMI 2011}, film, 2012
Figure 3.42 Ikeda Moriko and Miyamoto Ryūji, Ikeda-san reenacting her search for the camcorder on the plot of land where her house once stood, *3.11 TSUNAMI 2011*, film, 2012

And I came to the living room and started filming here.

Figure 4.1 Diagram of a pinhole apparatus
Figure 4.2 Katsuhika Hokusai, “Mt. Fuji Through a Knothole,” from *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*, woodblock print, 1830s

Figure 4.3 Ueda Koichirō, *Scene 4 Shinjuku West*, pinhole photograph, 2011
Figure 4.4 Edward Levinson, *Summer Solstice*, pinhole photograph, 1998

Figure 4.5 Nojima Yasuzō, *Muddy Sea*, gum-brichromate photograph, 1910
Figure 4.6 Yamanaka Nobuo, *Pinhole Room Revolution I*, pinhole photograph, 1973

Figure 4.7 Yamanaka Nobuo, *Pinhole on the 9th Floor*, pinhole photograph, styrene boards, 1975
Figure 4.8 Yamanaka Nobuo, *Pinhole on Floor and Wall (1)*, pinhole photograph, plywood, 1977

Figure 4.9 Homma Takashi, *Tokyo*, pinhole photograph, 2013
Figure 4.10 Hara Hiroshi, *Niramu House*, exterior, 1978, photographed by Miyamoto Ryūji, 1983

Figure 4.11 Hara Hiroshi, *Niramu House*, interior with skylight, 1978, photographed by Miyamoto Ryūji, 1983
Figure 4.12 Miyamoto Ryūji’s “pinhole house,” 2000

Figure 4.13 Miyamoto Ryūji, Pinhole House, Chuo-ku 2-chōme, pinhole photograph, March 8, 2000
Figure 4.14 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Pinhole House, Kōtō-ku, Tatsumi 2-chōme*, pinhole photograph, March 7, 2000

Figure 4.15 Miyamoto’s pinhole houses on exhibition at Akiyama Gallery, Tokyo, 2000
Figure 4.16 Miyamoto’s cruciform pinhole photography on view at BankART Gallery, Yokohama, 2012

Figure 4.17 Miyamoto’s handheld pinhole camera designed by a Swiss camera maker
Figure 4.18 Miyamoto Ryūji, *Yokohama Portside*, pinhole photography panels, 2012

Figure 4.19 Miyamoto Ryūji, *grass*, photogram, 2002
Figure 4.20 Miyamoto Ryūji, *grass*, photogram, 2002
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