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Graphic Poetry as Historical Experience: Naoko Fujimoto's "Thursdays" and "On A Black Hill"

Introduction

Japanese American poet Naoko Fujimoto, living and writing in the US, works primarily within the medium of poetry and art. Her upcoming book is a collection of graphic poetry, and her previous collections, including *Home, No Home*, and *Where I Was Born*, both navigate the complex cross-cultural and transnational geographies that shape her life. Born in Japan, Fujimoto moved to the US for school, where she now lives. Through her work, she explores what home might mean in the context of the two geographies that shape her life, their own relationship to each other in the context of the atomic bomb during the Second World War, and her own family history. Her poetry and art navigate complex questions of what it means to live in a country that has had a significant historical impact on both her personal family history as well as the collective history of Japan.

Fujimoto's poem "Thursdays" and its visual counterpart "On A Black Hill" both speak to this question specifically— tying together both the mediums she uses to navigate temporal and spatial questions of the impact of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Her work, and her own identity as Japanese American, highlights questions of what this impact means across time and space. *Situating this within and across multiple genres, Fujimoto's poetry highlights the usefulness of the graphic poem in navigating a complex transnational memory historically and for her.*

Genre in Fujimoto's Graphic Poetry

Fujimoto's work primarily draws from three distinct genres: graphic narrative, poetry, and visual art. While graphic poetry connotes a similarity to the graphic narratives, Fujimoto's work differs from the conventions of the graphic narrative through the role it plays as poetry. Drawing on Will Eisner's work, Scott McCloud defines the comic or graphic narrative as "sequential"—tying it to multiple panels, multiple image and text combinations that move across time and the space of the page.¹ However, here, Fujimoto's graphic poetry is distinct from this form (even though it draws from it) in that it is *not* sequential (in this specific poem, there is only the single image). While the graphic narrative as McCloud defines it relies on the reader to navigate the spatial movement as temporal movement, it provides visual cues for readers to make those temporal jumps—the gutters, the panels.² Fujimoto does not follow this central aspect of the graphic narrative—there is no visual or textual clue for the reader to move through the poem (other than possibly exploring it as a movement across medium of one of her textual poems). Other than how to read individual pieces of text on the page, there is no *specific* linearity in the page.

Hillary Chute also writes of the comic: "Comics is a word-and-image form in which words and images create unsynthesized narrative cracks; that is to say, it is not an illustrative form in which each is redundant of the other. It is also a form that fundamentally relies on space to represent time, carving punctual moments out of the space of the page. Comics locates the reader in space and for this reason is able to spatialize memory."³ She goes on to also discuss the graphic narrative as a mapping—highlighting the ways in which space exists and is used in the graphic narrative.⁴ This definition of the comic is useful in highlighting how Fujimoto works within this tradition—while her work does not use the traditional genre conventions of the comic that McCloud highlights, it does similar work to spatially map in image text combinations.

¹ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1993) p. 5.

² Ibid.

³ Hillary Chute, "Comics Form and Narrating Lives," *The Modern Language Association of American*, 2011, p. 108.

⁴ Ibid.

Building on Chute's discussion of the comic form, poet and visual artist Gabrielle Bates writes of the poetry comic: "It is a form (genre? subgenre? happening? mode?) where meaning is found in integration by dwelling in the between. Juxtapositions form the whole, and to be read truthfully, these contrasts must be considered in relation. In other words, the face is split: to see it, you cannot look only at the left side or the right. You must look her in both her eyes."⁵ This definition is similar to Chute's definition in how does not necessarily highlight a distinction between the poetry comic and the comic, merely focusing on meaning through text and art. However, the label itself highlights a difference in genre based on poetry vs. novel/narrative. The crucial difference in Fujimoto's work and the graphic novel is the way it uses poetic literary devices and makes connections not only by proximity as the graphic narrative implies, but uses those poetic devices in order to navigate the work of spatial mapping it does, rather than devices of prose narrative.

Arguably, the poem even moves outward from center, similar to a pattern novelist Jane Alison describes in her craft book *Meander, Spiral, Explode: Design and Pattern in Narrative*, the radial. Alison defines the radial as: "those in which a powerful center holds the fictional world—character's obsessions, incidents in time—tightly in its gravitational force."⁶ Here, Alison focuses on fiction, but the radial can also be a really useful way of mapping history across generations (as poet Aria Aber also does in her lyric essay "Rilke and I"). Alison describes it as an "explosive, magnetic center."⁷ Thinking about this, and the atomic bomb as the center that holds the poem (and even more broadly, Fujimoto's body of work as a descendant of this history), Fujimoto navigates outward into questions of time, space, and history. Within contexts of exploring the impact of violence of war across generations, this form is even tied to this in the

⁵ Gabrielle Bates, "Poetry Comics: You Must Look Her In Both Her Eyes," Poetry Foundation, February 21, 2019. Accessed February 5, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2019/02/poetry-comics-you-must-look-her-in-both-her-eyes?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social_media&utm_campaign=general_marketing.

⁶ Jane Alison, *Meander, Spiral, Explode: Design and Pattern in Narrative* (New York, NY: Catapult, 2019), 165.

⁷ *Ibid.*

language Alison uses—the radial, with its powerful center around which all circles implies an inability to escape this all-powerful central idea/question that transcends everything else, especially the linearity of narrative (here, Hiroshima and time). Even spatially, the poem takes as center the line “On A Black Hill” and moves outward from there (discussed later in more detail). However, this connection to Alison’s radial also highlights the fundamental question of genre here—how crucial long-form narrative approaches (as Alison explores and as the graphic narrative suggests) are to this poem as a shorter narrative.

Situating Graphic Narrative and Japanese-American Art-Text

The graphic narrative has often been a useful way to navigate questions of geography and distance in historical experience, including work such as Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*. Marianne Hirsch also discusses the power of the image in her Editor’s Column for the October 2004 PMLA issue— she writes of “seeing [as] a form of wounding and being wounded.”⁸ Hirsch also highlights the power of the image through Donald Rumsfeld’s words about Abu Ghraib: “you cannot help but be outraged.”⁹ This specifically highlights how the image in the graphic novel is useful in questions of historical memory and trauma that Fujimoto’s work navigates—in the context of the impact of Hiroshima and the terror of the atomic bomb and its ongoing impact.

A particularly useful example to highlight this distinction in genre between graphic narrative and graphic poetry, as well as to situate Fujimoto’s work within a history of Japanese American art-text work about the war, is Mine Okubo’s *Citizen 13360*. There are distinct differences in the spaces both of these works come from—Okubo an American citizen forced to go to a Japanese American internment camp during the war, and Fujimoto an immigrant to the US from Japan, where she was born and raised, two generations removed from the direct

⁸ Marianne Hirsch, “Editor’s Column: Collateral Damage,” PMLA vol. 119, no. 5 (October 2004): 1211. doi:10.1632/003081204x17798.

⁹ Ibid, 1209.

experience of the war. While *Citizen 13660* is also not a graphic novel and is defined as a visual autobiography, it suggests connections to the questions of time that Fujimoto is also concerned with. Towards the end of the autobiography, Okubo writes: “My thoughts shifted from the past to the future.”¹⁰ This line is tied to the question of a non-linearity of time that Fujimoto’s work also explores in how it connects past to future without the explicit connection of present in the space of the line—highlighting that movement across time that is so central to Fujimoto’s work too. Another important parallel here is the way that Okubo’s work is not directly a graphic novel—instead, a visual autobiography in drawings later accompanied by text. Here, Okubo’s work is a useful comparison to highlight the power of the visual in Fujimoto’s work since it too uses that idea of art and text, but is distinctly different from the genre of graphic novel as defined in literary spaces.

The lack of panels in Fujimoto’s work ties into what Gillian Whitlock discusses in “Autographics: Seeing the ‘P’ of Comics”: “comics offer a unique mediation of trauma in “boxes of grief.”¹¹ Discussing the role of comics within narratives of historical trauma such as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, here, Whitlock highlights the comics as a medium to navigate that trauma because of how it uses that sequential form in order to navigate questions of grief¹²—however, different from the graphic novel that uses panels to suggest connections across time (sequentially), Fujimoto does not contain it. The textual poem contains white space and enjambment frequently, both of which suggest a simultaneous restraint as well as spilling over of grief, and the lack of panels in the graphic poem points to that idea of ongoing loss and ongoing history for Fujimoto and the speaker of her poem attempting to move through geography—this history cannot be contained in a panels, in a sequence, it spills over, moving around the page, non-linearly. It moves in the way Jane Alison highlights, circling that question of the radial as a

¹⁰ Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13360*, (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2014), 209.

¹¹ Gillian Whitlock, “Autographics: Seeing the ‘P’ of Comics,” *Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 52 no. 4 (Winter 2006), 969.

¹² *Ibid.*

space to hold that loss because of how extensive it can be and how it does not require a beginning or ending through time—it moves differently: circling Hiroshima through the family.

Fujimoto’s work, despite its difference in movement (radial (nonlinear) vs. sequential), builds on this existing tradition of art-text work including graphic novels (such as *Maus* and *Persepolis*) and visual autobiography (such as *Citizen 13360*). Whitlock highlights the role of the autobiographical comic in “engag[ing] in traumatic memory work across languages, cultures, and generations”¹³—this is what Fujimoto builds on, but in her work, she moves through narrative non-linearly, using different craft techniques to situate her own understanding of this idea of memory and history after collective historical trauma within this tradition of visual and literary art about memory and documentation.

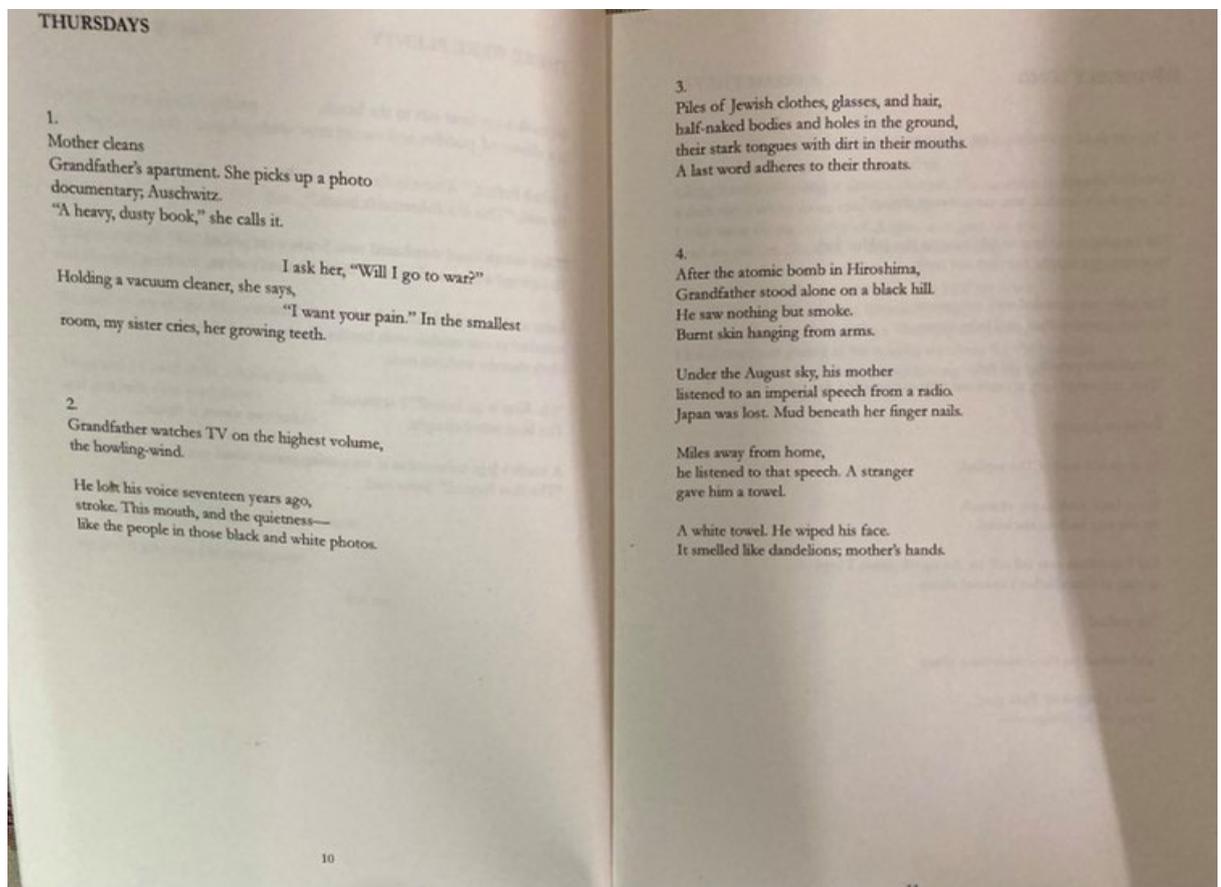
Naoko Fujimoto’s “Thursdays” and “On A Black Hill”

Thursdays:

“Thursdays” is a part of Fujimoto’s collection *Where I Was Born*, and the title of the collection itself establishes these central preoccupations of the collection, of geography and time—*was* implying a before and after, which Fujimoto challenges in the poem through geography, *where*. Even in text, Fujimoto’s role as a creator of graphic poetry is evident—in navigating the liminal historical space this poem centers, even in text, Bates’ imperative and the nature of the graphic narrative, to look at both space and text is central. Both of these geographies and times are crucial to understanding the poem as a whole. The poem itself is divided into four sections, separated by both numbering into sections and white space. The poem’s use of two pages visually, and how they are separated makes it visual in many ways (similar to the work visual writer Sarah Minor has done with literary essays shaped and

¹³ Ibid.

fragmented in the space of the page—once again highlighting how Fujimoto is working within a tradition of work in the forms she uses).



(pages 10-11 of Naoko Fujimoto's *Where I Was Born*)

In the first section Fujimoto situates the context of the poem—the speaker's mother is cleaning her grandfather's house and "picks up a photo/documentary: Auschwitz."¹⁴ In the line break here, Fujimoto uses enjambment to break language—"photo documentary" as "photo/documentary"—moving the sentence and phrase over the line break. This enjambment asks readers to rethink the space between the words and what it might mean—her mother picking up a photo without the following context of "documentary: Auschwitz" ties into how this poem connects personal history to historical context, and photo might imply a familial

¹⁴ Naoko Fujimoto, *Where I Was Born* (Detroit, MI: Willow Books, 2019), 10.

connection being passed down, or a family memory immortalized forever, suspended in time. Once again here, this connection to a suspension in time (of both photo, and of Hiroshima), as never finished, always ongoing. Visually, (the) “photo” is suspended—no punctuation to end stop the line, just the enjambment carrying it over.

To place documentary on its own next to “Auschwitz” also reminds of the lived historical reality of World War II in how the line allows for a thinking of the “photo/documentary” as both connected and disconnected, to think of Fujimoto’s geography and history as situated in a specific historical period, to ask us to think of geographies as ongoing rather than disparate. The central historical events references in this poem (Auschwitz, and later, Hiroshima) are inherently connected, and coming back to Bates again, both are contextualized and geographically linked. “Photo/documentary” also asks us to consider the role of the graphic—in separating the phrase by a line break, the words stay a phrase, and become two words. As two words, “photo” and “documentary” highlight the way this poem (and its graphic counterpart) are concerned with image as documentation. Considering Hirsch’s words on the image in the context of the aftermath of atrocity that Fujimoto’s work also chronicles, this idea of graphic poetry as visual, and then visual as wound and outrage connects once again to what Bates asks us to do to understand the poetry comic (here, graphic poetry) as documentary, as historical reflection. In the line break of “photo/documentary” Fujimoto draws attention to the ways in which the idea of image as powerful might function as symbol in text. Additionally, while the text is certainly powerful, the further *translation* of text to graphic (while it is an adaptation of genre, thinking about it through the lens of translation also allows for an understanding of text as tied to language here) allows it to be far more powerful in how it interrogates question of time and landscape.

Here, “documentary” in the context of a poem is also reminiscent of the genre of documentary poetry—while Fujimoto’s work is not documentary in the traditional sense, it

engages with that idea of poetry as testament to atrocity in many ways, as a record of historical event. Jenny Bouilly writes in *Betwixt and Between: Essays on the Writing Life*: “The page is artifact to poetry, that is, to what has been.”¹⁵ Here, the photo documentary is “artifact to what has been” just as Fujimoto’s work itself is “artifact to what has been” in the context of her own family history as tied to Hiroshima as “what has been.” Poetry here allows Fujimoto to navigate that historical documentation through a personal lens—to make it “artifact.”

From “photo/documentary,” Fujimoto moves on to the speaker, the “I” asking the mother if she too will have to go to war, to which the mother responds that she wants the speaker’s pain.¹⁶ Here, the text is visually space in a way where the question of going to war is set off slightly, the line until the mother speaks is once again left aligned (directly below the book), and for the actual text of what the mother says, it begins aligned with the line about the question of going to war (see image earlier). So here, while literally “I want your pain” is what the mother says to the speaker, it is also tied into the question of the speaker attempting to understand her own experience seeing the pain of the other members of her family, processing that grief and pain—both the mother and the speaker attempt to navigate questions of their own understanding amidst familial pain of war. Pain as tied to wound also comes through here, highlighting how Fujimoto’s shift to visual might reflect what Hirsch writes of the power of the visual on the viewer.

In the second section of the poem, the grandfather of the speaker watches TV, and the speaker, in the narration of the poem contextualizes the history of the grandfather—that “he lost his voice seventeen years ago [.]”¹⁷ This loss, of voice through a stroke, is then likened to “black and white photos.”¹⁸ Once again, Fujimoto in this fragment of the poem, centers image—TV,

¹⁵ Jenny Bouilly, *Betwixt and Between: Essays on the Writing Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 2018), p. 43.

¹⁶ Naoko Fujimoto, *Where I Was Born* (Detroit, MI: Willow Books, 2019), 10.

¹⁷ Naoko Fujimoto, *Where I Was Born* (Detroit, MI: Willow Books, 2019), 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

photos (as Bouilly writes, “artifact to what has been.”). This image in the poem, of the photo as memory (even tied to the Auschwitz photo documentary from the first section) is important in how it highlights a trapping in time and memory—the loss of voice as a suspension of language, to be trapped in time. While not directly visual, this poem is deeply concerned with the power of the image, of the image as a way to understand the implications of historical violence, and by extension, historical loss. The repeated language of the image, here, in these first two sections, situates Fujimoto as exploring the way the intersections of language and image work to highlight historical trauma, to interrogate how we understand the connections between media to understand the connections between geography and time—for the grandfather and the speaker, seventeen years ago is not a *before*, it is an *ongoing* loss of voice, of language. For it to be ongoing is to ask the reader to not demarcate events into before and after, but to rethink time as ongoing—seventeen years ago is now.

The third section is composed of four lines, all of which situate the poem in the historical context hinted at so far more deeply. In this, Fujimoto describes a scene of bodies of Jewish people, which can be inferred to be from the “photo/documentary” of Auschwitz referred to in the first fragment due to the spatial connections of the third section being next to the first one (parallel on the facing page).¹⁹ In this description of death, of incomplete comes up—in the last line: “A last word adheres to their throats.”²⁰ To adhere implies to connect—to not be able to leave, and as such, the adherence of the last word here, once again connects through language, loss as ongoing, historical violence as ongoing. Auschwitz here is not an event of the past—the photo documentary, the lived experience of the speaker’s grandfather as tied to Hiroshima make the impact of World War II ongoing.

¹⁹ Ibid, 11.

²⁰ Ibid.

The fourth section, significantly longer than the previous ones (twelve lines compared to eight, five, and four respective), is directly concerned with the grandfather's experience of Hiroshima at the time of the atomic bomb. In the first verse, the grandfather is on a hill, and "saw nothing but smoke" which is followed by the image of "burnt skin hanging from arms."²¹ This attention, once again, to image, emphasizes the continued overarching images the poem emphasizes, of the visual—of the visual as "outrage" for the reader as specifically tied to Hiroshima.²² Then, in the following verse, the poem moves spatially to the mother of the grandfather (the speaker's great-grandmother), to situate her listening to the surrender of Japan: "his mother / listened to an imperial speech from a radio. / Japan was lost."²³ Loss is deeply connected to the central question of this poem—of loss as ongoing. The grandfather losing his voice, a loss of time and geography as this is ongoing, all work towards asking readers to rethink loss as tied to that central question of Hiroshima. In this line, loss is once again directly referenced after the loss of voice for the grandfather in section two, and in both of these instances of loss, the line is relatively short, eight words in the first, and three in the second. This containing of loss in shorter sentences also symbolically ties into how Fujimoto asks us to reimagine historical loss across time rather than before and after, and even in containing loss in these short sentences, Fujimoto situates it as perpetual. Following this, the grandfather too listens to the same speech, but "Miles away from home."²⁴ This spatial distance, in conjunction with what Fujimoto does to time in this poem once again highlights the interconnectedness of space and time for understanding this history as lived. The poem ends with him wiping his face on a towel given to him by a stranger that smells "like dandelions; mother's hands" directly

²¹ Naoko Fujimoto, *Where I Was Born* (Detroit, MI: Willow Books, 2019), 11.

²² Marianne Hirsch, "Editor's Column: Collateral Damage," *PMLA* vol. 119, no. 5 (October 2004): 1209. doi:10.1632/003081204x17798.

²³ Naoko Fujimoto, *Where I Was Born* (Detroit, MI: Willow Books, 2019), 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

linking, once again, this listening to of the speech, in connection to the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima, across space.²⁵

The third and fourth sections appear on the next page that faces the page sections one and two appear on, leaving white space on the rest of the page below sections one and two (image earlier). This ties into the way this poem exists, with section one and two focused on now (for the speaker), and section three and four more directly dealing with historical violence as it happens and in the immediate aftermath. For Fujimoto to situate these two halves of the poem in the book opposite each other, on one page and the immediate facing page ties into the need to understand these dually. The poem, in this use of white space, is no longer linear (much like time is not linear and clear for the impact of these historical events themselves—the poems are ongoing not linearly, but *across* the page), but is parallel, constant—the past is now, now is the past.

On A Black Hill:

“On A Black Hill,” which appears on [Fujimoto’s website and blog](#), is a mixed media graphic poem that uses the space of the page to explore the events and themes of “Thursdays,” using text and art in a translation of sorts in order to navigate this shift in genre (I use translation because of the movement across language and geography that it highlights and that exists in Fujimoto’s work too). The poem is entirely created by hand—using no digital tools, including handwriting for text. In doing so, Fujimoto situates herself in the poem, tying herself to the speaker through that choice to place herself in it through this artistic choice.

This poem exists as one single image/page, with no clear direction as to where to begin. The first, most powerful image a reader is drawn to is at the top left—a flower blooming, but the flower itself resembles fire. Thinking about this resemblance of fire as the “explosive center”

²⁵ Ibid.

Alison describes for the radial makes it possible to view this poem radially, moving outwards from that image of Hiroshima, with all the other questions of the graphic poem around/circling it both thematically and visually. This is a single page with no distinct sequential separation in any way, which highlights the distinctions between the medium Fujimoto uses and what the graphic novel is. As a graphic poem, the page is largely divided into two separated diagonally by the line “On a black hill” (which also appears as the setting of the grandfather seeing smoke in Hiroshima in “Thursdays”)—and this is diagonally parallel to a hill itself.²⁶ This image of the hill as the one the grandfather stands on as he witnesses Hiroshima is once again tied to that idea of radial—all the other parts of the poem circle this text of being on the hill, which in turn is very deeply tied to that image of Hiroshima (also tied to the flower).

On the hill, the grandfather stands, with the photo of the bodies from Auschwitz from fragment three of “Thursdays” below, within the black part of the hill.²⁷ Below that, as the hill widens, the mother vacuums the photo documentary, the speaker asks if she will end up having to go to way.²⁸ In this movement through media of the poem from text to graphic, the line “I want your pain” does not appear. Here, it does not need to appear, with the radial allowing that implied idea of pain as non-linear and circular always shifting and moving. Here, the non-linear nature of the way she structures the page around the flower as symbolic of Hiroshima allows that idea of pain to encompass the rest of the page, to shape how we understand it without explicitly stating—the radial is useful because of the connections it implies non-linearly.

From the left of the hill, a flower emerges, orange at the top of the hill (possibly intentionally symbolic of the atomic bomb).²⁹ Here, the speaker’s sister from “Thursdays” is on

²⁶ Naoko Fujimoto, “On A Black Hill,” *White Words*, 2019, <http://naokofujimoto.blogspot.com/2019/04/how-graphic-poetry-helps-us-progress.html>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

the mother's back, crying, and from here, the flower that becomes center of the radial grows. This connection between the center (as tied to the grandfather) and as tied to the child too allows it to connect this memory generationally, and explore this history across time, as ongoing. The mother is also at the same time vacuuming the photo documentary—here, all of these things are connected literally in the visual aspect of the poem. Fujimoto makes those connections to center explicit, intersecting these different orbits in order to navigate the connections across geography and time as central to understanding the ongoing impact of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

The hill itself as a section of this graphic poem because of the way it exists spatially—things build on each other, grow on each other, and are all connected. Here, it is useful for Fujimoto because of how she inverts the way we might expect these events to exist within the shape of the hill. The hill, as collage, is also important because of how visually overwhelming the collage itself is—busy and cluttered, disorienting as it moves from one place to another, symbolic of the speaker's own attempt to understand this history and she moves through it. To move upwards is to go through linear time, to climb uphill, to move from Hiroshima to the speaker. But to understand time as ongoing is to recognize that seventeen years ago is now, to understand that moving uphill is also moving downhill.

The other diagonally divided section (left/top) consists of the text of the grandfather standing, and the mother listening to the speech from "Thursdays."³⁰ Set at the top of the page, in a relatively larger size compared to most of the other text on the page, this attention to this language centers the idea of the connections between spatial distance, loss, and time that the poem explores. Below that, an inverted United States flag made of the white towel that the stranger gives the grandfather, with those lines appearing in the alternate stripes of the flag.³¹ The

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

US flag itself does not appear in “Thursdays” and Fujimoto’s use of it here as image particularly draws attention to the contrasting geographies of Fujimoto—Bates’ “you must look her in both her eyes.”³² To understand the poem, to understand Fujimoto’s work necessitates understanding these aspects together and not separating them into either/or, but to understand all of these contrasts as co-existing and as ongoing to fully understand lived experience—even the textual poem and visual poem work together to create meaning in some ways, and can be understood better considered together than separately.

Situating Hiroshima Historically in Fujimoto’s Work

Within contexts of Hiroshima and the atomic bomb, Fujimoto’s work symbolically navigates historical aspects of this historical event, exploring through the genre of the graphic poem as a text these questions that circle (as radial) Hiroshima (as center). Here, this radial/non-linear pattern of movement through language of historical memory allows it to be a powerful navigation of loss as ongoing—always with the potential to spill over across geography and time, not contained. In situating this narrative of a single historical event across generations in the way it does, radiating outwards, always circling but never too close to center. Fujimoto does not center the event itself (center), more focused on the impact—in the text, in the fourth section, she moves to “after.”

Through this envisioning spatially of the radial in literature, Fujimoto builds on existing traditions of art and literature of the historical impact of Hiroshima too—here, while her conception of the graphic poem is unique, it exists amidst other literary traditions of graphic novels, poetry, and fiction, among others that explore the impact of Hiroshima. Tied to this, John Dower discusses the Marukis’ work of drawings related to Hiroshima, the title of which in

³² Gabrielle Bates, “Poetry Comics: You Must Look Her In Both Her Eyes,” Poetry Foundation, February 21, 2019. Accessed February 5, 2021. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2019/02/poetry-comics-you-must-look-her-in-both-her-eyes?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social_media&utm_campaign=general_marketing.

English is “Flash-bang.”³³ This title, for a collection of art about the atomic bomb ties into Alison’s description of the center of the radial as “explosive”—and how, in this narrative technique, the center is what is always present in the background, intersection with the many ways different questions move around it. In the context of the atomic bomb, this shape of narrative also symbolically navigates that idea of war and violence as tied to loss and grief always present in the background, the potential for directly intersecting the “explosive” center always too close. The radial for the visual poem as non-linear also symbolically and spatially allows Fujimoto to build on existing work in this tradition—to situate her work amidst existing literature that serves as “artifact” as Bouilly puts it.

Dower writes: “...that most Japanese regarded Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the preeminent moments of atrocity in World War II in Asia, towering above all other acts of war just as the mushroom cloud had towered over Hiroshima...”³⁴ He also discusses how this tied into how other Japanese atrocities were acknowledged, which ties into Fujimoto’s work of understanding Hiroshima through the radial. Charlotte Eubanks also discusses the Marukis visual art in the context of picture scrolls that had backdrops of fire.³⁵ Thinking about both of these highlights how the radial brings to mind and ties into existing works—the cloud circling everything, fire as backdrop, bring to mind that idea of “explosive center” Alison describes, allowing Fujimoto’s work to symbolically engage with these questions of the aftermath of war nonlinearly through poetry.

Conclusion:

³³ John W. Dower, “The Bombed: Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in Japanese Memory,” in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, ed. Michael J. Hogan, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 128

³⁴ Ibid 141

³⁵ Charlotte Eubanks, “The Mirror of Memory: Constructions of Hell in the Marukis’ Nuclear Murals.” *PMLA* vol 124 no. 5: 1616.

Thinking about “On A Black Hill” as a translation of “Thursdays,” from textual poetry into visual poetry, into the poetry comic, is useful in terms of what poet and translator Johannes Göransson writes of translation his essay “Translation Wounds” in the book Deformation Zone published by Ugly Duckling Presse: “The wound of translation makes impossible connections between languages, unsettling stable idea of language, productive ideas of literature.”³⁶ This connection between Fujimoto’s writing and art is also possible through what poet and translator Joyelle McSweeney writes further in Deformation Zone, in fragment 4 of her essay “Translation, the Slavish Mould, the Filthiest Medium Alive: With Special Reference to Matthew Barney, Andy Warhol, and Divine”, of translation as “medium” dually—both as form and as a movement.³⁷ Form and movement, tied to what Goransson discusses of translator Christian Hawkey’s work on translation as “in-between space”³⁸ is especially useful to ground how this poem moves from the textual to the visual—in movement and in form, Fujimoto’s work is ongoing, rather than thinking of the contemporary (here, Fujimoto herself living in the US) as separate from the past (here, the US dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima), Fujimoto creates the liminal space of translation Hawkey and Goransson and McSweeney envision through art, recognizing these events as ongoing rather than clearly *before* and *after*.

In her work, Fujimoto navigates non-linear understandings of geography and time through visual and literary art, situating her work within traditions of writing of the ongoing impact of historical trauma, including but not limited to Hiroshima. Within the contexts of the similarities and differences in categorizing her work between existing, traditionally defined genres such as the graphic novel, Fujimoto creates a spatial understanding of literature as non-linear, highlighting how non-linear narrative can be useful for exploring historical events, and how non-

³⁶ Joyelle McSweeney and Johannes Göransson, Deformation Zone (New York City, NY: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012), 8.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

linearity is especially useful in the context of Fujimoto's own identity across geography as a Japanese immigrant living in the US in the 21st century exploring the impact of Hiroshima.

Through "Thursdays" and "On A Black Hill," Fujimoto explores how time is connected to history, and uses the medium of graphic poetry to explore the ways in which text and art can collectively highlight a rethinking of the symbolism of space and the way historical events exist in and are understood through time, challenging us to look at poetry and history non-linearly. In Fujimoto's work between mediums, as text, as graphic poem, as translation, she works in and explore how spatial connections work across time, thinking of her own identity as a Japanese diasporic writer living in and publishing in the United States. Transnational geography and thinking through time through spatial connections allows graphic poetry to explore the lived experience of historical events, and Fujimoto uses the movement of the poem from text to graphic in order to navigate this.

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