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## Reconstructing the Hiroshima Maidens

IN 1950 THE FAMOUS Japanese American sculptor Isamu Noguchi made a historic pilgrimage to Japan, where he lived and worked intermittently for the rest of his life.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the early 1950s, Noguchi pursued a successful series of projects in Japan, including a sculpture garden at the Reader's Digest building in Tokyo, an exhibition of his works at the Mitsukoshi department store, and a memorial for his father at Keio University. Noguchi also designed stone railings for two bridges in Hiroshima. The Great Bridge for Peace (called *tsu kuru*, translated as "to build" or "life") and the Great Western Bridge for Peace (called *yuku*, translated as "to depart" or "die") were meant as symbolic thoroughfares by which travelers could visit Hiroshima's newly constructed Peace Memorial Park (fig. 7).<sup>2</sup> The park, the brainchild of the Committee for the Reconstruction of Hiroshima, was first conceived in 1947 to honor the citizens and city ravaged by the 1945 atomic bombing, although it did not achieve conceptual maturity until 1955.<sup>3</sup> Before working on the bridges in Hiroshima, Noguchi also proposed a design for a "Memorial to the Dead," an exquisite six-foot black granite cenotaph that would function as the official monument for Hiroshima's war dead. As Noguchi himself described the sculpture, "[The cenotaph] was to be the place of solace to the bereaved—suggestive still further of the womb of generations still unborn who would in time replace the dead."<sup>4</sup> Despite the proposal's poignant simplicity, Noguchi's elegant cenotaph design was rejected. The Committee on the Construction of the Peace Memorial City



**FIGURE 7** Hiroshima survivors Sakae Okubi, left, and Mariko Matsumoto pose beside Isamu Noguchi's Peace Bridge on the ninth anniversary of the atomic bombing. The two women were among the thousands of female *hibakusha* who did not come to the United States for the Hiroshima Maidens project. The sartorial contrast between Okubi's Western outfit and Matsumoto's traditional kimono suggests some of the underlying tensions that occurred during the reconstruction and modernization of Hiroshima in the 1950s. Photograph taken August 13, 1954, © Bettmann/Corbis.

felt it was inappropriate for an American citizen, regardless of ethnic heritage, to design a memorial that commemorated the destruction of Hiroshima.<sup>5</sup> Even though "the atomic bomb cenotaph is a symbol of recognition and retrospection for everyone," wrote Noguchi in 1953, "the Japanese said they did not need a foreigner's help."<sup>6</sup>

At approximately the same historical moment, and not far from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, the Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto was seeking foreign help for an altogether different kind of project. Tanimoto, a Methodist minister who had trained at Emory University in the 1930s but returned to serve in his Japanese hometown, wanted to bring a group of young Hiroshima women who had been badly burned and disfigured by the atomic bomb to the United States for plastic surgery.<sup>7</sup> For most of their adult lives, the young women had been kept out of sight by their embarrassed families, who understood their disfigurements as subjective reflections on their families' status rather than as the objective effects of atomic warfare. As a result, the young women bore deep physical and psychological wounds. Around the city, they were known informally as Tanimoto's "Keloid Girls," an awkward term of endearment that referred to the hard scar tissue that formed from their radiation burns. In 1951 Tanimoto was introduced to Norman Cousins, the influential editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*. Cousins had commenced a series of well-publicized tours to increase public awareness for the plight of Japanese orphans and war victims both in the United States and abroad. Tanimoto implored Cousins to help him arrange for a cross section of the Keloid Girls to travel to the United States and undergo reconstructive plastic surgery. Over the course of four years, Cousins was finally able to grant Tanimoto's wish. Although British and German doctors had imported Western medicine to Japan in the mid-nineteenth century, Japanese surgeons did not develop plastic surgery as a medical specialty before the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, advanced reconstructive techniques had put British, French, German, and American surgeons at the forefront of modern surgery. Beginning in late spring 1955, a team of plastic surgeons at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City performed over 140 necessary operations on twenty-five of Tanimoto's Keloid Girls. Soon known in the United States and abroad as the "Hiroshima Maidens," they recuperated in the metropolitan New York area in the homes of Quaker families who had agreed to sponsor them. For eighteen months, from May 1955 until

November 1956, the travails and triumphs of the Hiroshima Maidens achieved international recognition. By the end of 1956, when the last operations were complete, the Maidens returned to Hiroshima where they were expected to begin new lives.

In what ways are these two seemingly unrelated stories about postwar Hiroshima connected? One might argue that Noguchi's cenotaph and Tanimoto's Maidens illustrate two different strategies that were devised by citizens of Japan and the United States to memorialize, and ultimately repair, the physical and psychic damage done to Hiroshima and its citizens by the atomic bomb. As Lisa Yoneyama has proposed, the city of Hiroshima itself is a powerful locus for understanding the political exigencies of memory: not only for the *hibakusha*, the survivors of the original 1945 atomic bombing, but also as a constantly shifting metaphorical site within contemporary Japanese cultural politics.<sup>9</sup> For Noguchi, the proposed cenotaph registered the horrors of war by proudly memorializing the dead. For Tanimoto, Cousins, and the Maidens themselves, plastic surgery registered the horrors of war by successfully repairing the living. This emphasis on surgery as a tool of reconstruction should not be surprising. After World War I, when the techniques used in modern plastic surgery first emerged from exclusively wartime use to civilian use in Europe and the United States, practitioners and patients regularly referred to plastic surgery as "sculpture in the living," and in the 1930s it had acquired a reputation as something of an art form.<sup>10</sup> These were applications of medical technology aimed at a consumer audience that transcended the destruction and disfigurement caused by war.

Noguchi's memorial cenotaph and the Maidens' plastic surgery were technological projects that expressed entirely different, and even contradictory, concepts of national identity for a postwar Japanese culture seeking meaning in the aftermath of trauma. Noguchi assumed that the Committee on the Construction of the Peace Memorial City denied his proposed contribution solely because of his American citizenship. But the Committee's expression of nationalistic integrity was hardly that simple.<sup>11</sup> Since Japan

opened its doors to Western cultural influences in the 1850s, Japanese leaders in both the public and private sectors had adopted numerous Western policies and practices, especially the promotion of Western industry, education, and technological development. Before it was transformed into an important military center for war production during World War II, Hiroshima was an unremarkable though picturesque city of approximately 280,000 citizens whose livelihoods were sustained by a bustling fishing economy and a small commercial sector concentrated in its downtown business district. After 1946, however, when it began the slow process of rebuilding itself, Hiroshima envisioned its future as a new "modern" city of wide boulevards and bridges, memorial parks and green public spaces, and Western-style architecture. Through this rebuilt landscape, individuals and civic groups realized the cultural and material benefits promised by applying Western ideas and technologies to the native environment. This attitude was partly derived during the Occupation of Japan (1945–52), during which time General Douglas MacArthur headed the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers. As Carl Mosk has noted, "Western ideas and goods started streaming into Japan as isolationism collapsed under American pressure in the early 1950s." After the war, according to Mosk, "the Japanese government exhibited a strong 'supply side' technological bias in its health/population quality maintenance and enhancement programs, eschewing social engineering . . . in favor of importing Western medical and public health methods and knowledge."<sup>12</sup>

The stories about Noguchi and the Maidens both embody the political and philosophical contradictions that lay at the heart of what Masao Watanabe has identified as "Japanese ethics, European science."<sup>13</sup> In this dialectic, both Noguchi's critics and the Hiroshima Maidens' sponsors sought a cosmopolitan postwar Japanese identity while also laboring to disavow the provincial values associated with prewar Japanese nationalism. According to this logic, plastic surgery's exotic status carried with it the elusive mark of modernity, providing tangible evidence of Western technical proficiency. Tanimoto and Cousins, guided by a similar and deliberate

privileging of Western cultural and technological forms, sought out American surgeons precisely because they used Western medical procedures that were heretofore unavailable in Japan. In such a mindset, Noguchi's traditional cenotaph would have been regarded as a sculptural form that was inimical to postwar enthusiasm for Western design, such as modern architecture, and thus something of a nostalgic atavism.<sup>14</sup> As Sachio Otani has observed, "Most Japanese perceived traditional culture to be tainted with nationalism, and consequently it was almost automatically rejected, a sort of expiation of war guilt."<sup>15</sup> The decision to send the Maidens abroad for medical care paralleled the rejection of Noguchi's sculpture in the sense that both actions symbolized, as James R. Bartholomew has written, the "deeply engrained Japanese belief that what had been 'proven' abroad" was preferable to anything domestic.<sup>16</sup>

Scholars and journalists have tended to offer complex interpretations of the story of the Hiroshima Maidens, more often than not seeing it as a shining expression of medical humanitarianism that attempted to repair some of the physical and political scars left by World War II.<sup>17</sup> Others have been more critical of the project: in 1961, for example, literary critic Edmund Wilson observed, "We have tried to make up for our atomic bombs by treating and petting the Japanese women whom we disfigured or incapacitated. We like to read about this in the papers."<sup>18</sup> This chapter examines the reception and promotion that surrounded the Maidens' surgeries in the United States from May 1955 through November 1956, using both public records and heretofore unexamined private documents. As we shall see, the Maidens project should be understood as a medical narrative of normalization that was galvanized by the futuristic tenor of plastic reconstructive surgery (especially cosmetic surgery) in the postwar years. Their surgical rehabilitation crystallized around popular fantasies—both international and domestic—about the possibilities of upward mobility and self-improvement that were embodied in plastic and cosmetic surgery. This chapter also examines the *nonsurgical* techniques that the Maidens' American sponsors used to rehabilitate the physical bodies and social identities of these



young women. The cultural fantasies attributed to plastic surgery's material effects may help us understand why and how the Hiroshima Maidens project was pursued at the very same time that Noguchi's memorial cenotaph was rejected on what were essentially the same grounds.

### BUILDING THE "NEW" JAPAN

In the late 1940s, the Reverend Kiyoshi Tanimoto organized a weekly support group for about forty young women from downtown Hiroshima who were so badly burned and disfigured by exposure to the heat and radiation of the atomic blast that their families hid them from public view.<sup>19</sup> In 1951 the young Japanese minister approached Norman Cousins on one of his tours of Japan. Tanimoto believed that, with Cousins's help, he could raise enough money and support for the young women to undergo plastic reconstructive surgery, permitting them to hold jobs and lead "normal" lives. Japanese surgeons who had tried to repair the Maidens' damaged bodies had done a bad job, so much so that in some cases they made the scars worse and left them in a nearly inoperable state. The heavy, inexpensive makeup the young women often wore sometimes led to rashes or skin infections. Their disfigurement was also exacerbated by the genotypical reaction to atomic radiation that many Asians experienced. The outermost layers of their skin either had been burned off completely or had formed keloids, fibrous pieces of scar tissue that cemented elbow or leg joints at right angles and made movement difficult or nearly impossible.

Tanimoto persuaded Cousins that the best possible medical care for the Maidens was in the United States and that he should move heaven and earth to help them as quickly as possible.<sup>20</sup> Cousins was moved by the plight of these young women, whom he affectionately dubbed the "Hiroshima Maidens," an awkward English translation of the Japanese name with which they had christened themselves—the "Unmarried Young Ladies of Hiroshima."<sup>21</sup> In 1953 Cousins approached Dr. William Hitzig, his personal physician at Mount

Sinai Hospital in New York City, and asked him to assemble a team of plastic surgeons who could perform the necessary major and minor operations. Hitzig and his colleagues flew to Hiroshima and selected twenty-five young women they believed could benefit most from the reconstructive surgery. In late April 1955, just days before the Maidens began their weeklong trip from Hiroshima to New York City, a group of American photojournalists traveled to Japan to capture their preparations for their historic journey. Such journalistic interventions were intended to inure the young women, all of whom had lived in involuntary privacy since 1945, to the routine elements of celebrity journalism. In the candid spirit of paparazzi photography—which used, among other things, the rhetorical pretension of “before” and “after” portraits—the journalists sought to familiarize the American public with recognizable images of the women that they expected would circulate in the media over the next few months.<sup>22</sup>

In one photograph, two of the Maidens, Atsue Yamamoto and Suzue Oshima, stand before the burned-out and exposed rotunda of the Industrial Promotion Hall, the Gothic tower built in 1908 as the leading commercial structure of Hiroshima Prefecture’s business district (fig. 8).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the Industrial Promotion Hall was one of the few buildings left standing after the atomic bomb was dropped, and for many in the city it became a triumphant metaphor of the enduring spirit of the “old” Hiroshima. It is known today as the “A-Bomb Dome.” After 1947, when Hiroshima Prefecture passed a bill that declared a section of the city a Peace Memorial Park, the Hall became the organizing symbol around which the city’s team of urban planners proposed their renewal project for the entire city. When the first group of Maidens returned to Hiroshima in July 1956, photographers for *Collier’s* even posed them in front of the famous building again, only this time standing on a grassy knoll that looked down on the Industrial Promotion Hall as well as the whole of the Peace Memorial Park.<sup>24</sup>

To a large degree, the dual focus on both the Industrial Promotion Hall and Yamamoto and Oshima in their best clothes perfectly



**FIGURE 8** “Unmarried Ladies of Hiroshima” Atsue Yamamoto, left, and Suzue Oshima pose before the Industrial Promotion Hall, one of the icons of the “old” Hiroshima now known informally as the A-Bomb Dome. Photograph taken late April 1955, author’s collection.

expressed the momentum behind Tanimoto's vision. More than merely serving as visual propaganda, this poignant though obviously posed image of the Hiroshima Maidens standing symbolically before the Hall served as a key to the hopes and dreams with which both Japanese and American sponsors endowed the Maidens project.<sup>25</sup> Though Yamamoto and Oshima are posed in the foreground and lighted from below, the building is intentionally shown out of focus, a remote and hazy reminder of the past. The smiling Maidens, dressed in their best suits, gloves, and handbags and surrounded by barbed wire, make a stark contrast with the haunted building, whose missing windows are infused with gray, sunless light. Photographs like this one were undoubtedly the result of general policies during the Occupation regarding representations of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, topographic photographs or reports of Hiroshima emphasized the architectural devastation of the city and later its rejuvenation. These images became symbols around which public discourse formed in the absence of photographs of *hibakusha* or those who were killed outright. Photographs of people killed or maimed were not published in American newspapers or magazines until late in 1952, the final year of the Occupation.<sup>26</sup> The absence of human beings in pictures of Hiroshima gave enormous power to the buildings themselves, so that the complete erasure of ordinary people from this historical record slyly avoided the human scale of destruction by which the bomb consumed Hiroshima's and Nagasaki's populations. In lieu of photographs of survivors, which were immediately censored by the State Department, images of the bleak, destroyed landscape—and the remains of public buildings like the Industrial Promotion Hall—became deliberate and extremely palpable substitutes for the people who could not be shown.

In May 1955, just weeks after this promotional photograph of Yamamoto and Oshima was taken, the State Department issued a classified internal memo that sought to downplay the atomic angle of the Hiroshima Maidens project. The State Department took

great pains to identify the young women publicly as war victims. According to the memo, it wished to maintain the belief that "the death and mutilation inflicted by the atomic bombs are no different than those caused by conventional weapons."<sup>27</sup> This strategy, used throughout the 1950s to maintain funding for nuclear energy research, was also used, in effect, to displace American culpability for the Maidens' disfigurement as well as to make them seem like ordinary wartime refugees. Consequently, posing Yamamoto and Oshima in front of the Industrial Promotion Hall had the rhetorical effect of linking them visually to famous postwar photographs of recuperating civilians, especially women and children, in Cologne, Dresden, London, Warsaw, and other European cities devastated during World War II. Like those forlorn children posed before crumbling buildings or on the broken cobblestone streets of Paris, as in the famous humanist photography of Robert Doisneau or Willy Ronis, the Maidens in their Western-style suits and smiles suggest that they are merely victims of war stepping out momentarily from the daily demands of their busy lives, not living survivors of the only atomic bombing in world history.<sup>28</sup>

After 1945, the architectural reconstruction of Hiroshima became a kind of shorthand for the ones in whose name the media dared not speak. The photographic emphasis on the city's physical environment allowed the media to refer openly to Hiroshima's destruction without also having to choose whether to defend the nuclear arsenal (or for that matter the military-industrial complex) in order to appease the State Department. Associated Press articles about Hiroshima, for example, which appeared in hundreds of small and large newspapers across the world, affirmed the architectural focus on Hiroshima's modernity on the tenth and twentieth anniversaries of the atomic bombing: "Ten years after, Hiroshima has shaken off the scars of war and rebuilt a better city with sturdier homes and more industry" (1955); "Though the Fukuya Department Store, Hiroshima's largest, was destroyed in the blast, it's now back in business with modern interior design and display counters" (1955); "Slowly but surely Hiroshima is rebuilding from

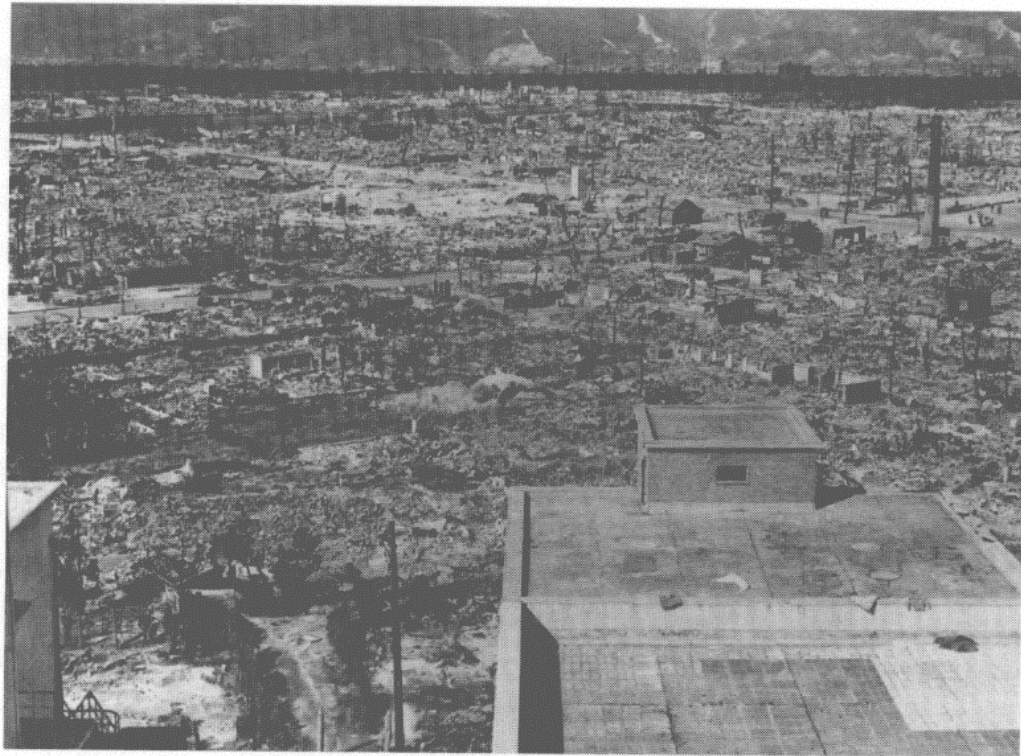
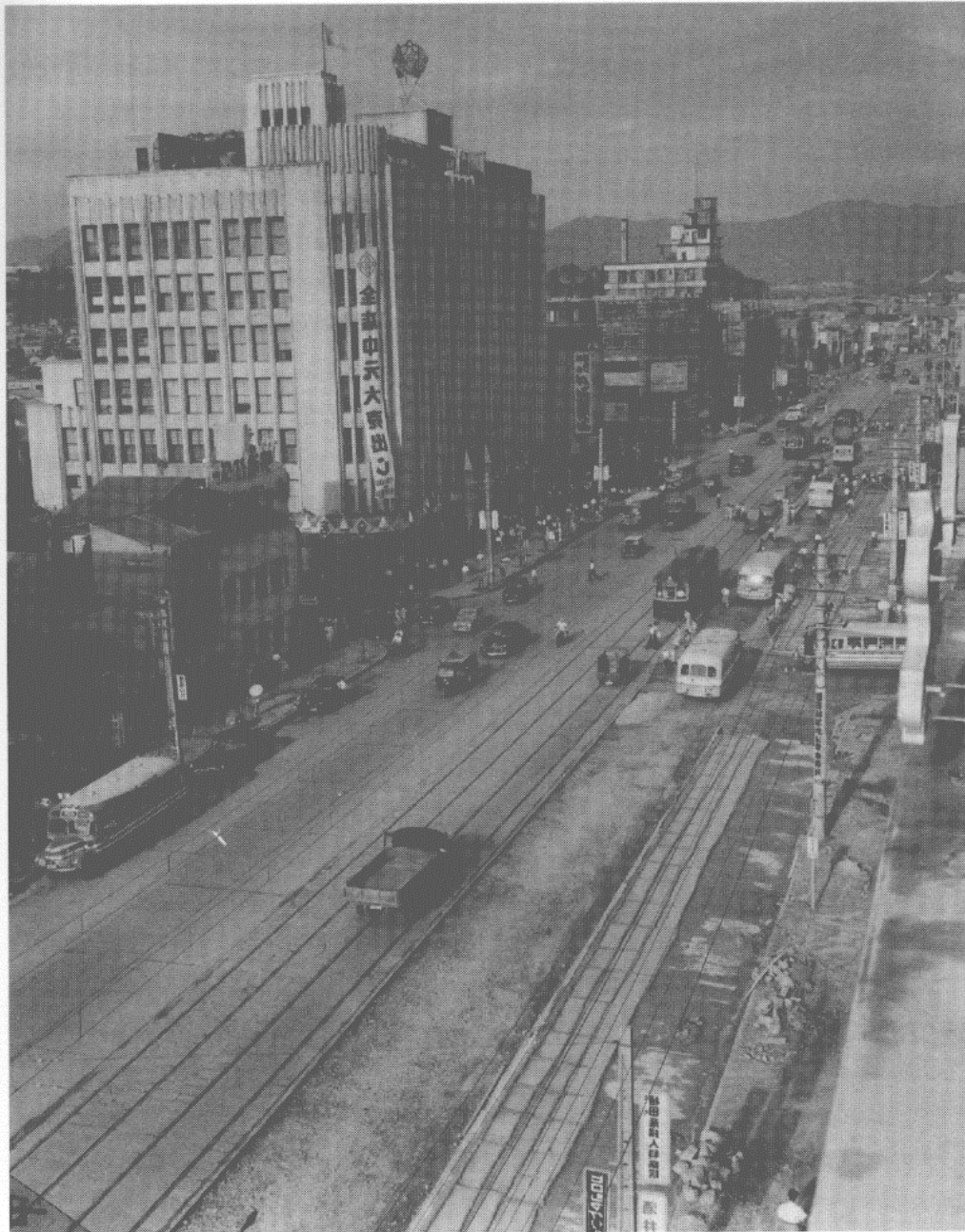


FIGURE 9 View of the destroyed Hiroshima from the top of a Red Cross hospital emphasizing rubble and debris over images of *hibakusha*. Photograph taken August 1945, © Bettmann/Corbis.

the shattered ruins left by the atom bombing ten years ago" (1955); "From a sleepy city with narrow winding streets, Hiroshima has become a well-laid-out metropolis" (1965).<sup>29</sup> Norman Cousins asserted in 1955, in one of his progress reports about the Maidens to readers of the *Saturday Review*, that "Hiroshima is on the way to becoming one of the most exciting cities, architecturally, in Japan. Already, the general outlines are becoming clear. The new park areas have been laid out, the new boulevards are well past the half-way mark, the new and modern civic buildings are being built." (See figs. 9 and 10).<sup>30</sup>

The reconstruction of Hiroshima as a Peace Park also belonged to a greater national anxiety over the fate of Japanese cultural identity following the war. During the seven years that the Occupation government dominated domestic policies in the rebuilding of the





**FIGURE 10** Aerial view of the rebuilt Hiroshima emphasizing modern office buildings, stores, and public transportation over images of *hibakusha*. The original caption, betraying a lack of subtlety, claimed “one has to look closely to find any scars of that terrible day when a city died.” Photograph taken August 1, 1955, © Bettmann/Corbis.

country, Japan's attraction to Western science, technology, and culture accelerated as proof of the people's capacity to enter the brave postwar world of modernity, efficiency, and technological prowess.<sup>31</sup> As Sheldon Garon has written, "So powerful was the Japanese belief in modernization, progress, and science that neither the contradictions of the wartime campaigns nor the nation's disastrous defeat in 1945 rent the alliance for daily life improvement in the postwar era."<sup>32</sup> The push to democratize Japan came from powerful economic incentives provided by the United States government, which pumped over \$2.2 billion into the Japanese economy between 1947 and 1952, \$1.7 billion of it in grants that did not require repayment.<sup>33</sup> In addition to new economic programs, on May 3, 1947, the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers (SCAP), under the direction of General Douglas MacArthur, approved a new constitution for Japan. It demanded that the nation break up concentrated wealth among the Japanese aristocracy and within large corporations, dismantle the state's military power, and disband all nationalist groups and associations, especially those that had germinated during wartime. According to Garon, the SCAP also forced all textbooks harboring "ultranationalist propaganda" to be replaced by what was perceived to be nonideological, democratic language approved by American supervisors.

Elizabeth Gray Vining, a Philadelphia Quaker commissioned in 1946 by the emperor of Japan to tutor his son the Crown Prince Akihito, experienced firsthand the postwar shift in Japanese culture from its feudal political organization toward democratic principles imposed during the Occupation. "Many of the Americans were indeed the 'crusaders' that General MacArthur has called them," Vining wrote in her memoir, *Windows for the Crown Prince* (1952), which championed the democratic values of American culture after the war.<sup>34</sup> "In their effort to produce a perfect model of democracy they sometimes instituted measures that would be advanced experiments in many of our own states and which were bewildering to the Japanese, who were only learning their democratic ABCs. 'But why,' they would say, 'shouldn't they avoid the mistakes we



made?" Like its academic counterpart *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), Ruth Benedict's classic anthropological study of Japanese value systems in the modern era, Vining's book tried respectfully to comprehend a foreign nation (and former enemy) undergoing enormous social change under direct American influence.<sup>35</sup> In 1947 socialist prime minister Katayama Tetsu launched the "People's Campaign to Build a New Japan," which espoused values that would come to embody the "new" Japan, including thrift, morality, hard work, love of homeland, and intolerance of crime and delinquency. Also instituted under the new campaign was what was termed "social education," which included everything from home economics to personal and public hygiene. This crusade to reform and regulate social behavior had fairly unambiguous political implications when, in 1959, the government sponsored its newest social program, the "Campaign to Beautify Japan."<sup>36</sup>

The legislative and cultural mandates that sought to forge a new and integrated Japanese identity were mirrored in debates over the architectural and spatial reconstruction of Japanese cities. Since the 1920s, several prominent Japanese architects had maintained an aesthetic dialogue with European and avant-garde movements in modernist architecture, most notably the German Bauhaus and visionaries like France's Le Corbusier. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, new visions for recreating Japanese cities were futuristic fixations that must have seemed extremely forward-looking to post-war Japanese culture.<sup>37</sup> In 1951, for example, Kenzo Tange, the architect who was awarded the contract to design the cenotaph to the war dead for the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, revealed his *Plan for Tokyo, 1960*. Describing his ideas for the Japanese capital, Tange wrote, "We are not trying to reject the Tokyo that exists and build an entirely new city. We wish instead to provide the city with a revised structure which will lead to its rejuvenation. We are talking not merely of 'redevelopment,' but of determining a direction along which redevelopment should proceed."<sup>38</sup> Tange's plan for a "revised" Tokyo consisted of a vast series of concentric rings of small residential units linked by bridges and water transport that

emanated from a central commercial and industrial hub. Tange's vision captures the essence of contemporary architectural and technological fantasies of the "new Japan." This is because the idea of social progress during the Occupation often privileged urban planning projects that replaced Japanese tradition with European and European-derived American modernism. Such projects were often directly inspired by American architectural visionaries like Buckminster Fuller and Raymond Hood. For Tange and his contemporaries, the "new" Tokyo could symbolize the ideal organic marriage of the structural demands of the modern city with the technical demands of modern architecture. It could serve its inhabitants not merely as a functioning city but as a symbol of Tokyo's ascent to the status of world-class international capitol. This impulse toward internationalism and modernity would fulfill what architectural critic Arthur Drexler first saw bubbling underneath new Japanese building styles; as he wrote in 1955, "Modern architecture in Japan must first be international—that is to say, visually and structurally related to twentieth century technology—before it can become specifically Japanese."<sup>39</sup>

In smaller cities such as Hiroshima, reinventing the landscape for the purposes of urban planning and reinvigorating economic growth held a particular appeal, especially since it linked them to a progressive, modern renovation. Plans for redevelopment in Hiroshima were formally set in motion in August 1949, when a law was promulgated mandating the reconstruction of Hiroshima as a "City of Peace." The charter for this law decreed, "The purpose of reconstructing the city of Hiroshima as a peace memorial is to create a symbol of our desire for lasting peace. . . . Besides the usual city planning, plans will be made to construct memorial spots for peace and cultural facilities which are suitable for a 'Peace City.'"<sup>40</sup> By 1965, on the twentieth anniversary of the atomic bombing, American newspapers celebrated Hiroshima through its topographical features, describing it as "a lively city of broad boulevards, green parks, modern buildings, a half a million people."<sup>41</sup> By 1985 John Hersey called Hiroshima "a gaudy phoenix . . . risen from the

ruinous desert of 1945 . . . with tall modern buildings on broad, tree-lined avenues crowded with Japanese cars, all of which had English lettering on them and appeared to be brand-new."<sup>42</sup>

Was the commercial transformation of Hiroshima inevitable? The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park was clearly built to commemorate trauma, death, and destruction, but apparently it also enabled planners to conceive urban renewal projects for the entire city. This careful execution paralleled similar renewal projects under the Marshall Plan that transformed the physical landscape of war-ravaged cities throughout Europe—as well as economically depressed inner-city areas in the United States—during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The prominent urban renewal paradigm of the 1950s—applied with remarkable overlap in cities as diverse as Hiroshima, Cologne, London, Los Angeles, and New York City—meant that municipal governments would be shaped and funded by commercial interests, economic boosterism, and tourism. Many inner-city areas became singularly committed to tearing down obsolete buildings and replacing city streets with pedestrian shopping malls to create fountains, gardens, plazas, and other public spaces that would obviate the perceived “urban dangers” of the inner city. Critics of urban planning have routinely asked for whose benefit such renewal projects are ultimately undertaken, and with good reason. Urban renewal, as Norman Klein has noted in his focus on postwar Los Angeles, often erases local history, privileging political and economic alliances between local government and corporate interests over the civic rights of its inhabitants.<sup>43</sup> For architectural historians like Christine Boyer and Elizabeth Wilson, these strategies of renewal call to mind the controlling machinations of the City Beautiful movement, which was zealously pursued by civic-minded Progressive Era reformers in the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup>

As early as 1947, citizens who attended public hearings about the reconstruction of Hiroshima expressed complete indifference to the green parks and flowerbeds promised to them. They demanded adequate housing, transportation, and food. Instead, in 1951

Hiroshima Prefecture gave eviction notices to the landlords of 320 buildings occupying space on the grounds of the Peace Memorial Park. In 1955 the editors of *Japan Letter*, a monthly newsletter published in San Francisco on behalf of Hiroshima orphans and refugees, commented that "the progress made in the rebuilding of the city of Hiroshima shows the courage of its people. Yet, between the new buildings there still remain many ruins and poorly built shacks. Ten years later, when the memories of war have begun to fade, the victims of the atomic bomb find it no easier to maintain themselves mentally, physically, and economically."<sup>45</sup> For many Japanese activists, the economic emphasis on urban renewal obscured the greater symbolic significance of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, which they envisioned as the obvious geopolitical locus for a growing international antinuclear movement. This was precisely what the State Department feared. On May 6, 1955, the day after the Maidens left Tokyo for the United States, the State Department sent an anxious telegram to the American Embassy in Japan expressing "concern . . . that [the] Hiroshima girls['] medical treatment in U.S. can generate publicity harmful not only [to] our relations with Japan but particularly [to] our worldwide efforts [to] avoid playing up [the] destructive effects [of] nuclear weapons."<sup>46</sup> Had the Maidens decided to delay their trip by one more day, it is not clear whether the Air Force plane commissioned to carry them to the United States would have been given permission to take off. The State Department feared that antinuclear propaganda, like Communist ideology, would spread and infect other grassroots movements and organizations. Three years earlier, for example, in August 1952, concerned Japanese citizens organized the Hiroshima Symposium for Peace, a rally "in conjunction with labor organizations and some thirty other peace and democratic groups," which protested the war in Korea and sought to "promote friendship and trade among Asians . . . [and] people throughout the world united in a struggle for peace." In mid-August 1955, just three months after the Maidens had arrived in America and on the ten-year anniversary of the bombing, antinuclear groups of various political

stripes mobilized in Hiroshima to sponsor the World Conference to Ban the Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. The State Department regarded such potentially subversive events with great suspicion, seeking ways to disarm them whenever possible.

By the end of the 1950s, many viewed the creation of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park as an unnecessary and even hostile economic program motivated more by real estate opportunism than by a desire to memorialize the city's war dead. Despite these criticisms, in 1958 the city continued the steady march of progress, forcibly removing 105 buildings—many of which were still functional and occupied by families and businesses—in order to complete the 122,000 square meters of the Peace Memorial Park. By 1970 the Italian labor leader Daniel Dolci (described by the Japanese press as a “leader of an Italian civic movement”) remarked critically on the Park's excesses: “Sprawling lawns, carps in the pond. . . . The ruins of Hiroshima should have been preserved as they were.”<sup>47</sup>

Debates over the political meaning of Hiroshima's urban renewal projects took shape in universities, government buildings, and urban planning committees. Meanwhile, Japanese foreign policy initiatives were responsible for exporting a decidedly more provincial version of Japanese architectural identity for Western viewers to see. For example, in 1953 the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City installed in its interior garden the Exhibition House, a model of a traditional Japanese home constructed in Nagoya, to highlight the relation between Japanese architecture and modern Western architecture. This was a period when, as Serge Guibault has argued, MoMA was the institutional epicenter of modernism in the United States.<sup>48</sup> The Exhibition House was part of a larger effort by MoMA and the Japanese Embassy to introduce to discriminating American audiences Japanese arts that included, among other things, the public premiere of the Japanese No plays in the United States.<sup>49</sup> For mid-1950s MoMA patrons, the traditional Exhibition House with its simple frame construction, sliding screens that blurred indoor and outdoor areas, elegant demarcations of public

and private interior spaces, and paucity of furniture or other visible emblems of domesticity must have been a truly exotic spectacle.<sup>50</sup> This emphasis on the Exhibition House and other traditional elements of Japanese culture enabled institutions like MoMA, for all their diplomatic and aesthetic efforts, to tame the strategies of modernization that were concurrently taking place in Japan. Exhibitions like MoMA's, like so much of postwar politics, relied on an active preference for safe, nostalgic images that effectively displaced wartime memories and downplayed national atrocities. Like the photographic emphasis during the Occupation on buildings without people, the Exhibition House offered the odd juxtaposition of architecture with the complete physical absence of living denizens: a Japanese house without any Japanese. In disseminating the elements of traditional Japanese culture, institutions like MoMA perpetuated the idea of the Japanese as irredeemably alien, successfully reclaiming the benign Oriental fantasy of Japan familiar to Americans before World War II.

In contrast to these retrograde illusions about Japanese architecture—or perhaps because of them—the Hiroshima Maidens project reflected the themes of renewal and progress associated with the rebuilding of Hiroshima, especially when ideas of architectural modernity were blurred with their surgical rehabilitation. The Maidens were portrayed as enthusiastic supporters of modern architecture, repeatedly commenting that they had never seen American skyscrapers and eagerly anticipated their first trip to the Empire State Building. When the Maidens arrived in early May 1955, the *New York Daily News* reported that they “were most astounded by the tall buildings of Manhattan. (In Hiroshima a six-story building is a tall one.) They said they want to climb to the top of the Empire State.”<sup>51</sup> The *New York Herald Tribune* observed that “the thing that impressed [the Maidens] most on the trip, according to the guides, was the size of New York’s buildings. In their own city, there are no buildings higher than seven stories.”<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile Toyoko Minowa, one of the Maidens whom the group had selected to be their spokesperson to the press, “said the girls’

first wish in New York was 'to climb up a big building to the top.'<sup>53</sup> Even in their alienation from routine social interactions with other Hiroshima citizens, the Maidens had learned enough to be thoroughly absorbed by the cultural sophistication associated with major architectural landmarks in cosmopolitan cities. The tall skyscrapers of the New York City skyline, like the surgical reconstruction the Maidens were about to undergo, became stand-ins for social progress and the embrace of the benefits of Western architectural modernism.

If the Marshall Plan served as a paradigm of foreign policy during the early years of the Cold War, the same could also be said of the Hiroshima Maidens before their arrival in the United States.<sup>54</sup> The orchestrated efforts by the Maidens' sponsors to reconstruct the young women's faces and bodies reflected the same desire for transformation that affected their native city. Since their physical revisions remained a familiar frame of reference for a postwar culture that equated progress through building with renewal through architecture, the Industrial Promotion Hall where they posed and smiled became not only a symbol of the "old" Hiroshima but an older model of living against which all future (and modern) architectural forms would be measured. Perhaps this contrast explains why Tomin Harada, a Japanese physician invited to learn plastic surgery techniques at Mount Sinai Hospital during the Maidens' tenure, selected the Industrial Promotion Hall for the cover of his 1983 memoir *Hiroshima Surgeon*.<sup>55</sup> The image of the Industrial Promotion Hall, visual evidence of the remains of a life before the evaporation of the city, provided a powerful contrast with more familiar high-rise buildings—like the iconic Empire State Building—which symbolized the economic prosperity and technological progress the Maidens project would seek to embrace. Because the Hiroshima Maidens project was invested with the collective desire to erase a difficult chapter of recent history and replace the scar tissue of the past with modern amenities and conspicuous comforts, the Maidens literally made visible the expectations of those who had witnessed the architectural reinvention of Hiroshima take

physical shape on the city's body politic. By the time they arrived in the United States, the Maidens project embodied many of the complex goals of foreign policy used by the United States in Japan. These goals would now be configured in the tools of Western medical technology with which the Maidens' sponsors would begin to reinvent the young women's lives.

### COMING TO AMERICA

The Air Force plane carrying the Hiroshima Maidens left Iwakuni Airbase in Tokyo on May 5, 1955, at 10:00 in the morning. Along with the twenty-five Maidens, the aircraft carried Cousins, Tanimoto, surgeon William Hitzig and his daughter Candis, Helen Yokoyama, who served as the Maidens' translator and "den mother," and an entourage comprising Japanese surgeons, medical technicians, interpreters, and a representative from the *Nippon Times*. After a brief layover in Honolulu, where they were feted by former citizens of Hiroshima who had relocated to Hawaii after the war, the plane arrived at Travis Airfield, just outside San Francisco, at 7:00 in the evening on May 7.<sup>56</sup> Before the plane landed, civic groups from California, including the California Japanese Benevolent Society, had gathered to greet the Maidens with flowers. Four local women, representing the Northern California Peace Council, used the event to deliver a speech of protest against the hydrogen bomb. A newspaper reporter commented that this assertive act lent an unfortunate "sour note" to the otherwise benign proceedings, during which all overtly political acts were apparently sanitized from the public sphere.<sup>57</sup>

The four female protesters, their identities unknown, provided an interesting counterpoint to the Hiroshima Maidens themselves, whose voices were conspicuously silent until their arrival in New York City two days later. While the "sour" women of the Northern California Peace Council were ultimately prevented from attending the incoming ceremonies, they did represent a small but growing minority of domestic antinuclear activists in the United States



during the mid-1950s. The newly created hydrogen bomb, an atomic weapon infinitely more destructive and infinitely more terrifying than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, had captured international attention approximately one year earlier in March 1954 after American scientists detonated one in the Pacific. The nuclear testing inadvertently killed twenty-three Japanese fishermen aboard the unfortunately named *Lucky Dragon*. The incident provoked the Japanese government to issue a protest on behalf of the dead fishermen by publicly memorializing the tens of thousands of *hibakusha* still untreated from the 1945 bombings. Activists like those in San Francisco demanded an end to the production and use of the hydrogen bomb, which was all the more subversive because it conflicted with the military's plans to associate the development of the H-bomb with the national security state. The patriotic rhetoric used against antidemocratic governments during World War II and the Korean War was regularly exploited to win support for the funding and maintenance of a forbidding nuclear arsenal, paralleling in interesting ways the exploitation of images of veteran amputees to promote prosthetics research that we saw in chapter 1.

One tangible result of this antinuclear activism was that the public became fixated on the Maidens' physical presence. While the photographs of buildings in Hiroshima had been used to display architectural progress and avoid engaging with American culpability for the bomb, photographs of the Maidens out in public—as well as the prospect of their imminent surgeries—brought the specter of culpability to the forefront. The visible presence of the Maidens opened the door to debate about the United States military's atomic weapons program. The State Department, however, believed that the love and altruism shown toward the Maidens could have a strategic purpose: to contain both foreign and domestic dissent about nuclear weapons testing. On June 2, 1955, less than a month after the Maidens arrived in the United States, Cousins requested a meeting with members of the State Department to clarify the goals of the project and to dispel rumors that

he was using the Maidens for his own antinuclear agenda. Government officials who watched the project unfold were sensitive that the Maidens' arrival in the United States roughly coincided with the ten-year anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was an anticelebration through which, it was feared, the rise of domestic and international antinuclear protests might expose cracks in the smooth rhetoric of nuclear deterrence theory then propounded by the American government. At the meeting Walter C. Robertson, assistant secretary to the Far East for the State Department, "commented that Orientals always inquire about the reasons why Westerners want to do certain things and that to satisfy those questions is very difficult." Norman Cousins asserted that "the Japanese have a strong sense of obligation in definite situations, but they are largely lacking in a feeling of altruism." In response to Cousins's observation, Robertson reasoned that "it would be a real triumph [for the United States] if the Japanese could appreciate the feeling of altruism underlying the project."<sup>58</sup>

The emphasis placed on steering the Japanese in the right direction is exactly what Cousins and Robertson seemed to imply in their desire to inculcate altruism in the Maidens and Japanese civic culture in general. During the first few weeks of the Maidens' trip to the United States, strategic images of ordinary Americans receiving them in New York circulated widely in the media, even though Cousins and Tanimoto had declared a general ban on photographs. There was also an immediate economic benefit to "altruism," no matter how much it was touted as a social or moral philosophy. After World War II, the push to export the American standard of living (usually characterized as "the American way of life") created opportunities for distributing American consumer goods and cultural products to a worldwide (and in many cases captive) audience. The Rockefeller Foundation, for example, forged social liaisons in Japan during the mid-1950s and laid the groundwork for international cultural institutions such as the Asia Society in order to expand the Rockefeller family's financial interests in China, in

Japan, and throughout Asia. The Rockefeller Foundation's Asian projects emerged from the same ideological moment that shaped Max Milliken and Walt W. Rostow's *A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy* (1957), a set of economic initiatives developed from a conference sponsored by Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the early 1950s. The proposal recommended that the United States must strive to make developing countries compatible with the perquisites of American consumerism and national values. "Although our techniques must be adapted to local conditions abroad if they are to be effective there," Milliken and Rostow argued, "they represent an enormous potential for steering the world's newly aroused human energies in constructive rather than destructive directions."<sup>59</sup> During such a moment of massive political restructuring and cultural upheaval, diplomatic overtures toward altruistic foreign policy initiatives promised to develop leadership skills, stimulate the tools of liberal consensus, and instill confidence in the political process among people who had never known true Western democracy.<sup>60</sup> A May 1955 article about the Maidens in the *Newark Evening News*, for example, described how "Kiyoshi Tanimoto . . . helped the injured girls find work and regain courage to face strangers . . . with their disfigured faces."<sup>61</sup> With an emphasis on triumphing over the stigma of public appearance through being productive and selfless, the Maidens' sponsors envisioned them as the beneficiaries of a democratic culture who could become role models for the "new" Japan. Programs designed to instill altruistic principles in non-Western countries—especially those that might be lured by the "global drift" of Communism—exhibit a similar patriotic rhetoric to the type found in the rehabilitation programs that we examined in chapter 1.

Some Japanese, however, had a hard time demarcating the boundaries between selfless community service and self-serving ambition. According to journalist Rodney Barker, in the early 1950s Tanimoto publicly declared it his professional and personal quest to "slow down the surging Left wing movement in Japan that was attempting to make the H-bomb the symbolic rallying point against

the 'American militarization' of Japan." Tanimoto insisted that the Japanese people should follow the American example and promote a "common humanity."<sup>62</sup> Yet John Hersey has famously described how Tanimoto used a large portion of the initial funds given on behalf of the Maidens to buy himself embarrassingly expensive presents. In one instance Tanimoto treated himself to a Cadillac convertible, imported from the United States, that had to be refitted with a coal-burning engine, since it was almost impossible to obtain gasoline in Hiroshima. Understanding this complex dialectical relation between altruism and luxury may help to explain, and make visible, the way American foreign policy during the Cold War often blurred together economic liberalism and political self-interest under the guise of social progress.

After the Maidens arrived in New York City on May 9, the State Department's worst fears immediately materialized (fig. 11). The visual and symbolic evidence of the women's damaged bodies, now in full public view, forged unavoidable links between their physical scarring and the devastation wrought by the atomic bomb, much to the State Department's chagrin. In large and small newspapers across the country, the young women were described variously as "bomb-scarred," "A-scarred," "Hiroshima-scarred," "A-burned," "Atomic-bomb-scarred," or simply as "A-girls" or "A-victims." These epithets exposed the incontrovertible fact that, regardless of state-sponsored propaganda or political intervention, not only would the Maidens retain an atomic resonance during their residency, but their relation to the bomb—and not, as the State Department had hoped, to the generic war tropes of World War II—would be forever sustained by the American public. The federal government did not make light of these associations. One week after the Maidens arrived in the United States, the Hiroshima Teacher's Union's graphic and controversial 1953 documentary film *Hiroshima* opened in New York City.<sup>63</sup> The State Department nervously issued an internal memo critiquing the "leftist" Union, fearing that the simultaneous release of the film and the Maidens'



**FIGURE 11** Shigeko Niimoto, left, and the Rev. Kiyoshi Tanimoto drinking coffee at Mitchel Air Field on Hempstead, Long Island, before heading to New York City. Images like this promoted the humanitarian dimension of the project and thus assuaged the State Department's fears that Cousins and Tanimoto were using the Maidens as antinuclear propaganda. Photograph taken May 9, 1955, © Bettmann/Corbis.

arrival would generate negative publicity.<sup>64</sup> Walter C. Robertson maintained that “helping victims of misfortune is a very worthwhile endeavor but every effort should be made to keep the project involving the Hiroshima girls from stirring up propaganda against nuclear weapons.”<sup>65</sup> Norman Cousins, feeling himself begin to buckle, confessed that the film’s producers had attempted “to obtain [his] sponsorship or endorsement in exchange for one-half the box-office proceeds of the first week of the film’s showing as a benefit for the Maidens.” Cousins, however, had “refused the offer and informed

the producers that the film had been made under Communist auspices and hoped they would not proceed without first ascertaining everything that ought to be known about it. . . . [T]he Maidens have had and will have no connections with the film."<sup>66</sup>

The Maidens did not need an affiliation with a documentary film. Cinematic narratives about their lives began to surface within days of their arrival in the United States. Almost immediately, apocryphal tales about the Maidens' disfigurement began circulating among the general public. Unlike survivors of conventional wartime damage, the Maidens elicited an unprecedented and, for many, unfathomable outpouring of medical anxieties and fears concerning the treatment of the body (and especially the female body) as disabled by the effects of radiation and nuclear fallout. In retrospect, this emotive outpouring ultimately illuminated more about American anxieties about radiation than about the Maidens' own physical scars. Bernard Simon, one of the Mount Sinai Hospital surgeons, recounted the popular but inaccurate story about Mitsuko Kuramoto, the Maiden who wore an eye patch to protect her damaged conjunctiva, the flap of skin just below her right eyeball (fig. 12).<sup>67</sup> Early reports about Kuramoto misunderstood the precise nature of her condition and claimed that her entire eyelid had disintegrated in the heat and light of the atomic blast. Many speculated that her eye wept tears uncontrollably as a result of her missing eyelid. As Simon explained, a person without an eyelid could expect to burn her cornea and probably become blind within a few days. Regardless of this quotidian fact, Americans held on to the story and perceived the eye patch as an object lesson. It was just as easily a potent metonym for the Maidens themselves. The story of her eye presented a sober reminder of what a nuclear future might look like.

The surgical treatment of Kuramoto's damaged eye—as well as the body parts of the other young women—was also a way to gauge publicly the success or failure of plastic surgery and rehabilitation medicine in general. During and after the war, Americans had come to expect miracles. Plastic surgery was promoted as an





FIGURE 12 Mikiko Kashiwabara, a Japanese American nurse, offers a bouquet of flowers to Shigeko Niimoto upon the arrival of the Hiroshima Maidens and their prominently displayed Pan-American Airways flight bags at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. Mitsuko Kuramoto, whose eye patch marked her as the “weeping Maiden,” is seventh in line. Photograph taken May 9, 1955, © Bettmann/Corbis.

art developed as a medical specialty under the duress of wartime, bearing the distinct heritage of military efficiency and expertise. In 1946, for example, *Life* displayed shockingly graphic (but always handsomely rendered) photographs of various surgical treatments in order to reassure viewers that “refinements in plastic surgery and the new methods of bone grafting and nerve repair will restore many victims of the violences of peacetime.”<sup>68</sup> Modern surgical techniques would constitute the first line of defense against the physically disabling effects of war or ordinary civilian accidents. For many, however, the presence of the Maidens both transcended and confounded the question of how to treat and care for their bodies. Their scars seemed unlike anything Americans

had ever seen before, appearing inscrutable, elastic, and beyond control.

Popular media tried to craft an alternative narrative for describing the Maidens' disfigurements as wartime injuries that could be healed by modern medicine. One reporter's comment that the Mount Sinai team hoped "to finish the task of restoring [to] these girls what war took away" seemed to neutralize their physical difference by invoking the patriotic image of the American GI about to undergo reconstructive surgery in the theater of battle.<sup>69</sup> But such narratives, while largely benign, brought to the surface many of the unresolved legacies of anti-Japanese and, more broadly, anti-Asian sentiment in the United States, now configured through the indignities that the Japanese experienced as the members of a defeated nation. Treating *hibakusha* as "guinea pigs," for example, had been a well-established protocol for a little less than a decade for scientists working for the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) in Hiroshima. The ABCC's decision to examine and study radiation victims while maintaining a strict no-treatment policy reflected what M. Susan Lindee has identified as the practice of "colonial medicine."<sup>70</sup> Despite the humanitarian ethos that surrounded the project, the potential for racism remained vexing for the Maidens as well as for the entire postwar generation of American citizens of Japanese descent for whom legal discrimination and government-sponsored internment camps were well within recent historical memory.<sup>71</sup> Making parallels between atomic bomb survivors and American veterans was a naive commingling of patriotism and nostalgia that served the State Department's desire to keep antinuclear propaganda out of the Maidens' visit. But it did not serve anyone trying to determine how to be Japanese in America, let alone how to be Japanese in postwar Japan.

The anxiety surrounding Kuramoto's status as the "weeping Maiden" made her a tragic figure of technological modernity. The emphasis put on her passivity and vulnerability, which could be rectified only through modern surgical techniques, also made her a poignant distillation of many popular stereotypes and Orientalist



fantasies about Japanese girls and women. For many, such images not only were distortions but were in direct conflict with the traditions and expectations of Japanese society. In mid-May 1955, for example, an unidentified U.S. Army officer stationed in Kobe reported that "the Japanese are very disturbed by the circumstances that no men were included in the [Hiroshima] group. . . . [A]nyone who knows anything at all about the Japanese people and their culture knows that women have a secondary position and that the men are the more important element in their social structure." Cecil R. King, a member of Congress from California who supplied the officer's comments to the State Department, encouraged it to go out of its way to turn this negative publicity in a more positive direction.<sup>72</sup> To some degree, the project depended on collective gendered fantasies of the Maidens as docile Oriental caricatures to accomplish its altruistic goals. That only young Japanese women—and not young Japanese men or, for that matter, any Japanese veterans—were selected for reconstructive plastic surgery rationalized what Sheila Johnson has called the "feminization" of Japan within American popular culture. According to Johnson, the American fascination in the 1950s with Japanese architecture, paper and print-making, flower arranging, Noguchi's kidney-shaped coffee tables, kimonos, calligraphy, Kabuki theater, and the existentialist-Eastern dialectic embraced by writers like Alan Watts and Jack Kerouac all stemmed from a cultural desire to replace the crafty, militaristic, kamikaze images of Japan with "soft" images in order to "repress wartime memories."<sup>73</sup> Such gendered strategies were used to promote acceptance of the women as well as greater acceptance of the project's vision of global cooperation and humanitarianism.<sup>74</sup>

On May 11, just three days after the Maidens arrived in New York City, a cross section of the project's entourage flew back to the West Coast to NBC television studios in downtown Los Angeles to create another soft image of Japanese culture for American audiences. In order to raise money for the group's surgeries at Mount Sinai, two of the Maidens, Toyoko Minowa and Tadako Emori, had agreed to accompany Tanimoto for his appearance on Ralph

Edwards's popular live television program *This Is Your Life*,<sup>75</sup> arguably one of the first reality TV shows to air in the United States. True to the perfunctory rules of the program's format, Edwards brought on a number of people who represented "voices" from Tanimoto's past. This was not as difficult an assignment as one might expect: although many of his acquaintances had perished in the bombing of Hiroshima, Tanimoto had spent some time in the late 1930s as an exchange student at Emory University's Candler School of Theology. Edwards delighted the audience when he brought out Tanimoto's wife, Chyssa, and their two children, whom Edwards had flown in from Hiroshima specifically for the event. Toward the middle of the program, however, Edwards surprised Tanimoto with another "voice" from his past, although it was one he had never actually heard before. Edwards brought out from behind a sliding translucent screen the nervous figure of Lieutenant Robert Lewis, copilot (along with Paul Tibbetts) of the *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.

Lewis reportedly had spent the afternoon drinking himself into a stupor at a downtown bar in preparation for the encounter.<sup>76</sup> To the dismay of everyone on the program, and under the patronizing gaze of Edwards and the breathless amazement of the studio audience, Lewis walked forward and took his place to the left of Tanimoto, whose entire body recoiled in what seemed like agonizing revulsion. Responding to Edwards's query, "Would you tell us, sir, of your experience on August 6, 1945?" Lewis looked on the verge of collapse as a low wave of electric organ chords began, soap opera style, to make their chromatic descent. He wiped perspiration from his face and, in a soft New Jersey accent, recited unsteadily the words he had prepared for this moment of public reckoning:

Well, Mr. Edwards, uh, just before 8:15 a.m. Tokyo time, Tom Ferrebee—a very able bombardier—carefully aimed at his target, which was the Second Imperial Japanese Army headquarters. At 8:15 promptly, the bomb was dropped. We turned fast to get out of the way of the deadly radiation and bomb effects. First was the big flash that we got, and then the two

concussion waves hit the ship. Shortly after, we turned back to see what had happened. And there, in front of our eyes, the city of Hiroshima disappeared. I wrote down later, "My God, what have we done?"<sup>77</sup>

One wonders whether Lewis's description of his target as the Second Imperial Japanese Army headquarters was a way of avoiding a reckoning with the devastation of the civilian population, perhaps underscoring the emphasis on buildings rather than humans that seemed to haunt postbomb discourse in the American popular media. Later in the program, Edwards asked Lewis and Tanimoto to shake hands, which they did as if both of them were under heavy sedation. Still sweating profusely, the embarrassed Lewis presented Tanimoto and the Maidens with a check for fifty dollars for the surgical treatment he had helped to make necessary. After the broadcast, Lewis returned to his regular life as personnel manager at Henry Heide Incorporated, a candy manufacturer in New York City. According to Koko Tanimoto Kando, Tanimoto's daughter, Lewis was later institutionalized for severe depression in a mental hospital in upstate New York. He died of a heart attack in 1983. In his remaining years, however, Lewis was said to have built a sculpture as an art therapy project: an enormous three-dimensional mushroom cloud with a single tear sliding down one side. The sculpture, which seemed to invoke the tears that Mitsuko Kuramoto putatively wept from her injured eye, also suggested that Lewis was like many in the postwar era, such as Isamu Noguchi, for whom a physical, sculptural form was the ideal therapeutic tool for memorializing the Hiroshima dead.<sup>78</sup>

The lurid voyeurism and brutal insensitivity of Lewis's appearance notwithstanding—a moment unprecedented on television in the United States—what truly disturbed *This Is Your Life*'s production staff was not the potential awkwardness of the on-camera meeting between Lewis and Tanimoto. It was the presence of Minowa and Emori on a live national broadcast. They had been deemed too hideous to be shown to American television audiences. Producers feared that their appearance would clash ignominiously with the

program's regular sponsor, Hazel Bishop cosmetics. Edwards told the audience, "To avoid causing them any embarrassment, we will not show you their faces," and he pointed instead to docile silhouettes of the women hidden behind translucent screens. Edwards may have thought he had the Maidens' best interests in mind when he showed them in shadowy profile. On camera it was a disturbing exhibitionist form that, ironically, made Minowa's and Emori's silhouettes reminiscent of undisclosed criminals, anonymous homosexuals, or finger puppets animated by the light of a nineteenth-century lantern slide. The production staff had also requested that Chyssa Tanimoto wear a kimono and wooden slippers during her appearance on the program, even though she normally wore modern Western apparel. It must have seemed necessary to extinguish the actual details of Chyssa's modern experience for the sake of transforming her and the Maidens into Oriental spectacles with which to elicit compassion from American viewers who might otherwise harbor residual resentment. In the last few minutes of the broadcast, Edwards presented Chyssa with a lovely gold charm bracelet. It was intended, as Rodney Barker argues, "to commemorate the happy moments in her life."<sup>79</sup> Was this appearance intended to rank among them? Clearly, by offering the public benign feminine images, *This Is Your Life* resembled foreign policy choices by the State Department and curatorial choices by institutions like MoMA. All three enforced nostalgic images of Japanese culture for the sake of political expedience, economic development, and to make certain that the presence of the vulnerable, unprotected female body would soften the formerly aggressive image of wartime Japan.

#### FROM UNMARRIED MAIDENS TO AMERICAN GIRLS

After Minowa, Emori, the Tanimotos, and the rest of the Maidens' entourage finished their time in Los Angeles, they returned to the East Coast, where they were reunited with the other members of the project. They were all invited to recuperate from travel exhaustion

and media attention at Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat in Overbrook, Pennsylvania, a sleepy enclave on the patrician Main Line just outside Philadelphia. As early as 1953 Norman Cousins had appealed to the Quakers—one of the most recognizable and vocal religious groups to protest war and the atomic bomb—and asked for volunteers who would serve as host families for the Maidens before and after their individual surgeries. The American Friends eagerly complied and formed the social and spiritual scaffolding on which the Maidens project took shape over the next few years.

On their way to Pendle Hill, the entourage stopped at Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market, an enclosed farmers' market. The market, with a rich local history, specializes in foods from across southeastern Pennsylvania and is one of the few local outlets for Amish goods from nearby Lancaster County. In one publicity photograph, three of the Maidens pose with two Friends in front of a butcher's kiosk (see fig. 13). Standing below a sign at the butcher shop that asserts "Double Thick Steak and Chops," each woman holds a box filled with frozen cuts of meat. The photographer's decision to pose the Maidens with steaks seems to offer the same promise of American abundance and comfort that the featured Quaker hosts do themselves. In Hiroshima, steak was a luxury in the postbomb period when, according to Sachio Otani, curried rice cost a week's salary and people regularly worked and bartered just to buy grain.<sup>80</sup> Two of the Maidens smile obligingly. The others look resentful, contemptuous, or even humiliated because the photograph was taken.

Looking at the awkward commingling of painful facial expressions, it is interesting to consider this photograph in light of how the Maidens had been thinking about their own faces only days before their arrival in Philadelphia. During the various stages of their trip to the United States, a number of Maidens had composed what they called their "Hiroshima Maidens' Song" to pass the exhausting hours spent in cramped airplane cabins, airport lounges, and press conference rooms. The song, which they all sang together, was later



**FIGURE 13** Five Hiroshima Maidens carrying gift boxes of “double thick steak and chops” pose uncomfortably with two of their hosts at Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia before going to a Quaker retreat in Overbrook, Pennsylvania. Photograph taken ca. May 1955, author’s collection.

released in Japan as an a cappella single under the title “Smile, Please Come Back.” It was an appeal addressed to their own body parts—in particular, their faces and lips—with the hope that the surgery they were about to undergo would let them reclaim the physical features they associated with their positive external identities. Perhaps that is why this photograph of the Maidens is so painful to contemplate. It exposes body parts, like their lips, as well as body language that strains to communicate, drawing a conspicuous contrast between their traumatized postures and the quotidian poses of their unselfconscious hosts. Tomin Harada, author of *Hiroshima Surgeon*, described a similarly awkward encounter when the Maidens attended a reception with Candis Hitzig, the daughter of Mount Sinai surgeon William Hitzig, in May 1955:

The Queen of the reception was clearly Candis, the eldest daughter of the Hitzigs, rather than the Maidens from Hiroshima. Candis was just eighteen and had recently made her debut in New York society. It was announced at the reception that she personally had gone all the way to Hiroshima to invite the girls to come for treatment. She received many approving looks. Her beauty and elegant white gown made her look as if she were queen of the ball, and contrasted sharply with the scarred faces and simple clothing of the Maidens. The differences seemed to symbolize the contrast between America, the global power, and Japan, the vanquished nation. While many watched Candis, others, especially the Quakers, embraced the Hiroshima Maidens, and I felt at this reception I had seen a cross-section of American society.<sup>81</sup>

Like the contrast between the Maidens and Candis Hitzig, the photograph showing the male Quaker's handsome lumberjack's coat and the woman's sensible bobby socks—both of which can be read as symbols of all-American, white Pennsylvania friendliness—contrast with the disfigured faces and unfashionable clothing of the Maidens peeking out from behind them. It is a photographic dramatization that seems to capture the heart of the matter. The Maidens look at the camera. The housewife looks at the farmer. The farmer looks out into space. Smile, please come back.

In late May 1955, shortly after the Reading Terminal Market photograph was taken, the Maidens began working directly with the Society of Friends in New York City. The Friends helped organize what would become the Maidens' routine over the next eighteen months—surgery at Mount Sinai, followed by recuperation with Quaker host families living in wealthy enclaves in the New York metropolitan region such as Scarsdale, New York, Darien, Connecticut, and Upper Montclair, New Jersey. Ida Day, one of the members of the Society of Friends responsible for welcoming the Maidens, compiled lists to identify the characteristics of each of the young women. Day worked closely with Cousins and Tanimoto to collect enough information to place each one with a family that suited her individual needs. Day's intent was to provide the organizers of the Maidens project with descriptive assessments of each woman's personality

traits, family background, and favorite foods, and what each wanted most from her experience in the United States. In retrospect, the following sample entries from Day's original detailed lists also reveal contemporary understandings of what was meant by the reconstruction of the Hiroshima Maidens. Betraying their surface appearance of common sense or compassionate hospitality—the putative reason for making such lists in the first place—these verbal snapshots convey much about the ways gender roles and class status were conceived by the middle-class imaginations of Americans living during the period:

Happy, not sensitive. Tries hard. Wants to do everything. . . . Is married (unlawfully). Not too intelligent. Low status—laborer father. Outgoing, easy. Put her with anyone with low intelligence.

Wonderful and gets along with anyone. Thinks for herself. Fair, unbiased. Dressmaking. Eyes affected by rays. . . . Reserved. More intelligent. Likes gardening. Not social. Small eater—don't worry. Studied dress-making 3 years. Not marriageable. Professional dress, or millinery.

Wants Western life and [to] learn Western ways. . . . Youngest child in family, spoiled, emotional, naive, hard adjustment. . . . [C]all Helen [Yokoyama, translator and "den mother"] if any difficulty.

Reliable, intelligent, good girl. Had millinery shop. Quiet, reserved, eager to learn. Studies hard. Very conscious of scars.

Lovable, not very intelligent, very appreciative. Naive, loves babies and little girls. Needs 9 or 10 hours of sleep each night.

Jr. College graduate. Likes parties. Wants to learn English, sewing, reading. Not lovable. Superiority air, objectionable to others.

Not disfigured. Would like to go to school and learn English.



Difficult, cynical, needs help, others afraid of her. Poor family, no father. Fatherly man wanted for host. Suicide in teens. Left church. Resents kindness. Touchable. Craves friend. No English, nor desire to learn.

Very good, sweet, better family. Willing to help. 8 years of ceremonial tea, also flower arrangements. Likes vegetables.<sup>82</sup>

What do such observations mean, outside of their historical value as indexes of the boundaries of social acceptability, respectability, or what made (or unmade) a person's reputation in the mid-1950s? One would have expected that the Society of Friends would have tried to protect the Maidens from (mis)apprehension by the superficial observations of detractors or hostile outsiders. Yet the Quakers, like their American contemporaries, constructed normative categories that imputed positive and negative social characteristics to the Japanese women. These lists seemed to denote explicitly, rather than connote implicitly, which ones among the Maidens were "lovable" and which were not, or what made a particular woman "marriageable," who was "intelligent," and even which young women were "difficult."<sup>83</sup> Standards were often applied to the Maidens in terms of their potential not only for surgical success, but also for upward mobility ("Wants Western life and [to] learn Western ways," and the enigmatic "Not disfigured"). Such potential was imagined to be either limited or catalyzed by the Maiden's class background ("Low status—laborer father," "better family"). Moreover, as we saw in the attitudes of prosthetists toward amputees in chapter 1, the authoritative power of personality played a large part in how the Society of Friends understood and consequently discussed the relation between the Maidens' bodies and their social identities. This clearly followed from the influence of contemporary sociologists like David Riesman and C. Wright Mills, who argued in the early 1950s that an "outer-directed personality" was the cultural capital that governed social relations. Apparently the Quakers were caught up in the same ideological

nets that compelled them to seek out, and even perhaps to give preferential treatment to, those who exhibited the greatest potential for extroverted, even-tempered sociability. Smile, please come back.

Yet the prospect of social rehabilitation was integral to—if not the defining feature of—the Maidens' physical rehabilitation. Such concerns about rehabilitation, as we have seen in the case of veteran amputees, were not new but were typical of the era. After World War II, for example, Frances Cooke Macgregor became the first American sociologist to write extensively on the social and psychological repercussions of plastic surgery.<sup>84</sup> In *Facial Deformities and Plastic Surgery: A Psychosocial Approach* (1953), Macgregor showed photographs of patients with craniofacial disfigurements to a random sampling of interview subjects. Their published responses demonstrate that even the most cursory exposure to facial disfigurement incited pity, moral indignation, and even class bias among her interviewees:

"Was this a war casualty?"

"Probably a gangster."

"I don't think anyone would hire him."

"This guy looks like the real criminal type."

"Laborer."

"Probably does some kind of work by himself. Probably digs ditches or is a writer. He must have a tremendous interest in life. Seems to me he would want to destroy himself."<sup>85</sup>

Macgregor concluded that "facial features . . . serv[e] as false clues [that] . . . impute to these patients personality traits considered socially unacceptable but assign them roles and status on an inferior social level."<sup>86</sup> At the same time, she argued that plastic surgery constituted a humane, compassionate corrective for those who suffered from severe physical disability or social handicap owing to their impairments. Like many practicing plastic surgeons at the time, Macgregor maintained an important distinction between plastic surgery involving craniofacial disorders, cleft palate cases, and skin

diseases and cosmetic surgery involving facelifts, blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery), and rhinoplasty (nose jobs). She regarded the rise in cosmetic surgery, however, as evidence that an obsession once only for the elite was now more widely available.<sup>87</sup>

The emphasis on the psychological, as well as physical, disabilities the Maidens experienced would have made perfect sense to the organizers of the project, who sought out a program that was holistic in its scope. This was not an uncommon attitude for those about to undergo plastic surgery.<sup>88</sup> As Sander Gilman has astutely observed, long before the mid-twentieth century, cosmetic surgery was shaped in equal part by medical ideals and by cultural expectations—both professionally sanctioned and personally internalized—about promoting socialization as well as smoothing out ethnic features to meet particular (usually white) standards of beauty.<sup>89</sup> As Elizabeth Gail Haiken and Joan Jacobs Brumberg have argued, elite American women in the 1910s and 1920s were deeply attracted to reconstructive—and, increasingly, cosmetic—plastic surgery as a tool of social status. Plastic surgery during the 1950s, according to Haiken, maintained its influence over the public, especially since it helped thousands of middle-class Americans anticipate the social and economic benefits of medical technology. Plastic surgery, like prosthetic devices, became one of the perquisites of post-war liberalism's redefinition of democratic public culture.<sup>90</sup>

Because of the equation of plastic surgery with consumerism, when the Hiroshima Maidens arrived in the United States for reconstructive surgery on their scars and burns, the distinctions between emergency plastic surgery used to ameliorate suffering and elective cosmetic surgery used to create beauty became blurry. The *Newark Star-Ledger*, for example, announced the Maidens' arrival in the United States with the headline "Disfigured Jap Girls to Get Face-lifting," while the *New York World-Telegram* explained that "25 A-Burned Girls . . . Hope to Regain Beauty."<sup>91</sup> The social consequences produced by this conflation of surgical genres caused enormous criticism of the Maidens project. Some members of the Japanese press accused Cousins and Tanimoto of luring the

Maidens away for experimentation despite the seemingly objective language of medical humanitarianism espoused by American plastic surgeons. A May 1955 article in the Communist *Daily Worker* referred explicitly to the Maidens as guinea pigs of Western imperialism: "It is the supreme duty of the American workers to rescue mankind by taking the power from this ruling class whose disfigured face, pitted by the disease of degeneration of capitalism, can never be repaired by plastic surgery."<sup>92</sup>

In order to resist any possible associations between surgical treatment and imperialistic practices that haunted medical projects like the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission, Bernard Simon and the other Mount Sinai surgeons made sure to distinguish cosmetic surgery (as reflected in headlines like "Disfigured Jap Girls to Get Facelifting") from what occurred in the operating theater. To make these distinctions material, between May 1955 and September 1956 the Mount Sinai team kept a precise log that recorded the names of each patient and the date and specific details of the surgical operations performed on her.<sup>93</sup> On June 16, 1955, for instance, lead plastic surgeon Arthur Barsky made a "formation of [an] abdominal tubed pedicle" for Toyoko Minowa, one of the Maidens who appeared on *This Is Your Life*. A pedicle is a small, tubular-shaped piece of healthy tissue that surgeons lift from an uninjured part of the body and then surgically graft to the site that needs reconstruction. Once the pedicle's tissue and blood vessels become independent, it can be cut and refashioned into whatever the patient requires. Grafting tubed pedicles was not "cutting edge" plastic surgery; it was a common technique among battlefield surgeons during World War II and remained a regular practice well through the 1950s. Simon later referred to such operations as "ballpark surgery," which, despite the phrase's reference to baseball, suggested a vernacular approach that removed it from plastic surgery's allegedly lofty orbit and put it back down on the ground with other emergency procedures. Similarly, on July 15, 1955, Simon performed an "excision and plastic repair of vertical scar of right cheek and right lower eyelid" for Mitsuko Kuramoto, the "weeping Maiden" who

famously wore an eye patch. Apparently the rest of Kuramoto's physical body either was unharmed or did not warrant surgery, since she did not undergo any other procedures until the following April, when Barsky attended to the "scar of [her] right upper eyelid." Although such attention paid to "scars" might be interpreted out of context as cosmetic, Simon believed that such reparative surgery was not an issue of vanity. This was true of the work done by junior surgeon Samuel Kahn on May 15, 1956, when he crafted "bilateral naso-labial flaps to defects created by excision of scars of upper lip" on Atsuko Yamamoto, one of the two women who posed in front of the Industrial Promotional Hall publicity photograph. The use of the word "defects" in the description is not a critical judgment of the patient's nose but a reference to the scars created by inexperienced Japanese surgeons who had tried unsuccessfully to provide Yamamoto with relief for her damaged nostrils.

Surgeons strategically emphasized the professional distinction between reconstructive and cosmetic surgery to ensure that the Maidens project would receive the appropriate support from the public, who might resent Japanese girls' getting facelifts. According to Simon, in the 1950s those who performed nose jobs, facelifts, breast augmentations, and the like without board certification or the pedigree of a prestigious university or military training were routinely chastised in professional circles as "whores of the medical industry."<sup>94</sup> One could interpret Cousins's comment as elitist pride. But it also seemed to stem from a professional concern that the Maidens might be exploited in ways that would undermine the project. In 1952, for example, long before the women even arrived in the United States, a group of doctors from the Soviet Union approached them and said they would perform reconstructive surgery for free on condition that the Maidens speak out publicly against American imperialism and nuclear weapons testing.<sup>95</sup> Barsky, Kahn, and Simon were assigned the job of countering this propaganda and were identified in the media as heroic individuals, board-certified plastic surgeons who had distinguished service records during World War II. In order to promote the Maidens

project as not only humanitarian but also patriotic, it was imperative to establish American plastic surgeons as experts, free-thinking promoters of American scientific superiority and humanitarian aid.<sup>96</sup>

Despite their actual work, the conflation of plastic surgery and upward mobility persisted. The Maidens story often competed with other stories published in popular magazines of the late 1940s and early 1950s about young women whose scars, large noses, or misshapen chins compromised their careers. Typical were sensationalist descriptions that played on the great pleasure postwar culture derived from self-improvement narratives. In 1947, news magazines ran feature articles on celebrity plastic surgeons such as Dr. John Pick, who made “bad men better” by “correcting” the faces of ex-convicts to make them more socially presentable and economically viable after they left prison. As Pick explained, when selecting candidates for plastic surgery, “the reform school is the place to begin. We could hope then to stop a criminal career right at the start.”<sup>97</sup> By contrast, what made a woman a career “criminal,” apparently, was her failure to attain even a minimally appropriate feminine appearance. As one *Saturday Evening Post* article put it in 1950, with the drama of a radio play, “She was an attractive girl—except for one shocking disfiguration. How could she earn a living with such a tragic handicap?”<sup>98</sup> Postwar philanthropic groups, often composed of prominent plastic surgeons, had begun to establish clinics to help those with congenital facial deformities—and later to correct the features of those lured by the transformative possibilities of cosmetic surgery.<sup>99</sup> A 1958 article in *American Mercury* titled “A New Face for Christmas” described the charitable activities of Stanley Slotkin, a Los Angeles businessman who established a foundation so men and women could undergo plastic surgery in order to succeed in their vocations. The article described Slotkin’s secretary, Betty: “On the wonderful morning when [Betty’s] bandages were removed, she saw her beautiful face. A new chin brought with her a look of strength and determination—and a promotion a few months later. She’s been moving upward in the agency ever since.”<sup>100</sup>

The popular discourse surrounding cosmetic surgery shaped the public's understanding of the Maidens project, even if none of the Maidens' surgeries were explicitly cosmetic. None of the women, for example, received new noses or chins that marked them as "Western." Yet whatever initial otherness the Maidens brought with them on the airplane was neutralized by reconstructing them in the image of American women—if not physically, then certainly socially. Bernard Simon observed that when the Maidens got off the airplane in New York they not only were exhausted and air-sick but were dressed in "ill-fitting" blue polyester "travel suits." They had teased their straight black hair into tangled knots that became, in Simon's words, "all frizzed out," since they assumed that all American women had their hair permed. The Quaker families immediately endeavored to change the Maidens' appearance and behavior. They gave them gifts befitting comfortable young American girls of a certain socioeconomic bracket and taste niche. According to Simon, many families bought the young women expensive tweed skirts, cashmere sweaters, and saddle shoes for daily wear, evening dresses and shawls for formal functions, and beauty products designed to restore their hair to its natural sheen. In addition, between surgeries, the Quaker families encouraged the Maidens to pursue professional and recreational interests at local community colleges, art schools, and vocational schools. Many took classes in painting, nursing, cosmetology, and secretarial skills, even if they anticipated that all the glamour would dissipate when they returned to the family fishing business.<sup>101</sup>

In the hands of their Quaker sponsors and American doctors, the Maidens became poster children for a new kind of postwar identity. They exemplified a generation of future citizens whose bodily damage, inflicted by the chaos of modern physics, could be healed through the miracles of modern medicine. Indeed, these miracles made it possible for them, as future citizens, to receive more than mere cultural opportunities or material gifts; it offered them an entrée into the triumphant global culture promised by Cold War

economic liberalism. New York journalist Arnold Brophy claimed optimistically that “plastic surgeons hope to erase the scars [the Maidens] suffered in the bombing of Hiroshima,” but he also mourned that “[the] bombing robbed them of their beauty—and of their status as normal human beings.”<sup>102</sup> These responses reflected the implicit goals of the Hiroshima Maidens project: not only to normalize the women’s physical features, but to normalize the terms on which modern science could absorb its capacity for recklessness and turn trauma into opportunity. Cousins claimed repeatedly during the Maidens’ stay in the United States that the “girls [were] free of many of the misconceptions about plastic surgery that apparently exist in relation to this project in both the United States and Japan. They realize that it is beyond the reach of modern surgery to restore their faces perfectly.”<sup>103</sup> Yet the Maidens themselves told reporters a different version of their inner world: a fantasy life enriched by the idea that plastic surgery would miraculously restore or, in many cases, dramatically transform them. In an article sensationally titled “Atom Blast Ruined Beauty, Sighs A-Victim,” Toyoko Minowa was alleged to have claimed, with dramatic use of ellipsis, “I used to be considered beautiful, that is until . . .” while Michiko Sako explained that the Maidens “[were] hoping to recover the beauty that nature gave us.”<sup>104</sup> Others told stories of how they sat “in the merciful dark of movie theatres, watching American movies, adoring James Stewart and Gary Cooper and wondering what it would be like to be as perfect and desirable as Elizabeth Taylor.”<sup>105</sup> This fantasy, which sounds suspiciously like the desires of any number of insecure American teenage girls, helped to normalize the Maidens as female consumers who believed in a meritocracy based on beauty. Indeed, to further enhance their claim to a thoroughly modern identity, references to the Maidens described them in language redolent of American psychologists and advice columnists of the early 1950s: “For ten years these young girls have passed *their most sensitive years* aware of the ugly keloids on their faces.”<sup>106</sup>

For the Americans that watched their transformation, the Maidens proved that plastic surgery, aimed at emergency cases as



well as at beauty's common denominator could serve as a democratizing force for these *hibakusha*, or for survivors of war, or for those with ungainly appearances, or even for those with problem personalities. In this sense the Maidens became literally the public face of those foreign nationals to whom the magic and mystery emanating from American goods and services flowed, giving the aggressive foreign policy initiatives and equally aggressive conspicuous consumption of the Eisenhower years a visible manifestation that one could not look away from. The term "Hiroshima Maidens"—the awkward translation of their Japanese appellation—suggested that their homely identity as shut-ins would be the first component of their personalities to go in their transition from naive girlhood to modern womanhood. They may have been poor female Japanese victims of radiation burns in real life, but this did not prevent Americans from imagining the Maidens partly as pioneers of innovative medical technology and partly as upwardly mobile career girls. As the *New York World-Telegram* reported, "For years [the Maidens] have avoided society's gazes and stares, helpless in their common sorrow. But now there is hope. . . . Twenty-five Japanese girls are seeing what America is really like."<sup>107</sup>

### IMAGINARY TRANSLATIONS

Like an unresolved mystery or unconfirmed myth, the story of the Hiroshima Maidens continues to invite reexamination and interpretation.<sup>108</sup> In 1994, for example, Daniel James Sundahl published a short chapbook of poems titled *Hiroshima Maidens: Imaginary Translations from the Japanese*. In modern free verse, the poems recount—one might say project—the psychic impact that the bombing may have had on the young girls in Hiroshima. Sundahl's stanzas are mostly written in the collective voice of the Maidens who, in the book, are not distinguished as autonomous bodies but are fused together, not unlike the features of their own bodies, as one univocal entity. In an early section, for instance, in which the

Maidens remember their lives before the bomb was dropped, Sundahl writes:

what was past is not past  
is not was but is / part  
of our great longing.

we try to find some place  
to go back to.

we remember:  
long hair in braids,  
feet gliding in satin slippers,  
hands clasping paper roses,  
lips singing morning prayers.<sup>109</sup>

At their best, Sundahl's "imaginary translations" are perhaps best described as poetic translations of a distorted American imagination, one that constructed a singular ideal of who these young Japanese women were and what they ultimately represented. Sundahl's description of the prebomb consciousness of the Maidens, while seemingly compassionate and eloquent, is refracted through several layers of misinformation about the class background imparted to their collective memory. Since the vast majority of them were born into poor working families of fishermen and seamstresses, none would have remembered the leisurely feel of "feet gliding in satin slippers," nor would many have spent their mornings "clasping paper roses." These were the daily activities of a kind of idealized, all-purpose Japanese handmaiden. Furthermore, the phrase "we try to find a place to go back to" belies the historical truth of their tribulations, since they had complex associations to their home country after Cousins and Tanimoto whisked them away to the United States in 1955. After the last of their surgeries were completed in September 1956, the Maidens remained for a final month and a half of recuperation and relaxation. Having left Hiroshima as

poor disfigured girls, they packed their new luggage with memories of kindness and compassion and returned to Hiroshima with repaired faces, working hands and arms, and new confidence imparted through surgical success and material transformation. In November 1956, when they returned home to Hiroshima, they encountered a wide range of responses from Japanese citizens as well as from other surviving *hibakusha*. Much to their chagrin and through no fault of their own, they were not universally loved. Some saw the Maidens as victims of Cold War propaganda, who walked down the runway bearing the visible evidence of attempts by American surgeons to hide the pressing issue of nuclear weapons testing. Others saw them as victims of cultural assimilation, who walked down the runway under a veil of cosmetic improvements and shining new accessories, unaware that their time in the United States had put them in an exclusive bubble. Still others sympathized with them, regarding them as a bridge between former enemies, beneficiaries of a new world order in which medical procedures could be used as tools of modernization and foreign policy. Forty years later, Sundahl's poetry unconsciously captured the essence of that postwar moment when the Hiroshima Maidens became a screen onto which many citizens around the world projected their own cultural fantasies about these young Japanese women: who they were, how they looked, what they had become, and what it meant for them to come here in the first place (fig. 14).

In 1960, less than four years after the last of the Maidens returned to Japan, Rod Serling's controversial but popular television show *The Twilight Zone* broadcast its most famous and critically acclaimed episode, "Eye of the Beholder." In the episode, originally shown on November 11, the modern hospital becomes an Orwellian nightmare when Janet Tyler, a young woman with a horribly disfigured face, undergoes her eleventh surgical procedure to become physically acceptable. The doctors and nurses, whose faces we see only in shadow, are not unsympathetic to the young woman's plight but know that the surgery, certain to have no effect on her condition, will force her to be relocated to a segregated community of people



**FIGURE 14** Filled with, as the original caption stated, “feelings of sadness and gladness,” the first group of Hiroshima Maidens wave from the runway at La Guardia Airport in New York City and begin their long journey home. Sadam Takahashi, a Japanese surgeon, holds a box containing the ashes of Tomako Nakabayashi, the Maiden who died of heart failure in May during her third operation to correct her disfigured arm. Nakabayashi’s death was underplayed in the American media but wildly overplayed by some Japanese newspapers, which maintained that the Maidens were guinea pigs of American medical experimentation. Photograph taken June 12, 1956 © Bettmann/Corbis.

who also suffer from her physical disorder. Although viewers never see Tyler's face while it is wrapped in tight, distorting bandages, they hear the character's plaintive voice as recorded by actress Maxine Stuart. In the final few moments of the episode, when the bandages come off, the woman is revealed as a stunning, physically normal blonde played by actress Donna Douglas, who later achieved fame as Elly May on *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The doctors and nurses, whose faces are finally brought out of shadow, have the grotesque misshapen noses, eyelids, and mouths of German Expressionist puppets.

Serling well understood television's role as a multivalent medium that conceptualized celebrity and beauty for different audiences and constituencies. Douglas Heyes, the director of this *Twilight Zone* episode, also knew that only a film noir approach to the *mise-en-scène*, punctuated by composer Bernard Hermann's dramatic score, would produce the desired effect. Heyes played with shadow and light so as not to reveal the program's characteristic ending twist. A promotional trailer shown in early November 1960 to drum up viewer interest recreated uncannily the Hiroshima Maidens' appearance on *This Is Your Life*. In it, Serling emerges from a shadowy silhouette to present the dark theme of the program. For the producers of *This Is Your Life*, the choice to show the Maidens in silhouette was a nod toward modesty and protection; for Serling, the silhouette heightened the program's intent to give the topic of plastic surgery an air of quasi-scientific menace. While many applauded the story, however heavy-handed, as an allegory of fascism and the dangers of mass conformity, organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) understood the program's social and political exploration of plastic surgery, appearance, and citizenship<sup>8</sup> in racial terms. In honor of the poignant episode, the NAACP presented Serling with its 1961 Unity Award for Outstanding Contributions for Better Race Relations.

Unlike the surgical patient in the *Twilight Zone* episode, the Maidens were compassionately healed in a modern American hospital, free from the exploitation and manipulation that anchor

Serling's fictional story. But the utopian mystique imposed on plastic surgery in the 1950s placed them in a larger cultural narrative of social improvement through medical engineering that seemed to be the premise for Serling's allusions to plastic surgery as a tool used to promote political ideology. Furthermore, like Serling's episode, the American and Japanese supporters of the Hiroshima Maidens project conceptualized the women within Western paradigms of beauty and femininity. The sophistication imputed to their surgery allowed the Hiroshima Maidens to eschew traditional Japanese culture and embrace an American female identity increasingly defined by the medical appurtenances of scientific modernism. Their transformation—from Keloid Girls to Hiroshima Maidens—unfolded as a public drama through which ordinary citizens could engage with medical science and witness its visions of both technological enthusiasm and abject horror as projected onto the female body. In this sense, the women functioned both domestically and internationally as a medicalized version of the Marshall Plan. Like the lists that Ida Day compiled, rehabilitating them meant measuring them against the demands of a range of normative categories: physical and psychological; economic and political; gendered and able-bodied; and specific to the needs of Japanese-American relations in the era of reconstruction.

The public drama of the Hiroshima Maidens continues to unfold, in ways that have been essentially absorbed within the parameters of globalization. Toward the end of 1955, after doctors completed the Maidens' first round of surgery, Cousins acknowledged that because the surgeons at Mount Sinai had donated their services, and because the hospital had provided beds for the Maidens at little or no charge, a portion of the \$55,000 collected on the women's behalf from philanthropic groups and public solicitations on the *This Is Your Life* broadcast had not been spent. Arthur Barsky, chief of plastic surgery at Mount Sinai and head surgeon for the Maidens project, suggested that the money be used for training Japanese surgeons in the reconstructive techniques that Barsky and his colleagues had performed on the Maidens. Barsky arranged for

three young Japanese dermatologists—Kitaro Ohmori, Takua Onizuka, and Namba Katsuya—to come to Mount Sinai and train with doctors in the hospital's plastic surgery program. In 1958, Onizuka and Katsuya created the Japanese Society for Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, which became the organization responsible for certifying practicing plastic surgeons in Japan. After 1958, dozens of plastic surgeons trained in Japan and learned Barsky's techniques, developing their own medical specialties of cosmetic surgery. By the early 1960s, surgeons in Japan, China, and Hawaii were recommending cosmetic surgery for men and women who wanted to Westernize their features.<sup>110</sup> By the late 1970s, blepharoplasty and augmentation rhinoplasty had become conspicuous consumer options among many Asian patients. Writing in 1980, Yoshio Hiraga, a prominent Japanese plastic surgeon, asserted, "Slit eyes are considered by some to make one look sad or ill-natured. Those with slit eyes are sometimes misunderstood and lose friends or even their work."<sup>111</sup>

One could argue that internationalizing plastic surgery techniques as modern social amenities suggests the breakdown of Western/non-Western binaries in terms of standards of beauty or access to particular medical technologies. The desire and willingness to undergo the knife in the name of physical improvement, one might argue, can no longer be regarded as a purely Western ideal foisted on unsuspecting populations. In a global marketplace dominated by goods and services that blur the cultural origins of an "authentic" national or ethnic heritage, identifying physical features as "Western" or "Eastern" may be an outmoded way of thinking. Yet the cautionary tale provided by the Hiroshima Maidens is that surgical options, no matter where they originate, retain their status precisely because people around the world have internalized medically normative ideas of what it means to have an appropriate or desirable body. In the late 1980s, cosmetic surgery became a widely publicized and hugely successful consumer product in so-called developing countries, where it is physical evidence of a particular standard of living. Some normative ideas of the body, however,

speak more directly to medicine's Cold War legacies of cultural imperialism. In post-Communist Russia and Eastern Europe, as well as in many Asian and Pacific Rim cultures such as Korea, China, and the Philippines, cosmetic surgery continues to symbolize prestige, modernity, and access to lavish goods and services.<sup>112</sup> In 1993 the *Wall Street Journal* reported the story of a Korean cosmetic surgeon who encourages prospective patients, especially young urban professionals, to undergo cosmetic surgery by a sign outside his office that proclaims "Go Anglo!" As one of the surgeon's female clients explained, "[Cosmetic surgery] is different from buying luxury items. It deals with self-esteem. I admit we're looking Anglicized, but we're social animals, and we have to adapt to society."<sup>113</sup>



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