

Peace Museums, Museums, And The Arts -- As Means For Generational Learning ©

A Paper ¹ For

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by

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the potential of, and the need for peace-museums, museums, and the arts as means for socially responsible “**Generational Learning**”² of the awful truth as to the brutality and absurdity of war. If we can move toward this “potential,” then youth of the 21st Century may not have to learn these truths first-hand as have we in our journey through the carnage of our 20th Century. To illustrate, I will present a few examples of the “possibilities.” I will reference a major failure by the United States Smithsonian Air And Space Museum in Washington, DC, to carry out this important institutional social responsibility -- namely the January 1995 Enola Gay capitulation.^{3,4,5} In contrast to this “failure,” I will examine a hopeful and encouraging Japanese youth group, “**The Peaceboat.**” and their 1998 attempt to do for America that which the great Smithsonian could not do, namely, help us in America understand in a minimal way -- what it means to have a city vaporized by a nuclear bomb. Museums, peace-museums, the-arts, and media can also help “vaccinate” youth against the “flag-waving” and “chauvinistic drum thumping” that so easily stirs young blood -- especially so when they so often have no living personal knowledge of the carnage and brutality of modern high-technology warfare. Finally I hope that this conference can also point us toward some new and creative ways and means to dissipate youthful alienation and creatively tap their idealism, so as to involve new generations in non-violent alternatives to war.⁶

Introduction

Let us begin with a review of some of the hopeful possibilities that are implicit in the wisdom contained in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution⁷ -- and then explore

“generational learning” function potentials of peace-museums, museums, and the-arts in moving ourselves toward a world that settles its disputes non-violently.

Article 9, the world’s most significant legal injunction against war, implies that non-violent means be used to resolve our inevitable conflicts between and within nations. Ultimately the wisdom of Article 9 must become an integral part of the constitutions of all nations -- most significantly including the United States.

There are multitudes of kinds of non-violent national service that might be performed by Japan under its constitutional “rule of law.” These are services that could do far more for world peace and justice than the rearming of Japan as has been US policy, in its 50 year paranoid cold-war-dance⁸ with the former equally paranoid USSR.^{9, 10,11,12} These kinds of service range from diplomacy and war prevention; to social and economic development with justice; to seeking an end to nuclear weapons and international weapons trade; to actions for reducing world population growth; to the design and production of technology systems that minimize the use of Earth’s finite resources, and which do not destroy the environment; to defending the nation non-violently with Civilian Based Defense (CBD). For an elaboration of these and many other related ideas, please see our recent book, *A Call For Peace: The Implications Of Japan’s War-Renouncing Constitution*.¹³

With these Article 9 words of wisdom in its constitution, if Japanese people will exercise their sovereign power to restore Article 9’s integrity and then insist that their leaders proudly act on their “law” -- Japan has a unique and historical opportunity to demonstrate and lead the nations of the world in shaping a new worldwide social-cultural norm of non-violent means for preventing wars and resolving conflict.¹⁴

The latest discouraging “happening” in the long line of relentless US efforts to rearm Japan, is the September 23, 1997 “doublespeak”^{15,16,17} document called **“guidelines for US--Japan defense cooperation.”** US and Japanese governmental reinterpretations and distortions over the years of the plain and simple words in Article 9, represent an attempt to lead us into an Orwellian “doublethink” -- that is, to simultaneously hold two contradictory ideas that [1] yes, Japan can rearm, and [2] Article 9 will still mean what its words say. We need to become more like the child in Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy-tale, “The Emperor’s New Clothes” who tells us that this emperor has no clothes.

Generational Learning Functions Of Museums, And The-Arts

As sentient beings we can be deeply moved by creative museum, literary, artistic, and musical experience. These social inventions facilitate a different kind of human communication enabling us to interact in ways not possible with other forms. They help us transcend our individualistic and tribal limitations to know that we are all sisters and brothers who must care for each other, and for our Mother Earth. Let us look at a few selected examples of the possibilities.

[A] Peace Museums and Museums Contribution to “Generational Learning”

Let me illustrate the massive potential for “museums” as social-inventions for societal and “generational learning” by sharing with you a quite recent “major failure” of an American museum, to rise to the occasion and fulfill its great promise.¹⁸

On the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing the great Washington, DC Smithsonian Air and Space Museum capitulated to right-wing congressional political pressure and so-called “patriotic” veterans organization’s demands to emasculate a proposed display of the B-29, Enola Gay. In this 50th year commemoration of this cataclysmic event, the Smithsonian originally intended to explore the significance, necessity, and morality of “the bomb” as well as its consequences and legacy -- including the nuclear arms race that ensued. On January 30, 1995, the curators of this proposed exhibit, under heavy pressure from these groups, chose to limit the Enola Gay display to a part of its fuselage, a plaque, and a video of the crew.

By capitulating to these pressures the Smithsonian denied an estimated eight million, young and old, visitors per year an opportunity to share in the dialogue and debate on this unbelievable violence. Limiting the exhibit constrains our opportunity to understand what happens to the moral principles of all nations when they engage in the savagery and brutality of modern high-tech warfare.

I understand the emotions of veterans who feel that the bombs might have saved their lives by not having to invade Japan. I too am a veteran of World War II and the Korean War. In August 1945 I was a 19-year-old B-29 tail gunnery student headed for Japan had the war continued. At that stage of my life I was rather ignorant about most everything except my love affair with flying-machines. I was relieved that the war had ended, enabling me to get on with my life without having to risk losing it over Japan. Sadly, my limited 19-year-old perspective did not include many moral and ethical concerns and considerations. Besides, what did any of us know about these holocaust weapons at the time. Only a select elite few, who operated in complete secrecy understood what these instruments of war were all about. My concerns about the morality of killing innocent civilians with bombs began as a result of my work as a pilot on a B-29 crew in the Korean war. Over the years as I have learned a little about the decisions to drop “Little Boy” and “Fat Man”, I have come to question the morality of and necessity for using these monstrous weapons.

Some argue that to question the morality and necessity of using the bombs somehow brings disrespect to the honor and valor of veterans who sacrificed so much in World War II. I disagree. Examining and airing these concerns honors the sacrifices of our soldiers by demonstrating our commitment to the essential principles of our founding documents -- our right as free people to explore ideas, facts, and theories so that we can truly learn from history.

I wish that we could have posted a bronze plaque at the entrance to the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, reading as follows --

“Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great Smithsonian Institution should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found.”¹⁹

The real lesson to be learned from this gruesomeness of war is that we must find ways to resolve our conflicts non-violently rather than resorting to the madness of scientifically designed and engineered slaughter. As a step in that direction I suggest that we add a display to the Enola Gay exhibit that contains the 73 eloquent war renouncing words of the Japanese constitution’s Article 9. This would at least enable a contrast of the machinery of war and nuclear holocaust, with peoples’ hopes for peace and justice.

B. A Japanese Youth Group’s Effort At “Generational Learning” in America

My wife, Ruth, and I had such a refreshing experience on August 24, 1998 in Columbus Ohio where I gave a talk at a nuclear holocaust photo display by this group of Japanese youth who called themselves “The Peaceboat.” The Peaceboaters also exhibited this display in San Francisco, Boston, and Washington DC. The Columbus Ohio²⁰ show was held on the first floor of the high-rise State Office Building located across the street from the Ohio State Capital building. Many state office workers and those doing business with the State of Ohio had an opportunity to think about what it means to [1] have a city vaporized, as was Hiroshima and Nagasaki; or [2] to be a U.S. soldier or “downwind” civilian victim of American’s 1950s nuclear testing, or [3] to be a baby dying from Chernobyl nuclear power-plant radiation.

These dedicated and beautiful Japanese Peaceboat youth, with their exhibit here in America were doing, in a mini-way, for American citizens -- that which our great Washington, DC Smithsonian Institution Air and Space Museum was forbidden to do. I am speaking of the 1995 Enola Gay fiasco at the Smithsonian²¹. It is a bit discouraging in all of this to note that we in America live with the illusion that, because of our great “Free Speech” First Amendment to our Constitution, we are a well informed people. We as citizens of Earth’s most powerful military-economic super-power -- have been prohibited from becoming more profoundly informed about one of the most significant and terrible events in all of humanity’s history. This is downright dangerous.

C. Some Japanese Artistic Creative Contributions to “Generational Learning”

Music

Shortly after the end of the 1991 Gulf Oil Resource War, I received a tape recording of a song written by Dr. Yokoyama with Mr. Maruyama as recording artist. This song, “This Star Called Earth,” was about the pain and brutality of the 1991 Iraq war, and of the peace and justice hope and promise of Article 9. In November 1993 on our lecture visit to Nagasaki, my wife and I were deeply moved by a magnificent female-male choral tribute to an Hibakusha woman, Mrs. Watanabe, in her effort to tell the story

of her teenage August 9, 1945 Nagasaki bomb experience. These creative musical expressions should be amplified so as to shine around the world on all cultures in the universal language that is music.

Yanagi's Installation Art

In our May 1995 Osaka visit I learned about and was quite stimulated by the work of a young Japanese "installation" artist, Yukinori Yanagi, who has most creatively addressed several themes that speak to issues of war and peace.²²

One of the exciting dimensions of art is the way that each of us interprets the artist's creation through our own unique life path and bio-social-ethical prisms -- an interpretation that may well be quite different from that which the artist had in mind at the time of its creation.

The Forbidden Box

In one of his installations called "Forbidden Box", Yanagi merges an ancient Japanese children's folk tale, *Urashima Taro*²³, with the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima using the folk tale's "forbidden box" as the link. Yanagi says, *I created The Forbidden Box as an allegory of modern Japan. To borrow from the Greek myth of Pandora's Box, left in the forbidden box which was opened against the taboo upon it is the "hope" for Japan: Article 9 of our Constitution.*²⁴

In our travels around the globe and living in different cultures I have found it hopeful to learn that the myths and legends which we transmit to our children through the "folk" or "fairy" tales we share with them, have universally common themes no matter whether the stories originate in Asia, Europe, Africa, or the Americas. This universality of children's tales enables us to know that we as a species share common core values and hopes all around the globe. From this we can learn anew that we are sisters and brothers who share a fragile globe and who must care for one-another and our dear "Mother Earth."

The World Flag Ant Farm And The 38th Parallel

In two other of his installations, Yanagi demonstrates with his "World Flag Ant Farm" and the "38th Parallel" a major constraint that separate us as people living in our different tribes (nations) -- namely the artificial political-economic-cultural boundaries symbolized by our national flags. Unfortunately, national flag symbols often fertilize "isms" like chauvinism, jingoism, false patriotism, and unhealthy nationalism -- all of which make it difficult for us as ordinary Earth citizens, to share our common concerns and hopes for peace and non-violent conflict resolution, and environmentally healthy life styles.

In his 1990 World Flag Ant Farm installation, Yanagi creates the 170 flags of the United Nations out of transparent Plexiglas boxes filled with colored particles of sand.

He then mounts these boxes on walls and connects all of these “tribe identifying” symbols with plastic tubing. He then introduces many ants into the tubes and lets them act out a bit of “chaos theory”²⁵ as they carry sand particles between flags to create a new world flag under which we as a species might successfully unite in a strategy for survival in the new millennium.

Yanagi has given us with his World Flag Ant Farm, an allegorical expression of our dilemma as a species, and at the same time suggestions as to how we must deal with our constraints. As ordinary people we must be like the ants in Yanagi’s ant farm, diligently burrowing across borders, and cultures so as to change our milieu to be one in which war prevention, non-violent conflict resolution, and caring for each other and the environment -- become the accepted norm, rather than the contemporary one of militarism, war, violence, and environmental and habitat destruction.

In the “38th Parallel”, Yanagi has his ants burrowing away to transform North and South Korean flags from two enemy tribes into a new entity that unites these people in a cooperative way on common concerns -- and that ends this sorry hold-over from cold-war paranoia.

Yanagi’s “ants” in their transformation tubes can be seen as symbols of our latest step in communications capability, the Internet and the World-Wide-Web which has grown into a vehicle that enables us to communicate with each other across all kinds of political, economic, cultural, and ideological walls and boundaries. The Internet enables us to escape the constraints of traditional media with its political, economic, and cultural biases -- as well as the fetters of governments, corporations, religious dogma, etc.

D. Books, Plays, and Media Contributions to “Generational Learning”

One of the best places to plant the seed of non-violent problem solving is in our youngster’s reading material. A recent American book comes to mind as an illustration -- Dr. Seuss, *The Butter Battle Book*.²⁶ In this story there are two tribes, one that butters its bread on the top and one that butters its bread on the bottom. Out of this profound ideological difference arose an arms race in which each side would escalate by inventing new killing technology, only to be out-done by the other side. This ‘butter battle’ sounds much like that which went on between the USA and the USSR during the period of Cold War paranoia.

I understand that a creative comic book, cartoon, format has been effectively used in Japan to convey the meaning and agony of the bombing of Hiroshima to children and also to adults who like to read comic books. This Japanese book, *Barefoot Gen (Hadashi No Gen): A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima*,²⁷ could be a model for further use of this medium. Knowing the power of cartoonists to capture the essence of complex situations so that the truth shines through the fog, I heartily encourage the use of cartoons and comic books to help spread our message of peace and justice and non-violent means for conflict resolution around the world.

The gross stupidity of governmental leaders that gave us the abominable slaughter of World War I²⁸ produced a large outpouring of anti-war anguish and anger, artistic and otherwise after the war. Probably one of the greatest anti-war novels ever written was Germany's Erich Maria Remarque's, *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

A German, artist Otto Dix,^{29, 30} a machine gunner in World War I, painted the absurdity and brutality of the carnage in all of its non-glory. It is instructive to note that, Dix had made such an impression with his anti-war art that soon after the Nazi regime came to power in 1933 they had him dismissed from his professorship at the Dresden Art Academy with the following note of justification for the dismissal. *Apart from the fact that some of your paintings are a gross offense to moral feelings and therefore a danger to moral regeneration, you have also painted pictures that are liable to impair the will to defend oneself.*³¹

Ernst Friedrich, another German, in 1924 published *War Against War*³², a book of gruesome photographs with satirical commentary that illustrates the absurd brutality of warfare. Friedrich's book conveys a very different message than the positive one portrayed in current American military recruiting propaganda slogans that urge young people to -- "Join The Few, The Proud, The Strong", to "Aim High" so that you can "Be All You Can Be." Friedrich's book has been adapted for Japanese readers by Tsuboi and Dungen.³³

May we be successful in this conference in developing our creative potential for "Generational Learning" so that the 21st Century will not be a more violent and destructive repeat of the brutal 20th.

Endnotes

¹ Some of my commentary here might seem rather critical of my country, the USA, and its path as a world leader for the past 60 or so years. Let me say at the outset, that I am grateful for the many opportunities that I have had, as a US citizen, to fulfill some of my promise -- and yet I, along with millions of my fellow citizens, seek to improve this system that nurtured us. I am inclined to agree with Michael Sherry's in his 1995 book, *In The Shadow of War*, when he characterizes the US, since before World War II, as a culture living in a state of "militarization" which he defines as -- "... the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence." I along with millions of other like-minded fellow citizens, seek an America where institutions will be judged according to how well they tend to maximize ethical, loving, and caring relationships nationally and internationally, rather than the culture of alienation, cynicism, selfishness, violence, and materialism that is contemporary America, in the view of many. Please see Michael Lerner's book, *The Politics of Meaning: Restoring Hope and Possibility in an Age of Cynicism*, Addison Wesley, 1996.

² By "generational learning" I mean the wisdom and understanding that one generation of our species might be able to effectively transmit to succeeding generations, so the young will not have to learn certain realities from their own personal experience -- especially brutal and absurd realities like those of modern high-technology war and violence.

³ Overby, Charles, "Moral and Ethical Lessons to be Learned from the Enola Gay Controversy," An Opinion Column, *The Athens Messenger*, February 15, 1995.

⁴ Bird, Kai, & Lifschultz, L., (Editors) *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy*, The Pamphleteer's Press, Stony Creek, Connecticut, 1998.

⁵ Linenthal, E. T., & Engelhardt, T., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt & Co., New York, 1996.

⁶ See my next book that is presently in partial manuscript form, for an elaboration on the essential role of youth, women, and the full spectrum of the arts -- in bringing us as a species to a sanity of non-violent conflict resolution.

⁷ **Article 9** --- *Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes./// In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.*

⁸ Eisenberg, Carolyn, *Drawing The Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1994-1949*, Cambridge, 1996.

⁹ Green, Michael J., *Arming Japan*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995.

¹⁰ Sherry, Michael S., *In The Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1995.

¹¹ Schaller, Michael, *Altered States: The United States and Japan Since the Occupation*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford.

¹² LaFeber, Walter, *The Clash: U.S-Japan Relations Throughout History*, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1997.

¹³ Overby, C. (text), Kunihiro, M. (translator), and Momoi, K. (photo artist), *A CALL FOR PEACE: The Implications of Japan's War-Renouncing Constitution*, Kodansha International, Tokyo 1997, Kodansha America, New York 1998 Distributed in the USA by Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ United States "cooperation and support" is urgently needed for this hopeful and creative new path to be successfully launched. Support of the United Nations and all other world powers, specifically including the G7 & 1/2 countries, is also necessary.

¹⁵ Please see my other paper for this 1998 journey to Japan and S.E. Asia, titled "Save Article 9: With Non-Military, Japan--U.S. Cooperation," for an elaboration on these "guidelines."

¹⁶ The word "doublespeak" is an adaptation from George Orwell's idea of "doublethink." "Doublethink" might be defined as "thought marked by the acceptance of gross contradictions, especially when used as a technique of self indoctrination." "Doublespeak" is related to the words "double-talk" and "gobbledygook." These three words might be defined as -- [1] "deliberately ambiguous or evasive language"; [2] "language that appears to be earnest and meaningful but in fact is a mixture of sense and nonsense;" or [3] "wordy and generally unintelligible jargon." Please see Orwell, George, 1984, *The New American Library* (Signet Classic), New York, 1962, and *Websters Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1990; or *The American Heritage College Dictionary* Third Edition, 1997.

¹⁷ Orwell, George, 1984, *The New American Library* (Signet Classic), New York, 1962.

¹⁸ Overby, Charles, "Moral and ethical lessons to be learned from the Enola Gay controversy", (Opinion Column), *The Athens Messenger*, February 15, 1995.

¹⁹ This quote is paraphrased from the "Sifting and Winnowing" plaque at the University of Wisconsin, which came from a late 19th century fight for free speech and inquiry. Replacing the words "Smithsonian Institution" with the words "State University of Wisconsin", restores this beautiful ideal to its original state.

²⁰ Columbus Ohio is the home of retired General Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the Enola Gay. General Tibbets is still concerned with what he calls the "second guessing" by young historians. As time passes, new documents become available to younger historians who are beginning to write a different history of the last half of the 20th Century -- history that is sometimes pejoratively called "revisionist history." Tibbets in a quote from our local newspaper about these critics said "None of them had been born that day. ... They had not matured enough, and they hadn't learned their history. ... You (*the young*) should have been taught to puff out your chest when they play the Star Spangled Banner." -- *The Athens Messenger*, 27 July 1998.

²¹ Overby, C., "Moral and ethical ..", Kai, B, *Hiroshima's Shadow*, and Linenthal, E.T., *History Wars*, *op. cit.*

²² Yukinori Yanagi, Project Article 9, published for exhibits at Kirin Plaza, Osaka, March and April 1995, and at The Queens Museum of Art, May through July 1995, Copyright, The Queens Museum of Art, Kirin Plaza, Yukinori Yanagi Studio 1995.

²³ *Urashima Taro and Other Japanese Children Stories*, Charles E. Tuttle Co. Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan, 1964. --- My wife and I first learned about this tale as we watched a cherry blossom celebration in April 1981 at Inuyama, a small city north of Nagoya. Part of this celebration consisted of a parade in which large and ancient Japanese multi-storied “floats” were pulled and pushed through the streets. On the top platforms of many of these “floats”, mannequins were acting out folk tales. One of these was this ancient Japanese tale, *Urashima Taro*. I was very much impressed with this method of telling a children’s tale, and upon satisfying my curiosity as an engineer by inspecting the insides of the “float” -- I was also much impressed with the quality of the ancient linkage and motion-transmission technology inside the “float” structure that drove the mannequins at the top.

²⁴ Yanagi, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Prigogine, Ilya, *Order Out Of Chaos: Man’s New Dialogue With Nature*, Bantam Books, New York, 1984.

²⁶ Dr. Seuss, *The Butter Battle Book*, Random House, New York, 1984

²⁷ Nakazawa, Keiji, translated by Project Gen, *Barefoot Gen (Hadashi No Gen): A Cartoon Story of Hiroshima*, Published by Project Gen, Tokyo, Vol.1, 1982.

²⁸ Tuchman, Barbara, W., *The Guns Of August*, Bantam Books Paperback, New York, 1976.

²⁹ *BELLUM: Two Statements On The Nature Of War -- An Essay On War Written In 1545 By Erasmus, and Fifty Etchings Created In 1923 & 1924 By Otto Dix*, Imprint Society, Barre, Mass, MCMLXXII, 1972.

³⁰ *Otto Dix, 1891--1969*, published by Tate Gallery Publications, Millbank, London , 1992, ISBN 1854370944.

³¹ *Otto Dix, 1891--1969, op. cit.*, page 197.

³² Friedrich, Ernst, *War Against War*, Germany, Copyright 1924 by Friedrich, paperback published by Zweitausendeins, Berlin, 1988.

³³ Tsuboi, Chikara, & Dungen, Peter van den, (editors and translators) *Senso ni hantai suru Senso*, Ryukeishosha, Tokyo, 1988.