

## National Trauma, National Horror

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**Abstract:** This paper is based on a talk presented to the Hofstra Honors College on March 18, 2021. Using trauma theory and the theory that horror films function as an avenue toward national healing after a national catastrophic event, this paper considers the ways in which the 1954 Japanese film, *Gojira* might have had a cathartic effect on the Japanese people after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the nuclear fallout over Bikini Atoll.

**Keywords:** film studies, *Godzilla*, *Gojira*, horror, trauma studies.

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### I. Introduction

In 1945, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, one on Hiroshima, the other on Nagasaki, partially in response to the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The Japanese, whose robust film industry had, by 1945, created propaganda films depicting the Pearl Harbor bombing so realistic that American intelligence believed they were authentic documentary footage, was censored from 1945 through 1952, during the American occupation of Japan at the end of World War II. The guiding principles for this essay are (1) war causes trauma, for those on both sides and (2) national film industries' horror films function as a part of national healing after mass trauma.

This paper focuses on the 1954 Japanese movie, *Gojira*. The paper has three parts: first, a brief introduction to trauma studies as the theoretical framework for this "reading" of *Gojira*. Next, a review of the history of film generally and the place of Japanese film within that history. Finally, a consideration of *Gojira* from these perspectives, referencing the history of World War II and its aftermath in the discussion of how one can read this film as a way of working out, and healing, one nation's trauma. The intent is to provide a model for thinking about other national traumatic events and the movies that might help to heal them.

### II. Trauma Studies

#### 2.1 Methodology

Trauma is difficult to talk about when one has experienced it; it is also not easy for empathetic people to address others' traumas, though sometimes looking at trauma "once removed" might spark a person to realize that they, too, have experienced trauma. Sometimes, dealing with one's own trauma directly may be too painful, but looking at another's experience may foster healing.

Cathy Caruth, professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cornell is one of the pioneers of literary trauma theory. Caruth uses Freud's theories of psychological trauma as the basis for her claims about the limits of language and history due to the disruption of an individual's ability to fully understand or describe a traumatic experience. Caruth argues that both individual and collective historical traumatic experiences (or "extreme events") cannot be known directly; rather, they are seen in repetitive absences. Caruth asserts that both individual traumatic experiences and collective historical extreme events are ultimately never known directly but only through an interrupted referentiality that points to the meaning of the past only as a type of reproduction or performance (Caruth 1996: 11), mediated through literature, and, this paper asserts, also through film.

#### 2.2 Trauma Studies and Film Studies

While some of Caruth's claims about trauma are debatable, the idea that national traumas are being "worked out," as it were, in the horror films of that nation invites a different interpretation of horror films. Raphael, professor of film and disability studies at University of Hawaii, states that "[i]n many ways *Godzilla* was a refracted response to the still fresh horrors of nuclear war at the hands of the US. So this historical memory of trauma might be said to be present in use of the Kaiju tradition" (Raphael 2016: 207). *Kaiju* is a

Japanese genre of films featuring giant monsters, and it is a subgenre of *tokusatsu* ("special filming," or special effects) entertainment.

Individuals who have the resilience to survive trauma often find the strength to continue in their lives by following habitual patterns of action; likewise, nations move beyond trauma by falling back on traditions, cultural practices, and stories of national identity. Examples of this include American bravery after 9/11 signified in the phrase "these colors don't run;" Hungarian defiance in the face of the post-World War II Russian occupation, signified in the Hungarian revolution of 1956; Japanese pragmatism after surviving the effects of nuclear war, signified in Japan's recovery after World War II.

Using the theoretical framework of trauma studies to examine the images presented by director Ishirô Honda and cinematographer Eiji Tsuburaya in *Gojira*, the overt messages against nuclear warfare are clearly present, but the images go beyond those warnings to show covertly the Japanese experience, in 1954, of the nuclear bombs being dropped on them, described by Raphael as, "a response to the still fresh horrors of nuclear war at the hands of the US" refracted through Honda's lens in the story of *Gojira*.

### III. History and Film

#### 3.1 Horror Films in Film History

History of cinema starts with Thomas Edison's kinetoscope, a single-viewer motion picture device, which was first shown commercially in the United States in 1894 and in Japan in 1896. The single-viewer device was not a practicable solution for mass audiences, however. In 1896, George Méliès' *Le Manoir du diable* presented the moving image projected on a screen to mass audiences in the United States as *The Haunted Castle* (and in Britain as *The Devil's Castle*). In 1897 the Lumière brothers became the first moving picture camera operators to work in Japan, introducing the Japanese to the Lumière cinematograph. By 2020, the largest film market in the world was China, Hollywood was number two, and the Japanese film industry ranked third.

#### 3.2 Japanese Film Industry

In 1897, projected images were not entirely new to the Japanese because of their pre-cinematic tradition of the "magic lantern," which used a light source to project images on glass slides using mirrors. However, the history of the Japanese national film industry begins in 1897. Japanese cinema continued to develop and thrive until 1923 when the Great Kantô earthquake, which measured 7.8 on the Richter scale, struck Yokohama and Tokyo. The earthquake, and resulting tsunami and fire tornado, killed more than 100,000 people. It also decimated Japan's movie industry as it destroyed films, equipment, and studios. It was not until 1932 that the Japanese film industry began a revival with the founding of Toho films, which released its first live action film in 1935.

Concurrently, in the United States, Radio Pictures released *King Kong* (1933), one of the first monster movies. The special effects (SFX)/stop motion animator of that film, Willis O'Brien, influenced cinematographer Eiji Tsuburaya, who credited *King Kong* (and O'Brien) with his choice of career (Bronson). Tsuburaya owned a copy of *King Kong*, and watched the film repeatedly to try and reverse engineer what O'Brien had done. As a young cinematographer, Tsuburaya invented a more flexible crane for creating special effects and perfected stop motion animation as he watched *King Kong* many times over to try and reverse engineer O'Brien's special effects.

#### 3.3 Films and War

Meanwhile, the world was going to war. Japan wanted to control the Korean peninsula and proceeded to attack China, occupying Manchuria in 1931 and invading China in 1937. Japan remained in China until the American occupation of Japan in 1945. While Japan expanded its influence in Asia, Hitler gained power in Germany and then, in 1939, attacked Poland, triggering the start of World War II in Europe. Films were being used by national leaders to disseminate targeted messages to their citizens, such as Hitler's depiction of concentration camps as country clubs, to justify their actions and gain national support. Likewise, in Japan, the Japanese film industry (like many other national film industries at the time) became purveyors of national propaganda. The Japanese imperial government used the newly-created Toho studios alongside Japan's National Research Studios to depict the latest advances in the military, ensuring that the propagandizing movies would feature military technology that was up to date (Clements and Ip 2012).

To make the movies realistic required special effects, and Tsuburaya who, by 1940, had been creating special effects for several years, was hired to make propaganda films. One for which Tsuburaya created the special effects was *Hawai Mare Oki Kaisen* (1942) directed by Kajiro Yamamoto. This recreation of the Pearl

Harbor attack was so convincing that it misled the Americans into thinking it was actual documentary war footage (Clemens and Ip 2012). The island of Japan had not been attacked since the Mongols attempted to invade in 1275 and 1281, and the island seemed to the world to be invincible. This may have been one of several reasons that the United States dropped two atomic bombs on the nation. Once Japan surrendered, the occupation of Japan by the United States commenced. The occupiers established a new constitution that promoted U.S. ideals: the new constitution established a democracy but stated that Japan could not wage war. In addition, the constitution reduced the emperor to a figurehead and it provided women with the right to vote.

During the American occupation, the United States censored Japanese films, prohibiting anything that the occupying forces interpreted as anti-American (or critical of American allies), anti-democracy, or critical of censorship. The occupation ended in 1952, and it is no coincidence that *Gojira* was released in 1954. Even though the Americans had ended their occupation, they still had some influence, so filmmakers made sure not to provoke or antagonize the former occupiers, trading lightly with story lines and images. At the same time, Toho Studios wanted to release movies on par with Hollywood's releases (Kalat 2017). The first film released by Toho studios after the end of the American occupation was *Eagle of the Pacific* (1953), about Japanese naval hero Isoroku Yamamoto, who oversaw the bombing of Pearl Harbor, but was respected in the west as well as in Japan. The production of *Eagle of the Pacific* marked one of the first times storyboarding was used in Japanese films (Kalat 2017). In many parts of the world, the film industry was helping the people get beyond the horrors of the war, just as Toho was in Japan. Toho's first post-occupation film release provided a bridge, of sorts, between pre-war and post-occupation Japan.

### 3.4 Inciting Incident for *Gojira*: One More Nuclear Disaster

In 1954, the Japanese fishing boat, Daigo Fukuryū Maru (Lucky Dragon #5) was caught in the fallout of an American nuclear test of the hydrogen bomb. The "H-bomb" delivered a blast that was 2.5 times larger than the testing scientists expected and 1000 times stronger than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The accident reminded the Japanese of the destruction caused by nuclear weapons; Japan was the first country to have its citizens killed by atomic bombs, and this incident brought the original trauma back for the nation as its fishermen were caught in the fallout of the hydrogen bomb detonated in the atmosphere above Bikini Atoll.

Toho Film studios producer Tomoyuki Tanaka heard the news of the accident along with his fellow citizens in Japan. Using the Lucky Dragon #5 incident as the inciting action for Toho Studios' first *kaiju* (monster) film, Tanaka storyboarded his idea, and recruited Ishirō Honda to direct and help write, and Tsuburaya to animate, the film, *Gojira*.

## IV. Healing National Trauma through Horror films: *Gojira*

### 4.1 *Gojira*, 1954

The DVD cover of Criterion Collection's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary release of *Godzilla* states that it is the "roaring granddaddy" of all monster movies, that it is "remarkably humane and melancholy," and that it was made in Japan at a time when the country was reeling from nuclear attack and H-bomb testing in the Pacific. Criterion's description of "a rampaging, radioactive beast, the poignant embodiment of an entire population's fears" became, paradoxically, both beloved and identified as an international icon of destruction.

The discussion that follows refers to the original 1954 version of *Gojira*, not the 1956 American adaptation. The 1954 *Gojira*, not the 1956 *Godzilla*, is the representation of Japan's traumatic experience of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In fact, the 1956 American release, *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*, an American-edited, dubbed-in-English cut, tells a different, Americanized story that does not depict the national trauma of the original Japanese story.

An English-speaking viewer, watching *Gojira*, might wonder whether the subtitles had been changed to soften or subvert the story for American audiences: is the translated dialogue was true to the original Japanese, or "badly" translated so as not to insult the country that, in 1954, had recently ended its occupation? The question of English subtitles for the 1954 *Gojira* is nonexistent: the 1954 *Gojira* was not released in the United States until 2004, fifty years later. Thus, in 1954, English subtitles for American audiences was not an issue. Instead, in 1956, *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* was released for American audiences. *Godzilla* had been heavily edited, "Americanized" and dubbed in English, erasing even the sound of the Japanese language. The American release included an American actor, Raymond Burr (who later became famous in the American television series, *Perry Mason* and *Ironsides*). The actor had been inserted into the story (much like *Godzilla* had been superimposed in some scenes), with Burr playing an American reporter in Japan. Overt references to

the atomic and hydrogen bombs, including the bombing of Nagasaki, the Bikini Island tests, and radioactive contamination of tuna by American (and Russian) bomb testing, were omitted for American audiences. References to the Oxygen Destroyer were amended and, in the final scene, Dr. Serizawa says he hopes that the weapon will not fall into the "wrong" hands—a subtle pro-American edit—as opposed to the original in which Dr. Serizawa states that he does not want the destructive invention to fall into *anyone's* hands.

The Americanized version, *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*, and its thirty-six sequels, while noteworthy in their own right, are not as relevant to this consideration of national healing from national films, that focuses specifically of Japan's own healing, post-World War II bombing from, surrender to, and occupation by American forces. This is due partly to the Americanization of the *Godzilla* franchise and partly to the transnational imagery and storylines of the made-for-American-audiences releases. As noted in the first section of this essay, trauma is difficult to talk about when one has experienced it; the trauma of others is also not easy for empathetic people to address, though sometimes looking at trauma "once removed," that is, with one or two degrees of separation, might spark a person to realize that they, too, have experienced trauma even though dealing with one's own trauma directly may be too painful.

#### 4.2 Definitions

Considering specifically *Gojira*, a Japanese film, made for the Japanese people, in the aftermath of the deliberate bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States, and the inadvertent bombing of the Lucky Dragon #5, this essay now addresses these questions: do horror films help a nation or a culture to "work out" their shared trauma? Do images produced by a national film—consciously or subconsciously—contain images of a nation's shared trauma in an attempt to help the citizens manage their *peripeteia* (sudden reversal in fortune) and start the healing process of *katharsis* (purification and cleansing)?

The following definitions are relevant for the discussion that follows:

**Visual culture:** Defined by Oxford Reference as visual forms and practices within a society, including those of everyday life, popular culture, and high culture, together with the processes of production and consumption or reception associated with them, visual art includes films, included for the purposes of this discussion as cultural artifacts, just as monuments and other forms of art are cultural artifacts. Further these cultural artworks are a window into the psyche (from Greek, meaning soul) of the artist, and perhaps (particularly in the case of film which is a medium for mass consumption/enjoyment), into the psyche of a nation.

**Trauma:** According to the American Psychological Association's fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*, referred to as DSM-5, trauma is the emotional response to the experience of a life-threatening event, including "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (American Psychological Association 271).

**Gojira:** This discussion considers only the 1954 Japanese release of *Gojira*, and hypothesizes only the 1954 Japanese version's representation of the trauma experienced by the post-World War II, post-US-occupied Japanese people. The 1954 film does not include any Americans, external helpers, or non-Japanese observers. It is not dubbed into English: it is all Japanese for the Japanese people (according to IMDB, it sold more than nine million tickets in during its 1954 theatrical release in Japan). The *Godzilla* franchise, first presented to the US and the rest of the world in 1956—a dubbed version with a young American actor, Perry Mason, edited in, was the first of more than thirty-six *Godzilla* movies—is an Americanized version of Director Ishirō Honda's original film, a version which Honda did not see until several years later. His carefully curated story had been radically rearranged and retold to make it palatable for American audiences. The 1954 version was not seen in the United States until 2004, fifty years later.

**Point of view:** For the purposes of this paper, point of view refers, literally, to the camera's point of view in a film, but it also signifies perspective, opinion, and the inclination of the one looking. For example, the ship in Figure 1 is also the one in the bottom center-right of Figure 2. This raises an ongoing question: can we ever really escape our own point of view?



Figure 1: Battleship (source: Gojira 1954)



Figure 2: Battleships on the Gojira set (source: Toho Studios)

This essay starts from the point of view of the United States. From the United States point of view, images of the bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima are presented from a "bird's eye" vantage, as seen in Figure 3. Compare this to the images of the aftermath of the 9/11 attack on the World Trade center, such as the one in Figure 4, which is most often depicted (for the United States viewers) from the ground, looking up.



Figure 3: Atomic bombs dropped during attacks on Japanese cities (source historydaily.org)



Figure 4: World Trade Center attacks on 9/11 (source: ibtimes.com)

The point of view in Figure 4 is looking across and slightly up at the smoke, a similar point of view that of *Gojira* in Figure 5, from the ground, looking slightly up to see the monster through the smoke (to the right near the mid-top).



*Figure 5: The monster emerges from the atomic haze (top right) (source: Gojira 1954)*

#### 4.3 Japanese Trauma, Japanese Point of View

The DSM-V devotes an entire chapter to the diagnosing and differentiating of trauma from other mental disorders. A person who develops post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) does so after witnessing the death of another or experiencing the threat of death or serious injury to oneself or a loved one. Trauma, and its aftermath, PTSD, are point-of-view injuries: a person is traumatized after they experience a terrible event, a trauma. If the traumatized person is experiencing stress reactions more than one month after the traumatic event, that person has likely developed PTSD. Psychotherapy protocols for the treatment of trauma and PTSD, outlined by the American Psychological Association, among others, assert that for healing to occur, a traumatized person needs to acknowledge and accept that the trauma has occurred (rather than "soldiering on" as though nothing has happened).

Likewise, a nation that lashes out at its attacker without dealing with the traumatic precipitating event will not provide a space for healing—the person (or nation) that has experienced trauma needs to "embrace" or accept the reality that they have been traumatized, and then move on to heal (or reconstruct, in the case of a nation). Trauma theory suggests that watching the images on screen may be one way that a nation begins its healing process.

The makers of *Gojira*, Toho studios, Director Ishirō Honda, cinematographer and special effects creator, Eiji Tsuburaya, along with writer Takeo Murata, and producer Tomoyuki Tanaka were influenced by Hollywood and wanted to make a movie that would at least equal those being created in Hollywood (Kalat). It is unlikely that they deliberately made a movie to depict and start to heal the national trauma that they had experienced during World War II generally and during the atomic bombings specifically. Rather, a combination of events—the 1938 re-release of *King Kong*, the 1952 end of the American occupation of Japan, and the 1954 nuclear fallout of the H-bomb on the crew of the *Daigo Fukuryū Maru*, the *Lucky Dragon #5*—sparked these creators to surpass Hollywood and make their own monster movie. Honda and Tsuburaya particularly, did not want to make "just another" trite monster movie, and they worked hard to avoid the tired monster tropes.

Prior to working on *Gojira*, Honda had attempted underwater filming in Japan's first underwater film (*The Blue Pearl*, 1951). As Honda developed his storytelling style, the four key elements of his storytelling emerged: underwater filming, a pacifist social message, meaningful characters and a love story, and self-sacrifice with a tragic end. Tsuburaya's pride in his special effects artistry included a meticulous recreation in miniature of then-present-day Tokyo (because he knew that people liked seeing the places they knew in movies). His perfectionism led him to refuse to acknowledge (for more than a decade) that the monster was actually created by suitmation (an actor in an animated suit) rather than stop-motion animation (Bronson 1974).

In fact, Tsuburaya created the miniature Tokyo in such detail that the movie house that Gojira swats with its tail confused those watching *from inside that movie house* about what was happening.

Honda's storytelling and Tsuburaya's special effects—the superimposition of images, use of puppets, their message of perils of war generally, and in particular, nuclear war and war testing (which they differentiated from the peacetime use of nuclear power)—combined to make a classic that was innovative for its analog time. The visual effects, supported and enhanced by the added suspense of the original score, created by composer Akira Ifukube—heightened the illusions, and the overall story. Tsuburaya acknowledged that without the music and without the audio effects, the visual effects would not have had the same impact.

The messages of the movie are clear: nuclear war, nuclear testing, and the polluting of the ocean with nuclear fallout will have monstrous results. The first scene of *Gojira* parallels the experience of the crew of the Lucky Dragon #5. In the film, the monster that nuclear testing awakens is dark, destructive, and deadly, but in its final cries, there is a sympathetic quality about it—it did not ask to be awakened by the bombs, but when it was, it was angered that the nuclear blast that awakened it also killed "the others like it"—its family. The monster is scarred from the nuclear radiation it has absorbed, seemingly lonely in its existence, and enraged that it has been awakened.

Dr. Serizawa, whose scarred face, missing eye, and devastating invention parallel him to Gojira, is the only one who can save Japan. He sacrifices himself in the process, primarily so that the knowledge of how to create his "oxygen destroyer" dies with him, and secondarily so that his fiancé, Emiko, can be with Hideto, the man she really loves, without dishonoring Serizawa, herself, or Hideto.

As the film ends, Dr. Yamane, paleontologist and father of Emiko, seems to mourn both his protégé, Serizawa, and the monster. Notably, Takashi Shimura who plays Dr. Yamane, was in 1954 Japan, a mega movie star. He had major roles in the two biggest Japanese movies of 1954—Honda's *Gojira* and Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*. Shimura's presence in the cast of *Gojira* immediately gave the movie the legitimacy that Honda and Tsuburaya wanted, making it "more than just another *kaiju* movie."

This film is considered a tragedy—the monster is defeated in the end, but the final moments are somber, not jubilant. Dr. Yamane's warning, that continued nuclear testing would almost certainly awaken another Gojira, provides Honda's hallmark pacifist message, and part of the feeling of tragedy in this movie is that nuclear testing will not end because of one movie's warning. In fact, the more than thirty movies that follow this Grandfather of all monster movies is a metaphor for all the monsters that humans are unleashing in this world, and beyond—in space.

It is worth noting that, Dr. Yamane does not lay the blame for the monster elsewhere. He says, "We woke the Giant." That is, Yamane accepts that, the Japanese, too, created the monster. Is the monster the symbol of the thirst for war? The Japanese had attacked China, tried to control the Korean coast, and bombed Pearl Harbor. That acknowledgement, taking ownership of their part in the tragedy through Dr Yamane's words, enables the Japanese people to step away from pure victimhood and into a position of more agency and healing as a nation.

The traumas implied in this film are several. In addition, there are many political statements in this movie. The initial nuclear fallout that references the Lucky Dragon #5 is, literally, only the beginning. The movie states and implies many anti-nuclear war messages: the evidence of scarring (both physical and psychological) of those affected by nuclear fallout (Serazawa and the monster); the discussion in the municipal hall that turns into an argument about whether to tell the people the truth or to tread lightly because of not wanting to upset the international community; and the seemingly offhand comments, like the commuters who are reading the paper on the train talking about not wanting to go into the shelters "again"—a clear reference to the wartime bombings. The people on the train are the same ones we see on the dinner boat when Gojira emerges from the sea. When the monster starts its rampage, we see a widow and her children. She is telling them that they will all "be with Daddy soon," implying that that "daddy" has died in the war, either as a soldier or in one of the bombings.

The symbolism and details that Honda presents and Tsuburaya animates add depth to the film, ensuring that it is not "just another" monster movie. Japan is an island, and so the fact that the monster comes out of the ocean is particularly devastating. The loss of five fishing boats in one day is a devastating to the economy and food supply as well as to the families of the individuals lost. The Oxygen Destroyer "destroys" the oxygen in

water, specifically salt water, like the ocean water of the not-so-peaceful Pacific Ocean that surrounds the island of Japan. Serizawa is not killing cows or insects with his device; he is killing fish—a possible reference to the radiation-infested fish that were the result of the H-bomb fallout.

Honda's attention to detail and the way he uses details to move from scene to scene may be one of the reasons that this movie is more than just another monster movie. *Mis en scene* literally means placed in the scene—everything that the camera sees. When one looks at the "actual" images of the *Gojira* set—the ones that depict the miniature size of the sets, as in Figure 2 above, one gains a greater appreciation that when the cameras are rolling, the *mis en scene* creates an illusion that, even when it is clear that the object in the image is a miniature (for example, the helicopter blowing over when the monster first appears to the fishermen is a toy, and the fire engines responding when the monster comes to Tokyo are not life size), the editor's match on action from life size to toy is done with an eye to all the details that create the illusion. The point of view, then, is relative, posing the question: can we ever really escape our own point of view, and bringing forward again the idea that for a national catharsis, the nation must face its monster from its own point of view.

#### 4.4 Cages and Catharsis

Adding to the images of national trauma, the cage imagery that Honda presents, somewhat inexplicably, when the monster walks through Tokyo, further serves to illustrate the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness felt by those who cannot control the monster. Helplessness and hopelessness parallel similar feelings in people who have experienced trauma. The birds in the cage that we see as Emiko and Hideto try to tell Dr. Yamane about their relationship symbolize not only the "love-birds" encaged in their cultural mores (seen in Figure 6 with cage-like shadows across their hearts),



Figure 6: "Love birds" encaged by their culture (source: *Gojira* 1954)

but also the electric cage that surrounds Tokyo to protect it from *Gojira*. As the couple attempts to tell Emiko's father about their relationship, they are interrupted by *Gojira*'s advance. The fourteen minutes of on-screen destruction that follow are a study in cinematic magic, detail, and timing. If there is any question about the cage symbolism, the bird cage through which the audience sees *Gojira* (Figure 7), and the brick wall and grate seen in Serazawa's lab (Figure 8) continue the cage metaphor.



Figure 7: Monster seen through a bird cage (source: *Gojira* 1954)





*Figure 8: Cage-like--brick wall and grate in Serazawa's lab (source: Gojira 1954)*

The electric wires and metal towers that are set up to electrocute Gojira do not work, of course, and its radiation breath melts the metal towers (made out of wax for the melting), while it chews those not melted, and munches a passing train (reminiscent of the conversation on the train earlier about the monster coming to "eat" the commuters). For anyone still not convinced about the cage symbolism, another look Serazawa's lab in Figure 8, reveals the cage symbolized by the window grate (to which he has his back at this point). The grate indicates that Serazawa has the way out—the cage behind him has an opening.

#### 4.5 Working Through the Trauma

Watching *Gojira* through the lens of national trauma, the images on the screen also gave several national first-"person" point of view images of the national trauma—from the inside, making it horrific: the audience sees several low-angle shots of the monster, particularly one (Figure 9) where it is being surrounded by what seems to be a mushroom cloud. Looking up at the monster and the cloud (from the ground) repeats the trauma of the atomic bombings for the traumatized nation. That first-person point of view is reminiscent of the retelling of trauma in a therapy setting: working out the event, the details, and the aftermath until ultimately the strengths of the survivor, and their resilience (in the words of Caruth) can be recognized and then nourished.



*Figure 9: Low-angle shot of monster from in a cloud (source: Gojira 1954)*

The build-up of the tension until the audience sees the monster—and until the audience sees what terrible thing Emiko has seen in Serizawa's lab—heightens the intensity for the viewers and draws them into the emotion: what terrible thing is coming? Normally the filmmaker creates the suspense using Dutch angles (tilted camera angles) and high shots (looking down at a subject) to make a scene effectively scary. Honda does not do this. Instead, he uses music, the "monster music," the details of the landscape, including the low shots (looking up at the monster) as in Figures 9 and 10, and the emotional reactions of the actors to draw the audience in emotionally. Literary and film critics have routinely noted that this movie is unapologetically dark—the monster scenes in particular do not have a lot of light in them, which makes the radiation breath (and corresponding glowing scales) of the monster stand out.



*Figure 10: Low angle shot of monster (source: Gojira 1954)*

The *mis en scene* includes lighting, and the choice to make the dark scenes dark—including the scene where the islanders are dancing at the beginning, and the monster's rampage in the last third of the movie—is deliberately part of the storytelling. The smoke of the fires and radiation, followed by decimation of the land and loss of life lit up by the light of the next day, give a sense of survivor guilt and despair, as the characters who need to do something (if only to move the story along) are also simultaneously part of the tragic trajectory.

## V. Conclusion

Ultimately *Gojira* views the monster from the ground up, in a cloud of billowing smoke and radiation. That is the story of the atomic bomb from the ground, looking up. At the end of *Gojira*, the Japanese defeat the monster with no help from the international community, particularly not from Americans. The question of *who* is the monster lingers, however, and the answer contributes to the tragic denouement, as the scarred figures, Serizawa and Gojira, are killed by the Oxygen Destroyer, and Dr. Yamane delivers his warning to humanity. The audience also experiences a sense of hope as Serizawa's death opens the possibility for the young lovers to have a chance at happiness, and, with it, the possibility of national healing.

A nation's art explores the psyche and trauma through the visual culture of that nation. Using the theoretical frame of trauma studies to interrogate national films, one might read in the cultural artifacts of horror films a subconscious "working out" of national traumas with the ultimate goal of healing and recovery from the mass trauma experienced by a nation's citizens. While *Gojira* is a notable example of a national horror film, it is certainly not the only national horror film. The framework of trauma studies combined with the analytic methodology of film studies provides a model for thinking about other horror films and the national traumas that these movies that might be working to heal.

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