The End, or Life in the Nuclear Age:
Aesthetic Form and Modes of Subjectivity

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Alicia Gibson

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Richard Leppert, Adviser

August 2012

Acknowledgments

Finding a way to express my gratitude for all the people who have made this dissertation possible may indeed be one of the most challenging tasks required for completing the project. It is, however, also the most satisfying.

I would like to begin by thanking my committee. Although I was basically a complete stranger, Hiromi Mizuno kindly accepted my request to serve as an advisor for a Graduate Research Partnership Program fellowship. Since our very fist meeting she has warmly supported my research, encouraged publication, and collaborated without hesitation. The addition of Shaden Tageldin to the Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature (CSCL) has been one of the most fortunate events to happen for our community in the decade that I have been studying and teaching here. Shaden is simply unmatched in generosity and intellectual rigor. Whether brainstorming, editing, or teaching, she gives nothing less than total commitment. It is an awe-inspiring and humbling experience to witness and benefit from her excellence. John Mowitt has guided my intellectual journey in CSCL from the start. I shudder to think about that first seminar paper I wrote for his class, but as always, John was gracious and encouraging and made me believe that I belonged in CSCL. With that said, John has also challenged me to think far above what I would be capable of on my own. It is not uncommon for me to leave his office completely mystified about what we just discussed, clinging to my notations as someone determined to decipher the riddles of a sphinx. In my attempts to solve his riddles, some of this dissertation's best ideas have emerged. Of course, this dissertation would not be possible without the steady guidance of my advisor, Richard Leppert. Richard has shared with me his intellectual passion for critical thinking, and his uncompromising professional ethic. He has also been a kind and comforting source of wisdom and calm. I want to thank Richard for always being there when I need him, and for giving me the intellectual space to independently follow my own research interests.

I would also like to thank the administrative staff led by John Archer, Robin Brown, and Gary Thomas. The ideas in this dissertation come from formative learning experiences with Cesare Casarino and Tom Pepper (who was particularly enthusiastic and inspiring in the early stages of the project). The camaraderie of fellow graduate students Lindsey Green-Simms, Meredith Gill, Matt Hadley, Tim August, and Tom Cannavino have kept me sane in the dark moments and laughing despite myself. There are two women whose friendship and intellectual engagement have inspired my dissertation in ways both unseen and concrete: Julie Wilson and Marisol Alvarez. I could not admire them more. Michelle Lekas and Steve Groening read portions of the dissertation and provided important feedback. Steve Groening deserves special mention for being a caring confidant and my unofficial advisor. A friendship like his is a rare and beautiful thing, and something I treasure.

In addition to the financial support provided by the University of Minnesota and CSCL, I would like to thank the Japan Foundation for funding a summer of language

training in Kansai, and the 2008 Nagoya American Studies Summer Seminars (NASSS) for a stimulating week of dialogue and engagement with scholars from around the world. My time at NASSS was possible with the recommendation of John Mowitt and Jani Scandura, and was made unforgettable by the generous participation of an intellectual hero, our seminar leader Rey Chow. For funding a year of study in Hiroshima, where much of the writing of this dissertation occurred, I want to thank the Social Science Research Council and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. The Hiroshima Peace Institute (HPI) served as my official host, and provided administrative and logistical support. I am very appreciative of the leadership of Professor Motofumi Asai and Kenji Tatebe's efforts to open the doors of HPI to an independent graduate researcher for the first time. Taro Mukaikubo deserves much credit for keeping me out of trouble, and for dispensing with my many cultural and bureaucratic mistakes with nothing more than a rise of the eyebrow. However, it is Professor Robert Jacobs who deserves an entire page of his own on the topic of gratitude. Bo refused to take no for an answer; my time there would not have occurred without the considerable will power of this remarkable man.

If I could send a thank you card to the every citizen of Hiroshima, I would. From day one I was received by the Hiroshima community with much warmth, and many open arms. As I said on the night of my departure, I will most certainly live there again for it has been like a home since my first visit there in the summer of 2008. The writing of this dissertation is filled with the friendship of Joy and Paul Walsh, Joe Savona, Natsue Ikeda, Ran Zwigenberg, and all the regulars at Kumi's irreplaceable Cordobesa.

I want to thank my father, Ray Gibson, for being a constant source of positive encouragement. He believed in this project even when I did not, and he supported me emotionally and financially without complaint or expectation. Finally I want to thank my partner in all things, Nick Edwards. He has welcomed this dissertation into his life with enthusiasm, has traveled across the world to participate in its creation, and has spent the better part of two years helping me manage the daily stresses and celebrate the successes. With his unfailing support, this dissertation finds its place within the larger project of filling our world with love.

Dedication

To my grandmothers, Setsu Katori LaFon and Winnie Mae ("Birdy") Gibson. Though they came from opposite sides of the world, they shared the same love of knowledge and education, and headed west for love.

Abstract

"The End, or Life in the Nuclear Age: Modes of Subjectivity and Aesthetic Form" is a transnational study of the experiences of Americans, Japanese Americans, and Japanese in the nuclear age as expressed in post-World War II literature, television, and cinema. I use the figure of the bomb as a way of understanding the historical, political, and linguistic impacts of modernity – crystallized in the image of the nuclear bomb – on our contemporary moment. I argue that the world has become fully global, not because all peoples experience the same material conditions of life, but because the nuclear age is one in which the world is conditioned for the possibility of the end of life as such. This project responds to key cultural and literary theorists writing from the aftermath of the Holocaust in Europe (in particular, Theodor W. Adorno, Jacques Derrida, Paul Virilio, and Michel Foucault), by enlarging the scope of their critique of modernity to include the atomic bombing of Japan. Crucially, I argue that nuclear war is not a futural event as commonly understood by most Western theorists. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki demands that we account for how acts of terror committed by the West against the non-West have discursively given rise to an age in which nuclear technology functions as the symbol for both the technological triumph of Western science, and total planetary destruction. In so doing, this dissertation contributes to further development of the interdisciplinary field of nuclear criticism.

Through a close reading of Japanese *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivor) essays, Japanese *anime* (animation) and cinema, American Cold War novels, and Japanese

American *Bildungsromane* I trace the emergence of an *aesthetics of the fissure* that resists the structuring logic of a global nuclear modernity organizing populations according to target sites and kill zones. In order to understand this aesthetics of fissure I analyze the literary concepts of semiotic liminality, mimesis, melodrama, and *Bildungsroman* alongside political discourses of nuclear strategy, Hegel's philosophy of history, and feminist theory. Thus, this dissertation creates a comparativist approach that takes seriously the inextricable connection between world literature and world politics.

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INTRODUCTION

> Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advancement of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.
>
> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki inaugurated a new political order, one whose foundation rests on the capability to destroy entire populations in seconds, and thus unveiled a terror previously unimaginable. Yet the atomic bomb also marked the singular achievement of modernity whereby human beings unlocked a similarly unimaginable source of power by mastering a basic source of universal energy. Measured by its ability to harness the power of the universe and rival the energy output of the sun with a blinding fireball of heat and light, the weapon unleashed at Hiroshima evinces the technological achievement of Western enlightenment. This contradiction – a world marked by a triumph that is also its ultimate terror – casts a shadow across faith in modernity's claims to progress and the ability to find a technological solution to every problem without becoming the target of mechanical mastery ourselves.

Nearly seventy years after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War, it may be possible to take for granted the magnitude of the explosion that the atomic bombs caused upon our ways of thinking and living. Yet the specter of nuclear weapons continues to mobilize populations to war, as evident in the Bush administration's successful rhetorical deployment of the now

mundane phrase "weapons of mass destruction." The administration did not need to make the threat of nuclear power explicit because our fear of nuclear war now constitutes the basic structure of international politics. Rey Chow refers to this as the age of the world target, "…an age in which the powers of terrorism are indistinguishable from powers of 'deterrence,' and technologies of war indissoluble from practices of peace."[1] Even if the ordinary person spends little conscious thought on nuclear weapons, the image of world annihilation inaugurated by the atomic bombs proliferates in popular cultural representations and shadows our dreams of the future. As the nightmare of nuclear meltdown in Fukushima continues to unfold, we must acknowledge that the time is long delayed for coming to terms with and finding ways to break our political obsession over nuclear power.

What follows is an analysis of the nuclear bomb as a historical and discursive site upon which modernity's contradictions and crises are made legible. I turn to several key literary and cultural texts from Japan and the United States in order to understand the way in which we have attempted to process the nuclear bomb as a new historical condition. I also stage encounters between these aesthetic objects and critical theory emerging from Europe after WWII. In so doing I aim to move beyond the privileging of the Holocaust as the iconic catastrophe of modernity, and thus extend the possibilities for critique. Similarly, by reading literary and filmic texts alongside political discourse, pop culture objects in relation to literary classics, and narrative representation as an alternate form of theorizing history, I interrogate the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction, "high" versus "low" and "popular" versus "classic" that continues to exclude minority

[1] Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 32.

experiences from the realm of serious thought and perpetuates the rationalization of disciplinary knowledge. What emerges is a comparative study of the nuclear age that aims to account for the transnational network of relations in which the bomb operates and through which modern subjects adopt and resist dominant modes of thought. What this amounts to is a comparativist approach resembling the one championed by Chow:

> No longer simply a spontaneous act occasioned by, say, the taxonomic arrangement of multiple linguistic spheres, comparison is understood…as a type of discursive situation, involuntarily brought into play by and inextricable from the conditions of modern world politics.[2]

The goal of this kind of criticism is to not only describe the conditions of catastrophe, but also to change them.

NUCLEAR CRITICISM: THINKING THE END AND BEYOND

Nuclear criticism emerged as a serious enterprise for literary study in the United States with the 1984 summer issue of *diacritics*, which brought together a handful of papers delivered earlier that spring at Cornell University. The editors described nuclear criticism as a new topic, though one already widely visible in contemporary literary criticism and critical theory through the recurring "allegory of nuclear survival."[3] The two broad categories of intervention they believed central to the project of nuclear criticism include a two-way movement between the literary and the political. According to the editors, politically responsible criticism places post-World War II literary (and presumably

[2] Ibid., 84.
[3] Richard Klein, "Editorial statement," *diacritics* 14 No. 2 (1984): 2.

filmic) texts within the context of the nuclear situation, thus "uncovering the unknown shapes of our unconscious nuclear fears."[4] Meanwhile, as a project inaugurated from the field of literary study, nuclear criticism in turn reads political and military nuclear discourses much as one reads a literary text, in search of the operative "assumptions whose implications are often, perhaps systematically ignored."[5]

It is from this tradition of literary study, officially inaugurated by *diacritics* in 1984, that "The End, or Life in the Nuclear Age" makes its intervention. This dissertation builds upon and broadens the field of nuclear criticism in several key ways. First, as the title of my dissertation indicates, I argue that discourses and representations of nuclear destruction—most dramatically epitomized by the specter of total nuclear war, or "The End" of civilization as we know it—construct narratives of modernity with the primary consequence of constraining certain possibilities for ways of living, just as it promotes others. Crucially, while attending to the cultural specificity of these texts, I do not use the Cold War as the dominant paradigm for analysis at the expense of other ways of thinking through their meanings. Second, I argue that the nuclear situation must be analyzed as a product of dominant ideologies arising from the historical period of Western Enlightenment, which have led to an exaggerated reliance on rationality and technology as ends in and of themselves. The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki not only paved the way for the total surrender of Japan, but also – and – more significantly, they signaled the triumph of a universalist, globalizing regime of power that would create a world united by terror. Third, I refuse the prevalent rhetorical slippage between

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

"nuclear weapons," "nuclear war," and "total nuclear war." Too often nuclear criticism has adopted the apocalyptic tenor that characterizes cultural discourse by focusing on the possibility of the end of civilization as a virtual reality rather than a narrative about the future that shapes our perceptions of the past and the present. This amounts to an effacement of the very real suffering by victims of the atomic bombs and the continuing threat posed by nuclear weapons testing and nuclear power facilities. Finally, I argue that aesthetic form offers a key site for critical inquiry because through the artwork we gain insight into the dominant ideologies at work, as well as ways of conceiving alternative paradigms.

If the project initially proposed by the editors of *diacritics* is to have continuing relevancy for our contemporary moment, we must find new ways of thinking beyond the confines of outdated paradigms that place the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union at the center of any serious discussion of the nuclear era.[6] Political scientist William Chaloupka offers a useful phrase for the kind of criticism currently taking shape: "*Life during nuclearism*."[7] He goes on to define nuclearism narrowly as "the position taken by the managers and leaders of nuclear states" in their realpolitik calculus of Cold War survival. However, I propose an alternate definition better suited to the present and future directions of the field: *Nuclearism is a globalizing ideology that*

[6] Though this dissertation does not focus on the Cold War as a central organizing category, I would like to mention two studies that do focus on the role of the atomic bomb in the constructing narratives during the Cold War era. Both are notable for their insight into the cultural conditions of that period of history, and both make important links between cultural expression and nuclear anxiety, even in texts not commonly thought of as "atomic." See Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); and Daniel Cordle, *State of Suspense: The Nuclear Age, Postmodernism and United States Fiction and Prose* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

[7] William Chaloupka, *Knowing Nukes: The Politics and Culture of the Atom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992): xiii. Emphasis in original.

organizes populations of people according to their proximity to ground and the contamination zone. According to this system of thinking, science and technology—particularly as it relates to the means of controlling the environment and human populations—is considered the only legitimate source of knowledge. The ascension of this ideology amounts to the reification of one mode of modernity as historically necessary and the concealment not only of other historical possibilities, but also of nuclearism's own roots in narrative and myth.

Literary theory is particularly important to the development of the field in part because of this concealment. The idea of the atomic bomb first appeared as an entirely fictional invention in a novel written by H.G. Wells in 1913. In *The World Set Free*, Wells predicted that artificial radiation would be discovered in 1933 (which it was). According to Wells, the resulting atomic energy would be put to use for industry and mobilized for the creation of atomic bombs in a world war (which again, proved prophetic). The introduction of the means to destroy all life on earth was depicted by Wells, ironically, as freedom because with this capacity to destroy came the imaginative capacity to think of the globe as one whole world, a world that must be acted upon as a universal problem rather than as a series of disparate crises. In 1932 Leo Szilard, who would later patent the idea of a nuclear reactor and champion the creation of an atomic weapons program in the United States, was inspired by the novel to imagine the possibility of a nuclear chain reaction and begin work in nuclear physics, even though fission had not yet been discovered. As John Canaday explains,

> Over the course of seven years, Szilard went from a belief that Wells' portrayal of atomic weapons was nothing but "fiction" to a conviction that it was "suddenly real." This change of heart suggests that the boundary between literary discourse and other, more "realistic" forms of discourse, such as science, are not as hard and fast as we generally assume. For instance, it is a central irony of the postwar world that after Wells' literary vision helped make the scientific development of atomic weapons possible, the scientific fact of these new weapons made possible their existence as fictional entities: their physical substance notwithstanding, since World War II nuclear weapons have exercised their power in a purely symbolic form.[8]

The story of Wells and Szilard offers a critique of nuclearism in two ways. First, as Canaday makes clear, Szilard's nuclear awakening through fiction highlights how scientific discovery and technology advance through the narratives we construct about our world. Similarly, in this dissertation I argue that the world itself is constructed, and *de*constructed, by the tale we tell of it. While Canaday continues his study with an investigation of the role of literature in the lives of the scientists who created the first atomic bombs and the role of fiction in that process, I read a text like *The World Set Free* as an expression of and a participant in the shaping of an entire way of thinking about the world. *The World Set Free* does not merely demonstrate an uncanny ability to grasp the direction of a technology that would eventually define much of human life. More

[8] John Canaday, *The Nuclear Muse: Literature, Physics and the First Atomic Bombs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000): 6.

significantly, the novel brings together scientific and political discourses and synthesizes them to express the unfolding of an entire historical narrative about modernity. As evinced by the thematic thrust of *The World Set Free* and signaled by its title, the structural logic of this version of modernity defines freedom as the triumph of the universal over its different parts.

The literary origin of the atomic bomb offers another critique of nuclearism in that nuclear weapons function primarily as discursive symbols of a power so immense they must never be unleashed, even if continually circulated in popular consciousness. Even before the actual bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the atomic bomb existed as a rhetorical device for uniting the world through the threat of its destruction. Additionally, in the decades after its first and only use at the close of WWII, the imagined nuclear destruction of the entire planet was more culturally visible than the actual scars of its victims. In the field of literary theory this essentially rhetorical nature of nuclear war led Jacques Derrida to proclaim it to be "fabulously textual." By "fabulously textual" Derrida meant that nuclear war necessarily depends upon language because it operates much like a missive; it relies on "technologies of delivery, sending, dispatching,… emission, and transmission."[9] Like all communication technologies, the nuclear missile operates alongside arguments that justify its existence, and according to preconceived notions of the attitude and character of its intended recipient/target. In addition (and here we should think back to *The World Set Free*), literature and the nuclear situation exist in relation to the fictive. According to this logic the foundations of both belong to that of the

[9] Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives)," *diacritics* 14 No. 2 (1984): 24.

fabula, to the stories we tell about others and ourselves. Just as literary theory is crucial to thinking through the meaning of nuclear war, the possibility of remainderless destruction threatened by the nuclear situation enables us to perceive literature as that technology of thought through which we grapple with what is truly other to us. That is, according to Derrida, literature belongs to the nuclear age in an exemplary way because through the fictive we encounter what can never be lived, for to do so would mean the end of existence.[10]

Derrida's conception of the "fabulous textuality" of the nuclear situation provides a crucial foundation for nuclear criticism, and for this dissertation in particular. However, there is a point at which an analysis of the nuclear referent that rests solely on the possibility of "remainderless destruction" loses its critical force. The nuclear referent in Derrida's "No Apocalypse Now" corresponds only to what we might more accurately call "total nuclear war," or the breakout of nuclear hostilities in such a way that triggers the end of civilization as we know it. This acceptance of an entirely apocalyptic meaning for the nuclear referent ignores the experiences of those who have lived and died in the presence of atomic bombs, the continued testing of nuclear weapons, and the reliance on nuclear power facilities. Despite its foundations in narrative (and its proliferation in discourse and the imaginary), nuclear destruction is *not* entirely fictional. Indeed, nuclear destruction is very real and continues to create victims. Instead of ushering the end of civilization, nuclear weapons have become a necessary structure for its entrenchment.

[10] This last point forms the theoretical foundation for two noteworthy texts of nuclear criticism that take up this proposition in literature and cinema: Peter Schwenger, *Letter Bomb: Nuclear Holocaust and the Exploding Word* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); and Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

Michel Foucault's concept of *biopower* plays a central role in this dissertation. Through that concept, Foucault theorized the emergence of a form of modernity that transforms the population into the primary category for social organization. For Foucault, this way of containing and disciplining bodies culminated in the concentration camps of World War II. I read the advent of the nuclear age as a biopolitical shift in the organization and production of knowledge such that power and technology are marshaled for the control of human beings at the structural unit of the population.

In the two primary instances of Foucault's theorization of biopower, the nuclear situation emerges as a problem because it poses the question of a radical end to life.[11] The concentration camp violently expresses a fully biopolitical world, but the true aim of this form of power is not the extermination of life, rather it seeks the complete control over life processes. Foucault's answer to this problem pivots on assuming the common Western theorization of "atomic power" as the imagined death of *everything*. Thus, for Foucault, atomic power serves as the ultimate end point of social control, the extreme limit point to biopower's regime. This formulation of both biopower and atomic power proves unsatisfactory, even according to Foucault's own theoretical method. Whereas throughout his body of work, he championed a mode of inquiry that proceeds by asking what a formation of power generates, not what it limits, when it comes to the relationship of atomic power to biopower, Foucault's analysis falls into the very trap he encouraged others to avoid. Thus, I argue instead that atomic power does not constrain biopower,

[11] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley(New York: Vintage Books, 1978): 135-59; and Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. English series edited by Arnold I. Davidson, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997): 239-63.

rather atomic power provides the necessary conditions for biopower to become a *global* structuring principle.

While Foucault's work provides a way of thinking about the productiveness of discourse and the kinds of epistemological conditions created by the nuclear bomb, I turn elsewhere for a theorization that would hold these technologies of knowledge (and weapons) production accountable to human suffering. It would not be fair to say that Foucault does not care about the injustices caused by any particular historical mode of discourse. However, the primary ethical relevance of his theorizations lie in the way they crack open ossified understandings of historical conditions, and expose the conditions of possibility for any given discursive object (madness, the penal institution, sexuality, war, the self). Thinking of social formations as specific technologies, that is, as tools for constructing a set of relations, inspires one to imagine how these relations might be reformulated. However, given that nuclear war remains an abstracted virtual concept for the West, largely severed from the wounds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I turn elsewhere to magnify what is at stake for this dissertation's critique. When it comes to holding our modes of thinking responsible for the wreckage of modern history, there is no more important theorist than Theodor W. Adorno. Throughout his body of work Adorno insisted that if we hope to stop the carnage of Western history from violently accruing we must understand how the genocide and dehumanization of the Holocaust arose from the very values that were meant to liberate us. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* offers the most complete articulation of his argument.[12] In this text Adorno (co-written with Max

[12] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelen Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

Horkheimer) described enlightenment as the triumph of the rational mind over the natural world in an attempt to conquer a fear of the unknown through knowledge. As a result, human beings have an unprecedented amount of control over the conditions of life, but at the cost of turning everything—including the lives of men and women—into parts of an equation that can be multiplied, added, even subtracted out of existence for the sake of expediency. When understood in this way the aims of enlightenment were not betrayed because of the exceptional evil of one man (Hitler) or the temporary madness of a nation (Germany). Rather, this terrifying moment in history reveals the project of enlightenment as forever shadowed by inherent distinctively dystopian contradictions.

Given the proximity of Adorno's experience to the Holocaust his uncompromising dedication to holding history accountable for the devastation of Europe is not surprising. This means, however, that the content of his critique did not venture much beyond the West. Even the atomic bomb, which serves as the best example of an over-rationalized enlightenment technology, did not elicit much more than passing mentions despite its increasingly central position in the global conflicts of the post-WWII world. This dissertation places the atomic bomb and the nuclear situation within the theoretical framework offered by Adorno's critique of modernity, and thus suggests ways in which the power of that critique remains relevant not only in the context of the historical trajectory of the West (Europe and America), but also for understanding how the contradictions of Western modernity now stretch across the globe. This allows us to reconsider Adorno and Horkheimer's opening sentence of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advancement of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.[13]

Though it may have been the glow of the Nazi ovens they had in mind, once we open their critique to the nuclear bomb, we see the burning cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki along with all the cities of the Earth that are set aflame in the modern imaginary.

GODZILLA AND THE NUCLEAR BOMB: EDUCATION AFTER HIROSHIMA

In the essay "Education After Auschwitz" (originally a radio address to German audiences), Adorno enlarges the frame of his intervention, seeking not only to describe the relationship between enlightenment and the monstrous death toll of the European Holocaust, but also a means of *rehabilitating* the modern condition. According to Adorno, preventing another Auschwitz constitutes the primary educational imperative: "Every debate about the ideals of education is trivial and inconsequential compared to the single ideal: never again Auschwitz."[14] Indeed, in the decades after he published the essay, sustained attention on the atrocities of the Holocaust led to the successful incorporation of Holocaust Studies into mainstream educational curricula. However, we must ask ourselves how effective education after Auschwitz has been in the absence of full acknowledgement of the extent to which the West has relied upon what Adorno calls a "veil of technology." This veil shields us from a clear view of our own recent history

[13] Ibid., 1.
[14] Theodor W. Adorno, "Education After Auschwitz," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 191.

such that we have yet to include the atomic bombings in our understanding of modernity's historical catastrophe. If we are to accept Adorno's intervention as our own without replicating ways of thinking that treat the sufferings of some communities as more worthy of theorization than those suffered by others, then we must address not only the horrors of WWII as experienced *in* the West, but must also think through modern forms of terror as an experience endured in the East as well. In order to begin redressing this imbalance I turn to the Japanese film *Godzilla*, an iconic popular text of the nuclear age that has led a kind of double life, first as a working-through of Japanese trauma and then as a commodified series of kitschy monster movies in the United States. In the following analysis I emphasize the way the original film undercuts the standard presumption that technological advancement is a human achievement in and of itself in ways that are suggestive of how I re-read Adorno's critique of enlightenment and Foucault's concept of biopower in this dissertation.

It is hard to imagine now the degree of courage it took to make *Godzilla* and release it in 1954.[15] Just five years earlier the film's references to the atomic bomb would never have passed the scrutiny of the U.S. occupation censors. Pressures to silence all discourse surrounding the atomic bombings in Japan was so total, that even after the end of occupation the censors left a generalized stigma in their wake. Toho Studios bought the film as the Japanese answer to King Kong and produced it as a science fiction monster film (*kaijueiga*). However, director Ishiro Honda saw it as his chance to bring attention to the devastation of Hiroshima. Honda had witnessed first-hand the complete devastation of the city as he traveled through it on his way home after fighting as a

[15] Ishiro Honda, "Godzilla," (Japan: Toho Studios, 1954).

soldier for the Japanese military in Japanese-occupied China. According to many critics, Godzilla functions not merely as a metaphor for the atomic bomb but rather its physical manifestation, a description that fits with Honda's explanation that he took all the qualities of the atomic bomb and gave them to Godzilla.

The film also directly responded not only to the immediate destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also to contemporary Cold War fears as experienced in Japan. While an American audience might overlook the film's opening on the deck of a fishing vessel, no Japanese would miss the reference to its historical counterpart, The Lucky Dragon, whose crew was exposed to radiation while fishing in the Pacific Ocean. All twenty-three fishermen were poisoned with radiation from the United States' first testing of a hydrogen bomb (called the Bravo shot). Over a dozen eventually died from their exposure, starting with the captain of the vessel less than seven months later.[16] The film was released mere months after the crisis of the Lucky Dragon in March of 1954, an event that rattled Japanese attempts to repress their all too recent experience as the world's first atomic bomb targets.

In *Godzilla*, the scenes of Tokyo in flames—now become commonplace in disaster films—were not merely fantastical images intended to shock and awe. Though the premise of a Jurassic creature roaming the streets of Tokyo was fictional, for the film's original audience who lived through the fire-bombing of Tokyo, the destruction of

[16] For a brief discussion of Godzilla and this incident see Yuki Tanaka, "Godzilla and the Bravo Shot: Who Created and Killed the Monster?," in *Filling the Hole in the Nuclear Future: Art and Popular Culture Respond to the Bomb*, ed. Robert Jacobs (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010); and Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, "Lost in Translation and Morphed in Transit: Godzilla in Cold War America," in *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Culture Icons on the Global Stage*, ed. William M. Tsutsui and Michiko Ito (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

local and national monuments had occurred and tens of thousands of their neighbors and family members had not survived. It is important to think back to the original film's production and reception because its difference from the American version released two years later could not be greater. In the American version, *Godzilla: King of the Monsters!*, much of the film's critical content was excised, including every reference to hydrogen bomb tests or measuring radiation with Geiger counters, the one mention of Nagasaki's atomic bomb attack, and the final words of the film that warn of more radiated monsters should nuclear testing continue. In contrast, the American re-make creates a new character, a journalist (played by Raymond Burr), who declares at the film's end that the devastation has come to an end and the world can go on living again.

Unlike its American counterpart, *Godzilla* is clearly meant to warn its audience about the dangers of atomic weaponry, particularly its continued development and testing. The complexity of the film's representations of technology and scientific research notably rescues it from the annals of risible horror movies. Godzilla stands in for the atomic bomb, he is the genie unlocked by humanity's hubris, but he is also its victim. No malice or murderous intent can be ascribed to Godzilla; indeed, wrested from his deep-water habitat he becomes a kind of early mascot for the environmental movement. The film's leading Godzilla expert and central character, zoologist Professor Yamane, nourishes the audience's sympathy for the creature. Yamane acts as the lone voice in the film urging people to find ways of understanding Godzilla rather than killing him. His agitation at being called upon to find ways to destroy that which he believes is his life's purpose to study results in uncharacteristically irrational actions for the otherwise placid

and objective scientist. Notably, the sympathy that Yamane champions also represents an enlightenment contradiction: Godzilla should live because of his value as an experimental subject.

The film's resolution is likewise unusually ambivalent. Godzilla has been killed, the immediate threat to Tokyo has been resolved, and yet the final shots of the film's central characters find them weeping. Yamane issues a grave warning that he believes there must be others like Godzilla who will awaken if nuclear testing continues, and the film concludes on a seemingly false image of sunlight sparkling on calm ocean waters that just minutes before tumultuously spewed forth as a bubbling sea of death. That said, the loss of the movie's anti-hero and the threat of another Godzilla are not the film's most upsetting moments. Most troubling, and critically reflective about the film's conclusion, is its assertion that nuclear weaponry is not the end point to humanity's history of weapons of mass destruction. The film's protagonists destroy Godzilla only by unleashing another terrifyingly dangerous technology, the Oxygen Destroyer. Yamane's student Serizawa saves the day by assembling a weapon from his discovery of a way to liquefy oxygen—thus indiscriminately asphyxiating all living things in the vicinity of the chain reaction. The contradiction posed by this means of eradicating Godzilla forms the film's central ethical dilemma. Serizawa kills himself in order to keep his discovery a secret, but the film implies he knows it is only a matter of time before political leaders put enough resources into recreating his experiments once the existence of the Oxygen Destroyer is made public. His early explanations resemble those of the first atomic physicists: he only sought to understand the true properties of oxygen and accidentally

stumbled upon a way to turn that knowledge into in essence, "weapons of mass destruction."

From the other side of WWII and located within the fallout zone of continued nuclear testing, *Godzilla* urges its audience to follow the hero Serizawa in leaving behind a childlike understanding of scientific discovery: the threat of technological progress looms large, for now entire populations find themselves threatened with extinction. Though Adorno encourages his fellow German citizens to take a similar lesson from the gas chambers of Auschwitz, he tellingly turns to the mass catastrophe in order to underscore his point, and he does so in terms that are decidedly biopolitical:

> [O]ne cannot dismiss the thought that the invention of the atomic bomb, which can obliterate hundreds of thousands of people literally in one blow, belongs in the same historical context as genocide. The rapid population growth of today is called a population explosion; it seems as though historical destiny responded by readying counter-explosions, the killing of whole populations.[17]

"One cannot dismiss the thought" of the atomic bomb when attempting to understand the legacy of Auschwitz and WWII, yet this is precisely the state of affairs, particularly in the United States and unfortunately in much of critical theory. If the history of the atomic bomb makes its way into a classroom at all, it only does so as the regrettable—though ultimately heroic—series of acts heralded by official history as the event that ended WWII. Or perhaps the sublime image of the mushroom cloud occludes any discussion of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and history skips directly to the Cold War. In either case, the

[17] Adorno, "Education After Auschwitz": 192.

atomic bomb never appears as an experience related to the Holocaust, certainly not as a genocidal act of terror against entire populations.

Of course, in order to see our way through the "veil of technology" we must also consider how cinematic techniques of the disaster genre cut against the thematic content of *Godzilla*. Susan Sontag most famously concluded in her essay, "The Imagination of Disaster," that science fiction disaster films contribute to a general state of psychic numbing by reproducing the experience of terror through a distanced lens.[18] She maintained that by replicating a mediated point of view at the expense of identification with the victim, audiences are less likely to question an international political system irrationally based on a delicate maintenance of globalized terror in the form of the nuclear umbrella. Paul Virilio issued a similar critique in *War and Cinema*.[19] In addition to the distancing effect, which makes it easier to imagine the other as target, he argued that we live through a virtual war carried out through a strategic vision of global destruction. For Virilio, the nuclear world is a visual text whose cinematic eye assists regimes of power by turning us into observation machines: we feel as though wherever we are, this exact location could be the next global target, and yet we detach ourselves from this anxiety through an "out of body" perceptual trick enabling us to also identify with the eye behind the scope.

Much of *Godzilla* conforms to the critiques offered by Sontag and Virilio. The scenes of Godzilla's destruction of the city are most commonly shot from above watching

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[18] Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," in *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film*, ed. Mick Broderick (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996).
[19] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989). Chapter 3 of this dissertation takes up both Sontag's and Virilio's arguments about cinema in greater detail.

the monster as he exhales radiation on his targets below—the people appear like ants, scurrying away. However, a rather odd series of shots in the midst of these scenes of disaster fracture the film's overall distancing effect.

Figure 1

Figure 2

The camera suddenly stops its sensational movement over Godzilla's wanton destruction of Tokyo, and pauses at medium range on the image of a mother holding her children close. Next, the camera turns to Godzilla in the background; in the foreground are birds trapped in a cage (Figure 1). The camera moves back again to the mother and her children, not from an aerial point of view, but this time with a close-up as though the camera (and the audience) share her position on the street (Figure 2).[20] This combination of frames stands out somewhat awkwardly in relation to the rest of the film. First, the camera's pan of the city just moments before places emphasis on the emptying of the city's streets. The sudden appearance of the mother fills the screen and arrests our attention. Next, the strange proportions of Godzilla and the birdcage suggest a surrealist dreamscape—noteworthy in a film attempting as much visual realism as possible.

[20] Notably, the scene referenced by Figure 2 has been entirely cut from the American version of the story.

Finally, not only does the camera offer an extended close-up of the mother and her children, who are clearly Godzilla's next victims, the mother comforts herself and her children promising that they will very soon be reunited with their father. Up to this point the only other character given any sort of back-story is Serizawa, whose blind eye and keloid scars indicate his involvement in the war. Here it seems to me that the film does something more than numb us to disaster—it reminds us that while modernity relies on the production of so many targeted populations, so many birds trapped in a nuclear cage, a story exists behind every kill number. An education after Hiroshima begins by attending to these narratives.

AN AESTHETICS OF THE FISSURE: SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Through close reading of essays, novels, anime, and films, I interpret texts of the nuclear age as Derridian *traces* that perform more than instances of semiotic operation or linguistic exchange. I see them as openings through which "a tremor, a shock, a displacement of *force* can be communicated."[21] In their representation of anxiety and disaster, the works under consideration do more than repeat the terror of the atomic bomb; they also open spaces for thought or fragments critiquing that very regime of representation in which they are nonetheless implicated. This aesthetics of the fissure resembles Adorno's theory of the artwork, which understands artistic production as a historically mediated expression of the contradictions of a particular place and time, as

[21] Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982): 309.

well as a preserve for utopic desires and hopes for the future.[22] Through historically contingent formal technique, artworks make visible the internal contradictions and the unifying structure of the larger social world that they both reflect and resist. In the context of the nuclear age, they create possibilities for meaning out of a paradoxical situation in which discourse remains trapped within the confines of The End while the overriding reality remains that life goes on under the shadow of nuclear disaster.

Jean-Luc Nancy contends in *The Creation of the World or Globalization* that there exist two possible destinies in the contemporary moment: a totalizing uniformity through globalization or a heightened capacity for world-making.[23] The aesthetic objects under discussion in the following chapters participate in an exemplary way in preserving our ability to make worlds (*life* in the nuclear age) rather than remain content with the homogenizing brutality of globalization (The End). They do this through the critical mode of refraction, or reflecting through fissures. In other words, history inheres in aesthetic texts not as mere representation; instead, those texts creatively engender an altered form of the world from which they come. My dissertation attends to the formal and historic specificity of the texts described below for the ways in which they reject the totalizing aims of nuclearism and globalization and point toward other possibilities for thinking and making the world.

In Chapter 1, I open "The End, or Life in the Nuclear Age" with the perspective of those who lived through the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Survivors of the

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[22] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
[23] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

atomic bombing in Japan are known as *hibakusha*, which translates literally as "atomic bomb-affected persons"; their first-hand narratives offered the first glimpses into the way language and representation would be used to process the atomic disaster. According to Paul Boyer, early accounts from the perspective of the a-bomb's victims worked their way into mainstream American media already in the first years after the war.[24] These stories met the needs of several conflicting ideological positions within the nuclear debate. For some, these accounts bolstered arguments in favor of nuclear disarmament; for others they underscored the reasons why the United States should maintain a monopoly over nuclear armament and served the emerging logic of deterrence.

I pay particular attention to one *hibakusha* narrative, Hayashi Kyoko's "Ritual of Death."[25] Her narrative highlights the dislocation and fragmentation of the *hibakusha* subjectivity, while refusing easy incorporation into a discourse of disaster. As a hybrid narrative, written between story and essay, it resists literary classification. I argue that this condition of narrative liminality reflects the liminal position of *hibakusha* subjectivity as it was splintered and dislocated by the atomic bomb. Some critics emphasize the importance of *hibakusha* narratives for how they show the world what awaits us all in a future nuclear war. I maintain, by contrast, that their importance resides in their accounts of historical reality—nuclear war has already happened. Indeed, the exploitation of the dead and dying *hibakusha* structures the nuclear present.

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[24] Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

[25] Kyoko Hayashi, "Ritual of Death," in *Nuke Rebuke*, ed. Morty Sklar, trans. Kyoko Selden (Iowa City: Spirit That Moves Us Press, 1984). Japanese names are customarily presented with the family name first in the main text of the dissertation. I follow this convention for authors whose works originate in Japanese. However, because of citation formatting considerations they are listed in the footnotes and bibliography according to Western conventions.

The popular Cold War *anime* cartoon series *Astro Boy* is the focus for Chapter 2.[26] *Anime* (animation that is distinctly Japanese in origin and style) emerged in the postwar world as one of Japan's most important global exports. Often originating in comic-book format as *manga* (as was the case with *Astro Boy*), *anime* circulates in pop-culture formations all over the world. While many different sub-categories exist within *anime*, many of the images and thematic content come from the same historical event: the atomic bombing of Japan. As a foundational postwar serialized comic book and cartoon, *Astro Boy* highlights this intersection of *anime* as global commodity and *anime* as the expression of nuclear trauma. The *anime* adventures of the nuclear-powered robot were the first to be serialized in the United States, and were eventually serialized globally.

Although *Astro Boy* embodies the rhetorical hopes for the future of the nuclear age, the serial repetition of one technological disaster after another suggests that the danger does not lie in any one form of power, but rather at the very heart of modernity. The constant reproduction of violence and melancholy in this children's cartoon implies that the sacrificial logic of the nuclear age stains all acts of creative engagement. As an orphaned robot boy constantly required to sacrifice himself on behalf of humanity, Astro's condition reflects our own enslavement to technological progress. However, I also argue that Astro's machinic mode of being can be read as a form of mimesis that does not merely re-present the conditions of our age, but also shows possibilities for our transformation.

The rhetorical trope of the nuclear family as the guarantor of stability comes into popular usage in the United States in the mid-40s amidst the proliferation of nuclear

[26] Osamu Tezuka, "Astro Boy," (Tokyo: Mushi Productions, 1963).

discourses in American culture. In Chapter 3, I analyze representations of nuclear disaster as essentially melodramatic. As in melodrama, discourses of the nuclear era excessively depict conflict in rigid categories of good versus evil. Additionally, melodrama and nuclear discourse reflect the same contradiction of modernity: reason has been pushed to its opposite, irrationality. The nuclear family plays a central role in the nuclear melodrama, for here at the smallest unit of the nation-state, new myths of survival emerge and the desire for alternate possibilities are contained.

I read the patriarchs of Akira Kurosawa's film *I Live in Fear* and Tim O'Brien's novel *The Nuclear Age* as faithful nuclear heroes.[27] In light of the continued testing of atomic bombs and the Cold War rhetoric of "mutually assured destruction" (MAD), they take pre-emptive steps to remove their families from the danger zone. However, by accepting the rhetoric in literal terms they confuse the metaphoric displacement at work in nuclear discourse and destroy their families rather than save them. While the patriarchs are clearly irrational in their obsessive nuclear fear, their outcomes illustrate the necessary conclusion of deterrence taken to its extreme. I argue that although the texts do not end in apocalyptic disaster, through the metaphoric slippage of nuclear family and nuclear war they show the operational logic of the nuclear age as a strategic logistics of perception in which the entire world has become a target. The true aim of this nuclear logic is the containment of all forms of risk. Just as the patriarchs of these texts must risk losing their hegemonic positions of control or suffer even greater loss, so must we

[27] Akira Kurosawa, "I Live in Fear," (Japan: Toho Company Ltd, 1955); and Tim O'Brien, *The Nuclear Age* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979).

displace the global regime of patriarchy upon which the nuclear age uneasily struggles for balance.

In Chapter 4, I turn to the *Bildungsroman* in order to examine the intersection of triumphant discourses declaring the fulfillment of universal history with those that project apocalyptic visions of nuclear end. The history of the *Bildungsroman*, as a narrative of self-development, provides insight into the way Western notions of history require the sacrifice of private desire in order to meet the demands of the nation-state. Thus, this literary mode represents the contradictory demands of the nuclear age to achieve both individual happiness and social harmony despite the escalation of violence and tragedy on a global scale. The Japanese American *Bildungsroman* becomes an important site of critique against the myth of the self-created hero, for these *Bildung* characters must face the reality of immigrants trapped within racial categories not of their own making. Caught between the historical catastrophes of the concentration camp and the atomic bombing of Japan, the Japanese American *Bildungsroman,* in particular, demonstrates that personal development has become stalled development in the nuclear age.

John Okada's *No-No Boy* and Joy Kogowa's *Obasan* present ambivalent Japanese American *Bildungsroman* subjects torn between identification with a dominant culture that defines its triumph against their exclusion on the one hand, or identification with a defeated motherland to which they have no real access on the other.[28] For the orphaned heroes, this impossible positioning proves the lie to the promise of incorporation that characterizes the history of the Western novel and the mythology of

[28] John Okada, *No-No Boy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976); and Joy Kogowa, *Obasan* (New York: Anchor Books, 1981).

the American dream. Since a true home or motherland is foreclosed to them, the figure of the mother proves an especially fractured element of their narratives. This is not surprising, as imprisoning definitions of motherhood are a crucial element in the production of a biopolitical order. In contrast, opening towards an *ethics* of motherhood that calls upon everyone to serve as mothers dislocates our frames of thinking away from conceptions of history where there could ever be a conclusive end.

CHAPTER ONE

Between Life and Death:
Hayashi Kyoko's "Ritual of Death," Liminal Fragmentation, and Narrative

> The observing, measuring, calculating subject of scientific method, and the subject of the daily business of life – both are expressions of the same subjectivity: man. One did not have to wait for Hiroshima in order to have one's eyes opened to this identity. And as always before, the subject that has conquered matter suffers under the dead weight of his conquest.
>
> Herbert Marcuse, "Note on the Dialectic"

The dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945 marked with violent fury the realization of a new kind of experience: instantaneous death for over a hundred thousand Japanese, tens of thousands more in a period of weeks and months, and still more in the years that followed. Indeed, the experience of the atomic bomb exceeded the limits of expression such that the existent lexicon could not describe it. Those "living" through the bomb were not called survivors (*seizonsha* in Japanese), but rather *hibakusha*, which translates literally to "explosion-affected person."[1] The term *survivor* had to be abandoned in the face of the atomic bomb, because the effects of radiation on the body exposed the limits of language in adjudicating the corporeal perimeters of life and death. As subjects could not linguistically frame the bombing's aftermath, they hung in a symbolic limbo between "living" and "dying."

Thus *hibakusha* social and political status could also be described as existing in a no-man's land of inside and outside. Organized medical care and social assistance did not exist for *hibakusha* until the passage of the A-Bomb Victims Medical Care Act in 1957.

[1] Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991): 7.

For twelve long years *hibakusha* had to shoulder the considerable expense of their atomic-bomb related injuries or forego treatment entirely. The state's neglect of the *hibakusha* is particularly shocking when one considers that those who needed medical care were often too disabled to work. Moreover, many lost their entire families as well as the extended social network that would ordinarily provide care and financial assistance. *Hibakusha* also faced employment and social discrimination. If they could work, employers were hesitant to hire them. Arranged marriages fell through once prospective partners discovered that they had been exposed to radiation. To add insult to injury, American Occupation censors forbade *hibakusha* not only from publishing accounts or artistic renderings of their experiences, but also from giving public voice to those experiences. This legal gagging effectively silenced its subjects. Many who lived through the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki refused to acknowledge their status, even when doing so would entitle them to medical care and other forms of financial assistance.[2]

Historian John Dower explains that American censors were worried that if first-hand accounts from Hiroshima and Nagasaki were to freely circulate in Japan, considerable backlash to the American occupation would result. In addition, officials thought *hibakusha* narratives might undercut efforts to try Japanese military leaders for human rights crimes committed in greater Asia by claiming the US had committed its

[2] For more about the discrimination against *hibakusha* see: John W. Dower, "The Bombed: Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japanese Memory," in *Hiroshima in History an Memory*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and M. Susan Lindee, *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994); and Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

own human rights abuses through nuclear assault.[3] Dower concludes that *hibakusha* suffering was compounded by the enormity of the destruction, the absence of organized large-scale assistance from either Japan or the US, and the inability to express their agony in any politically meaningful way. This not only kept the *hibakusha* from processing their anguish and terror, but also shrouded the whole of the country under a cover of atomic darkness. "Only the Japanese actually had experienced nuclear destruction. And in the years immediately following, only they were not allowed to publicly engage the nature and meaning of this new world."[4]

It has not been uncommon for many inside Japan to attribute the relative silence of *hibakusha* to the depth of their suffering, a state that, according to the reasoning of the unnamable, renders the victim mute.[5] However, as Lisa Yoneyama argues in *Hiroshima Traces*, even well meaning claims that the experiences from Hiroshima and Nagasaki are essentially unspeakable mask the discrimination that has actively kept *hibakusha* from speaking out. Certainly those who lived through the bombings describe the hollowness of language and the inability of visual media to communicate their experiences fully. Yet as *hibakusha* retire, leaving the immediate pressures of family life and employment, an increasing number of them describe the act of testifying as an empowering one, which Yoneyama describes as a courageous "decolonization of language."[6]

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[3] Dower, "The Bombed".
[4] Ibid., 116.
[5] Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*.
[6] Ibid., 86.

In this chapter I will closely read one *hibakusha* narrative in particular, Hayashi Kyoko's autobiographical story, "Ritual of Death" (*Matsuri no ba*).[7] Exploring Hayashi's use of ritual, I argue that the *hibakusha* became liminal subjects whose wounded bodies were sites upon which the new nuclear order was created. Hayashi's essay does not, however, attempt to articulate a greater universal meaning from *hibakusha* experience that would integrate the narrative into easily identifiable categories. Though I can offer a specific interpretation of her text, Hayashi's writing stylistically resists re-inscription in the nuclear world order while exposing the fragmentation that lies at the heart of the atomic age.

War and Ritual Sacrifice in the Name of the Nation-State

Kyoko Hayashi spent her first fifteen years as an expatriate in Shanghai during Japanese colonial expansion, but by 1945 she had taken refuge in Nagasaki along with her mother and sister. Hayashi was soon conscripted to labor at the Mitsubishi munitions works, only a kilometer and a half from ground zero. Here, she and her classmates were working on August 9. Like many *hibakusha* who were forbidden by law from publishing any accounts about the bombings prior to 1951 (the end of American Occupation), Hayashi held back her stories for years. She published "Ritual of Death" in 1975, for which she

[7] Hayashi, "Ritual of Death". The following is a list of other works by Hayashi that have been translated into English: Kyoko Hayashi, "The Empty Can," in *The Crazy Iris and Other Stories of the Atomic Aftermath*, ed. Kenzaburo Oe, trans. Margaret Mitsutani (New York: Grove Press, 1985); and Kyoko Hayashi, "Two Grave Markers," in *The Atomic Bomb Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, ed. Kyoko Selden and Mark Selden, trans. Kyoko Selden (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1989); and Kyoko Hayashi, "Yellow Sand," in *Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction*, ed. Norika M. Lippit and Kyoko Selden, trans. Kyoko Selden (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991).

won the Akatugawa Prize.[8] Despite official recognition of her literary contribution, many critics dismiss her work claiming that it centers obsessively and narrowly on the atomic bomb.[9]

"Ritual of Death," like many of her stories, is autobiographical in nature and written as a first-person narrative. As the tale unfolds, the essay turns to a number of rituals: some enacted prior to the bombing, others in the bomb's aftermath. Hayashi's foregrounding of the word "ritual" (*matsuri*) in the title invites the reader to interpret the meaning metaphorically, as no specific rite is highlighted in the plot. Indeed, the story does not describe any officially sanctioned ritual act as such. There are, however, a number of incidents that rise to the level of ritual in that they function symbolically as a method of recuperating meaning from otherwise alienating events. The stories' various rituals work to bind the drafted body, the laboring body, and the dead body to the nation-state and thus operate as sacrificial rituals: rituals of death.[10]

Hayashi describes a group of dancing schoolboys who sent their friends off to war in a series of farewells throughout the summer: "In those days, young students left every

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[8] The Akatugawa Prize is awarded to the best new writer of literature published in a magazine or newspaper.

[9] John Whittier Treat, "Hayashi Kyoko and the Gender of Ground Zero," in *The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996): 264. Treat describes particularly virulent criticism from the novelist Nakagami Kenji and others who believe the sense of mission that emerges from Hayashi's work makes it of dubious literary merit. One must suppose from their position that literature worthy of the name is characterized by its dispassion, stripped of all political power and relevance. Ibid., 264-67.

[10] Note to the Japanese title: The second half of the title (*ba*) has a strong phonetic tie to a homonym with a separate kanji that sounds exactly the same and means "site" or "place." When heard and not read, there is an ambivalence to the meaning. *Matsuri* is most commonly used to mean "festival," though one of its alternate meanings (both phonetically and ideographically) is also "ritual." The relationship between ritual and festival in Japan is strong. While many festivals have an outwardly carnival atmosphere, at the heart of the holiday lies a ritual or series of rituals connecting its participants to changes in nature, local shrines, or ancestors. The most common English title is "Ritual of Death," which I have used here.

day, and the bleak concrete court of the factory had become the place of their ritual."[11] The dancing rite provides a process by which the schoolboy—turned temporary laborer—symbolically transitions from the relative shelter of the factory floor to the warfront.

> It is a sad dance, a silent ceremony of students sending a friend to the front. The student who is leaving stands in the middle, his fellow students making a circle around him, arms linked. The leader calls out and circle swings to the right, everyone lifting their left foot. Alternating feet, the circle turns to the right, little by little. From time to time the leader calls out. As they move to the right, the students' wooden clogs make a rasping sound on the concrete. The echoless noise sounded vacant to me, like a wave that surged up but did not run back… The students give a cheer after the silent dance is done…. [A]gain they dance shoulder to shoulder. It is the same dance as before, but this time they sing too, the anthem of the boy's high school. The tempo gradually rises until the dance is a frenzy. Then it halts. Thank you – the departing student bows. Let's meet again – the rest return the bow. It is a simple farewell, a ritual of mourning.[12]

During the dance, the boys cast off the regular routine of their work and comfort each other in a protective embrace. "Arms linked" and "shoulder to shoulder," they create an intimate space against the otherwise "bleak" situation. With bodies joined, the schoolboys meet the loneliness and terror of death with an act of solidarity. This solidarity literally takes shape in the form of a circle that both signifies the conscripts'

[11] Hayashi, "Ritual of Death": 29.
[12] Ibid., 31-32.

unity, and connects the departing boy to a larger chain of living. Thus the circle moves first slowly and then at great speed, but always as one being.

The unity of this dancing circle moves in contrast to the singularity of the boy in the middle. He exists simultaneously inside and outside of the circle, and he serves as the exceptional figure anchoring the event. This ad-hoc ritual created by the classmates assigns the values of loyalty and obedience to the body of the boy in the group's center, who wears a "white band across his shoulder symbolizing loyalty unto death."[13] Significantly, this inscription of social meaning occurs in a liminal zone where the fear and confusion of death finds expression in a sanctioned form of "frenzied" madness.[14] In this way, the bodies of those in the circle and that silent body at its center become conduits for attaching meaning in the face of an experience that produces a crisis of meaning. On the morning of Hayashi's recollection, all the boys died there together on the concrete court. The circle could not hold against the force of the atomic bomb. Leaving bodies crushed and internal organs exposed, the boys' ritual of mourning gave way to the brutal reality of the blast.

The atomic bomb destroys the schoolboys' ritual on the concrete court. Similarly, it disfigures schoolgirls as they stand in a field of flowers, making literal the offering of their unpaid wartime labor. With "headbands still declaring 'Sacrifice self to serve the country!'" on scalps no longer capable of holding hair, the bomb creates a ritual of absurdity from the girls' deaths.[15] In the extremity of atomic disaster, shown here in the hideous disfigurement of the once-laughing girls, the brutality of the war effort reveals

[13] Ibid., 32.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 36.

itself. Here, ritual is wrested from the theater of battle, as these schoolgirls are reduced to mere "harlequins" at the service of "directors of the drama of war."[16] These children, who have been deemed by the victor's narrative of history as legitimate combat targets are, in the wake of the atomic bomb, absolutely alienated from the most basic sensations of experience. They stand on the threshold of death and turn to one another, trapped by the inadequacy of signification. They no longer have the words for pain, but only questions: "doesn't this hurt, doesn't this hurt?"[17]

There are rituals, too, for those living on in the days and months after the bombing. Yet the capacity for these rituals to reaffirm life is as precarious as the very existence of those who remain. In an attempt to carry out proper Japanese funeral rites and recuperate meaning from the death of his son, the narrator's uncle carefully scavenges among the remains of a classroom of students reduced to piles of ashes. According to tradition, mourners carefully pass the cremated bone fragments from one to another by chopsticks, in accordance with funeral rites that fold the dead into the broader stream of cultural and social meaning. However, in the charred rubble left behind by the atomic bomb, the uncle can only clumsily dig through the piles to haphazardly identify his son by the gold caps of teeth and charred pens. Despite his attempts to symbolically recuperate the death of his son in socially sanctioned ways, the uncle cannot reconcile the sacrifice of his son as an act of national loyalty. His alienation from previous regimes of ritual is so complete that the narrator's uncle rebukes his emperor and threatens to evict

[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

any family member who joins the thronging crowds who gather to see the emperor as he visits the site of destruction.[18]

Months later, when rebuilding begins and schools re-open, collective mourning ceremonies for the dead mirror the uncle's attempts to piece together previous forms of ritual that might ease the suffering of the living and reestablish communal order. Yet at Hayashi's school re-opening, the names of the missing schoolgirls are overshadowed by the "pierced" bodies of the girls huddled before the ceremonial paper scrolls.[19] This ritual cannot fully accomplish its purpose, for it cannot even be clearly concluded who is dead and who is mourning. Half the bowed heads of the girls in attendance are bald, "lifeless and sick."[20] Moreover, as the narrator repeatedly explains, in "radiation hangover," the absence of visible illness belies the lingering immanent danger. The school's quotidian ritual of mourning fails the *hibakusha*, because successful resolution implies the impossible processing of an act of war that continues to attack its targets. Successful reordering of the social world would require the production of meaning not only for the horrific sacrifice of tens of thousands of civilians, but for an act that has in fact forever injured the bodies of those who survived. This alternative meaning would need to address the alteration of the very cellular structure that turned those bodies against themselves and into pain-producing weapons.

[18] Ibid., 50.
[19] Ibid., 57.
[20] Ibid.

THE SEMIOTICS OF WAR: RITUAL "UNMAKING"

Psychologist Robert Jay Lifton describes *hibakusha* experience as an encounter with death, both individual but also as an apocalyptic death of the world itself.[21] Summarizing his findings Lifton reports:

> …the *indelible imprint of death immersion*, *which forms the basis of what we shall later see to be a permanent encounter with death*; the fear of annihilation of self and of individual identity, along with *the sense of having virtually experienced that annihilation*; destruction of the non-human environment, of the field or context of one's existence, and therefore of one's overall sense of "being-in-the-world," and the *replacement of the natural order of living and dying with an unnatural order of death-dominated life*.[22]

This death-dominated experience is one in which life and death are "no longer properly distinguishable."[23] Indeed, those living through the atomic bomb describe an uncertainty regarding the basic structure of "their identity as living human beings," and often portray themselves as spirits from the afterworld or soulless machines.[24] This destabilization of personal identity couples with the breakdown of social order. In the words of the *hibakusha*, this destabilization presents not merely the collapse of social order, but the literal coming of hell on earth.[25]

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[21] Lifton, *Death in Life*: 22-23.
[22] Ibid., 30. Emphasis in original.
[23] Ibid., 25-26.
[24] Ibid. For example, survivors described themselves as "automatons" walking in the "realm of dreams" and *Jizō* (images of deities carved in stone).
[25] Ibid., 29.

Lifton's compilation of *hibakusha* experiences bears a striking resemblance to Elaine Scarry's analysis of the body in pain during the act of torture. Scarry's description comes closest to Lifton's study of *hibakusha* in her understanding of torture as a process by which "the created world of thought and feeling, all the psychological and mental content that constitutes both one's self and one's world, and that gives rise to and is in turn made possible by language, ceases to exist."[26] Scarry's theorization of the torture experience resembles Lifton's descriptions of death and intense pain. Both are "forms of negation": "one occurring in the cessation of sentience, the other expressing itself in grotesque overload."[27]

Like torture victims, for those living through the atomic bomb life is permanently marked by what the subjects of Lifton's study universally describe as overwhelming horror and pain that pushes them beyond normal sensory and emotional limits. This movement beyond experiential limits can only be captured by an appeal to the absolute emptiness of death. In the words of Yōko Ōta, another noted *hibakusha* writer, "Besides the living me, there is another me which has been dead…."[28] Ōta's second self serves as the reminder of an experience that cannot be fully integrated with the world of the everyday. Her other-self "lives" on as a haunting absence of "I" and "world." For Scarry, the systematic production of an absolute identity with death, "another me which has been dead," is a political process of *unmaking* not limited to the torture room, but implicit as well in the very structure of war. She defines war as a contest of injuring where the

[26] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985): 30.
[27] Ibid., 31.
[28] Lifton, *Death in Life*: 34.

human body and the pain it suffers demonstrates and substantiates the ideological claims at stake.

Ultimately, Scarry's brief theorization of this process of unmaking in the context of nuclear war is unsatisfying. She begins by pointing out that nuclear war breaks from conventional warfare in both a qualitative and quantitative sense. The speed and sheer immensity of nuclear weaponry's destructive capacity makes it impossible for those bodies whose wounds substantiate the claims of war to consent to their injuring. Unlike in the case of conventional war, Scarry asserts, "consent is in nuclear war a structural impossibility."[29] In other words, in a standard war situation, soldiers and civilian populations support their nation's participation to varying degrees, and allow "the nation to be registered there in the wound."[30] In nuclear war, however, collective casualties occur simultaneously without the ability for populations to "authorize the degree and level of injury."[31] Scarry's "nuclear exceptionalism" and theorization of consent implies that nuclear war is inherently undemocratic and different from all other kinds of war, because it can never uphold the liberal value of free choice. Here she overly simplifies the complex forces at work in the mobilization of the public. Though she claims that nuclear war is exempt from this kind of reasoning, this is in fact the same argument used to justify the dropping of the bombs on civilian populations in Japan: because they were nominally engaged in wartime activities (digging ditches, tearing down old wooden structures to prevent fire), even children could be considered mobilized operational targets. Given the overdetermination of ideological pressure and nationalism, particularly

[29] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*: 154.
[30] Ibid., 112.
[31] Ibid., 156.

during war, it is hard enough to describe the participation of enlisted soldiers as structured on consent, let alone the conscripted labor of draftees, prisoners, and slaves. That these coerced participants in the war effort did not choose prison, or death by non-nuclear means does not persuasively produce a rigorous concept of consent but rather empties it of particularity and meaning. Scarry's larger claim in *The Body in Pain* stands in contradiction to this logic of popular consent and war (according to the more coherent part of her argument, a subject can be forced to betray itself. Indeed, extreme instances of pain make betrayal an inadequate word for the coercive effects of power).

Scarry's theorization of nuclear war also shows a common Western bias in that the term is reserved for contests in which both sides are nuclear states. Yet Hayashi's narratives (and others like them) stand in contradiction to this assumption. Scarry's understanding of nuclear war privileges the West as the true theater of history—Hiroshima and Nagasaki are only warning shots, signposts for the future structuring the nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Despite this problematic moment in the text, there is still a great deal to be gleaned from Scarry's theorization of the injured body's role in the unmaking and eventual recreation of the world in war. Her analysis provides a way of constructing a semiotics of war that places the body and experience at the center of meaning production. Meaning is produced not only for the subject who experiences, but also for the larger social world in which that experience is constructed. Previous accounts of semiotics and experience describe the latter as a cultivation of individual subjectivity within a larger social reality that is then misrecognized by those subjects as authentic personal

encounters with the world.[32] However, the body forced into a condition of pain calls for an evaluation of the ways in which this process of experience and production of subjectivity often occurs through an unmaking of the subject. Experiences like those endured by *hibakusha* bodies are better described as subject *de*-formation. Subject de-formation, through the infliction of totalizing pain and annihilation of world, ruptures the subject's capacity to meaningfully express experience, thus breaking open the body and the semiotic structures it inhabits. The rhetoric of unmaking semiotic processes in theoretical contexts most often celebrates the concept at an abstract level as an act pregnant with revolutionary potential. However, it is worth noting that because the body and its experience in the world serve as a site for the substantiation of social meaning, its deliberate unmaking can also re-produce unjust social relations and power inequities.[33]

In the case of war, bodies are assigned to sides of the conflict, and their labor is appropriated and translated into a demonstration of strength. Yet once injured, the body as wound is "empty of reference."[34] The disruption of signification results from a reversed appropriation in the act of injuring: the labor that was once exploited turns

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[32] See for example Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984): 159. The concept of *semiotic* I use in this essay also corresponds generally with De Lauretis' treatment of it in her final chapter, "Semiotics and Experience." She relies heavily on Charles Peirce whose theorization of semiotics emphasized the role of the body in a number of ways, including the act of interpretation in triadic make-up of the sign and the successful integration of experience in the production of habit or habit-change. Unlike a Saussurean conception of semiotics that provides little room for the experience of sign users in the production and re-inscription of meaning, according to Peirce the processing of the sign by the subject constitutes part of the semiotic structure. This alternative conception of semiotics corresponds to Peirce's larger philosophic project of pragmaticism that places experience at the center of meaning production. For more on the work of this see Charles Pierce, *Pierce on Signs: Writings on Semiotics*, ed. James Hooper (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1991).

[33] For the revolutionary potential of "unmaking" semiotic structures I am thinking here of work like that by Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). Kristeva's semiotics also provides a position of meaning production for the body. In the case of Peirce, the relationship between experience and semiotics is the observation of cause and effect and the production of habit.

[34] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*: 118.

against that power and becomes instead a liability. The injured body now works as a sign of the opponent's superior force. Scarry explains: "That it belongs to both or neither makes manifest the nonreferential character of the dead body that will become operative in war's aftermath, a nonreferentiality that rather than eliminating all referential activity instead gives it a frightening freedom of referential activity."[35] The body's "frightening" referential instability both cuts against ideological inscription and favors it, as the body and its ideological attachments can be recoded. This reassignment of meaning often requires pain, and even death.

Injury and death de-form the subject and make it a powerful sign of the postwar future. The injured body literally carries with it the wounding of the past, serving as a site of visible remembering. However, the injured body also projects into the future, and thus serves as a "fiction-generating" or "reality-conferring" object upon which the postwar world is built. The instability of these "unmade" bodies that represent the unmaking of civilization serve as reminders of what has been lost, but also create the conditions under which the world must be made anew. Amidst the rhetoric of war (or postwar), those who were absent from the battlefield witness the injured body and begin to accept the new realities occasioned by the conflict. Fascination and horror at the sight of the wound enable the transfer of experience from the injury into ideology (what Scarry calls 'the disembodied idea'):

> It is as though the human mind, confronted by the open body itself (whether human or animal) does not have the option of failing to perceive its reality that rushes unstoppably across his eyes and into his mind, yet

[35] Ibid., 119.

> the mind so flees from what it sees that it will with almost equal speed perform the countermovement of assigning that attribute to something else, especially if there is something else at hand made ready to receive the rejected attribute, ready to act as its referent.[36]

Death and injury produce a kind of vacuum of meaning in their aftermaths, offering a blank slate on which ideology can be transmitted. In the death and injury of another, the onlooker confronts a "death-dominated experience" at the limits of meaning. In this void, a porous zone between life and death opens up, and those very ideological structures that originally created the crisis now provide a recuperative passage back to the world of the everyday, thus acting as the referents for the stabilization of meaning.

RITUAL LIMINALITY: APOCALYPSE AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Ritual progression, as described by Victor Turner, employs a similar kind of semiotic structure. By separating from the everydayness of life, ritual produces a passage through a threshold state, or what Turner refers to as a liminal phase.[37] This liminality breaks from the normal constraints of time and space in the movement from one form of subjectivity to another: "For through acts turning the world upside down the very possibility of openness and change emerges."[38] This turning of the world on its head generates an anti-structure, or an "unmaking" of social order, which eventually leads to the reestablishment of that order. Crisis is an essential element of this process: rituals occur during times of crisis and mimetically enact aspects of that which work to

[36] Ibid., 126.
[37] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine, 1969): ix.
[38] Ibid., x.

reestablish order and reinscribe meaning for the community. The rituals described by Turner rely on a symbolic system that in turn attaches to the bodies of the "threshold people" who are "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."[39] The bodies participating in ritual practices and their borderline experiences stand in for the larger social totality as both the crisis of meaning and the means by which that crisis finds resolution. The power of ritual comes from its relationship to this liminality; accordingly rituals are often found at those moments when life brushes up against death. Rituals may appease death, but they are always done in service of life as a way of making meaning from events that otherwise disrupt meaning production. By mediating these liminal states, Turner's rites of passage carry "apocalyptic agency" that may engender critique and deconstruction.[40] This apocalyptic potential generates the capacity to resolve such ambiguous states in favor of a restored, though transformed, communal order.

There is an important distinction between ritual and war: what ritual symbolically produces through repetition, war makes all too literal. Yet both war and ritual rely on a semiotic process of unmaking the world that seizes upon referential instability and substantiates ideology in crisis upon the human body. Not incidentally, both aim towards the resolution of contradiction in favor of social order. By turning the world upside down in order to reestablish communal harmony, war and ritual share an apocalyptic vision: one literally, the other symbolically. If there is a vast chasm between nuclear and

[39] Ibid., 95.
[40] See also Donald Weber, "From Limen to Border: A Meditation on the Legacy of Victor Turner for American Cultural Studies," *American Quarterly* 47 No. 3 (1995).

conventional war, it is found here where theatre of war meets rites of passage; the latter can be processed through ritual, whereas the former utterly frustrates ritual redress.

Lifton's interview subjects described Hiroshima after the atomic bomb as a hell on earth, and that personal identification with death mirrored what occurs in torture. In both, the world itself empties of content. In its ability to level nearly incomprehensibly vast spaces and at the same time invisibly penetrate the cellular structure of what survived immediate destruction, the atomic bomb announced itself as an apocalyptic weapon. Apocalypse rather than disaster is the more appropriate designator of nuclear war in this context. Apocalypse, at least, promises the unleashing of hell in order to decide between the good and the evil in a final triumph of the Blessed. Apocalypse did not take place, but the power of the bomb is such as to make it seem as though it did or as though apocalypse were possible. As a mechanism of war, the atomic bomb is presumably produced and maintained not as a weapon to destroy the Earth and bring about disaster, but as a device promising to establish permanent order. Thus, the "death immersion" that leaves one with the virtual experience of apocalypse so prevalent among *hibakusha* is not an ancillary experience of the atomic bomb, but a realization of its primary strategic capacity. In the symbolic production of apocalypse at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the atomic bomb enacted a rite of passage to a new global era. The rhetoric of the West, as we now know, proclaimed that this ritual assault brought an end to world war. And in this way, the deployment of the atomic bomb functions, according to Turner's analysis of ritual, as an act of apocalyptic agency.

In the world re-ordered by the atomic bomb, science reigns supreme. Indeed, Dower describes the way the atomic bomb contained two separate realities, "In Japan, as elsewhere, the bomb thus became Janus: simultaneously a symbol of the terror of nuclear war and the promise of science."[41] Exposure to the terror of science did not create the impetus to turn away from modernity, but the opposite. As the new constitution required that Japan rebuild itself as a pacifist state, the bulk of national rebuilding energy centered on weaving the wonders of science into the fabric of everyday life. According to Dower "the vast majority of talented Japanese scientists, businessmen, and bureaucrats devoted themselves to promoting *civilian* applications of science."[42] The promotion of science, coupled with the promotion of democracy in Japan, led to progressive reforms.[43] Yet the structuring of the new Japan around scientific achievement enabled a forgetting of both Japanese atrocities in Asia as well as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ironically, many Japanese would conclude at war's end that they lost the war, not because they had overreached in their colonial aspirations, but because they had not advanced quickly enough in the scientific arena. Incredibly, part of the redemption of the bomb by the Japanese was the result of scientific study of the bomb's victims and the effects of radiation on their bodies, an endeavor that would transform their pain into a rational, instrumental form of knowledge.[44]

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[41] Dower, "The Bombed": 122.
[42] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Lindee, *Suffering Made Real*: 15. "The bomb was a frightening manifestation of technological evil, so terrible that it needed to be reformed, transformed, managed, or turned into the vehicle of a promising future. It was necessary, somehow, to redeem the bomb." I will turn again to this scientific study of *hibakusha* later in the chapter.

ATOMIC SPECIMENS: EXPERIMENT AND SACRIFICE

Hayashi Kyoko's "Ritual of Death" exposes the way apocalyptic agency was marshaled in the coupling of a political strategy and scientific objectification. Before the narrator describes the city's bombing from the position of those who experienced it, "Ritual of Death" opens with a letter contained inside a measuring device dropped over Nagasaki to calculate the force of the atomic bomb's blast. While this particular letter appears to be a literary or fictional invention of Hayashi's, she most likely found inspiration from leaflets dropped on Nagasaki after the atomic bombing.[45] Hayashi transforms the details of the historical event in order to critique what she saw as the military and scientific collaboration that made the atomic bombs possible—both within the American and Japanese governments. Though similar in tone and content to the letter found on the opening page of the story, the actual leaflets were written by military personnel, not scientists. In "Ritual of Death" the leaflet is described as a letter written to a Japanese physicist who at one time worked as a colleague with its author; it calls for surrender:

> We are sending this as a personal message to urge that you use your influence as a reputable nuclear physicist to convince the Japanese General Staff of the terrible consequences which will be suffered by your people if you continue this war.

[45] Chad Diehl, "Resurrecting Nagasaki: Reconstruction, the Urakami Catholics, and Atomic Memory, 1945-1970" (Dissertation, Columbia University, 2011). According to Diehl, propaganda leaflets were commonly dropped before bombing campaigns in Japan—including the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Leaflets appeared in Nagasaki within hours after the bombing, most likely because the city was not the mission's primary target. These leaflets, written by personnel in the Office of War Intelligence, explained that atomic bombs would be used to wipe out Japan if their leaders did not surrender.

> Within the space of three weeks we have proof-fired on land in the American desert, exploded one in Hiroshima, and fired the third this morning.
>
> We implore you to confirm these facts to your leader, and to do your utmost to stop the destruction and waste of life which can only result in the total annihilation of all your cities, if continued. As scientists, we deplore the use to which a beautiful discovery has been put, but we can assure you that unless Japan surrenders at once, this rain of atomic bombs will increase manifold in fury.[46]

The scientists' sorrow for the deadly use of atomic power rings hollow in light of their participation in what they simply refer to as "total annihilation." As the letter indicates, in the age of technological triumph, it is not the priest who foretells apocalypse, but the man of science.

The destruction of Nagasaki, which will have already taken place by the time this letter is read, finds its place in a series of bombings starting with the paradoxically titled "Trinity Test" at Los Alamos. As the third site for the dropping of the atomic bomb, Nagasaki is structurally placed by the scientists within a trinity of successful deployments of this experimental new weapon of destruction.[47] At Trinity Site, Robert Oppenheimer announces the nuclear age in an implosion of science, war, and the sacred giving rise to

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[46] Hayashi, "Ritual of Death": 21.

[47] The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki used two different systems for payload deployment. The names given to each, Little Boy and Fat Boy, in part reference these technical differences. Thus some have argued that the seemingly "unnecessary" destruction of Nagasaki completed within days of Hiroshima's annihilation can be explained by the scientific necessity of determining which deployment system worked best, that is, which technique offered a higher kill-power. See for example, John Whittier Treat, *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

the scientist's now famous pronouncement: "I am become Death, destroyer of worlds."[48] Even though it will cause unprecedented suffering and horror, the scientists cannot help but declare allegiance to atomic power, for the discovery and use of atomic fission and fusion enable a leap beyond god's divine mystery of unity as symbolized in the Holy Trinity. This "beautiful discovery" rivals an act of god, granting the man of science and the man of war the technological power to reign over nature. Where there was once the life-giving promise of rain, there will be Man's wrath and devastation.[49]

As Hayashi's narrator explains: "The effect of the warning, coming after the bombing, was designed to be heightened by the sacrifice of the lives of the people I knew." Indeed, she concludes that such a letter was only possible "because they were children of God."[50] This alignment of the American scientists to divine election appears again later in the essay. After describing a type of atomic burning that causes the skin to hang in "frills" from the body, and describing a child who suffered from this infliction, Hayashi writes: "The Children of God conducted all kinds of experiments on burns and human bodies, it seems."[51] Much has been made of Nagasaki's history of Christianity. In fact, one of the first and most popular *hibakusha* stories is Nagai Takashi's *Bells of*

[48] Spoken by J. Robert Oppenheimer from the Hindu scripture the *Bhagavad Gita*.
[49] Among the scientists working on the Manhattan Project there was a great deal of doubt about whether this new weapon should be used. In the aftermath of its use, many of these scientists actively worked against further production of atomic weapons and believed that no one state should hold proprietary rights over nuclear knowledge. In the immediate months after the bombing dissident atomic scientists founded a journal to educate the public about the dangers of atomic weapons. This journal, *Bulletin of Concerned Atomic Scientists*, continues to this day. For in-depth treatment of the shifting alliances of the atomic scientists see Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).
[50] Hayashi, "Ritual of Death": 21.
[51] Ibid., 37.

Nagasaki, the story of the bombing from the perspective of a devout Christian.[52] Hayashi's repeated references to Christianity must be understood in light of this history. Nagai has become something of a patron saint for the city, highlighting the role played by Nagasaki and its Christian denizens in Japan's opening to the West. Indeed the city began as a Western outpost: it was founded by Portuguese merchants in the 16th century who brought their religion with them. For a short period of time after 1580 Nagasaki was a Jesuit colony.[53]

Nagai's wife, a descendent of a long line of Christian leaders from Nagasaki, was killed in the bombing; he too eventually died from the effects of radiation poisoning, making orphans of their children. (Although he inarguably suffered a great deal in the bombing, Nagai had previously been exposed to deadly amounts of radiation before the bombing due to his medical work with tuberculosis patients. This fact was largely overlooked in the popular mythologizing of Nagai and his dying body as he became a Japanese atomic martyr.) In *The Bells of Nagasaki*, Nagai suggests that the bombing of the leading Christian city in Japan amounted to a kind of divine selection whereby Nagasaki was chosen in order to stand witness and testify to the horrors of war so that peace would come to reign upon the earth. The original title of Nagai's novel was in fact, *The Curtain Rises on the Age of the Atom*, a historical event that the doctor celebrated despite the price paid by the living and the dead in Nagasaki.

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[52] Takashi Nagai, *Bells of Nagasaki*, trans. William Johnston(New York: Kodansha International, 1994). For a short description of Nagai, *The Bells of Nagasaki*, and the influence of Christian themes on Nagasaki *hibakusha* literature, see also Treat, *Writing Ground Zero*: 307-15.

[53] As the larger colonial aspirations of the Portuguese and Spanish became known, the ruling lord of the area ordered the crucifixion of twenty-six Christian Japanese (all of whom were eventually canonized as martyrs), after which Japanese Christians practiced their faith in secret until the late 19th century.

The repeated reference to the "Children of God" in Hayashi's "Children of Death" points out the irony of claims like those made by Nagai: the bombs were dropped by Christians who believed in the very same god as the Japanese Christians who were killed and maimed. This, of course, was the same god to which Nagai and others turned in the aftermath to rescue them from the glaring contradictions of the event. Significantly for the narrator, the "Children of God" are also men of science. This duality is captured in the figure of Nagai: a medical doctor who maintained his faith in science as well as religion. The warning dropped by the US/Christian scientists, however, comes *after* the death of the narrator's friends and neighbors. This highlights not only the hypocrisy of the gesture, but the fact that the warning was not meant to rescue the victims of Nagasaki. Rather, their deaths only served to substantiate a warning meant for others.

That *hibakusha* suffering is meant primarily to serve as a symbol of the danger awaiting another recasts these people as sacrificial players in a spectral ritual drama that reshaped the global political landscape. Given the development of the atomic bomb, this sacrifice also has the character of an experiment. There has been a "beautiful discovery" of apocalyptic dimensions and it must be seen exactly how this new power is capable of transforming the world. That it will kill is already known, but how, with what degree of pain, and to what extent remains to be proven on the bodies of the living and dying of Nagasaki.

Although the advent of science purportedly brings with it the death of god, and the unmasking of religious figures, sacrifice and the recreation of apocalyptic structures follow closely behind, this time through technological rather than mythological means.

Adorno and Horkheimer explain in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that the power of the shaman rests in his ability to mimic Divine power. The modern man of science replaces the reign of representation with an analogous system of extrapolation. While the shaman relies on a structure of similarity that unites the profane and the sacred, the scientists uses control and experimental sets in order to make claims on the general:

> The man of science borrows his power from the shaman, whose magical rites are replaced by the work of the laboratory. An atom is smashed not as representative but as a specimen of matter, and the rabbit suffering the torment of the laboratory is seen not a representative but, mistakenly, as a mere exemplar.[54]

Science deposes the shaman but, as Adorno and Horkheimer argue, the structure of ritual does not disappear. Instead, it is "replaced by the work of the laboratory." Adorno and Horkheimer do not seek a recuperation of representation; rather they work to expose the lie of modernity that claims we have been freed from a world of terror. What is more, modernity's tendency to objectify the field of living constructs a generalized laboratory space:

> The observing, measuring, calculating subject of scientific method, and the subject of the daily business of life – both are expressions of the same subjectivity: man. One did not have to wait for Hiroshima in order to have

[54] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelen Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002): 7.

one's eyes opened to this identity. And as always before, the subject that has conquered matter suffers under the dead weight of his conquest.[55]

The conquest of nature becomes the destruction of life as well. Thus, the specimens of the atomic "Ritual of Death," who are at once sacrificial and experimental, make visible a terrifying truth regarding the structure of quotidian life. The creation of the living dead at Hiroshima and Nagasaki would not be possible without a world that never saw those lives as much more than observable phenomena whose pain and death convert into a measurable power.

The *hibakusha* of Hiroshima, who were solicited as scientific subjects in the post-war years by the U.S. Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC), experienced this objectifying modern reality. In 1948 the ABCC was created under the auspices of the Atomic Energy Commission in order to study the effects of radiation exposure from atomic weaponry on the human body.[56] While the scientists working for the ABCC provided valuable diagnostic information for the participating subjects, they worked under a no-treatment policy.[57] Lindee points out that the no-treatment policy was not exceptional in the 1940s, and is often a condition of contemporary medical studies. The latter point reinforces the critique expressed in "Ritual of Death" and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the treatment of the atomic bomb patients was secondary to their scientific value. This was precisely the argument made by a prominent *hibakusha*, Kiyoshi Kikkawa (also known as "A-Bomb Victim Number One"). He confronted ABCC

[55] Herbert Marcuse, "Note on the Dialectic," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew J. Arato (New York: Continuum, 1982): 451.
[56] For an excellent history of the ABCC see Lindee, *Suffering Made Real*.
[57] Ibid., 123.

personnel about the way *hibakusha* were examined merely as experimental subjects rather than patients receiving medical care.[58] The director dismissed his complaints, implicitly acknowledging that Kikkawa was little more than data for his study. According to the operational logics of the ABCC, there was no reason to provide "special aid" to Kikkawa and others like him. Complaints like this shadowed the organization during its nearly three decades of work in Japan. As Lindee explains, this no-treatment policy still fuels the belief among many *hibakusha* that Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been bombed as part of biomedical experiment.[59]

NARRATIVE LIMINALITY: AGAINST APOCALYPSE

So far we have discussed the way "Ritual of Death" uses the trope of ritual to critique the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in a number of different ways. The ritual practices of those living in Nagasaki are emptied of meaning in the aftermath of the atomic bomb. The evacuation of meaning serves as a structural function of both ritual and war in the "unmaking" or de-forming of subject and world for the eventual transformation and re-establishment of social order. This de-forming of the subject as enacted in modernity relies on a coincidence in identity between the Man of God and the Man of Science, and correspondingly ritual and sacrifice are replaced with experiment and specimen. It could even be said that the narrative structure of "Ritual Death" follows a kind of ritual process whereby semiotic structures of symbolic meaning production are "unmade" and then re-

[58] The director initially argued that ABCC did provide medical care by providing the diagnostics. Kikkawa pointed out that if this was the case, why were *hibakusha* only given access to the facilities when summoned by the ABCC, which necessitated taking off a day of work without reimbursement, losing valuable wages, and not when they were ill and in need of care.
[59] Lindee, *Suffering Made Real*: 126.

ordered, bringing narrative closure to an event outside all comprehension. Weaving together the memories of the narrator's experience and those of others alongside scientific and technical evidence, the essay might be seen as filling the void of meaning opened by the atomic bomb.

However, if ritual structure is at work in the short story, it does not find any apocalyptic agency by which to narratively dis/close the event. Though the story ends with "a beautiful line" from an American documentary on the bomb – "… Thus, the destruction ended…" – the narrative itself cuts against any easy "coming to terms" with the bomb.[60] This reference to the American film is utterly ironic, for as the narrator's description of the effects of radiation relentlessly illustrate, the atomic bomb altered the very cellular form of the human body in its path. The atomic bomb vaporized tens of thousands, but also consigned tens of thousands more to a body permanently (if invisibly) damaged, a life experienced as a waiting for death.

The inability to find closure in the aftermath of the atomic bomb is mirrored in the instability of Hayashi's narrative form. Although primarily told from the perspective of an unnamed "I," the story does not begin with the events most immediately belonging to the narrator. Instead, it begins with a letter written by the scientists who built the bomb, a letter now on display at a museum. Next the short story turns to the memories of the narrator's mother and sister living many towns away. When the narrator's own experience of the bomb appears, it does so not as climax, but as another one of the many recollections from Nagasaki. Descriptions from the perspective of friends and schoolmates find their way into the story, often without attribution. Moreover,

[60] Hayashi, "Ritual of Death": 57.

descriptions of mortal injuries and recorded times of death inform the story, absent any explanation as to how these things could be known. The instability of the story's point-of-view makes it hard to describe the narrative's form. Is it a short story or an autobiographical essay? It appears to be an autobiographical essay, but if so, how can we account for the narrative's fluid movement between I, other, and the dead?

Just as the story begins with a letter on display at a museum, written by those who were not there, the story's personal recollections are interrupted continually by facts and figures, Red Cross reports, government memos, and medical surveys. That the narrative must continually suffer these interruptions reflects the event-like structure of the bombing. Both personal and impersonal, the use of narrative voice has to contend with a disruption to the structuring of self and world. Recall Ōta's splitting herself into two: to speak from an undivided "I" would render the crisis manageable for a subject that has been radically de-formed, but would resort to the world of fantasy since there is no way any single account can put back together a world of signification that has been obliterated. In the same way, Hayashi's fictionalized letter from the scientists addresses their Japanese colleague by name as though it were written to someone, when the true recipient was Japan most immediately, but ultimately, the world in general.

The interrupted point-of-view also reflects the way in which the meaning of experience and the re-constitution of the world after the atomic bomb require a reliance on a process of rationalized objectification and measurement. Characters in the narrative are introduced by their distance from the bomb, and the estimated time of their death is carefully included (e.g. instantaneously, within two hours, or two months). Official

designation as *hibakusha* is not a mere "being there," but the product of a bureaucratic legal process that is terrifying in its absurdity. Those seeking government assistance for their injuries must demonstrate "proof of death"; that is they must certify their location within the deadly blast-range of the bomb with the names of three witnesses. However, as the narrator points out, those who lived to witness often died before the conclusion of the legal process. Cultural studies scholar Lisa Yoneyama argues that this legal requirement meant that *hibakusha* storytelling was from the first also a medico-legal discursive practice that affected the narrative structure of the vast majority of accounts.[61] This structure is marked by the external conditions of its reception: the testimonial story must earn authorization by the bureaucrats who will scrutinize the elements for accuracy. Concretely this resulted in an emphasis on exact figures and scientific terms in order to translate the catastrophe into measurable and calculable damages.[62] As a medico-legal discursive practice, this narrative structure also alienates the speaking subject from its own past. The truth, then, lies not in the experience but in how closely it conforms to impersonal and official versions of history.

By incorporating these facts and figures as interruption, rather than signaling them in organized paragraph breaks that would clearly delineate where each piece of information comes from and how much weight it carries, the short story does more than *reflect* the objectification now taken as simple fact. "Ritual of Death" produces confusion as an effect, requiring the reader to work at piecing the narrative together and refusing an answer to our desire for authentication and verification of the story's claims. In this way,

[61] Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*: 93.
[62] Ibid., 94.

the essay mis-performs as a measuring device, and thus works to subvert the universal drive of calculation that could ever find good "reason" for the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a product of patch-worked memories, punctuated by official numbers and bits of collected information, the essay makes no claims to accuracy. Additionally, because the recollection does not impose a strict linear temporality, the story is a different kind of technology writing against the rationalized measurement of the force of the bomb-blast, the costs of war.

Unlike the clear timetable presented in the letter of warning ("Within the space of three weeks we have proof-fired on land in the American desert, exploded one in Hiroshima, and fired the third this morning"), in "Ritual of Death" memories of the past dissolve together and disrupt logical linearity. Paragraphs alternate from pre-bomb memories, to the moment of the bombing, and back again to yet another pre-bomb memory as in the following example:

> Let's meet again – the rest return the bow. It is a simple farewell, a ritual of mourning. The last group that I saw all died, one in the center and the others around him. I remember a meeting with a student who was later killed in the battle of Okinawa. Maiguma was the undisputed slob among the students at Kumamoto Higher School. He was enjoying the sun in the court. The all-clear had sounded and I was pattering across it when he called, "Hey!" and beckoned me over. When I approached, he held open a seam in his uniform and chuckled "Let's play hunt the lice. It's fun when they run away." Then, he warned me in a whisper not to tell anyone and

> parodied a solemn reading of the opening line of the Imperial Rescript on Education: Know ye, Our Subjects, "We broke wind involuntarily, you our subjects must find it malodorous. Pray withstand it for a second." At first I didn't get it. When I understood the meaning the second time around, I burst out laughing and said, "No, no! Not God incarnate!"[63]

The first line of this example refers to the narrator's general recollection of the students' farewell dance. This is interrupted by an acknowledgement that all the boys dancing together on the day of the bomb died. Without allowing for time to absorb the totality of this death toll, Hayashi moves on to a more specific personal memory from before the atomic bomb, to comic effect. The paratactical, dislocating narrative movement, without paragraph-breaks, mimics the way memory works, as the subject sifts through past experiences in order to make meaning of the present. Rendered here in essay form, however, it is as though the bomb obliterated the seams of the past. The narrator struggles to find the thread of meaning, but just as she describes they way the bomb's blast tears a kimono fabric away from its formal whole and relocates it 25km away, the content of her memory shifts unexpectedly from tragedy to humor, and back again to horror.

Hayashi's fragmented narrative mode contrasts sharply with the story of the atomic bombs told in the documentary, *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*. Originally conceived as a humanitarian plea for help by Japanese filmmakers, the project was quickly co-opted into a scientific mission by the Japanese government, and soon thereafter confiscated as a strategic military tool by the U.S.

[63] Hayashi, "Ritual of Death": 32.

occupation.[64] The film footage and photographs, taken just one month after the bombings, constitute the primary visual foundation for the global nuclear imaginary; they have been used as found footage in movies such as *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), fantastically transformed into animation, and reproduced through special effects in apocalyptic disaster films. Whereas the narrative "I" of "Ritual of Death" speaks for a patchwork of *hibakusha* experiences, in contrast the narrator of the documentary acts as a stand in for the scientists investigating the bombs' effects. However, the scientists' textual authority comes not from the documented objects but from the new form of power made legible in their deformation. Film scholar Abe Mark Nornes argues that the true narrative center of *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* is the atomic bomb itself:

> Suddenly, the city maps came to rely on an imaginary point: the Epicenter. The Hypocenter. Ground Zero. Anything straying from the sphere of this powerful point became meaningless and unseen….All creators of representations of the atomic bombings, no matter their physical or temporal location, inevitably feel the demanding pull of this point, this originary space in the air. The canisters of steel known as "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" may have vaporized in their own self-annihilation, but they still demand the privilege of ultimate reference point, leaving only that powerful magnetic, imaginary point we call the Epicenter…. That is to

[64] For a fascinating, detailed account of the production of the only documentary footage of the immediate aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima, see Abe Mark Nornes, "The Body at the Center--The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki," in *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film*, ed. Mick Broderick (New York: Keagan Paul International, 1996).

> say, *the film gives voice to the point of view of the bomb itself.* Nothing is more terrifying.[65]

Significantly, the filmmakers deliberately chose to work within the objectivizing conventions of *kagaku eiga*, or the science film, which strives for the "direct representation of reality" through the "accumulation of data without processing it for larger meaning."[66] Nornes concludes that the documentary used the conventions of the science film to express the logic of the Epicenter.

Though screening of the documentary has been severely restricted inside Japan, reception of the film, particularly the translation of its title, identified this neutral/neutralizing logic. In Japanese the word used for "effect," *koka*, also means "results"—as in the results of a scientific experiment. Japanese critical of the film attributed authorship of the title to the U.S., mirroring Kikkawa's belief that the "unmade" bodies were never anything other than research material, results of an experiment conducted in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[67] Nornes suggests that the authorship of the translation is in actuality much more complicated, most likely belonging to the Japanese scientific institution that originally funded the film. This coincides with Dower's description of the conflicted reactions to the atomic bomb within Japan: the atomic bomb was seen as both a force of terror and a marvel of modern science. The responsibility for the bombs most immediately lies with the United States. However, the logic of the Epicenter reflects the conditions of a globalizing modernity; a condition in

[65] Ibid., 140-41.
[66] Ibid., 136-37.
[67] Ibid., 134.

which there are few innocents—as the narrator's uncle in "Ritual of Death" begins to understand in his rage.

"Ritual of Death" strategically calls upon the logic of the Epicenter by introducing each of the story's *hibakusha* according to their distance from Ground Zero. Yet by subsequently refusing any objective trajectory (linear, geographic, point of view) this reproduction transforms into critique. According to Norne's argument in "The Body at the Center" we might describe this critique as cannibalistic, a way of ingesting the power of the bomb and transforming it into an act of agency on behalf of the *hibakusha*. Nornes introduces his theory of aesthetic cannibalism with the following explanation:

> In ritualistic practice, the cannibal devours human bodies to *incorporate the other's magic*. Appropriately enough, cannibalism has even occurred as part of ritualistic drama. It is a means to obtain certain qualities of the consumed, an appropriation absorbing the vitalities of other bodies. The cannibal reduces their power while making it one's own.[68]

Interpreted this way the essay preforms an inversion of the ritual of suffering and devastation, its own "ritual of death." The body at the center would not be the *hibakusha* body in pain, but the atomic bombs from which the survivors would transform their suffering.

There is something disturbing about a reinterpretation of this kind. Just as Nornes offers the potential for critique, he acknowledges a dangerous ambivalence in any act of reappropriating nuclear power. Writing generally about any use of the footage of *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* he argues:

[68] Ibid., 146. Emphasis in original.

> This fascination with the absolute indifference of the Epicenter and its violence was possible in the wake of the bomb, but since then the atomic bombings have slowly become imbricated deeper and deeper into the networks of human discourse, gradually moving out of the realm of the epicenter. The "original" film becomes inseparable from and experienced through written histories, memoirs, and the fabric of other films. The point of view of the bomb has become veiled, and thus its potential power has increased dramatically.[69]

Yet in reference to documentary projects more specifically Nornes contends that:

> …documentarists courageously cut straight to the Epicenter, cannibalizing documentary images of human bodies that express the terrifying banality of the bomb. Despite the process of constant reappropriation and repetition, the images continue to tap into the absolute indifference of the Epicenter…Unlike their colleagues in fictional filmmaking, documentarists turn the impossibility of representation to their own advantage. By removing and consuming pieces of *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, documentarists incorporate its terrible power. They tear away the veil and offer a glimpse of the cruel, matter-of-fact violence of the bomb. Through the power they have made their own, they unleash the energy contained in the images only to divert it toward new kinds of resistance.[70]

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[69] Ibid., 147.
[70] Ibid., 148.

There seem to be a number of problems with Nornes' use of cannibalism here. First, there is little coherency in making documentary practices an exceptional use of atomic bomb imagery. This portion of the argument relies on a presumption of immediacy that is both impossible and replicates the privileging of rational-scientific forms of knowledge that created (in Nornes' own words) the "terrifying" cultural conditions of the nuclear age.

Cannibalism as a potentially resistant practice in the context of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki faces an even larger problem. The power of the bomb is itself cannibalistic, not only in symbolic, but also in more literal ways. The bombs produced the conditions for a logic of the Epicenter by devouring the bodies closest to it and permanently un-making those proximal to its blast range. What is truly veiled in any cannibalistic incorporation of the power of the Epicenter is the source of that power: the actual bodies of the *hibakusha* themselves. Strangely enough, in Nornes' discussion of what makes the citizen-activist screenings of *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* he notes the way they include contemporary testimony of the people whose images had originally appeared merely as factual "mug shots." The point here is that the citizen-activists resisted "the charms of the epicenter not by cannibalizing its power, but by redirecting us to a space all but forgotten (or simply avoided): *the point of view of the victim*."[71] "Ritual of Death" takes this redirection a step further by pointing to the cannibalistic qualities of the bomb, revealing the way it functioned as a death ritual, and thus a practice of power generation. Moreover, in "Ritual of Death" there is no stable point of view of the victim because of the permanent state of

[71] Ibid., 149. Emphasis in original.

liminality that grants the bomb continuing apocalyptic agency. Unlike *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, which pieces together the bomb's logic through an unrelenting catalogue of scientific effect, or other "cannibalistic" reappropriations that would reinforce the logic of the Epicenter, "Ritual of Death" expresses the fragmentation of human experience and interrupts seamless re-signification into the nuclear age.

A Closure That Never Comes

According to all accounts, both personal and technical, nearly anyone in the path of the atomic bomb's radioactive blast should be dead. Arising from the ashes of Nagasaki, Hayashi's story bears the imprint of death. Its narrative is marked by an instability that penetrates and lingers, like the effects of radiation, at the very center of meaning production itself. Death functions here like a permanent absence of meaning that does not, in the end, bring about an end to meaning production. Rather, death unsettles previous regimes of experience. Seen as sacrifice, the bodies of those who died, and continue to die, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki find their place in an atomic order: their deaths ended a war. Yet seen as something *resembling* sacrifice, the *hibakusha* body and its position between life and death refuse to be re-ordered. Looking back on her experience of the bomb, the narrator is left without answers: "Life and death pull at each other till they stand back to back, in a balance more delicate than tissue paper."[72] Similarly, the distinctions between narrative and ritual, memory and fact push and pull creating a kind of tension in which the essay finds its critical force.

[72] Hayashi, "Ritual of Death": 33.

As narrative, the story gives an account of what happened on August 9, 1945 in Nagasaki. Like ritual, the narrative creates a space for the mimetic re-enactment of crisis. Yet Hayashi's narrative works against ritual's apocalyptic agency by refusing easy passage from one state of de-formed liminal subjectivity to one in which identity is recovered. It is no wonder then that "Ritual of Death" has elicited both praise and scorn from literary critics and other writers.[73] Hayashi's unflinching account of the bombing carries with it the power of the experience, a force that critics cannot deny. However, the essay leaves no comfortable place for the reader from which one might come to understand the universal nature of the event. Critics still seem unable to categorize even the basic form of the narrative: Is it fiction? Is it strictly an autobiographical account? The offense of "Ritual of Death" is double: it does not hide behind the ethical demands of history inside an apolitical theory of art that reserves a place for it as a preserve for eternal truth. Similarly, "Ritual of Death" does not claim the false objectivity of science from which truth-claims about the nature of reality must seek authority. This hesitation amounts to Hayashi's greatest sin, one that leads some to dramatically declare that the work is not literature at all.

In this regard, Hayashi's *literary* essay articulates the kinds of liberating heresy that Adorno argues is the central feature of the *critical* essay: "By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, something becomes visible in the object which it is orthodoxy's

[73] For more discussion of these criticisms, see Treat, "Hayashi Kyoko and the Gender of Ground Zero"; and Davinder L. Bhowmik, "Temporal Discontinuity in the Atomic Bomb Fiction of Hayashi Kyoko," in *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Comtemporary Japan*, ed. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999). Bhowmik's analysis differs from mine. I argue that confusion is an effect of the temporal dislocation, whereas Bhowmik asserts that the inclusion of historical material is an attempt to ground the story and add credibility to memory. Bhowmik's essay, like Treat's, includes discussion of Hayashi's literary reception in Japan.

secret purpose to keep invisible."[74] The narrative disrupts the literary establishment because it reminds its readers too insistently of the devastation at the heart of Japanese modernity. Rather than "smoothing" over the "fragmented" nature of the atomic reality, the story "gains its unity only be moving through the fissures."[75] There are narratives of Hiroshima and Nagasaki attempting closure. However, unlike the American documentary on the bombing referenced by the narrator, Hayashi's story refuses a recovery of meaning that would transform *hibakusha* experience into a position from which one could declare, "And thus, the devastation ended."[76]

[74] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, *New German Critique* 32 (1984): 171.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 164.

CHAPTER TWO

Atomic Pop:
Astro Boy, Anime, and the Machinic Form of Life

> Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself.
>
> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"

Originating as a Japanese manga series from 1951, the television program *Astro Boy* was broadcast in Japan between 1963 and 1966.[1] Due to the enormity of the show's popularity, NBC quickly bought rights to syndicate *Astro Boy*, making it the first Japanese television series broadcast in the U.S.[2] In addition to its popularity in both the U.S. and Japan, the animated series gained widespread international popularity throughout the Cold War period and was remade in the 1980s,[3] and again in 2003.[4] The original Japanese title, *Mighty Atom* (*Tetsuwan atomu*), illustrates more clearly than its English counterpart (Astro Boy) the central role atomic power played in the cartoon series. The hero Atom (Atomu), a young robot created in the form of a human boy, is powered by nuclear energy. Atom, with his peaceful use of atomic power, embodies the latent utopic possibilities of the atomic age—nuclear power used to save rather than to

[1] Osamu Tezuka, "Astro Boy," (Tokyo: Mushi Productions, 1963).
[2] For an in-depth account of *Astro Boy*'s history see, Frederik L. Schodt, *The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, Manga/Anime Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2007).
[3] Noburo Ishiguro, "Astro Boy," (Tokyo: Tezuka Productions, 1980).
[4] Kazuya Konaka, "Astro Boy," (Tokyo: Tezuka Productions and Sony Pictures Television, 2003).

destroy.[5] Yet, anime critic Daisuke Miyao notes the darker side of Atom: "As the Japanese title for the series, 'Mighty atom,' suggests, the superhero 'son of science' Atomu is at once a hero and a threat. Because he draws his powers from nuclear energy, any breakdown on his part could mean grave danger."[6] In order to turn this technology into a life-saving power, humanity, here represented by a precocious Atom, must learn to wisely manage the tremendous power it has discovered.

In a seemingly unlikely scenario for a children's television series, Atom lives in relation to the show's human subjects as one who has been abandoned. Beginning with the show's first episode, the robot-boy finds it impossible to live up to the expectations of the human subjects who create and manage him: his desire to do good cannot wholly overcome a world predicated upon the instrumentalization of his power. Much of the television series' drama centers on his ambivalent position as a child learning the ethical principles that govern human interaction on the one hand, and a weapon that could potentially destroy the world on the other. Although Atom has the external and affective structure of a child, he is a machine. The series thus positions the robot somewhere between human and object and forces us to consider the difference. In what amounts to a narrative *mise en scène* that establishes one of the central on going plot devices for the entire series, Atom is built in the exact likeness of another child, one who dies in the first minutes of the series' inaugural episode. This death that serves as the show's founding,

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[5]In order to emphasize the connection between the anime television series and the atomic age, this chapter employs a literal translation of the main character's Japanese name, *Atomu* which means Atom. However, when referring to the series as a whole, I will use the English translation *Astro Boy*.

[6] Daisuke Miyao, "Before Anime: Animation and the Pure Film Movement in Pre-war Japan," *Japan Forum* 14 No. 2 (2002): 192.

and the subsequent machinic doubling of identity, haunts the television series and offers profound insight into the possibilities and challenges facing the construction of the human subject in the nuclear age.

In this chapter I argue that despite its utopic longings, *Astro Boy* re-enacts the violence of the nuclear age and exposes the sacrificial logic of the social order. This order shatters the boundary between subject and object in order to objectify subjects, harness the potential power of objects, and therefore better manage a globalizing regime based on alienation and terror. However, in Atom's unstable movement between human and machine other possible forms of being emerge. Atom's globally televised series contained and thus masked emerging fears of a totalizing nuclear regime; at the same time potential critiques and ways of imagining the world were born along with Atom in the emergence of anime.[7] Taking a cue from Atom's machinic doubling of another boy, the chapter engages the literary and philosophic concept of *mimesis*. Mimesis classically refers to the act of imitation and has long been used to describe the relationship between art and life: the power of aesthetic representation lies in its ability to reflect (or imitate) the conditions of human existence. As such, mimesis is the generative source of artistic creativity. Yet in an age in which destruction has "gone global," and humankind's greatest technological achievements are measured by kill-power, we must confront the possibility that artistic reproduction of the conditions of human life is now marked by

[7] The episodes and scenes discussed in this chapter can be found in both the Japanese and American versions. Although the overarching argument is the same, I provide more detail about the ways the two versions differ in, Alicia Gibson, "Atomic Pop! Astro Boy, the Dialectic of Enlightenment, and Machinic Modes of Being," *Cultural Critique* 80 (Winter 2012).

destructive, rather than productive forces. The question then arises, what becomes possible from out of this rubble?

LONG LIVE ATOM

When Tezuka created Atom and the *Astro Boy* manga series in 1951 he set the "birth" of Atom into the future: April 7, 2003.[8] When that future arrived in Japan, children and adults joined together to participate in birthday celebrations that held the status of an unofficial national holiday, complete with a year-long countdown promoted by the second-most circulated national newspaper *Asahi*. The festivities were organized and paid for by a collection of eighty corporations collectively known as the "Atom Dream Project," the ideological content of which involved the inculcation of Atom's spirit of sacrifice and personal responsibility for global peace and security "in the minds of all children and adults in charge of our world."[9] The dream also included a projected $5 billion in direct and indirect revenues over three years from the sale of *Astro Boy* manga, anime, and related merchandise.[10]

According to Frederik Schodt, a longtime fan of manga / anime and one of the first to chronicle the medium's rise as a global phenomenon, the birthday celebrations

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[8] According to Frederik Schodt, Tezuka had a difficult time choosing a birth year for Atom. He originally set the date in 2003, changed it to 2013, and then eventually returned to the year 2003. Schodt, *The Astro Boy Essays*: 5. For an historical account of *Astro Boy* as well as representations of robots in Japan before *Astro Boy* see Kenji Ito, "Robots, A-Bombs, and War: Cultural Meanings of Science and Technology in Japan Around World War II," in *Filling the Nuclear Hole: Art and Popular Culture Respond to the Bomb*, ed. Robert Jacobs (Latham: Lexington Books, 2010).

[9] Schodt, *The Astro Boy Essays*: 7.

[10] Mark Steinberg, "Sections and Trans-Series Movement: Astroboy and the Emergene of Anime," *Animation* 1 (2006): 190. , points out that from its inception *Astro Boy* created a new form of mixed media that has served as a model for the emergence of anime as a global phenomenon. He argues that *Astro Boy* circulates as a particularly successful commodity through its serialization and merchandizing power, what he refers to as a "character-based system of commodity serialization."

peaked a day before the official "birth" date at Robodex 2003 held by the Japan Robot Convention. As tribute to both the series and its author, organizers seized upon a re-enactment of Atom's vivification as the centerpiece of the festivities. For days before the main event, an oversized Atom lay prone on a laboratory table, attended by non-humanoid robots, while participants looked on.[11] The father of the Atom series, Tezuka, died several years earlier in 1989; his son—Macoto Tezuka—stood in his place. Macoto Tezuka was not cast in the role of his own father, but rather as that of Tenma, the driven and mad scientist from the *Astro Boy* series who "fathers" Atom. Macoto Tezuka went to some lengths to alter his appearance so as to better imitate the origination scene:

> Then Macoto, the forty-two-year-old son of the late Osamu Tezuka, made a grand appearance dressed in an oversized cream-colored impresario suit, his hair dyed a dramatic blond. Playing the part of a postmodern Dr. Tenma at the birth of his creation, he stood by the prone and still lifeless robot, while more smoke billowed and dramatic announcements boomed over the cavernous hall's loudspeakers. Atom then opened his eyes, slowly sat up, and extended his hand, whereupon Macoto grasped it as if to welcome the little android to the real world.[12]

This scene captures the sense of play and appreciation of the absurd that make *anime* a favored medium in Japan. Combined with the nationwide celebrations of the birthday, the

[11] Atom "lay in repose" for his re-birth, though this calls to mind televised and heavily attended official viewings of important bodies that are "lying in state" – an image that will become important later in the chapter when we turn to the animated "birth" scene. Schodt, *The Astro Boy Essays*: 10.
[12] Ibid., 11-12.

scene also captures the degree to which Atom's emergence and longevity as a popular icon represent larger historico-cultural forces.

The utopic promise of the celebrations mirrored Tezuka's initial aspirations for the robot-boy, though these aspirations were from the first stained with catastrophe and violence. The first incarnation of the series ran from April 1951 through March 1952 and was titled *Atomu Taishi*, or "Ambassador Atom." In the original narrative another planet identical to Earth is blown up and its surviving inhabitants search the cosmos for a suitable replacement. They discover Earth and decide to emigrate to the planet. The members of the alien diaspora encounter additional difficulty when the Japanese Minister of Science, Dr. Tenma, loses his son in a traffic accident and eventually also loses his grip on reality. He builds Atom to act as a robotic surrogate for his dead child. The creation of a replacement son does not relieve his grief; it only serves to aggravate his rage. Tenma turns against the aliens and recruits a band of secret police that work to eliminate their inter-planetary neighbors. This in turn sets the stage for a battle between aliens and humans. The aliens eventually threaten to destroy earth with hydrogen bombs. Atom rebukes his father's homicidal madness in the name of justice and saves the world by serving as a neutral third party and peace emissary. Peace is achieved only when Atom beheads himself in order to prove the sincerity of his mission.

Despite serious flaws with the series (convoluted plot, too many characters, too much text, slow pacing, cramped graphics), *Ambassador Atom* succeeded as an outlet for atomic anxieties, provided by the displacement of atomic war into the future and in an alternate fantastical world serving as a kind of psychic cushion. Literary critic Frederic

Jameson describes this method, common to science fiction, as a particular historical mode that fixes the present as the already past of some time to come. According to Jameson, science fiction is a form of representation that does not so much train its audience for the dizzying shocks and displacements of technological change as create an elaborate distraction that enables its audience to apprehend the present. The fantastical elements and the projection into the future are necessary because of the empty alienation of the present, a reality against which modern subjects have created defense mechanisms that shield them, just as it makes them blind to the nature of that reality.[13] Placing *Astro Boy* within this description of the narrative logic of science fiction, the various incarnations of the *Astro Boy* story can be seen as a "process of distraction and displacement, repression and lateral perceptual renewal" that transforms the historical experience of the atomic bombings into an image that can be apprehended without flinching.[14]

Astro Boy is ostensibly set in a future when the utopic promise of atomic power has come to fruition and is seamlessly integrated into the social structure—the question of atomic power is all but invisible save for the title of the story. However, the narrative must be read as a historical document of the 1950s, a world where atomic technologies are anything but commonplace. The historical moment out of which Tezuka created the series reverberated with the political aftermath of nuclear power. Indeed, before Tezuka

[13] The nature of this emptiness and alienation will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.
[14] Frederic Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia: or, Can We Imagine the Future," *Science Fiction Studies* 9 No. 2 (1982). A similar point is made by Theodor W. Adorno: "Specifically, artworks are like picture puzzles in that what they hide – like Poe's letter – is visible and is, by being visible, hidden." At Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 121.

had a story he had a word: *atom*. Not only had the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki been destroyed a mere six years earlier, the Americans were also actively building their nuclear program and testing their advancing weaponry on the Marshall Islands to the southwest of Japan. At the same time, President Eisenhower sought a way to mask the escalation of nuclear weapons technology, announcing in his 1953 "Atoms for Peace" speech at the United Nations that the United States would devote "its entire heart and mind to find the way by which the miraculous inventiveness of man shall not be dedicated to his death, but consecrated to his life."[15] Most shockingly, the United States government sought not only to make Japan the target of Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace program, but specifically targeted Hiroshima as the ground zero for their propaganda efforts.[16] Yet as Peter Kuznick points out, the United States simultaneously pursued an exponential intensification of its nuclear weapons program. The American nuclear arsenal grew from approximately 1,000 nuclear warheads at the start of the Eisenhower presidency to nearly 22,000 by the time he left office. Tezuka found himself in the crucible of this new nuclear order, in an interview with Schodt he remarked that "everyone was talking about *atoms* then." [17] He clearly yearned to transform the nuclear fears of the day into an image of utopic stability in ways remarkably similar to the

[15] Cited in Yuki Tanaka and Peter Kuznick, "Japan, the Atomic Bomb, and the "Peaceful Uses of Atomic Power"," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 9 No. 18: 1 (2011). Since the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima on March 11, 2011 there has been an intensification of interest in the history of Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace initiative and the embrace of nuclear energy in Japan. For a discussion of Japan's turn towards nuclear energy in light of the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant see Gavan McCormack, "Hubris Punished: Japan as Nuclear State," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 9, 16:3 (2011),. For a brief history of Japan's elite group of nuclear decision-makers called the "nuclear village," see Eric Johnston, "Key players got nuclear ball rolling," *The Japan Times Online*, July 16, 2011.

[16] For a historical account of the Atoms for Peace initiative, particularly as it unfolded in Hiroshima, see Ran Zwigenberg, "The Coming of a Second Sun: The 1956 Atoms for Peace Exhibit in Hiroshima and Japan's Embrace of Nuclear Power," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 10, 6:1 (2012).

[17] Schodt, *The Astro Boy Essays*: 21. Emphasis added.

rhetoric of Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace speech. His earliest story idea came in the form of an imaginary continent, an "Atom continent" where atomic power was used for peaceful purposes rather than for war. This narrative displacement into the future and onto an imagined space ironically enables its audience to view its historical and ontological trajectory through the masking of that reality in fantasy, play, and visual desire.

A GENERATION FINDS ITS HERO

Contained within a small boy's frame, Atom—due to a complex integration of atomic, mechanical, electrical, and (in later releases of the show) digital technologies—flies with supersonic speed and battles forces of destruction with strength the equivalent of a "100,000 horsepower" atomic reactor. In the early 1950s when Osamu Tezuka first created *Astro Boy*, the robot's famed "100,000 horsepower" was meant to represent an order of power at the limit of human imagination. Yet, given the actual power unleashed in an atomic explosion, and its escalating potential power in the Cold War—measured by reference to the power of the sun itself—Atom's "100,000 horsepower" reactor was already oddly obsolete at the time of his inception. This slippage highlights the difficulty audiences had integrating the terrifying reality of a world gone nuclear with previous conceptions of technological power. The forces unleashed in the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki exponentially outpaced even the projections of the scientists who created the bomb, who after witnessing a detonation described the new form of energy as comparable to "a thousand suns."[18] A Japanese doctor who witnessed the bombing from a

[18] Robert Jungk, *Brighter Than A Thousand Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists* (Ft. Washington, PA: Harvest Books, 1970). In his examination of the days and weeks immediately following

small village on the outskirts of Hiroshima summed up his experiences with the simple title, "The Day Hiroshima Disappeared."[19] This unimaginable magnitude was simply too frightening to confront directly, though equally impossible to ignore. However, by transposing the power of the atomic bomb into a "100,000 horsepower" atomic reactor, Atom provides a more manageable reference for those whose utopic dreams of nuclear power might just as easily turn to nightmare.

In keeping with this more benign reference for atomic power, one wrapped in a cuddly package, *Astro Boy* also offers a positive example of atomic power's possible uses. Although technically a weaponized robot (powered by nuclear fission, he has laser beams and machine guns that shoot out of his backside), Atom is nonetheless employed not to destroy the world's cities, but to save them. As he awkwardly discovers his new capabilities, he represents not only atomic technologies, but also humanity itself learning to use this new power to beneficial purpose. Just as a troubled humanity struggles with a new form of power and its attendant ethical dilemmas, Atom's control over his capacities is not complete: he has the strength of a superhuman, but only a boy's control of his awesome powers. In the *manga* and *anime* series, his foibles largely play to comic effect. When asked to clean the robot tigers until they shine, his intensive efforts scrub off even their stripes, leaving them gleaming white; when left alone in an airship cabin, he accidentally rips pipes from the walls, breaks the legs off chairs, and generally

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the bombing, cultural historian Paul Boyer includes the following commentary by Edward R. Murrow, then affiliated with CBS radio broadcasting: "Seldom, if ever, has a war ended leaving the victors with such a sense of uncertainty and fear, with such a realization that the future is obscure and that survival is not assured." Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985): 7.

[19] Shintaro Hida, "The Day Hiroshima Disappeared," in *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controvery Series*, ed. Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz (Stony Creek: Pamphleteer's Press, 1998).

embarrasses his handler's attempts to integrate him into "normal" society. Thus the boy's overwhelming strength can become a liability exposing his imperfection. Behind the comedy lies a serious message: we must learn to control the atomic power we have awakened. [20]

Astro Boy's utopic narrative of a peaceful atomic future—one that translated the overwhelming fears of nuclear disaster born from the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki into a children's drama—entered the imagination of the first "atomic citizens" as they sat in front of their family television sets. Japanese children born after the world's first use of nuclear power embraced Atom with fervor, although it wasn't until Tezuka sought to humanize Atom by providing a familiar family structure that the character began its journey to iconic status.[21] The introduction of Atom's family served to "normalize" the robot-boy, but it also turned the traditional structure on its head. (The children were particularly drawn to the storyline that details the creation of Atom's robot parents *after* his own birth and abandonment by his creator Dr. Tenma.)

Orphaned and shunned by the children at school, Atom begins to notice that earth creatures have families. In the manga version he sees a group of ducklings swimming with their "parents." In an early animated version, Atom looks on at a mare and her colt from the other side of a chain link fence. The scene is drawn with the audience to Atom's back as he looks on longingly, grasping the fence with his life-like robot hands. From this perspective it is not the horses who are fenced in, but rather Atom who is imprisoned by

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[20] According to Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*: 7., Murrow's colleague at NBC, H.V. Kaltenborn encouraged his listeners to "'think of the mass murder which will come with WWIII.' Adding a few days later, 'We are like *children* playing with a concentrated instrument of death whose destructive potential our little minds cannot grasp'" (italics added).
[21] Schodt, *The Astro Boy Essays*: 21, 40.

his superpowers in a world where he alone is master (with unequaled powers), and at the same time held separate because his is a world that cannot easily tolerate difference.

The show attempts to resolve the problem of Atom's alienation and loneliness through the stabilizing structure of the nuclear family.[22] The family home is often considered the interior social space that provides relative security in contrast to the external world where the body is subject to unknown dangers. However, the experiences of World War II, particularly the demolition of all space from the force of the atomic bombs and the subsequent radioactive fallout, undermined that presumed safety. In the bombs' blast the divide between private and public, domestic and civic, as well as the body's interior and exterior collapsed in frightening ways.[23] Accordingly, the creation of a recognizable family unit was consciously meant to "humanize" Atom; it also worked as a way of returning the fragments of domestic life back to their familiar locations. Yet these fissures remain visible in Atom's artificial genealogy: his parents are technically younger than he is, and not quite as bright, either. In a version of the story published in the newspaper *Sankei*, Atom starts school as a fifth grader while his parents must begin in the first grade.

Although the show eventually brings domestic stability to Atom's everyday world through the manufacture of a nuclear family, his journey to a "normal" childhood is a perilous one. In early black and white Japanese versions of the show Atom's longings

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[22] For a more in depth discussion of the nuclear family and the atomic age see the following chapter of this dissertation.

[23] In its August 20, 1945 issue *Life* reported to its readers that Nagasaki had been "disemboweled." Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*: 8. Here we see clearly the dissolution of inside and outside, as well as the dissolution between the space of the individual human body (private space) and the space of the masses (public space) in the metaphorical move from individual body to metropolitan area. For more on the way the atomic bomb *un*made its victims both literally and semiotically, and thus opened the world for a new order, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

take the form of nightmare as he dreams of a surreal landscape in which he searches for his parents. In later versions (black and white re-issue in the US and color revisions in the 1980's) Atom must first save his parents before they can be delivered to him. No sooner do his handlers complete his parents' basic robotic components than their still lifeless bodies are kidnapped in order to make them into slaves.[24] When Atom comes to the rescue he is met with mockery: the villain laughs at the idea of a robot with parents.

Both versions of Atom's "homecoming" express the fears and longings of those who have been robbed of childhood. Atom has been introduced to the harsh realities of the world too young and is left with a sense of profound alienation; young audiences connected to his desire for a reprieve from adult responsibilities. Atom thus emerges as a hero for a new generation coming of age in a postlapsarian, nuclear world. This is a world inaugurated by technologies rendering their parents' childhood stories antiquated, a world they suspect their parents may not be adequately prepared for. In the anxious domestic space of the family living room, the *Astro Boy* series acknowledged the ways in which the world had forever changed, while masking that world in the cloak of the future. The reversed genealogy of Atom's nuclear family reflected the realities of the present historical moment, symbolically as well as literally; whereas the fantastical nature of Atom's superpowers shielded the children from fully integrating the devastating impact

[24] This of course parallels the history of the concept of the robot, a term introduced in the play *R.U.R.* (1920), which means "drudgery" or "hard work" in Czech and originally referred to the period of time that an indentured servant had to work for his master. *R.U.R.* is set at a robot-factory powered by robot-labor. The androids are so life-like that an outsider who has come to liberate them takes them as human. They remain nothing other than machines for the engineers who create them. Karel Capek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, trans. Claudia Novack-Jones (London: Penguin, 2004).

of that knowledge. Rather than rejecting the terms of their abandonment, children were induced to "soldier on with hope and courage."

TURNING ON THE TUBE: IN SEARCH OF SECURITY

By entering into the everyday through the medium of television, *Astro Boy* not only provided a historical form whereby the present could be seen and deferred, it also participated in the domestication of nuclear power. Roger Silverstone argues that in order to understand the way in which television participates in cultural and subject formation we must analyze the medium's relationship to psychological development, the domestic sphere, and global cultural processes. This tripartite relationship is essentially world defining and finds its sphere of operation in the everyday. Television's total absorption in the everyday makes the medium all the more powerful because of its slippery banality. Relying on the work of psychoanalysts Anthony Giddens and D.W. Winnicott, Silverstone argues that television helps re-establish viewers' sense of trust in a world now organized by "relational networks and mechanisms whose workings we cannot see or feel as part of our own physically located patterns of daily life."[25] Through the consistent repetition in television programming, the medium re-produces yearly, weekly, and daily cycles to match the pace of modern life. This technological routine teaches us in our private domestic spheres to "trust from a distance," a social discipline all the more important in a world marked by "a threat that is increasingly derived not from natural hazard but from socially created risk."[26] Television functions as an object that both

[25] Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1994): 6.
[26] Ibid., 7.

reproduces anxiety in the repetition of images of destruction and continual commentary on catastrophe, as well as provides a secure framework for domesticating that overwhelming fear of a world that is beyond individual control.

In Raymond Williams' terms, television functions as a "powerful form of social integration and control" that is often "politically manipulative,"[27] the logic behind which is reminiscent of Silverstone's argument that television both reproduces and domesticates anxiety. Williams, arguing that broadcasting technology creates a means of mass communication delivered through individual television sets, points out that the structure of this technology is contradictory: a centralized form of transmission to masses of people that removes the communal in the act of communication.[28] The massafication of communication technologies corresponds to a massafication of subjectivity as individual subjects (viewers) become statistical objects[29] in a centralized and globalized system too abstract for the average audience member to fully comprehend. Significantly, Williams uses the language of nuclear war to describe the effect this technology has on broadcasting subjects: audiences find themselves "living in the *fall-out area* of processes determined beyond them."[30] His reference to radioactive effects highlights the relationship between these two seemingly different forms of technology. There is

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[27] Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975): 23-24.

[28] Williams (ibid., 26.) describes this as "…a kind of technology for which no satisfactory name has yet been found: that which served an at once mobile and home-centered way of living: *mobile privatization*." For an in-depth analysis of this concept, Stephen Groening, "Connected Isolation: Screens, Mobility and Globalized Media Culture" (Dissertation, University of Minnesota, December 2008)., traces the emergence of mobile privatization not only as a form of technology, but as an emerging way of life, one that alienates its subjects from the lives of others as it integrates them into increasingly global networks.

[29] Otherwise known as *targets*—for television technologies we refer to target audiences; in the calculus of nuclear war the human dimension is even further erased, we return to the generalized term (target).

[30] Williams, *Television*: 26.

something overwhelming about the process whereby a viewer participates in a mass communication that is largely one-sided. Through the individual set, the viewer functions only as receiver, or target, of transmissions that come from "somewhere," or rather seemingly out of thin air from "nowhere,"[31] producing an anxious state that is then managed through its privatization and domestication in the individual television receiver.

In its televised format, *Astro Boy* serves as a particularly crucial site for managing the fear of a world gone nuclear. By plugging into the tube at the regularly scheduled hour, audiences find relief from their atomic anxieties paradoxically by reliving them—both in content and in form. As Silverstone points out, television is replete with scenes of catastrophe in broadcasting narratives as well as in the ever-present threat of breaking news. This is certainly true of *Astro Boy*, which highlights in every episode the way technology becomes deadly in any number of ways: greed, ignorance, or simple accident. Moreover, television's technical production reflects the global systems and networks of the nuclear age, which hold the modern world together and threaten to make any collapse total. Television, like the threat of nuclear war, is "constantly present. It is eternal."[32] Yet, in the consumption of *Astro Boy*, audiences relive their fears with a difference. There are no scenes of nuclear devastation: each episode presents a technological catastrophe that must be resolved, this time with the aid of Atom's atomic-powered strength. Thus, the risk posed by the use of nuclear weaponry is transformed via the medium of television

[31] As discussed in Chapter 1 a great deal of the anxiety about the fall-out area comes from the sudden realization that one's environment is radically out of control, a realization that undoes the structure of reality itself. Death comes in the form of a bomb that came unexpectedly from "out of nowhere" and radioactive threat remains invisibly "in the air" itself.

[32] Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*: 15. While Silverstone does not mention atomic technologies Williams, *Television*: 9, 13., groups "the steam engine, the automobile, television, and the atomic bomb" together as new technologies that challenge our conceptions of cause and effect.

into security. *Astro Boy* is, in Silverstone's words, the transitional object that bridges the gap between atomic nightmare and atomic utopia.

THE DEATH OF TOBIO: THE BIRTH OF ATOM

For his theorization of the transitional object, Silverstone relies on Winnicott's description of an infant's first separation from the mother, which takes place through an emotional and cognitive attachment to an object. Transitional objects mark the beginning of reality testing, as well as the infant's first encounters with fantasy and play. It is the transitional object's role as structural metaphor that Silverstone finds productive in his analysis of television. Television functions as a transitional object in that it frames a "dialectic of dependence and freedom, trust and insecurity, creativity and sterility, potency and omnipotence."[33] In this way, Atom functions as a transitional object of the atomic age. As aesthetic device, the robot serves as a figure in which the mimetic impulse found in artistic practices and technological advancement converge. The robot is a copy of the human; one that is not subject to the same laws of mortality and one that allows the human to project the fantasy of eternal life. This fantastical construction is also the dream of the technological supplement of divine or natural law: from the construction of the machinic form of life, human beings go beyond mere reproduction of the species and become creators in their own right. Yet from his very inception, Atom functions as all transitional objects do, as a contradiction. He also illustrates the ways in which the mimetic impulse that characterizes the nuclear age is fraught with disillusionment.

[33] Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*: 12.

According to the storyline presented in the first episode, "The Birth of Astro Boy," the robot-boy is meant to mask the death of another. In the episode's opening scenes the audience confronts the "original," Dr. Tenma's son Tobio who dies in a violent accident. The child's death and subsequent moments of remorse quickly transform into a "birthing" scene as Dr. Tenma decides to tempt fate and replicate the divine mysteries of life and death by creating an exact replica of his dead child, this time in the form of a new robotic weapon—Atom. Shadowed in darkness and secrecy, a distraught Dr. Tenma pushes forward with his scientific experiment, which is laid out in its monstrous steel shell on an operating table.

Figure 3

Figure 4

Here the line between creation and destruction blurs. Tenma brings life to his new "son." And yet the scene also takes on the tone of funeral rite. Above all, the body lying on the table symbolizes a grieving father's inability to face the absolute law of mortality; he cannot say goodbye.

What are we to make of this melancholic beginning of a children's cartoon series? Within the very first minutes of the show as we are introduced to the larger story-arc and foundational narrative, we encounter the death of a child and the birth of a machine. The

life of the robot-boy is forever tied to the life of this other child, the "real" boy. As an inert and lifeless machinic carcass awaiting Tenma's life-giving touch, Atom must first re-enact the boy's death before coming to life—the father acknowledges as much in the silent gesture made in the darkness of the laboratory. While the family dog "Jump" finally accepts him as the young master returned from the grave, his "father" does not. Atom faithfully studies the relationship between words and things, and earnestly embarks upon the project of becoming Tobio. However, he is forever trapped within the steel cage of Tenma's making: he cannot grow. With every passing year his now too-faithful replication of the "original" son as he *was* serves only to remind Tenma of his ultimate failure. Moreover, his internal nuclear reactor makes him much more powerful than the human Tobio—or for that matter, more powerful than the father/creator Dr. Tenma—could ever be. It is also important to place this scene within its postwar historical context. The fantasy of bringing the dead to life enacted in *Astro Boy* exists in contradiction to the grief left behind by the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki: reanimation of the dead exists only in dreams.

THE FATAL BLOW: IMITATING THE POWER OF THE UNIVERSE

The confused mixture of emotion Atom encounters in the humans among whom he lives reenacts the ancient anxiety over "original" and "copy," "life" and "art," "master" and "disciple" first expressed by Plato in the *Republic*. Plato's suspicion of mimesis stems from a fear of the rhetorical power embedded in art practices that not only reflect the world "as it is," but also shape that very world. Mimetic practices—the act of mimicking,

imitating, copying, aping, and parody—create an impassable rupture for any concept of truth as an absolute, and unsettle the corresponding insistence on the perfect correlation between reality as a concrete material world and as a set of ideas about that world. If the purely fictional does not act passively as mirror but also as a crucible for the new, there emerges a radical opening to possibility that brings with it also a terror. This terror is not unlike that encountered at the dawn of the atomic age in the images of destruction from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in Truman's claim of mastery over "the basic power of the universe."[34] In this moment the possibility of radical potential meets that of radical end.

What Silverstone identified as an increasingly threatening modern world, a world of terror dialectically reflected in the family television, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer described in philosophical terms as the dialectic of enlightenment: technological mastery over nature—what we call progress—gives way to destruction in the increasing rationalization and abstraction of all that is. When all things (including human subjects) are assigned a numerical equivalence or treated as items of exchange in the name of utility and efficiency, then their elimination can become a mere keystroke or final step in an equation. Writing during the Jewish genocide in Europe and a war that threatened to turn the entire world against itself, they wrote of a lingering anxiety prevalent in everyday attitudes:

> The noonday panic fear in which nature suddenly appeared to humans as an all-encompassing power has found its counterpart in the panic which is ready to break out at any moment today: human beings expect the world,

[34] Harry S. Truman, "Announcement of an Atomic Bombing on Hiroshima," in *Public Papers of the Presidents, Harry S. Truman* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, 1946): 197.

> which is without issue, to be set ablaze by a universal power which they themselves are and over which they are powerless.[35]

The nuclear bomb, with its ability to replicate the fiery forces of the sun, exemplifies the kind of universal power referenced by Adorno and Horkheimer. Exposure to this new form of terror springs not simply from a desire to destroy, but from a desire to know, to create, and to exert control over the conditions of human existence. The bomb and the achievement of nuclear fission represent the highest technological advancement and express this complicated desire—no longer to be at the mercy of natural forces, but to control the productive as well as destructive capacity of the universe.

Artistic representation cannot escape the contradictions of the atomic age. While technology and art are both ways of engaging the world in order to create new conditions for existence, it is in mimesis that art finds its power. As Adorno explains in *Aesthetic Theory*, art—in its reflection of the concrete experiences of any given historical moment—claims relevance. The advent of the nuclear, however, represents a fatal implosion of scales of power, the point at which the twinned desire to create as well as to control turns back upon itself. Technology, which is meant to secure the meaning of human life, becomes instead the latest weapon of mass destruction, the easiest means to an end and the ultimate threat for the continuation of that life. Mimetic representation and its televised images in the wake of the atomic bomb cannot help but express this anxiety of a world at once full of technological promise but shadowed by this universalizing terror.

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[35] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelen Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002): 29.

The Robot: Between Subject and Object

Atom pays a price for his inability to seamlessly integrate his atomic power with his life among humans. Even though advanced robotic technology enables him to look nearly identical to the child he is modeled after, he is in the end an artifact of the atomic age, one that touches upon a lingering anxiety that his human counterparts can only express alternately with awe and disgust. As artifact Atom is both human and non-human. Most obviously, he appears at surface-level as a human. He is thus subject to human normative rules. However, as machine he is only a tool with no right to his own existence; he is, rather, the means through which the human world creates its nuclear future. Thus Atom's life is structured by two contradictory requirements: he is expected to live among humans, according to their rules, and he is ruled by the categorical imperative to save his human companions at any necessary cost to his own structural integrity.

Episode 3, "Save the Classmate," offers an early example of Atom's problematic status. After rescuing a group of school bullies from certain death in a roller-coaster accident, nearly fatally shorting his own circuitry in the process, the story ends with Atom physically separated from the people he has served, looking on as the boys are reunited with their parents. While some of the more friendly children accept Atom's sacrifice and reconcile themselves to his presence in their class, the parents of the saved classmates are the very ones who want to see Atom removed from class early in the episode. These parents, who are also the school's benefactors, do not acknowledge Atom's efforts or notice the injuries he receives while endangering himself on their

behalf. In their minds, his sacrifice is expected as a robot created to serve their human ends.[36]

Martin Heidegger, in "The Question Concerning Technology," argued that the future of humanity rests on an ability to understand our relationship to modern technology. He put the dilemma in simple terms: atomic energy "can be released either for destruction or for peaceful use."[37] While Heidegger refused to be wooed by the fairy tale ideology of atomic utopia, he acknowledged that since technology is essential to any definition of what it means to be human, as such it is much more than merely "a means and a human activity."[38] Although the use of technology is a defining characteristic of the human, in the events of the twentieth century Heidegger identified a shift in the way technology is utilized. Not only is technology a way of taking advantage of objects to the benefit of man, technology has become a way of "unlocking" the universal energy stored inside objects. Objects are thus not things belonging to this world encountered and valued according to their use, but representations of human virtual power. Just as a pirate seeks his secret treasure seeing only the wealth it will be converted into at some later date, human beings create a relationship with objects, and the world itself, as mere means for human enrichment. The world and everything found therein only exists as something to be mined, they are resources to plunder. When this happens the things of this world are no longer *objects*, a category of being that for Heidegger implies an autonomous

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[36] In the Japanese version, his sacrificial nature is all the more underscored: in the series' opening episode Atom must save the circus owner who has enslaved him. Atom only barely manages to survive. He is granted his freedom for his courage, although his value remains clearly tied to his ability as a technological object to serve humans.

[37] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977): 15.

[38] Ibid., 5.

existence and an otherness outside the confines of human experience. Objects become, rather, that which properly belongs always at the ready for human control, what Heidegger calls *standing-reserve*:

> The danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself.[39]

Each object, turned standing-reserve—now a disposable representation of universal power—serves as a mirror for human achievement. By forcing an image of the human on all that is encountered, a kind of coerced existential mimicry becomes the ruling logic of modernity. Objects do not have value as objects but as potential forms of human power.[40]

Herein lies the melancholy of *Astro Boy.* Atom is an object turned standing-reserve; his value as a being in this world is measured by how well he fulfills his function

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[39] Ibid., 27.

[40] Recall here the discussion from Chapter 1 in which the dead and dying *hibakusha* bodies are marshaled as meaning-producing objects that indicate the overwhelming global reach of American military power and form the foundation of a new historical era.

and by how well this functioning resembles or mimics the universal power that humanity seeks to master. Particularly striking is that the series goes to great lengths to create an affective relationship between the viewer and the robot. As Atom silently casts his glance downward, head bowed with every scene of abandonment, we are induced to sympathize with him and shed the tears that he cannot. In his innocent curiosity and delight in the people and things he encounters, Atom embodies a form of subjectivity preserved only in the early years of childhood. Tenma's rage can be understood in this light, for Atom's inability to grow is also an inability to "grow up." This failing acts as a kind of refusal of the ruling social order, and thus serves as an implicit critique of a human world defined by increasing levels of mastery. In Atom's imperfect mimicry of the human, and in our ready identification with his constant exclusion, we better understand Heidegger's argument that the transformation into standing-reserve is not limited to objects. In a world that exists only for command and control, a world in which utility is the highest form of measure, the human being also becomes standing-reserve. Every instance of the human is already marshaled for that same ultimate purpose awaiting the life of all things in the production and reproduction of power.

SACRIFICE AND MIMESIS: RIVALRY AND REASON

From its inception, *Astro Boy* reflects the tragic conditions of the nuclear age. Each episode presents the possibility of catastrophe but ends in minor triumph: despite his abandonment and exclusion, Atom proves his worth by sacrificing his own body for the humans who refuse to acknowledge his existence as something other than their inferior

copy or their machine. Yet, the larger crisis remains. One is left with a sense of profound sadness as Atom looks on at a world to which he does not belong. Rey Chow's "Sacrifice, Mimesis, and Theorizing of Victimhood (A Speculative Essay)" offers a conception of mimesis that may help us understand the seemingly strange confluence of living and dying, inclusion and abandonment, the human and the non-human in *Astro Boy*:

> …mimesis, one may argue, is the sign that *remains*—in the form of a literal being-there, an externalization and an exhibition—in the aftermath of a process of sacrifice, whether or not the sacrifice has been witnessed or apprehended as such. Mimesis is the (visibly or sensorially available) substitute that follows, that bears the effects of (an invisible or illegible) sacrifice.
>
> Reformulated in this manner, sacrifice and mimesis would seem a double epistemic passage underlying all acts of signification, a passage that tends to become acute in contexts of dominance and subordination, in which loss and gain are existentially palpable phenomena impinging on individual and group identity formation.[41]

According to the conventional definition of mimesis as aesthetic representation of reality, mimesis is essentially productive and has been present in human civilization since its most ancient beginnings. Chow provocatively explores in the cited passage a further complication to this understanding: sacrifice might in fact be the destructive analog to the

[41] Rey Chow, "Sacrifice, Mimesis, and the Theorizing of Victimhood (A Speculative Essay)," *Representations* 94 (Spring 2006): 137.

creative faculty. Chow refers to her essay as speculative because in it she takes up the French literary critic and philosopher René Girard's theorization of mimesis, which—she explains—has largely been out of favor. His work is controversial because while it offers insight into structures of meaning production, it also threatens to sanction violence and victimization as essential to the act of creation itself. For Girard, rivalry is the dominant drive behind all that we desire. We imitate or mimic our rivals in pursuit of what we perceive to be their objects of desire:

> This all-pervasive, mediating presence of mimesis means that to desire is, behaviorally speaking, to *compete* with a rival in a vicious circle of violence, in which the antagonists become increasingly indistinguishable from each other—become what Girard calls "monstrous doubles." The only way in which the circle can be broken is through sacrifice—that is, through an artificial process in which someone who is, like everyone else, a member of the community becomes chosen as a scapegoat—and expelled as a surrogate victim.[42]

Girard's work makes mimesis and acts of mimicry originary rather than compensatory or displacing.[43]

Chow's understanding of Girard's work is relevant to this discussion because it offers a way of understanding *Astro Boy* as a cultural object of the Cold War, a time in which the rivalry between the United States and the USSR structured the geo-political boundaries as well as the ideological content for much of the globe. The nuclear logic of

[42] Ibid., 143.
[43] This aspect of Girard's argument is important for Chow because it has relevance for her work on feminist and post-colonial forms of mimicry.

sacrifice and rivalry works upon the political landscape, but also the very act of signification itself. The robot, Atom, thus performs as the exemplary literary representation of the sacrificial victim in the atomic age. He is an almost perfect copy of the human—one who lives amongst "us"—that also serves as the coveted object of desire (atomic power as such). This desire is here displaced in the science fiction fantasy of a figure that can save us despite our own misuse and abuse of technological power. However, we need not essentialize the mimesis/sacrifice structure as inherent to meaning production. Indeed, as Chow points out in her speculative discussion, positing violence and victimization as a universal fact of signification may result in a precarious ethical dilemma whereby historical acts of violence are justified as nothing other than ritualized forms of violence, originary in character, unfortunate but perhaps occasionally necessary.

Adorno and Horkheimer's discussion of sacrifice in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in contrast, offers another potential avenue of critique. They suggest that sacrifice was once a way in which humans responded to the violence and fear associated with living according to the capricious dictates of nature. Its modern version does not stop with the singular individual who stands in as a representative for the whole. Sacrificial mimesis now targets entire populations of people who are targeted for an otherness that is largely produced.[44] Otherness was once something worshipped through imitation. Otherness is now something to be destroyed. Adorno and Horkheimer turn to Odysseus as an exemplary figure of the sacrificial logic underlying modernity. According to them, Odysseus is not the last hero of epic myth, but rather the prototype of

[44] For more of Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis about the Jewish genocide and modern sacrificial mimesis, see the discussion of the Nazi extermination of the Jews in their chapter titled "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 137-172.

enlightened man. They characterize the hero as the expression of an already rationalized subject capable of making calculated risks with his own life as bargaining chip. This ability to make calculated risks with one's own life, to cheat the gods (who represent the chaos and caprice of natural world) through cunning, is for them the basis of a society built on sacrifice later revealed as the logic of exchange.

In a fully rationalized world—one in which any one of us is now already a virtual kill number in a calculation of nuclear war and fall out—sacrifice represents the violence we are willing to submit ourselves to in our quest to fully master those forces that belonged to a non-human world. Just as the secret of the atom—what we have long held to be the "building block of the universe" or in Truman's term the "basic power of the universe"—is unlocked and mobilized, so what was a universal power becomes more properly, though no less terrifyingly, human power. Mimesis was in its primitive form a non-violent repetition of nature's violence. However, in a world in which human beings claim themselves masters of the universe and the sphere of the non-human diminishes in its ordering as standing-reserve, mimesis becomes the repetition of *human* violence.

Astro Boy then offers insight into the historic conditions of existence in the atomic world. Written and produced in the decades following Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *Astro Boy*'s episodes mimetically re-enact a sacrificial logic whereby the new world order—announced dramatically with the deployment of the atomic bomb—rises from the ashes of the burning cities. This televised version of sacrifice exploits the medium's ability to construct new rituals for a transformed world. As Silverstone explains, television has the "capacity to mobilize the sacred and to create what anthropologists have called

'communitas;' the shared experience, however fragile, momentary and authentic, of community."[45] In the disruption of meaning opened by the atomic bomb, the serialized and transformed story of atomic power works to produce a narrative that "provide[s] a secure framework for the control and reproduction of the unfamiliar and threatening,"[46] namely, the destruction of entire cities in minutes, and the possibility of world annihilation itself. With every subsequent revision and translation for global audiences, what emerges in the robotic version of the young boy is a nostalgic, static vision of an innocence no longer possible in a world turned nuclear. The darker side of the atomic age is visible most clearly in the death of Tobio, a death that marks the birth of Atom's narrative. Traces of this founding violence haunt the show in every failed attempt to reconcile the utopic possibilities of the age with what we might call a nuclear diegetic demand: the world can only be saved with the sacrifice of the abandoned.

SACRIFICE AND MIMESIS: ALTARITY AND AESTHETIC REPRESENTATION

At this point, we have a very bleak picture of the possibility of mimesis in a nuclear age. Rather than falling prey to an easy celebration of *Astro Boy*'s wild success and global popularity we have pushed at the cheerful image of Atom and discovered the violence and melancholy hidden beneath the surface. Indeed, this dark core is not incidental to the iconic status of the series; it lies at the heart of *Astro Boy*'s power as the first global cultural object of the nuclear age. Without the lingering shadow of Atom's abandonment and sacrifice, the show would be consigned to historical oblivion as nothing more than a

[45] Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*: 21. In Chapter 1 of this dissertation this process is explored through the concepts of liminality, ritual, and apocalypse.
[46] Ibid.

kitschy and childish relic of the Cold War. Yet despite the outmoded narrative and formal qualities of the *Astro Boy* franchise, Atom remains. *Anime* creators, as well as audiences, find in *Astro Boy* inspiration for an emerging world of aesthetic representation—*anime*—that reflects relevant historical conditions. However, it is far from certain that the form is capable of doing something other than confirm the inevitability of a world ruled by the logic of destruction.[47]

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the ancient apprehension about aesthetic representation and the power of mimesis was never essentially a fear of the power to present the world as it is, but rather of the power to both present the world as it is and to alter that image. Anthropologist Michael Taussig, in his study of mimesis, explores the way the concept gestures towards a shifty kind of transformation that happens through the confusion of the real and artifice: "Once the mimetic has sprung into being, a terrifically ambiguous power is established; there is born the power to represent the world, yet that same power is a power to falsify, mask, and pose."[48] In the kaleidoscopic world of mimesis, Taussig argues, it becomes impossible to trace anything like origin and authenticity because the mimed and the miming create an on-going performative circuit of imitation. A space opens up in the confusion; this is the space of alterity. In the introduction to his study of alterity and philosophic thought, Mark C. Taylor points out that to alter means both "'to make otherwise or different in some respect' and 'to become

[47] For example, critics argue that Hayao Miyazaki's films represent attempts at thinking outside reified concepts of gender, affect, and community. See Thomas Lamarre, "From Animation to Anime: Drawing Movements and Moving Drawings," *Japan Forum* 14 No. 2 (2002); and Susan Napier, "Confronting Master Narratives: History as Vision in Miyazaki Hayao's Cinema of De-assurance," *Positions* 9 No. 2 (2002).
[48] Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 43.

otherwise, to undergo some change in character or appearance.'"[49] Alterity is likewise the "the state of being other or different; diversity, otherness." Inspired and frustrated by the confines of this concept, he finds a close association between the words "alter" and "altar." An altar, as he explains, exists as that place where sacrificial offerings are made, ceremonies are performed, and transformation occurs in the meeting of the sacred and the secular. Taylor creates a new word out of this philological encounter—*altarity*. Taylor's movement between *a* and *e*, his marriage of "altar" and "alter," is meant to enact the concept it creates. Indeed, Taylor's altarity closely resembles Taussig's mimetic acts—formally and conceptually. Mimetic alt*e*rity and alt*a*rity go beyond the mere state of producing difference or otherness, and move instead towards that confusing place in between similarity and difference, identity and other.

Mimetic alt*e*rity and alt*a*rity are evocative of the utopic possibilities that inhere in aesthetic objects as theorized by Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*. Aesthetic objects find their power and relevance by holding a mirror to historical reality. However, artworks also exist for themselves. Despite their reliance on reality, they produce a world of their own that exists as artifice, fiction, something other than a mirror of the world that casts only an identical correlation in its reflection. Artworks belong and do not belong, they reflect and they turn away—they exist in the push and pull of mimetic alt*e*rity and alt*arity*. This tug of war between similarity and difference shapes the aesthetic object, but it also makes certain requirements of its audience:

> Prior to total administration, the subject who viewed, heard, or read a work was to lose himself, forget himself, *extinguish* himself in the artwork. The identification

[49] Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): xxviii.

> carried out by the subject was ideally not that of making the artwork like himself, but rather that of making himself like the artwork.[50]

Mimetic alterity produces a chain of performativity, one in which audience and performer (text) switch back and forth fluidly, even unconsciously, between roles. According to Adorno this movement implies a certain "extinguish[ing]" of the subject, a kind of terminus or end that results in the becoming something other. The text then functions as an altar, a space of altarity, a moment of transformation.

In order to understand the relationship between mimesis, sacrifice, and text in this context we return again to Odysseus, this time in Erich Auerbach's study of mimesis and the history of modern European narrative form. For Auerbach, like Adorno, Odysseus is a foundational figure for modern narrative. Auerbach presents mimesis as the literary representation of reality (temporal, psychological, affective, as well as material), which he argues becomes crucial for modern narrative form with two historic contrasting styles: Homeric and Old Testament.[51] Strikingly, while he does not clearly articulate a relationship between mimesis and sacrifice, his analysis centers on two classic sacrificial narratives.[52]

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[50] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*: 17. Emphasis added.

[51] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003): 23., describes the narratives' relation to the representation of reality: "The two styles, in their opposition, represent basic types: on the one hand fully externalized description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, few elements of historical development and of psychological perspective; on the other hand, certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, "background" quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic."

[52] The Old Testament reference is Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. While this second example is not irrelevant to our discussion, I have chosen to focus on Auerbach's treatment of Odysseus' Scar in order to maintain the chapter's organizational focus.

Auerbach's first chapter "Odysseus's Scar" (which opens the larger project in lieu of an introduction) centers on the strange interruption of the tale of Odysseus's homecoming by a set of flashbacks: his naming as an infant, and the boar hunt in which he receives the telltale scar that will tip off his nursemaid to his true identity. Relevant to our analysis, Odysseus's true identity is given away by a wound, and not just any wound, but one received through a battle with natural forces (here a vicious boar, which he slays) just as he enters the cusp of manhood. The wound functions as a pivotal point of metamorphoses marking the termination of childhood. It is this scar, a reminder of the death of Odysseus-the-boy and emergence of Odysseus-the-man, which contains the key to his true identity. Because of his wounding it is hard to clearly distinguish who or what was sacrificed in this moment of alteration: the boar or Odysseus himself.

Even before the tale of the scar, we encounter the brief recollection of how Odysseus receives his name. Autolycus, his maternal grandfather, is something of a rapscallion who owes his success to offerings given in the name of Hermes in order to win the god's favor. When given the honor of naming his grandson, Autolycus returns to the sacrificial logic. He names his grandson "man of suffering" in remembrance of and in offering to the men and women whom he has caused great suffering in his rise to power. The grandfather expiates his sins through the naming of the child who must now bear the violence that founded the patriarch's order. Odysseus is thus himself a kind of mimetic sacrifice that bridges the gap between the power of the patriarch and the victims of the patriarch's regime. Cast away, set upon, and yet also tempting fate through cunning and

trickery (like his grandfather before him), Odysseus is both victim and victor, as well as something more than either one of these terms implies.

Sacrifice and mimesis in the tale of Odysseus' scar are performative in nature. In the performance of sacrifice (the wounding of Odysseus-the-boy and slaying of the boar, the substitution of Odysseus-the-infant for the suffering of others) the rigid boundaries between subject positions become fluid and create transformations that figure prominently in the unfolding narrative—even if visible only in the second look, the momentary flash of recollection. In his re-reading of Auerbach's *Mimesis*, classicist Egbert J. Bakker returns to an earlier meaning of mimesis as the relation between an action and its model, the "becoming another" that necessarily affects the subject of the performative act.[53] Combining this more originary meaning with Auerbach's use of the word to describe a relationship between a text and its referent (the novel and everyday reality) engages productively with Adorno's proposition that the act of encountering the text is an alt*a*ring moment, one that threatens (or promises) the extinction of the subject as it originally was. The text does not only reflect its world—however violent and homicidal that world—it also alt*a*rs its subject to the world of its own creation.

In the case of Odysseus, the tale pulls its audience into the world of epic poetry where centaurs and mermaids lurk. According to Auerbach's analysis the text inaugurates realism despite its fantastical nature because it seeks to create a world without gaps that can be apprehended with the senses; every moment of the journey and every strange creature is tamed through its detailed recording and transcription. However, the tale is

[53] Egbert J. Bakker, "Mimesis as Performance: Rereading Auerbach's First Chapter," *Poetics Today* 20 No. 1 (Spring 1999).

one essentially of legend, of a world that exists in opposition to our everyday mundane experience. Odysseus's Scar is a crucial moment for Auerbach's study; it opens his analysis but also poses certain problems for his definition of mimesis as the representation of reality. In order to truly enjoy the performance enacted by the tale, one must forfeit one's hold on reality long enough to be taken in. The world that replaces the "real" one in which the reader lives serves both as a reminder of a time before the reign of reason, and a voice of resistance against all that would foreclose an imagining of the world other than it is. To enter into this relation the subject must give itself up as the center of meaning production and instead follow the lead of the object (the text) in a dizzying impersonation of reality, a miming of the mimed: "The death of this subject is the sacrifice forever occurring at the altar of the temple that always remains suspended above the cleavage opened by the work of art."[54]

In the case of *Astro Boy* the series seduces its audience through the fantastical innocence and power of Atom. On second reflection we note that the series does not cover over the atomic age by harkening back to a primitive past before the reign of reason and total administration. The series' hero is a robot who, despite his creator's desires, can imitate the life of another but can never be a perfect replica. His eternal childhood and failure to grow into a man haunt the show as a reminder that even while Atom performs the subject position imposed upon him, he is no human subject. The boys and girls glued to the television are interpellated by Atom's mixture of melancholy and freedom, which both acknowledges their own limited subject positions just as it asks them to imagine themselves as some other form of being. Tobio the boy must die, just as essentialist

[54] Taylor, *Altarity*: 58.

notions of the human subject must be extinguished in the birth of Atom the robot. Children toting Atom packs and baseball hats, dreaming of machinic gears in place of beating hearts, take part in the alt*a*ring performative structure of mimesis: humans imitating objects imitating humans.[55] In this on-going circuit of mimetic performance something like the truth draws near. The children offer up their place at the center of the totalizing nuclear system and, if only for the briefest of moments, become robotic.

SUPERFLAT: DREAMING IN ANIME

Astro Boy functions as an aesthetic object that through its internal antagonisms reflects the historical conditions of the atomic age just as it masks those realities in futural fantasies. It is no coincidence that while the series began as *manga* in comic-book format, *Astro Boy* found its most popular expression through its animated televised serialization. Through the medium of television the show expresses its audience's anxieties just at it provides a stable everyday structure in which the domestic space is reconfigured according to the new nuclear imperatives. These imperatives include the privatization of communal experience (tuning in to the tube) and the globalization of technology (audiences as targets). As a popular television icon in the postwar world *Astro Boy* served as a transitional object bridging private experience to global technologies.

As robot, Atom also serves as a transitional object that mimetically links representations of the human with representations of human technological advancement. In Atom's machinic imitation of the human, radical end meets radical potential. On one

[55] Recall here Makoto Tezuka's mimetic re-enactment—in the place of the father—of the birth of Atom. In this light the trivial and the absurd resonate with possible meaning. Are we to ask whose driving ambition and abandonment Makoto re-enacts?

side of this divide he illustrates the way all things in the nuclear age become virtual representations of a universal power full of creative potential that, in actuality, is used for destruction on a mass scale. Through Atom's mimetic self-sacrifice the world emerges from the ashes of war, structured along a global rivalry for this universal power. However, Atom's mimetic self-sacrifice can also be read as a transformative alt*a*ring of the world of the viewing subject. *Astro Boy* encourages identification with the imperfect copy, the not-quite-human machinic form of life. This machinic form of life—the robot—exposes the way the human is already robotic in a totalized world of abstracted reason. And yet, for that brief moment of robotic interpellation, the subject sees the world through a slightly fractured prism, catching a glimpse of both its imprisoned condition as well as the possibility of freedom.

In many ways mimesis and *anime* do not have obvious points of intersection. Cinema, rather than *anime*, is more often associated with mimesis. Miyao describes this relationship in his explanation of early Japanese cinema and the Pure Film Movement:

> For Pure Film reformers, the essence of cinema lay in its ability to depict the world with greater realism than other art forms. The ideal of realism within the Pure Film Movement seemed to entail a belief in the transparency of the medium, or the objectivity of the camera, in its representation of people and of the world. Thus, a great deal of emphasis was placed on 'naturalistic' or 'realistic' styles of acting, an acting that did not appear to be acting.[56]

[56] Miyao, "Before Anime": 201. This understanding of mimesis corresponds to Auerbach's use of the term in his discussion of literary form and Western modernity.

Miyao's description of the aims of the Pure Film Movement coincides with schools of thought within film studies arguing that cinema exemplifies mimetic form because it provides an image of the world that corresponds in a nearly identical way to life as it is lived. *Anime* in contrast, "failed to depict the world in the realistic way demanded by reformers."[57]

Anime's failure in this regard corresponds with Atom's failure to perfectly replicate Tenma's "real" son Tobio. For both, the performance does not/cannot hide its status as copy. Just as Atom's nuclear powered flight gives away his parody of the human as performance (to Tenma's rage), *anime*'s strange insistence on maintaining visible seams between the different forms of visual media at work (cinema, cel animation, and digital animation) means that the genre must be evaluated by reference to something other than a reality effect.[58] In order to understand *anime*'s mimetic potential we must learn to think *other*wise. According to *anime* critic Thomas Lamarre:

> Animation presents other possibilities. For, to compose a movement, animation must first decompose or decode it. Even when animation closely follows the models of live-action cinema, it does not merely copy or replicate. It recodes, and thus decodes. Decoding goes beyond an imitation or reproduction of live-action cinema, and opens up new possibilities for expression. It reaches into the so-called live action and unravels it. It thus goes to the heart of what is 'live.' This is a potential of

[57] Ibid.
[58] For a more in depth discussion of the relationship between anime and cinema see Thomas Lamarre, "The First Time as Farce: Digital Animation and the Repetition of Cinema," in *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation*, ed. Steven T. Brown (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

> animation that becomes especially important in *anime*. *Anime* cuts to the quick of the 'live.'[59]

Recoding and decoding, *anime* presents us with a mimesis that is something more than the replication of what is. Rather, the medium makes possible an alternate vision of reality. Going "to the heart" of "live," cutting "to the quick," this altering resembles a kind of mimetic sacrifice and becomes a transformative alt*a*ring.

Anime's transformative power comes not from a nostalgic return to the world as it was, even as it refuses to be enslaved to the world as it is. *Anime* (as opposed to other forms of animation) may include the most technologically advanced techniques, but it cannot be said that these techniques are marshaled to make the image "more real":

> With this minimal approach to presenting movement, however, something new appears in the mechanism of recognition, something that troubles it. The walking, so minimally presented, may evoke a sense of skippiness, jerkiness, awkwardness or artificiality. The figure becomes not simply a walking automaton. Rather it becomes an automaton of walking. It is a machine of walking, in a manner of speaking. It walks objects—and potentially anything becomes an object: human figures, animal figures, stones, trees, machines, crowds, planets and so on…. It is a process of inventing machines of movement—machines of walking, of talking, of running, leaping, flying, and so forth—that take up all manner of objects.[60]

[59] Lamarre, "From Animation to Anime": 333.
[60] Ibid., 339.

> …it is not simply a question of a walking machine, a flying machine, a living machine. Rather, it is a question of a machine walking, a machine of flying, a machine of living—such machines traverse and organize narrative. And the Tezuka-style stories, in which one comes to understand the humanity of the automaton, steadily give way to narratives in which everyone, everything, is machinic, automaton."[61]

Ironically, it is a calculated simplicity in visual form that gives rise to the alt*a*ring effect. Alt*a*ring here is the dislocation of the absolute position of the subject: rather than perfectly imitating the world as experienced by the human subject, *anime* offers a world of layers, mediated by gaps. These spaces between the cels perform a de-centering of subjectivity because the emphasis turns on foreground and background rather than the distance to or from any one position. The visual interest operates primarily on a scale of relative movement of cels rather than the creation of one focal point of interest from which the action unfolds.

Not quite unburdened from the confines of his performance of the human, Atom gives way in the infinite mimetic play of *anime* (objects aping subjects aping objects, and around and around again) to an emerging field of machinic forms of life that offer a glimpse into the experience of what Adorno might call the "expression of the expressionless, a kind of weeping without tears."[62] For Adorno, this is the experience that artworks offer—not communion with nature, not the recuperation of ideology masquerading as celebration of human values. For Lamarre this figure is found in the

[61] Ibid.
[62] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*: 117.

automaton/robot. It is no wonder that *anime* from its inception as global phenomenon (with the birth of *Astro Boy*) abounds with images of apocalyptic catastrophe.[63] From the position of the object—and now the human subject turned target—life in the nuclear age resembles the world of the *anime* image more than the medium's departure from the reality principle would suggest. Film critics less impressed with *anime*'s refusal to smooth out its performative seams decry the departure from humanist themes: *anime* leaves us with a world emptied of meaning. From the other side on the *anime* debate comes this rejoinder: "… to those who think of animated characters as somehow flat and depthless, the reply is: 'Of course, and not only that, they are superflat.'"[64] For the artists, critics, and fans of superflat it is not *anime* that hollows out experience, it is the proliferating rivalries for power forever threatening catastrophe that threaten all possibilities of meaning production.

Superflat has become more than a description of the formal qualities of *anime*, it operates as something of a call to arms among *anime* critics and fans. As a nihilistic fetish of meaninglessness for its own sake, the call offers nothing more than the further totalizing of the world according to a numerical equivalency that turns everything into either a representation of virtual power or virtual target. However, superflat as the

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[63] See Susan Napier, *Anime From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japan's Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)., for a discussion of the relationship between apocalypse and *anime* in her chapter "Waiting for the End of the World." She notes the connection between apocalypse, *anime*, and the atomic bomb writing: "Of course, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the most obvious catalysts to apocalyptic thought. As of today Japan is still the only country in the world to have suffered the devastation of atomic destruction. Although the bomb itself is not always specifically delineated, it stalks through a notable amount of postwar Japanese culture in a variety of displaced versions…" (253); and "Caught in a postwar world in which the dream of consumer abundance is less and less able to conceal a corrosive emptiness, the apocalyptic mode may seem to be the only sure means of escape" (274).

[64] Lamarre, "From Animation to Anime": 339.

unflinching rally cry to re-examine the limits and possibilities of living in a world gone nuclear is a humbling and potentially empowering moment of alt*a*rity. In this moment of transformation perhaps other questions arise besides those focused narrowly on the accumulation and containment of power:

> Not only do we not yet know what life is biologically, chemically, physically, spiritually, metaphysically and so forth; but we also do not know—we refuse to know even as we strive to know—what this world is. We do not yet know what this world, this life is *of*. How then to know what this life is *for*?[65]

Posing as textual riddle, Astro Boy and its animated progeny offer machinic modes of thinking and being in relation to the world that do not necessarily end in the replication of disaster, even amid the overwhelming mobilization of life.

[65] Ibid., 340.

CHAPTER THREE

The Nuclear Family and a World Gone MAD: Kurosawa, O'Brien, and the Fabulous Textuality of Nuclear War

> People find it easy to say that in nuclear war "humanity" runs the risk of its self-destruction, with nothing left over, no remainder. There is a lot that could be said about that rumor. But whatever credence we give it we have to recognize that these stakes appear in the experience of a race, or more precisely of a competition, a rivalry between two rates of speed. It's what we call in French a *course de vitesse*, a speed race. Whether it is the arms race or orders given to start a war that is itself dominated by that economy of speed throughout all the zones of its technology, a gap of a few seconds may decide irreversibly, the fate of what is still now and then called humanity—plus the fate of a few other species. As no doubt we all know, no single instant, no atom of our life (of our relations to the world and to being) is not marked today, directly or indirectly by that speed race.
>
> Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now"

In 1960 Herman Kahn transformed the specter of global annihilation from inchoate nightmare to political policy with the publication of *On Thermonuclear War*. Kahn began his trajectory as a leading figure of the atomic age as a consultant with the RAND Corporation, a non-profit research institute created to advise the Air Force through its transition from conventional bombing by planes to a system structured around the new potentialities of the long-range nuclear missile. His treatise on nuclear war quickly formed the intellectual foundation for the strategy of deterrence and the logic of mutually assured destruction. In it he describes the future of the world through his absolute certainty that the thermonuclear world was not just a possibility, but a living reality: in his narrative of the nuclear age, World War III occurred as "history" in 1951—

over a decade before he published the book in 1969.[1] The speculative nature of Kahn's claims notwithstanding, in the span of less than a year the book became a classic text among Air Force personnel. Moreover, as his colleagues from RAND found positions in the Kennedy White House, Kahn's analysis carried considerable weight in national security decision-making.[2] His popularity in the circles of the ruling elite did not, however, make him immune from criticism. Kahn's apocalyptic text was a lightning rod for debate concerning the ultimate defensibility of deterrence and the doctrine of mutually assured destruction. Depicted as a character of immense proportions (both in wit and girth) to match the enormity of his vision of global nuclear war, Kahn made an easy target. Many argued that any man who could think so systematically and calculatingly about the end of the world could be nothing short of a madman deriving pleasure from the contemplation of others' pain.

In order to address his critics, Kahn followed up his first treatise with a second, *Thinking the Unthinkable*, in which he described his project as nothing less than the defense of thought itself. Reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer's rationalized subject, Kahn argues that cold detachment in the face of world annihilation is the only truly ethical position. Indeed, the author of the book's introduction describes Kahn's explorations on the frontiers of nuclear disaster as the height of moral courage.[3] The

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[1] Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (New York: Free Press, 1969): 312.: "In a sense, what we have called here World War III is also 'history.' Although no Soviet-U.S. war was fought in 1951 the capabilities on both sides are reasonably well known."

[2] Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi, *The Worlds of Herman Kahn: The Intuitive Science of Thermonuclear War* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2005): 20.

[3] Herman Kahn, *Thinking About the Unthinkable* (New York: Avon, 1962): 11. The introduction was written by Raymond Aron, a French philosopher who aligned modern subjectivity with the nation-state to such an extreme degree that he opposed dual-citizenship, arguing instead for the state's ultimate authority over other possible forms of meaningful individual/group identity. Belief in a transcendent unbreakable

detractors of deterrence, in contrast, are nothing less than sentimental fools who confuse morality with emotion. To charges that his kind of thinking could be nothing other than mad ravings, Kahn replies that the truth of the charge is irrelevant, because "Like the repressed sadist who can perform a socially useful function by sublimating his urges into surgery, the man who loves war or violence may be able to sublimate his desires into a careful and valuable study of war."[4] He admits that this does require a certain "unpleasant degree of detachment" but it should be possible to develop a "disciplined empathy," despite the fact that rigorous analytical thinking is severely hampered by a conscious awareness "at all times of the human tragedy involved."[5]

Like Adorno and Horkheimer's wholly rationalized scientist in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Kahn's theorist-of-war performs a vital function for modernity. Both have internalized the dictates of reason to such a degree that human beings no longer appear as autonomous subjects for themselves, but rather as calculable objects of analysis. Kahn's rational explication of imminent death and destruction functions as its own kind of enlightenment science:[6]

> Science stands in the same relationship to nature and human beings in general as insurance theory stands to life and death in particular. Who dies

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citizen-state bond certainly fits within the Cold War paradigm, which makes moral and logical sense only by enforcing a strict correlation between the state and its subjects.

[4] Ibid., 26.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*: vii., acknowledges his critics who referred to his thinking as a pseudo-science, but insisted that he was not practicing science, rather his "calculations are illustrative examples and metaphors, or as basic communications, and scientific proof." His denial of the book's science is an obvious hypocrisy: in his mastered use of mathematics and claims to understand the physics of thermonuclear dynamics he gives his arguments the status of objective science. However, by refusing the title of science he dodges the requirements of reproducibility and scrutiny. In this case his book represents the worst case of a kind of science that is unaware of itself to the point of denying itself as such so that it may all the better be used strictly as tool freed from all requirements of justification. Also, these remarks indicate the fabulous textuality of nuclear war, as I will consider later in the chapter.

> is unimportant; what matters is the ratio of incidence of death to the liabilities of the company. It is the law of large numbers, not the particular case, which recurs in the formula.[7]

This kind of science "has no awareness of itself; it is merely a tool" for the systematization of knowledge in which all facts (and subjects-turned-objects) are made to conform to a single principle that has been given in advance. That principle for Kahn is nuclear war—"*Within, at the most, ten years, some of those bombs are going off. I am saying this as responsibly as I can.* That *is certainty*"—thus all thought must turn itself towards a conjecture taken to be supreme fact.[8]

In their critique of reason turned into its opposite—unreason—Adorno and Horkheimer point toward a fundamental contradiction within Western modernity. Reason is taken as a transcendental principle through which human subjects create the "conscious solidarity of the whole," yet reason is also the "agency of calculating thought" marshaled for the purpose of self-preservation.[9] Deterrence and mutually assured destruction epitomize this aporia in the atomic age. On the one hand you have the very survival of the world at stake giving rise to the concept of "world" as shared fate, on the other a privatized struggle in which elements of the whole are atomized and turned against one another such that rational thought turns both homicidal and suicidal. In moral terms, the "solidarity of the whole" becomes the monolithic unification of parts of the whole, fighting for domination over that totality: the world is split absolutely between good and

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[7] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelen Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002): 66.
[8] Kahn, *Thinking About the Unthinkable*: 27.
[9] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: 65.

evil, U.S. and Soviet, democratic and communist. Terms outside these divisions are excluded or eliminated as irrelevant, surplus data.

As Kahn's rhetoric makes clear, in the creation of this world, a conceptual apparatus is constructed that is fantastically textual in that it relies on imagined projections into the future of what is already taken as history (e.g., Kahn's "historical" account of WWIII in 1951), despite the absence of any external "actually-existent" reference point. In this way, we can say that the mode of the nuclear age is best described as melodramatic: a sensational dramatic text with binary depictions of good and evil, operating through exaggeration and the production of extreme states of fear and anxiety.

In order to better understand this fabulous textuality, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores the narrative conventions associated with melodrama, paying attention to the way the melodramatic imagination plays out the tension between social norms and private desires as the recovery of expression from muteness. The second section examines the intersection of melodrama and nuclear fear in Kurosawa's film *Record of a Living Being*, arguing that the central character embodies the nuclear faith required by new regimes of visuality, but fails to make himself useful to that regime through the everyday repression of nuclear fear. The third section argues that the melodramatic resolution provided in Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age* suggests that only a radical form of love, one in which exposure rather than self-preservation forms the basis of an enlightened ethics, offers a way through the conflicting Enlightenment demands of unification and self-preservation.

The critical force of *Record of a Living Being* and *The Nuclear Age* arises from their use of melodramatic devices, but also through a reversal of the conventions of melodrama. Melodrama binds the texts to their historical context just as it gives us the opportunity to read them against these reigning protocols. Additionally, both texts highlight the mobilization of the nuclear family, and the patriarchal coding behind nuclear war. Finally, what ultimately separates the father figures in *Record of a Living Being* and *The Nuclear Age* from the madmen of instrumental reason is their incomplete "discipline" of empathy, their inability to dissociate enough so that their unreason is made useful by the nuclear order.

ENLIGHTENMENT, MODERNITY, AND THE MELODRAMATIC IMAGINATION

Melodrama as a literary / filmic genre, in its contemporary form, is most often associated with Hollywood films produced from the 1930s to 1960s marketed as "women's films." Films of this genre have also been pejoratively labeled "weepies," capturing the gender politics at stake. As Christine Gledhill explains, films assumed to be appropriate for male audiences favored a "realist" tradition, one set in tension with melodrama's emphasis on domestic relations and expressions of affective states:

> Tragedy and realism focused on 'serious' social issues or inner dilemmas, recentering the hero and claiming tragic value for the failure of heroic potential. Sentiment and emotiveness were reduced in significance to 'sentimentality' and exaggeration, domestic detail counted as trivial, melodramatic utopianism as escapist fantasy and this total complex

> devalued by association with a 'feminized' popular culture. Men no longer wept in public.[10]

Unlike characteristically "male" films that provide narratives in which (male) characters overcome psychological challenges by facing external threats (westerns and war films, for example), melodramatic conflict takes place almost entirely within the home between individual private desires and the expectations and limitations imposed by other family members, social peers, and local communities. As the basic social unit, the "family, with its ties of duty, love and conflict, the site where the individual is formed, and the centre of bourgeois social arrangements" provides a space in which private desires that are unexpressed or repressed by the social structure find expression.[11]

Literary critic Peter Brooks, whose work on melodrama and the nineteenth century novel inspired the emergence of the term in film criticism, explored a mode of imaginative expression that he referred to as "melodramatic." Brooks' interest in melodrama as a mode is important to note, for this chapter similarly turns to melodrama not to establish a set of themes or to contribute to a taxonomy on the history of a form, but rather to explore a particular, historical "mode of conception and expression, as a certain fictional system for making sense of experience, as a semantic field of force."[12] According to Brooks the melodramatic imagination is also the *modern* imagination. In modernity the rise of rationalized systems of thought replaces religious doctrine; therefore, ethical imperatives must be established without recourse to a transcendental

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[10] Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1990): 34.
[11] Ibid., 31.
[12] Peter Brooks, *The Melodrmatic Imagination: Blazac, Henry James, Melodrama, and The Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995): xvii.

belief system. Essentially, what Brooks finds in this imaginative mode is a way of rendering, in narrative form, the ethical dilemmas attendant to the crisis of reason as described by Adorno and Horkheimer, and defended by Kahn. When the old mythologies that unify human experience give way to the dictates of rational thought, the subject must detach from unruly desires and carefully (in Kahn's words) "discipline" empathetic responses. The melodramatic imagination, in contrast, functions as the affective, hysterical underside of this enlightened repression.

Melodrama expresses the contradictions of "enlightened" reason in two ways. First, the drama centers on the tension between private desire and social norm. According to Brooks, muteness, though seemingly in contradiction with the expressiveness of melodramatic form, serves as an embodiment of social repression. It is against a backdrop of oppressive social forces, which would silence the central character, that the drama turns towards excessive articulation of inner states through gesture, *mise en scène*, and musical accompaniment.[13] This struggle reflects the dialectic of enlightenment in that the production of the whole occurs, not through a spontaneous alignment of individual actors, but through their systematic subjugation.

Second, the credibility of secular forms of justice, which represent "enlightened" forms of reason, often comes under intense scrutiny. Despite highly developed structures

[13] Indeed, this struggle is mirrored in the emergence of the genre in the 19th century as a popular theatrical style in France, Germany, and England (in various ways, depending upon the conditions of each particular national locale). Melodramas were created for a mass audience, rather than the educated, wealthy, aristocratic elite who favored plays. The particular stylistic conventions of melodrama were designed to work around legal restrictions placed on those who were excluded from performing in officially recognized playhouses. Not only was creative access to these playhouses restricted, but also specific theatrical modes of expression associated with the plays were themselves deemed off limits. For an in-depth description of this history see ibid; and Gledhill, "Melodramatic Field"; and Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1990).

for uncovering the truth, secular justice appears as inherently flawed because cunning is employed to take facts out of context in order to better manipulate the "letter of the law" such that the virtue of the heroic character is cast in doubt or threatened. In the shadow of false judgment these characters abandon their disciplined stoicism to express disenchantment in emotionally excessive terms:

> The melodramatic utterance breaks through everything that constitutes the "reality principle," all its censorships, accommodations, tonings-down….to achieve the full expression of psychological condition and moral feeling in the most transparent, unmodified, infantile form. [14]

Virtue triumphs as melodramatic heroes replace the de-sacralized moral landscape with personal myths "that would then—by an imaginative or even a terroristic leap—be offered as the foundation of a general ethics."[15] While these early melodramatic dramas offer happy endings, the victories are largely Pyrrhic. They "can offer no terminal reconciliation, for there is no longer a clear transcendent value to be reconciled to."[16]

In Japan, much like its Western counterpart, the melodramatic imagination is a modern aesthetic phenomenon, and likewise represents anxious responses to new structures of social formation. Critic Ken Ito traces the emergence of this imaginative mode to Japanese modernization, primarily in texts written during the Meiji Era (1868-1912).[17] While not wholly identical, comparisons to European modernity rightly begin

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[14] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*: 41.
[15] Ibid., 16.
[16] Ibid., 17.
[17] Ken K. Ito, *An Age of Melodrama: Family, Gender, and Social Hierarchy in the Turn-of-the-Century Japanese Novel* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). During this time the country was united around a strong, centralized emperor, in contrast to the feudal shogun system of the previous one hundred fifty years (known as the Edo Period). The restoration of the emperor coincided with modernization for

here; indeed, the emperor took the name Meiji, which is often translated as "Enlightened Rule." According to Ito, fiction from this era focuses on the domestic unit, for it is here at the level of the family that one gains appreciation for the severe social disruption caused by modernization. Laws meant to consolidate power with the emperor as head of a modern nation-state took place through transformations to property and inheritance laws. Nearly every aspect of family relations prior to these changes were determined according to the Japanese *ie*-system, an extended network of households centered on a primary patriarch. Rather than splitting family property among many children, which would adversely affect its overall value, the first-born son inherited the entirety of the family property. The eldest son also inherited the day-to-day care of elderly parents, and the responsibility for tending to the well-being of each member of the extended social network. The *ie* system continued in large part until the end of World War II. However, industrialization meant that parcels of land were split and liquidated, and many family members—including women—found employment in factories and in the newly emerging and expanding corporate and state bureaucracies. These changes brought corrosion to the centralized *ie*-system as families lost the stability of family farms and individual members gained independence in other segments of the economy. Like all other sectors of society, individual members of the Japanese *ie*-system were

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Japan. In the span of less than fifty years the country experienced economic and social transformations similar to those that had occurred in Europe during the Age of Enlightenment (spanning roughly the 17th through 18th centuries), and the Industrial Revolution (19th century). As part of the vision for a Japanese enlightenment, the ports opened, capitalism was embraced, and experts from Europe in all fields of science and industry were brought to the country, just as Japanese scholars were sent abroad for exposure to the most advanced forms of thought, which they would apply upon their return.

defined increasingly by consumerism and wage-labor, rather than by birth order and family name.

While the term melodrama is entirely Western in origin, Ito traces the development of the genre in Japan to *yomihon* or "books for reading" from the middle of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century, and *ninjobon* or "books of sentiment" (also known as *nakihon*, "crying books") from the end of the 19th century. *Yomihon* were notable for their didactic polarization of good and evil, while *ninjobon* turned to the lives of everyday people in which tormented love and sacrifice were simultaneously realistic and excessively sentimental.[18] These forms of the novel from the Meiji era are sensational narratives that not only "portray established models of the family" but also "generated newer forms that responded to the discontinuities of their time."[19] As in the West, these melodramatic texts operate as a modern form of mythmaking by bringing ethical questions of right and wrong, framed in morally "universal" terms, down to earth in an enlightened world no longer in need of their gods.

Of course, not all melodramatic mythmaking offers productive forms of social critique. Rather, exaggerated affective expression often does little more than purge repressed emotions, or produce feelings of pity for the lives of others, all the better to face another day of discipline and detachment. Moreover, many melodramatic narratives offer regressive returns to outdated myths, such as the eventual triumph of love or the certainty of divine intervention. Easy resolutions like these do little to encourage critical evaluation of the conditions of crisis. Yet film critics have found that some melodramatic

[18] Ibid., 12-13.
[19] Ibid., 3.

narratives lend themselves to alternate readings that go against the grain of the commodity culture from which they are produced. According to Thomas Elsaesser, the genre makes possible "escapist forms of mass-entertainment," but nevertheless real forms of critique also become visible:

> The persistence of melodrama might indicate the ways in which popular culture has not only taken note of social crisis and the fact that the losers are not always those who deserve it most, but has also resolutely refused to understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms.[20]

Just as earlier versions of melodrama presented heroes who combated repression in an excessive display of emotion, Hollywood versions of the modern hero emphasize the emptiness of a world built solely on rational mastery. Melodramatic heroes are not always classic underdogs; in fact they are often characters who appear to "have it all." They are suburban everymen (and women), who until the moment of melodramatic crisis, obediently pursue the "good life." Usually, they are beautiful, wealthy, and have obtained a high degree of social status. Yet, contrary to socially constructed visions of success, these characters remain unfulfilled. Indeed, melodramatic heroes are monumentally unhappy despite their external achievements.

The films of Douglas Sirk are most often associated with the kind of Hollywood melodrama that makes visible the cracks beneath the polished veneer of Western progress. In them, the characters' sexual libidos betray their disillusionment. Unleashed desire violates all the social boundaries that maintain the community's order: women

[20] Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury": 47.

eschew appropriate domestic partners in favor of younger men, disaffected wealthy social climbers fall for working class heroes, and black characters are not content making possible lives of luxury that are forever foreclosed to them. Unlike earlier forms of melodrama, resolution cannot be so easily achieved by recourse to simplistic moral binaries. Crisis comes not from "evil" characters bent on making use of reason's failure, but rather on the normative structure itself:

> This is why the melodrama, at its most accomplished, seems capable of reproducing more directly than other genres the patterns of domination and exploitation existing in a given society, especially the relation between psychology, morality and class-consciousness, by emphasizing so clearly an emotional dynamic whose social correlative is a network of external forces directed oppressingly inward, and with which the characters themselves unwittingly collude to become their agents."[21]

In this world, there are no "evil" characters, only those who re-assert the social code through ridicule when the heroes violate the established order. Failure to comply does not mean death or imprisonment, but rather social exclusion.

Indeed, just as there are no truly evil characters, "hero" is likewise an inaccurate term for the main characters. The audience is most certainly meant to identify intimately and sympathetically with the central character, however complicated and even contradictory the putative heroism on display. As Elsaesser explains,

> Melodrama confers on them a negative identity through suffering, and the progressive self-immolation and disillusionment generally ends in

[21] Ibid., 64.

> resignation: they emerge as lesser human beings for having become wise and acquiescent to the ways of the world.[22]

The endings of these melodramas are "happy" in name only. Heroic action is replaced by uncontrolled excessive expression; the existential angst that would be exorcised through externally directed acts of resistance becomes an "inner violence, often one which the characters turn against themselves."[23] In order to pursue their recalcitrant desires, characters do not transform the social order, rather they must consciously choose to give up large portions of their life: the esteem and stability provided by social peers and family members, or true love and sexual desire. Moreover, by the time they finally make a decision, their love object has often suffered a near mortal accident (often unknowingly brought on by the main character). Rather than live gloriously in triumph over repression, they must remain celibate and displace their desire in order to assume the mantle of caretaker.

In spite of their initial glamour, melodramatic "heroes" are brought back to earth such that in melodrama "the true pathos is the very mediocrity of the human beings involved, putting such high demands upon themselves trying to live up to an exalted vision of man."[24] In his study of cinema and melodrama, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith emphasizes the ordinariness of characters and their settings, noting the prevalence of the domestic drama for the genre:

> The characters are neither the rulers nor the ruled, but occupy the middle ground, exercising local power or suffering local powerlessness, within

[22] Ibid., 55.
[23] Ibid., 56.
[24] Ibid., 67.

> the family or the small town. The locus of power is the family and individual private property, the two being connected through inheritance…. patriarchal right is of central importance.[25]

> Notably, the question of law or legitimacy, so central to tragedy, is turned inward from 'Has this man a right to rule (over us)?' to 'Has this man a right to rule a family (like ours)?'[26]

The family thus serves as a microcosm for the study of power and a site to explore the possible escape routes from a social space built on patriarchal rule. Even in the absence of a strong patriarch, the narrative can never quite shake the father's long shadow. In fact, it is the absence of the strong father that often produces the crisis and opens the family unit to the chaotic demands of desire.

As we turn to Kurosawa's *Record of a Living Being* and O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age* we will pay attention to how the drama in each unfolds as essentially a contemporary *family* crisis. The subject matter of the film purports to be nothing short of the fate of the world itself, and yet its narrative drive comes almost entirely from the private drama of one large sprawling Japanese family in a state of self-destruction. In this intersection of nuclear and family drama, *Record of a Living Being* presents a vision of the *nuclear family*, not as the organization of a single household comprised of one married couple and their children, but as a domestic sphere cracking under the pressure of modernization and globalizing regimes of nuclear destruction.

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[25] Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Minnelli and Melodrama," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1990): 71.
[26] Ibid.

Record of a Living Being and the Logistics of Perception

The prospect of global nuclear catastrophe creates an essential crisis for the possibility of anything like recording, documenting, and archiving. Without anyone left to read the trace, what becomes of our efforts to immortalize the ephemeral experiences of human life on Earth? In this moment without time, it will truly be as though we never existed. In thinking through this aporia Jacques Derrida asserts that the nuclear crisis is everywhere *marked* (as in legible) upon every instance of our collective living. Indeed, he claims that nuclear crisis is essentially a literary crisis:

> If "literature" is the name we give to the body of texts whose existence, possibility, and significance are the most radically threatened, for the first and last time, by the nuclear catastrophe, that definition allows our thought to grasp the essence of literature, its radical precariousness and the radical form of its historicity; but at the same time, literature gives us to think *the totality* of that which, like literature and henceforth in it, is exposed to the same threat, constituted by the same structure of historical fictionality, producing and then harboring its own referent.[27]

As indicated by the scare quotes, the "literature" that Derrida puts into question is not confined to the written page. What he refers to is that "literary" process of making meaning in the world through the invention of worlds that can be said to exist only through imagined or entirely fictive referents. In other words, while literary texts make use of the "real" world, they only make sense with the suspension of the "real," for they

[27] Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives)," *diacritics* 14 No. 2 (1984): 27.

are about people and places and moments in time that have never actually happened. Like the historical present and future depicted in Kahn's history of thermonuclear war, "literature" is entirely speculative. Yet literature makes claims to truth; in it we document living, even when it contains no discernable human figures at all.

Kurosawa's film *Record of a Living Being* was originally released in English as *I Live in Fear*. While living in fear may lie at the heart of the movie's diegetic core, the Japanese title makes no reference to fear. Rather, it poses the question of its own production: recording or documenting (both meanings come from *kiroku*) life itself. Although the narrative's *mise-en-scène* realistically mirrors the time and place in which its original audience found themselves, the film does something other than faithfully record in exact detail any particular or actual life. Kurosawa, in an interview with film historian Donald Richie, framed the film's production in surprisingly apocalyptic terms: "We really felt that we were making the kind of picture that, after everything was all over and the last judgment was upon us, we could stand up and account for our past lives by saying proudly: 'We are the men who made *Record of a Living Being*.'"[28] On one level, the text thus serves as a recording of its creators' moral value; when they are gone their lives are to be read through its prism.

The film should also be read metaphorically as the fate of the patriarch through the melodramatic undoing of the film's central character, Nakajima, a man of extravagant virility and a desire to leave in his wake a sea of progeny. Obsessive, paranoid, although ultimately begrudgingly acknowledged as rational (none of the characters can find fault with Nakajima's reasoning, except that it is too excessive), through the character of

[28] Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

Nakajima, Kurosawa records the affective structure of modern man who takes himself as the prototype for all living beings. As a melodramatic hero he functions as "so sensitized an instrument, one upon whom everything leaves a mark, with whom everything sets up a correspondence, [this] is not simply to be an observer of life's surface, but someone who must bring into evidence, even into being, life's moral substance."[29]

In a reversal of the classic melodramatic diegesis—from muteness to expression—Nakajima is eventually driven to insanity through his obsessive desire to protect his numerous children, and thus the future of his lineage, through which it is assumed some trace of him will remain. Nakajima is determined to resettle his family on a plantation in Brazil in order to escape either slow invisible death by radiation or incineration in the inevitable nuclear war to come. Indeed, he vehemently argues (in classic melodramatic fashion) that he is not afraid of death itself. So what is it then that Nakajima is so frightened of? One of his more pressing concerns, as he admits in several scenes, is radiation. Sandwiched between America to the east and Russia to the west, Japan experienced radiation poisoning as a very real concern at the time of the film's production. Indeed the Americans tested ever more destructive nuclear weapons on islands in the Pacific Ocean close enough for those working on deep sea fishing vessels to be fatally exposed to radiation.[30] Moreover, after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese were terrified of the possibility of corrupting the genetic code itself, to the extent that female *hibakusha* often had to hide their connection to the

[29] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*: 22-23.
[30] I am referring here to the Lucky Dragon incident, which I discussed in more detail in the introduction.

bombings in order to find suitable husbands. Given these anxieties, radiation not only threatened the bloodline's survival, but also its integrity.

Nakajima, the terse, short-tempered owner of a highly successful foundry located within the main family compound, has four separate households of children. His highly unrealistic goal is to resettle them all in a new world far from nuclear threat. Nothing stops the patriarch from saving his own life by fleeing to South America, but he will not be satisfied until he coerces his entire family to leave with him. The children, however, have other plans, which include living luxuriously off their family property. The children of the main-stem family go so far as to convince their weak-willed mother to take Nakajima to court in order to obtain an injunction that would keep him from wasting any more of the family fortune on his scheme. After much hand wringing on the part of the arbitrators, the children are eventually successful with their petition. With judgment against him from the arbitration, the patriarch rapidly deteriorates physically and mentally. He has little practice ruling his family with anything other than force, and finds himself pushed farther and farther into the periphery of the family unit. This turn of events gives rise to Nakajima's melodramatic break. Gesturing towards his youngest offspring, a sleeping infant, he prostrates himself before his older children and begs them to save themselves and the future of the sleeping babe.

When this final debasement results in only further humiliation, Nakajima collapses and begins his melodramatic journey into muteness. He commits himself to one last attempt to wrest his children from their narrow focus on the wealth generated by the foundry so that they may see the wisdom of life in another world. In stealthy silence

Nakajima temporarily recovers his powers for one last exertion of patriarchal right. By setting blaze to the factory in the family compound, he destroys the household in order to save it. Not surprisingly, the fire does not provide the anticipated effect. Instead, when confronted by the devastation that the loss of the factory means for his workers Nakajima indeed falls completely into madness, fulfilling the terms of the arbitration court's decree as if it were a prophecy.

Like many of the melodramatic characters in filmic versions of the genre at the time of *Record of a Living Being*'s theatrical release, Nakajima acts in ways that correspond to Elsaesser's description of heroes whose "behavior is often pathetically at variance with the real objectives they want to achieve. A sequence of substitute actions creates a kind of vicious circle in which the close nexus of cause and effect is somehow broken and—in an overtly Freudian sense—displaced."[31] Nakajima wants to secure the future of his progeny; instead he achieves only potential ruin for them, and madness for himself. He hopes to articulate his vision of a world free from nuclear threat; yet by the end of the film all Nakajima can see is the world as a globe in flames. He believes he has escaped not only Japan, but the doomed planet itself. Looking out his window in the mental institution, Nakajima mistakes the setting sun for the planet Earth, and cries out for his dying home planet, "Earth is on fire! On fire! The earth is destroyed!"

This revision of the melodramatic diegesis—originally a movement from muteness to full articulation through the release of repressed affective states—suggests a changing world, one ruled by contradictions that bring patriarchy into crisis. Although this is not to suggest that Nakajima's fall brings about the release of other mute

[31] Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury": 56.

characters, most noticeably the female characters still trapped within gendered forms of dominance. Rather, with the father gone a generalized state of masculine power reigns as the younger men coordinate their authority. The younger daughter, who dares to make fun of her elder brothers, is continually bullied; with the fall of the father she no longer has anyone to shelter her from their blows. There is also the mute melancholy of the eldest daughter-in-law who is given only minimal dialogue, but who appears in many of the scenes, silently serving the other family members above her in the hierarchy's pecking order. As the patriarch lies in a near unconscious state, she looks longingly from the frame of the window towards a freedom that remains elusive.

Moreover, as the dialectic of enlightenment fully reveals itself in this melodrama of nuclear crisis, affective hysterical states are not only repressed in the service of reason, but also actively produced and managed. That is, Nakajima's central objectives are thwarted, but his insistence on nuclear threat jars the film's most sympathetic character, Harada (the mild mannered dentist serving as a volunteer arbitrator) out of complacency and reaffirms his belief in imminent disaster, which he will then have to commit to further repression in order to simply go on living.[32] The psychiatrist at the sanitarium offers a similarly dejected view: "Is he the mad man, or is it we who are delusional?" Their growing awareness of threat is clearly the position that we, the audience, are encouraged to adopt. As Harada begins to appreciate, however, the nuclear subject is placed in an impossible predicament: complacent acceptance of the state of things or excessive attachment to the rhetoric and resulting madness.

[32] Shimura Takeshi, the actor who played Harada, also starred in the central role in a more popular Kurosawa film released three years earlier, *Ikiru*—which translates as "To Live."

Atomic subjects like Harada are left pondering the delusional quality of what has become a fantastic reality because nuclear faith (belief in eventual apocalypse of the kind displayed and encouraged by Kahn) operates on the level of the fictive—in Derrida's terms, nuclear end is fabulously textual. A text that, taking a cue from Paul Virilio, Derrida describes as one that operates through *speed*—the imminence of atomic end makes thinking otherwise a difficult task; thus Derrida urges us to slow down, and offers the reminder that apocalypse is not *now*. In *War and Cinema* Virilio expands upon his assessment of the effects of speed and concludes that the nuclear world is also a visual text, one that inaugurates the "logistics of perception."[33]

With the achievement of weaponry that can entirely wipe out the enemy with little chance of adequate response (response time must occur within minutes and even then would potentially be mere revenge from the nuclear grave), a "war of pictures and sounds is replacing the war of objects (projectiles and missiles)."[34] Virilio argues that nuclear weapons' increased capacity for destruction, their unstoppable speed, makes nuclear attack fundamentally different from previous forms of mass destruction, despite a similarity in actual damage and numbers of casualties:

> …the first atomic bombs, dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6th and 9th of August 1945, presented the ideal conditions: great mechanical effectiveness, complete technical surprise, but above all, the moral shock that suddenly banished to the prop room the earlier strategic carpet-bombing of large Asian and European cities, with all its logistical

[33] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989).
[34] Ibid., 5.

> sluggishness. By demonstrating that they would not recoil from a civilian holocaust, the Americans triggered in the minds of the enemy that *information explosion* which Einstein, towards the end of his life, thought to be as formidable as the atomic blast itself.[35]
>
> This total transparency affecting object, subject and surrounding space—which makes each of the antagonists feel both that he is watched by invisible stalkers and that he is observing his own body from a distance—illustrates the derangement of perception in an environment where military technology is distorting not only the battlefield, but also, and especially, the space-time of vision, where the observation machine and the modern war machine are conjoined….[36]

Ideological conquest thus no longer simply means gaining tactical advantage over one's enemies. It requires the maintenance of a strategic vision of global destruction, a generalized "climate of terror." What must be emphasized here is that the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ushered in a war of perception, one that alters globalized subjects' relationship to space, and the act of viewing itself.

In Nakajima's catastrophic vision of the world as a globe aflame, we see the deranged image of the world's final End. Produced in the midst of nuclear build-up, but before the full articulation of mutually assured destruction *Record of a Living Being* presaged the "aesthetics of the electronic battlefield" that made possible the "military use

[35] Ibid., 8. Emphasis in original.
[36] Ibid., 91.

of space whose conquest was ultimately the conquest of the image."[37] Combined with nuclear technologies, this strategic vision is one in which the entire world is brought into complete illumination through collusion with technologies of the visible: electronic images for remote detection, satellite images that relentlessly sweep across the globe, a larger than life cinema that offers technologies of space and time that supersede our concrete experience of the physical world.[38] According to Virilio, in the production of a generalized vision of apocalypse, cinema plays a unique role. Like the nuclear commander with his proverbial finger on the final trigger, the cinematic eye makes possible a perceptual position from which destruction can remain separate from any lived experience of it. Using the same forms of technology that create a "logistics of perception," both the scope of war and the scope of the cinematic camera project an image of their targets as from above and as spatially distant.

This is the point made by Susan Sontag in her critique of science fiction "imaginations of disaster," in which nuclear war plays a central role as an important narrative development, and moreover as the repeated collective nightmare that cannot be banished because it too closely resembles our own reality.[39] While her criticism is perhaps overly broad in its sweeping indictment of the entirety of science fiction films, she nevertheless makes an important contribution to our understanding of the way that cinematic devices intersect with a military vision of the world. The films that Sontag takes aim against are those that "invite a dispassionate aesthetic view of destruction and

[37] Ibid., 111.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," in *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film*, ed. Mick Broderick (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996).

violence—a technological view" that effectively exorcises and neutralizes fears of impending global disaster, and offers fantasies of control.[40] Virilio's argument similarly focuses on the production of nuclear spectacle that has "no other reason for existence than to be without any justification" in order to stir up the public's "nuclear faith."[41] This "faith" is the absolute conviction that nuclear war is a very real possibility, that it may be as close as a keystroke away.

Record of a Living Being shows us the other side of this "logistics of perception," which requires a contradictory everyday repression to keep us from taking to the streets in mass panic and fear to collectively demand the dismantling of the nuclear superstructure. At the same time that the military nuclear industry continues to produce and display the existence of ever-bigger weapons, ones that would make the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki pale in comparison, nuclear narratives largely work to familiarize us with this end (in heroic terms), or to alternately indicate the possibility of survival.[42] Since there are no adequate answers to this question, Nakajima's inability to carry out imperatives of the dialectic of enlightenment can only lead to insanity, for a "sane" life in the nuclear age requires an attachment to nuclear faith, but also its corresponding repression. Although ultimately leaving us without a heroic stance, Nakajima's failure offers a moment to pause and reflect upon this contradictory state of being.

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[40] Ibid., 44.
[41] Virilio, *War and Cinema*: 9.
[42] See Robert A. Jacobs, *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010). Jacobs' book historicizes American narratives of the atomic age, for an in-depth discussion of the survivalist narratives see Chapter 4, "Survival of Self and Nation under Atomic Attack."

The film's critical stance is reflected in Kurosawa's corresponding refusal of the techniques described by Sontag. Melodramatic form, despite its somewhat regressive emotionality, also works by cutting the distance between the audience and its characters, by throwing off the disciplined empathy called for by Kahn. In contrast to techniques found in much of the science fiction genre, rather than creating an ambivalent stance towards crisis (one that in narratives of nuclear apocalypse rely on images of the sublime evoking both terror and awe), melodrama unites the viewing subject with the subject on the screen—it makes us cry.

Kurosawa keeps the camera close to his subjects; the perceptual range present through the viewing experience reflects the limited point-of-view of the characters themselves. As noted in the critical evaluation of cinematic conventions in Hollywood melodrama, the camera captures the suffocating intensity of the characters' predicaments. They are often seen looking longingly from windows as if silently dreaming of escape from the normative frames that ensnare them in impossible predicaments (recall the daughter-in-law lingering over her view from the house, which also functions as her prison). It is no surprise, then, that in Nakajima's final scene he stares out the window of a sanitarium upon a world that is foreclosed to him. The camera's point-of-view, like that of Nakajima, is enclosed by the window of the cell that he considers his new planet.

Figure 5

Yet the camera also presents the sun, now an earth in flames, as likewise captured within the limits of the window's frame. This scene from the end of the film contrasts with the movie's opening shots, which pan across the bustling Japanese city where the story is set from above and at a distance. The music for these opening scenes calls upon the generic conventions of classic science fiction; the soundtrack comes straight from science fiction movies of the time. The rest of the film, in sharp contrast to these distancing devices, offers the audience very little visual relief in the way of long shots. The juxtaposition of the film's establishing shots, particularly with those from the end, work to produce a critical dialogue that expressly repudiates the "logistics of perception" of the nuclear age.

The Nuclear Age and the Logic of Pre-emption

Virilio was not the first to diagnose the logistics of perception. Before him Martin Heidegger described modernity's relationship to its world as one in which the totality appears before the viewing subject as a "world picture." This implies not simply the apprehension of a "picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as

picture."[43] Inspired by Virilio's theorization of the logistics of perception, Rey Chow places Heidegger's formulation in the nuclear context: we grasp the totality of the world as a series of targets, whether in the long-range images of its various locations, or that of the whole Earth as a target in space. The "world picture" has finally become "world target." Moreover, "[t]o conceive of the world as a target is to conceive of it as an object to be destroyed." [44] For Heidegger, the world as picture is not possible without "the smashing of the atom."[45] The world picture appears as a vision comprising vast distances, but importantly, the changes to our structures of thinking about the world include a contrast with its miniaturized reflection. The logistics of perception then, exists as a dialectic between the large and the small: "[T]he gigantic is making its appearance. In so doing, it evidences itself simultaneously in the tendency toward the increasingly small. We have only to think of numbers in the atomic physics."[46] With the unlocked secret of the tiny atom, it becomes possible to organize the world itself. Again, speed emerges as an essential ingredient: modernity "rages" forward "with a velocity unknown to the participants."[47]

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[43] Heidegger, "Age of the World Picture," in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. William Levitt (New York: Harper, 1977): 129.
[44] Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 31. Chow and I come to similar conclusions about the epistemological structure of the nuclear age; however, her primary argument in this text is to critique the practice of Area Studies, poststructuralism, and comparative studies more generally (including Comparative Literature) that replicate the self-referentiality of the bomber's view on the world and its others as target, "As long as knowledge is produced in this self-referential manner, as a circuit of targeting or *getting* the other that ultimately consolidates the omnipotence and omnipresence of the sovereign "self" / eye—the I—that is the United States, the other will have no choice but to remain just that—a target whose existence justifies only one thing, its destruction by the bomber." Ibid., 41.
[45] Heidegger, "Age of the World Picture": 124.
[46] Ibid., 135.
[47] Ibid.

Although up to now there has been a slippage in my usage of the terms *atomic* and *nuclear*, a relevant distinction can be made here. Further discovery in nuclear physics led scientists to update their understanding of the mechanics of nuclear weaponry after their deployment in Japan. What they thought was fission at the level of the atom was in actuality fission at an even smaller level of scale—the nucleus of the atom itself. Development of newer and bigger bombs after the end of WWII reflected this discovery, thus in the cultural imaginary *nuclear* also references explosive capabilities that exceed the already overwhelming amounts of damage in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. According to Kahn, our expert on thermonuclear war, the difference between atomic and nuclear war is an exponential difference in force: atomic bombs are measured in mere kilotons, while nuclear weapons make an exponential leap into megatons. *Nuclear* then, better captures the unstable movement between the miniscule and the gigantic that lurks behind the logistics of perception.

While both atomic and nuclear have entered the popular lexicon as household words, nuclear has become a word we associate intimately with the family itself. Beginning as a botanical description of plant structure, the term has proliferated its field of signification: nuclear stars of planetary nebulae, the nucleus of a cell, atomic nuclei, the psychoanalytic "nuclear-complex," linguistic nuclear terms independent of modifiers, nuclear fission and fusion, nuclear weapons, the nuclear family, nuclear winter, going nuclear, the nuclear option. Indeed, the atomic age has given way to the nuclear. Despite this abundance of signification it is, as Derrida reminds us, the geo-political struggle between proliferation and containment of nuclear weapons that occupies the central

position of meaning, that "marks" every "atom of our life." One *might* say that in the nuclear age, nuclear annihilation has consolidated the nucleus of signification itself.

This is certainly true for the central character of Tim O'Brien's Cold War melodrama, *The Nuclear Age*. William Cowling is a man obsessed with total nuclear war. As a child growing up in middle-class America of the 1950s, William is haunted by the nuclear threat mobilizing his country. He thinks of the world in terms of fission and fusion, civil defense, chain reactions, first strikes, escalation, and fallout. At night he looks out his bedroom window and sees a reenactment of a future to come:

> … and it was raining upside down – but the rain was burning, it wasn't really rain, it was wet and burning – loud noises, electricity, burning mountains and rivers and forests, and those flashes, all colors, the melted elements of nature coursing into a single molten stream that roared outward into the very center of the universe – everything – man and animal – *everything* – the great genetic pool, everything, all swallowed up by a huge black hole.[48]

The rain outside his window is no longer the regenerative principle with which life flourishes. Instead it is nothing but movement towards the void, a nightmarish hell on earth. This nightmare of atomic war ends in holocaust: a fiery fusion of all things in death, the eradication of all differences between things. Mountains, rivers, forests no longer exist as separate manifestations, they have become nothing but a "single" life-

[48] O'Brien, *The Nuclear Age*: 33.

destroying advance. There is neither referent, nor anything to refer to: where there was once the world, there is instead only an empty hole, a nucleus of nothing.

William cannot understand why he is seemingly the only one taking this threat seriously. He believes in realistically assessing the danger, and after a quick accounting he gets "the global picture and it's no fantasy – it's real."[49] From the "microorganisms in Nevada" and the "rattlesnakes and butterflies on that dusty plateau at Los Alamos," to the "wall shadows at Hiroshima" William hears the "half-life of [his] own heart."[50] Despite the fact that nuclear war has yet to break out, its traces, as though sent from the future, warn of annihilation on the verge of eruption. Nature has itself been corrupted – microorganisms, rattlesnakes, and butterflies, even the human heart – become nuclear referents.

As an early adolescent William finds no respite from his nuclear anxiety. Like the war he so desperately fears, his nuclear nightmares know no boundaries, leaching into all his waking hours. In a moment of sheer panic William constructs a nuclear safe-house out of his family's basement ping-pong table. He knows others may think he has gone crazy, but instead he feels a measure of control. He assures himself that his desire for refuge is normal, even natural: "…the lion's instinct for the den, the impulse that first drove our species into caves. Safety, it's *normal*. The mole in his hole. The turtle in his shell…. I didn't need a shrink. I needed sanctuary."[51] According to William's logic, this yearning for the center of things, for the sheltered nuclear core expresses a fundamental drive of life itself.

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[49] Ibid., 7.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 15.

Often envisioned as the fundamental locus of social production, the nuclear family, too, occupies a central position in the production of meaning. For William, it is the abiding love of his parents that banishes his apocalyptic nightmares. In a "touching" scene of "No Mercy" ping-pong, William's father refashions William's nuclear safe-house into a site for father-son bonding. Through his efforts to best his father, man to man, William finds a release from his morbid obsessions. According to William's narrative, "The balance of power held," and with a kiss goodnight on the forehead his father derails his son's orbit around nuclear holocaust. Yet this balance only tenuously holds: every summer his father participates in a ritualized melodramatic performance of Custer's Last Stand. As Custer, himself, "Every summer he died," "Every summer he got scalped."[52] While William watches in mesmerized horror he feels pulled in two directions – both to save his father, and to watch him die. Later as an adolescent William would find that he "loved him, but also [he] hated him."[53]

We could suppose William suffers from what psychoanalysts would refer to as that Oedipal "nuclear-complex": an unconscious desire for sole possession of his mother, and hence the corresponding unconscious desire for his father's death. This death of the father would thus be something like a sacrifice upon the altar of a mother's love. We should not pass this level of signification by, but we should also pay careful attention to the metaphoric slippages at work. Every summer William's father died in his reenactment of another famous sacrificial father. Custer's suicidal battle with the consolidated band of Lakota and Northern Cheyenne Indians has the ring of tragedy to it: outnumbered by

[52] Ibid., 10, 11.
[53] Ibid., 28.

nearly five to one, his defeat has become memorialized for its civilizing zeal – a sacrifice on the national altar.

As I discussed earlier in Chapter 2, sacrifice is a fundamental attribute of enlightenment rationality. Sacrifice is not the defining feature of pre-modern primitive cultures, but rather a re-enactment of the violence done against both human and nature in the exercise of an objectifying reason that would subjugate the world in order to overcome it. Sacrifice describes the beginning of a process whereby consciousness is separated from nature, and the means (reason, exchange, technology) become reified as end: "… in other words, self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved."[54] Self-preservation exists in tension with the Enlightenment's other imperative, the "conscious solidarity of the whole," in practice, nothing more than the elimination of the parts that do not fit. Self-preservation thus dictates that one approach the world with "disciplined empathy" as if looking at a far away target through the scope, or as mere datum in a calculation of mega-death in nuclear war. William's sacrificial desires of patricide engender confusion precisely because they reflect a world of terror that mirrors the rise of reason, a world in which fathers would be destroyed by the very hands they helped create. Correspondingly, Custer's sacrificial Last Stand against the Native Americans re-enacts the triumph of civilization in an extermination of any and all witnesses whose lives might testify to the lie, namely that self-preservation requires absolute domination, which starts as the domination of nature.

The nuclear family thus finds itself at the heart of historical crisis: sacrifice is simultaneously feared and desired in fulfillment of a civilizing destiny. The rhetoric of a

[54] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: 43.

return to the family, which coincidentally appears in the mid-40s, increasingly places emphasis on the nuclear family as a guarantor of an impossible stability. In her book, *Homeward Bound*, Elaine Tyler May argues that post-war Americans desired nothing more than security: "They wanted secure jobs, secure homes, and secure marriages in a secure country. … And so they adhered to an overarching principle that would guide them in their personal and political lives: containment. Containment was the key to security."[55] What May describes is a substitution of terms – a metaphoric displacement. Nuclear threat becomes a universal underwriter of meaning from which all aspects of life find their place accordingly. Pleas to "focus on family first" may appear to be attempts at untangling the threads of signification between nuclear war and nuclear family, however, this rhetoric never "disarms"; that is, it fails to re-think the family in terms other than threat and containment. The nuclear family does not offer a viable alternative to nuclear war, merely a way to cover the lie: as the American version of freedom and equality spread throughout the globe, the world itself becomes less secure, not more.

Ironically, this lie is nowhere more apparent than inside the nuclear family itself. As re-conceived in the 1940s and 50s the nuclear family thrives with mother as anchor, father at the helm, and the children dutifully "on deck." As "anchor" the woman's energies, in particular, must be sacrificed: pre-marital sex is undesirable and careers should be forsaken for the making of the home. Indeed, the containment of women figures centrally in O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*. Although the balance of power held within William's childhood family, his wife's assumed infidelities and the death of an ex-

[55] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th Anniversary Edition ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2008): 15-16.

lover (whose open sexuality William found threatening) trigger a return of his nuclear anxieties. As the novel opens we encounter William as a husband and a father, slipping out of his marital bed for the darkness of his backyard where he begins (again) to build a nuclear safe-house. This time, the safe-house turns sinister as William intends to not only ride out nuclear war, but to trigger a series of explosives that will bury his family and himself inside.

> Folded in forever like fossils. I don't want it but I can see it, as always, the imprints in rock, the wall shadows at Hiroshima, leaves and grass and the Statue of Liberty and Bobbi's diaphragm. Here, she can't leave me. The fossils don't move. Crack open a rock and she'll be curled around me. Her smile will be gold and granite. Immutable, metamorphic, welded forever by the stresses of our age. We will become the planet. We will become the world-as-it-should-be. We will be faithful. We will lace through the mountains and seams of ore, married like the elements …[56]

What William truly longs for is transcendental permanence. His longing cannot be properly called the longing for love, or even for life. What William seeks in his hole is rather completion, timelessness, the perfect life of the dinosaurs for whom the wayward disruptions of chance are now ultimately foreclosed. Inside the hole all the risks meld into one: fossilization, the wall shadows of Hiroshima, leaves of grass, a wife's infidelity.

[56] O'Brien, *The Nuclear Age*: 302.

As a child the substance of William's longing comprised the core of his nuclear nightmare: a fiery fusion of all things into a void of nothingness. Indeed in the intervening years, nightmare has become fantasy. Where once the imagined stability of the nuclear family secured the void of meaning opened by nuclear global war, nuclear threat and its politics of total containment now promise to secure William's domestic front. His safe-house becomes yet another sacrificial altar. Reminiscent of his childhood ping-pong fallout shelter, William's murderous plans are the extension of a naturalized longing for security exercised as a rationalized division from the outer world. According to Adorno and Horkheimer: "Humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown… Nothing is allowed to remain outside, since the mere idea of 'outside' is the real source of fear."[57] Through an exercise of ultimate mastery, in William's hole all the unknown threats become known threats.

This drive into the safe-house is mirrored by the drive to split the atom, which is nothing other than the desire to conquer a natural world whose order never fully conforms to human self-interest. And yet mastering the nuclear core, continuing the politics of division, only unleashes an enlightened nightmare: the world can only be conquered through the threat of its complete destruction. In *the Nuclear Age*, the logic of sacrifice, united with the imperative for self-preservation – taken to its extreme – gives way to the logic of pre-emption. "Going nuclear" reenacts a violence perpetuated against humanity and the natural world in the repetition of an originary division. What is more, the "nuclear option" generates an escalation of violence – at the level of world itself – in order to maintain a façade of control. William's domestic sacrificial desire is ruled by this

[57] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: 43.

nuclear logic of pre-emption: he will destroy his very world rather than risk the pains of a broken heart.

It is not mere coincidence that William's return to madness is triggered by feminine betrayal. As an outside to reason (which has long been discursively coded masculine) the feminine is associated with the Dionysian impulse against order in favor of pleasure and the irrational. Thus woman, like nature, provides a constant theater of war. Her conquest re-enacts what has already taken place in the achievement of complete dominion over the natural world and, crucially what has taken place with finality in an age defined by the splitting of the atom. Fittingly William's wife, Bobbi, is given minimal dialogue within the novel. As the crisis of the novel unfolds, Bobbi sleeps soundly in the drug-induced sleep planned and executed by her husband. Of the one-dimensional characterization of Bobbi, we know only that she is a poet, and as her husband falls deeper into madness she communicates with him solely through the poems she clips to his pajamas and slips under doors.

The novel's relation to these poems is ambivalent: it subsumes them, but in so doing reserves them as moments of dislocation, revealing the fissures of both William's desires for mastery and the novel's attempts at narrative closure. This disruption is partially achieved through their incomplete inclusion. The contents of Bobbi's first poem for William, "Martian Travels," – though the subject of intense debate between William and his girlfriend – are never disclosed. Indeed, he admits that he grasps its meaning only barely. This poetic confusion continues with Bobbi's second poem, "Leaves." And while the meaning of the last poem, "Backflash," is more accessible with its overt references to

war ("we burned this house to save it"), William recounts only a few lines. There is more but it eludes his memory.

As the titles of the poems indicate, Bobbi's field of signification is not dominated by nuclear threat. These poems stand in stark contrast to the narrative of the novel (identified clearly with William) positioned dialectically between the nuclear bomb and the nuclear family, as though the meaning of either can only be disclosed within a hermeneutic of pre-emption and containment. William's dilemma is defined by his disappointment with the world, a disappointment with the promise of scientific discovery in particular: "If I were a believer, if the dynamic were otherwise, if we could erase the *k* factor, if Fermi had failed physics, if at the nucleus of all things we might discover an inviolate, unbreakable heart."[58] William's "nuclear" crisis is experienced as *disenchantment*: the failure of the world to remain whole.

Bobbi's poem, "Leaves," however, offers a different vision:

What do the leaves mean?
Autumn comes to fire
on hillside flesh,
but you ask,
What do the leaves mean?
The oak, the maple, and the grass.
Winter comes and leaves
and each night you touch me
to test the season.

[58] O'Brien, *The Nuclear Age*: 206.

Here, I say, and you ask:

What do the leaves mean?[59]

The tension of the poem is underscored by the unsettled positioning of "leaves." The world of this poem is one of movement, of constant juxtaposition between seasons for growing, passionate becoming, and falling away. There is no place of exception, no hole in which the laws of nature exist separately as an "outside" to ward against. The central figures of the poem are not evergreen but deciduous; they are marked by an unavoidable temporariness, a precariousness that limits just as it engenders the possibilities for continuation. Indeed, with each repetition of its refrain the poem opens the possibility that the leaves may not *mean* at all, thus pointing towards the enigmatic quality of both the poem and the leaves themselves.

Where William sees only *leaving*, the poem sees the wayward ways of the world, not a stasis of perfection but the very continuation of life that makes passion possible. William would seek to protect his heart from breaking open, but this would keep it from beating as well. In contrast to this notion of love as containment, Jean-Luc Nancy urges us to rethink love as that very breaking, as being broken into: "[I]t is the break itself that makes the heart. The heart is not an organ, and neither is it a faculty. It is: that *I* is broken and traversed by the other where its presence is most intimate and its life most open."[60] Opposed to the regimes of self-preservation, containment, and pre-emption, we would have what Nancy calls the "regime of exposition." This regime of exposition is not an act of abandoning the other to chance (which would reenact the rules

[59] Ibid., 285.
[60] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Shattered Love," in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Lisa Garbus Peter Connor, Michael Holland, Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991): 99.

of sacrifice), but rather of embracing the other with abandon, of letting oneself be "exposed to missing love as well as to being touched by it, exposed to being betrayed, as well as to taking account of its miserable means of loving."[61] Unlike self-preservation a regime of exposition does not participate in a dialectic of domination, and requires not the glorification of self-preservation but rather its demystification.

The nuclear age is an age of perpetual threat, an age of disenchantment where we discover that the atom holds no secrets other than the ones we have always known (after all there is nothing new about violence, horror, war). However, in its radical form as a displaced (and displacing) center of the text, in "the proliferating and contradictory multiplicity of representations and thoughts of love" "love arrives" "in all it shatters,"[62] repeating itself in never-ending chains of fission and fusion. Love as shattering is a very different form of resolution than those offered by the classic melodramatic texts in which love remains the mystified promise of perfect union. However impossible and even homicidal that desire for union and the ultimate "solidarity of the whole" may be in the nuclear age, we still find ourselves on the edge of our seats, Kleenex in hand, waiting for more. The melodramatic resolution in *The Nuclear Age*, in contrast, finds a point of departure and exceeds the hegemony of signification promised by the specter of total war. Though love as exposition remains an unfulfilled longing within a world dominated by reason, the capacity to imagine a world other than it is offers our only hope of destabilizing the ossified divisions between subject/object and "I"/"other" that maintain the possibility of our total destruction.

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[61] Ibid., 94.
[62] Ibid., 101.

CHAPTER FOUR

Orphans of History:
Historical End and the Japanese American *Bildungsroman*

> Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital….The atomic situation is now at the end point of this process: the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual's continued existence.
>
> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*

In the summer of 1989 Francis Fukuyama published an article in *The National Interest*, a conservative journal of American foreign affairs, arguing that the spread of liberal democracy around the world confirmed Hegel's concept of universal history. In the proceeding months, Fukuyama's thesis generated a great deal of attention and debate; it seemed to anticipate the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War with uncanny accuracy. Coincidentally, Fukuyama—like Herman Kahn—worked as an analyst for the RAND Corporation, the "Research and Development" think tank charged with the task of creating a theoretical framework for strategic thinking in a nuclear world. Meeting the military challenges posed by fighting with, and anticipating attacks from, long-range nuclear missiles required new structures of thinking. A nuclear ideology had to be formed to prepare the armed forces for a world in which the battlefield had suddenly become total and global. Herman Kahn's melodramatic prophecy of total nuclear war and the end of civilization as we know it marked the birth of this nuclear ideology (as discussed in Chapter 4), while Fukuyama's return to German idealism

provided the necessary update for America's "coming of age" and ascension as sole nuclear superpower. In the span of just under three decades, nuclear ideology had shifted from "the end" to "the end of history," resulting in the strange situation whereby a progressive notion of history claiming a state of total actualization ("the end of history") exists alongside apocalyptic visions of history marked by technologies capable of bringing global death ("the end").

This chapter takes up the dual nature of historical end that operates as a nuclear ideology constraining alternate visions of the future and absenting other ways of accounting for the past. An analysis of the *Bildungsroman* as narrative mode is instructive here, for it has played a crucial role in shaping a modern sensibility that takes the fulfillment of the future as a guarantor of meaning for the past. By looking at the *Bildungsroman* as it takes shape in the atomic age, it becomes clear that history as progressive actualization and history as social/technological evolution make contradictory demands for the development of personal identity, or *Bildung*.

Subject to indefinite detention as enemy aliens in the United States and atomic annihilation as enemy populations in Japan, Japanese American encounters with the *Bildungsroman* reflect the inescapable pressures at "history's end." These are narratives of stalled *Bildung*: the political and legal status of Japanese immigrants in the United states was forcibly tied to their racial and ethnic identity as Japanese, yet they were also expected to strive to become American (no matter how impossible the task) and abandon personal identification with the motherland. Under these conditions the only form of *Bildungsroman* possible is one that narrates failure, thus exposing the way that Western

history and progress require the maintenance of racialized ethnic categories just as it denies them with the myth of the autonomous, self-created hero. The failed Japanese American *Bildungsromane* discussed in this chapter make it possible to see the way in which Japanese in America were forced to leave behind the Japanese *motherland* and to critique a discourse of civilization that absents the *mother* from the production of selfhood. They also make it possible to conceive of concepts such as progress, development, and personhood in ways that foster societies radically open to new modes of history, in contrast to the confinement of alterity that characterizes a history structured by nuclear end.

HISTORY FROM THE STANDPOINT OF "THE END"

Modern theories of history can be traced to Hegel's philosophy, which as Fukuyama points out, makes the achievement of freedom on a global scale the end-goal. This freedom is measured at the level of self-sustaining or autonomous collectives—"individuals" and "wholes" (nations and states). The individual person and smaller communities are only of "slight importance"; they endure tragedy for the sake of the greater good: "It is this final goal—freedom—toward which all the world's history has been working. It is this goal to which all the sacrifices have been brought upon the broad altar of the earth in the long flow of time."[1] Certainly, Hegel accedes, reflection on the misfortune that has befallen so many carries a great deal of sadness, but he urges us to fix

[1] G.W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, trans. Leo Rausch (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988): 16, 23, 22.

our minds towards the future, towards the end-goal of world history for which "these monstrous sacrifices were made."[2]

From the position of this Hegelian intellectual tradition Fukuyama declares imminent the arrival of the end of history, otherwise known as the achievement of universal/world history. Focusing on the end, and not the means, he spends little time discussing nuclear weapons, even though the collapse of the nuclear-powered arms race is the most immediate historical event supporting his thesis. However—crucially—Fukuyama turns to Hiroshima and the specter of total nuclear war in his analysis of the inevitability of modern technology, and thus the inevitability of universal history (what he describes as universal liberal democracy):

> Since Hiroshima we have envisioned [global war involving weapons of mass destruction] as a nuclear war….Assuming that such a war does not trigger nuclear winter or some other natural process that makes the earth completely uninhabitable by man, we must assume that the conflict will destroy much of the population, power, wealth of the belligerents, and perhaps of their major allies, with devastating consequences for neutral onlookers as well….Yet even these extreme circumstances would appear unlikely to break the grip of technology over human civilization, and science's ability to replicate itself. The reasons for this again have to do with the relationship between science and war. For even if one could destroy modern weapons and the specific knowledge of how to produce

[2] Ibid., 24.

> them, one could not eliminate the memory of the method that made their production possible.[3]
>
> And if the grip of a progressive modern natural science is irreversible, then a directional history and all of the other variegated economic, social, and political consequences that flow from it are also not reversible in any fundamental sense.[4]

Fukuyama ignores the implication that a history defined and directed by (nuclear) technology and the calculating apparatuses of mechanized science is inherently destructive. Instead, he concludes that the inexorability of planet-threatening technology only proves the impossibility of creating an alternate mode of history. Notably, Fukuyama's description of universal history's culmination in a homogeneous worldwide liberal democracy bears a strong resemblance to his earlier description of totalitarianism: "fundamentally invulnerable to change or reform."[5] As with the ideological foundations of most totalitarian regimes, history in this narrative is ruled by the forces of destiny. The past and present are manifestations of a future that has been foretold.

Fukuyama's "update" to Hegel's philosophy of history, as seen in the passage above, is important to our inquiry for two reasons. First, he attempts to incorporate the terror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the ensuing nuclear arms race, into Hegelian conceptions of history: sometimes evil is necessary for good. Second, he replaces Hegel's

[3] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992): 87-88.
[4] Ibid., 88.
[5] Ibid., 9.

Geist with "Mechanism" (modern natural science) as the driving force of history.[6] He explains that the "possibility of mastering nature opened up by modern natural science" is history's motor, driving it ever-forwards in the name of progress.[7] This mastery leads to ever more efficient ways of producing economic value, and includes the mass organization of labor. Fukuyama acknowledges that the forced mobility of industrialized labor upsets older forms of social organization that "may in certain respects be more humanly satisfying to live in, but since they are not organized according to the rational principles of economic efficiency, they tend to lose out to those that are. What replaces them are modern bureaucratic forms of organization."[8]

While many read Fukuyama's declaration of the end of history as intellectual justification for the triumph of the West, there is a strange ambivalence in both the original essay and the subsequent book that casts doubt on such claims.[9] The initial essay tentatively concludes that "the present world *seems* to confirm that the fundamental principles of sociopolitical organization have not advanced terribly far since 1806" (the

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[6] Ibid., 72.: "As a first cut at understanding the Mechanism that gives history its directionality, let us take our cue from Fontenelle and Bacon, and posit knowledge as the key to the directionality of history—in particular, knowledge about the natural universe that we can obtain through science."
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 77.
[9] In the context of his relationship to neo-conservatism, this ambiguity is particularly pronounced. After being considered one of the political movement's most important intellectual leaders, Fukuyama broke his allegiance to the international neo-conservative agenda. In 2006 Fukuyama distanced himself from a belief in American exceptionalism, writing: "What is needed now are new ideas, neither neoconservative nor realist, for how America is to relate to the rest of the world — ideas that retain the neoconservative belief in the universality of human rights, but without its illusions about the efficacy of American power and hegemony to bring these ends about." Francis Fukuyama, "After Neoconservatism," *New York Times Magazine*, February 19, 2006: 67. One cannot help but think that the deceptive claims about the existence of weapons of mass destruction hit a chord with Fukuyama who (along with his parents) had been imprisoned in concentration camps based on fabricated claims of national threat. We can only wonder where Fukuyama's ideological evolution will end as he expresses increased disappointment in America's historical global role.

world as described by Hegel). [10] Thus he concludes, it must be that Hegel was correct in his declaration that history had come to an end: Western liberal democracy is the end point of ideological evolution and the final form of government. However, this end is a place of sadness for Fukuyama and in the final days leading to its culmination he finds himself wistful for the days of "ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism."[11] As for a character who has arrived at the end of his *Bildung* development, the harsh experiences of the past emit a rosy glow from their ashes. Modern man, too, Fukuyama argues, has come to the end of a long turbulent adolescence. In the union of the part and the whole, individual desire and universal equality, one has the luxury of looking back at the thrill of a time when the future was unknown.

Although couched in the conservative rhetoric of nostalgia and resignation, behind Fukuyama's melancholy lurks something resembling critique. Adorno and Horkheimer, in contrast, fully articulate this critique by rejecting the facile accommodation of thought to its apparent inevitable totalization and make their theories accountable to the necessity of resistance:

> The enslavement to nature of people today cannot be separated from social progress. The increase in economic productivity which creates the conditions for a more just world also affords the technical apparatus and the social groups controlling it disproportionate advantage over the rest of the population. The individual is entirely nullified in the face of the economic powers. These powers are taking society's domination over

[10] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," in *The National Interest* (Wes Jones, 1989). Emphasis added.
[11] Ibid.

> nature to unimagined heights. While individuals are vanishing before the apparatus they serve, they are provided for by that apparatus and better than ever before. In the unjust state of society the powerlessness and pliability of the masses increase with the quantity of goods allocated to them. The materially considerable and socially paltry rise in the standard of living of the lower classes is reflected in the hypocritical propagation of intellect.[12]

Rather than resigning themselves to a Hegelian reconciliation with the "monstrous sacrifices" demanded in the movement towards the end of history, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that we must acknowledge the complicity of Western forms of thought. Thought collaborates with injustice through an intellectualization of history to the point of abstraction, making rational justifications for irrational behavior. Faith in an end point of history in turn, provides a comforting release from the dictates of conscience for those who speculate about it—what amounts to a "hypocritical propagation of intellect" relieving anyone from the obligation to think through or beyond the status quo.

In light of the increasing global nature of human life, Susan Buck-Morss likewise argues for a return to the concept of universal history. However, unlike Fukuyama she calls not merely for an update but for a revision of the project itself:

> Can we humans, in a kind of reversal of Hegel, refuse to see ourselves as history's instrument, our particular actions meaningful only when subsumed within some overarching concept as it historically unfolds—

[12] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelen Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002): xvii.

> even when that concept is human freedom? Can collective subjectivity be imagined as inclusive as humanity itself? Is there a way to universal history today?[13]

In addition to a rethinking of human freedom and collective forms of subjectivity, what the nuclear situation also urgently demands is a reassessment of technology if we are to think a universal history in terms other than domination. As discussed at a number of moments throughout this dissertation, the critiques to modernity that we inherit from Adorno, Horkheimer, Heidegger, Virilio, and others ask us to acknowledge that technological advancement has meant an end to human suffering in significant ways; and yet, they argue, it has also shaped every aspect of human life to such an extent that perception is threatened into becoming something merely technological.

It is from such a situation that we read Foucault's lectures, *Society Must Be Defended*, as a history of modernity that offers an understanding of politics as a set of technologies for waging war.[14] War, he asserts, has become the underlying principle behind all political power. Foucault inverts Clausewitz's famous dictum ("war is the

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[13] Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009): 111. Her analysis of the status of race, notably in Hegel's master/slave dialectic, has a productive resonance with this chapter's discussion of race and the ethnic *Bildungsroman*; however, for the sake of coherence I will not directly make these connections when they appear in the chapter. That said, it is worth noting that part of her revision of what constitutes universal history places emphasis on the revolutionary Haitian slaves as the agents of universality, rather than as passive sacrifices that would be fully realized after their deaths by the French Revolution: "The rightful source of universal history, however, is not in the absorption by narratives of the French Revolution. Universality is in the moment of the slaves' self-awareness that the situation was not humanly tolerable, that it marked the betrayal of civilization and the limits of cultural understanding, the nonrational, and nonrationalizable course of human history that outstrips in its *in*humanity anything that a cultural outlaw could devise" (133-34).

[14] I am not arguing that Foucault intended his analysis of "political technologies" to imply the technological takeover of the political realm. Quite clearly in his work on technologies of the self he used the word "technology" to historicize *constructions* of the self and to analyze the tools created for this self-creation. However, critiques of modernity in relation to science and technology, as referenced in this chapter's discussion, open up the possibilities of reading his use of technology in the political realm.

continuation of politics by other means") to ask how politics became "war by other means." Politics as war by other means arises in a globalized world in which those with power must find ways of controlling people not merely in villages or neighboring nations, but in crowded megacities teeming with transnational affiliations, and its reach must include entire continents of states. Technology best describes the exercise of power on this level for it operates as a rationalized and abstracted system of administration. Politics converges with war because politics adopts the strategies of war for surveilling, managing, and disciplining these exponentially expanding and geographically diverse sets of bodies. Meanwhile, tactics of war apply to domestic populations of people in addition to their foreign counterparts. From the convergence of war and politics emerges *biopower*.

In order to understand what Foucault means by biopower we begin with his discussion of earlier forms of political power vested in a sovereign who exercised his right over life by exercising his right to *kill*, what Foucault refers to as "essentially the right of the sword."[15] As modernity progresses, this old right is not so much replaced as complemented by a different form of power, the power to "*make live* and let die" (as opposed to "make die and let live").[16] This form of power can be seen by the promulgation of rules and regulations over the spacing of bodies, their increased productivity (exercise, drills), and the surveillance of where these bodies live and work, and what these bodies do. Central to the materialization of this power is the need to

[15] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. English series edited by Arnold I. Davidson, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997): 51.
[16] Ibid., 240.

control an increasing multiplicity of bodies. Foucault identifies two modes of political technology thus put into service of control: disciplinary and regulatory. Disciplinary technologies are capable of singling out individual bodies for surveillance, training, and punishment. The second regulatory mode of political technology is one that Foucault argues is the most recent in the history of modernity. This mode of power:

> is addressed to a multiplicity of men, not to the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on.[17]

Here we have the politics of populations, where human life is defined en masse as "man-as-species." This is the "biopolitics of the human race."[18]

Biopolitics describes the way in which wars are framed in the name of saving life. That is, wars are legitimated not by the acquisition of resources or the continuation of particular regimes (though these may be the most significant driving forces), but rather by discourses that claim the very continuation of the populace is threatened by the existence of another enemy population. Foreign populations are targets but the goal is to contain domestic populations in whose name the war is fought.

> [E]ntire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as

[17] Ibid., 241.
[18] Ibid., 242-43.

managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars causing so many men to be killed.[19]

This is possible only once each human subject is capable of abstracting individual bodily security and identifying it with that of the larger populace, once an individual is also already a member of the mass. Likewise, this requires homogenizing discourses of enemy populations as one great threatening entity, and race becomes an easy way of making these biopolitical distinctions. As Foucault describes it, thinking scientifically (or technologically) is absolutely necessary, for subdivision is the "first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower."[20] The second function is to operate according to a biological logic of social Darwinism: inferior races die out, and thus by eliminating the weak, the victor improves the overall condition and continuation of the human race.[21]

Technology appears in this context as a historical category of thinking the political, but it is important to also account for the way in which technology as such (in the commonplace way of thinking about technology) relates to this technologico-political history. We can read *Civilization and Madness*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline and Punish*, and *The History of Sexuality* as texts in which Foucault does exactly this kind of

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[19] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978): 137.
[20] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended"*: 243.
[21] For an excellent discussion of Foucault's analytics of race and biopower, see ibid., 255. Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995)., provides a thorough account of the final lecture at the Collège de France and its relationship to the final chapter of *The History of Sexuality: Vol 1*. She argues that Foucault contributes to an understanding of how race functions for modernity by identifying a series of transformations in racial discourse "from a discourse on war proper to a discourse on war conceived in biological terms; from a power based on discipline to one transfigured into normalization; from a discourse that opposed the state to one annexed by it; from an ancient sovereign right to kill converted into a deadly principle in the modern state's biopolitical management of life; from racial discourse as the nobility's defense against the state into a discourse in which the state intervenes to defend society against itself" (89).

work—these texts provide histories of the discourses surrounding technologies that altered medical, penal, and educational institutions. As he outlines in *Society Must Be Defended,* the transformation of politics into a generalized state of war can perhaps most clearly be seen in the concentration camp, which represents a biopolitical expression of these modern technologies as they coalesced around discourses of race. In this regard, for Foucault the Nazi death camp was this political technology's sudden, violent formation.

Alongside the Nazi death camp there is the shadow of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although Foucault never explicitly references the violent expression of this new technology, he seems to sense that a discussion of biopower is not complete without also addressing atomic weapons. In every instance where he sketches out the concept of biopower he turns to something he called in contrast, *atomic power*. Atomic power is important for Foucault because it supports his theory that a new form of power has emerged, one characterized by the mass killing of entire populations of people in the name of the continued existence of one's purported own population. As the power to kill all of life, atomic weapons guarantee global control of populations: "[t]he atomic situation is now at the end point of this process: the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual's continued existence."[22] Atomic power makes the full emergence of biopower possible because it exponentially increases the murderous reach of power from population to planet.

Yet Hiroshima and Nagasaki go unnamed in Foucault's theorization because atomic power also challenges his insistence that death acts as the boundary point for politics. According to Foucault, in death a person moves out of the field of control, thus

[22] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*: 137.

because biopower expands its field of operation in the maintenance and regulation of human beings, it has an investment in managing life rather than taking it away.[23] He refers to this as the impossible paradox of atomic power: "the power to manufacture and use the atom bomb represents the deployment of a sovereign power that kills, but it is also the power to kill life itself….[a]nd therefore, to suppress itself…"[24] It is important to notice the way Foucault initially describes atomic power as the ability to both manufacture and use atomic bombs, but he quickly contracts (and expands) this to nuclear annihilation (total nuclear war). Equating atomic power with total nuclear war expands the concept's definition in that any instance of atomic power results in immediate planet-wide effects. However, in reality this amounts to a narrowing of the concept's impact whereby atomic power is mistakenly taken to be a restraint to biopower rather than its globalizing catalyst. The paradox at work here is best described, not as impossible, but as *suicidal*. As discussed previously in Chapter 3, the discourse of total nuclear war (and the suicidal international atomic policy of mutually assured destruction) is a melodramatic technique rendering invisible the everyday function of atomic power to create a generalized climate of terror.

I have analyzed several other aspects of atomic power that function in biopolitically paradoxical ways as catalyst and not constraint. As argued in Chapter 1, reproducing a conception of atomic power fixated on the specter of global suicide threatens to overlook the fact that nuclear war has already happened—and was waged by a nuclear state against one that was non-nuclear. The dead and dying bodies of the

[23] Ibid., 138.: "Now it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its dominion; death is power's limit, the movement that escapes it…"
[24] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended"*: 253.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki *hibakusha* call attention to atomic power's *paradox of liminality*. Death may serve as a limit for atomic power in the sense that populations of dead bodies foreclose their inclusion as subjects in the building of new regimes. However, these bodies create a frightening referential instability, a liminality that can be co-opted and inscribed with meaning. The terror of atomic war, which has escalated to images of planet-death, may act as a limit point on the one hand, but on the other it also generates a globalized regime of nuclear power that has its foundation in the very real deaths in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Chapter 2 explored the mimetic impulses expressed in the atomic age. From the standpoint of their first use, atomic weapons represented not merely a means of ending the war, but also the discovery of a way to replicate what was perceived as the tremendous power of the universe itself. In biopolitical terms this is the *paradox of technological mastery*. The greatest scientific achievement of mankind (unleashing the power of the atom, the building block of life) placed those in control of atomic power in the roles of gods capable of using this new technology to destroy mankind or to infinitely fuel increasing mastery over the earth. That creation now appears aesthetically as destruction instead of regeneration is an expression of this paradox.

This chapter describes a fourth paradox, that of *historical end*. Progressive, teleological discourses of history that seek the realization of universal human freedom require first the rationalization of terrifying historical events. In the atomic age, these discourses next require individuals to reconcile their personal destinies with regimes of political power that maintain this terror through the continued production of the means

for destroying the world itself. According to this discursive logic, the fulfillment of the future is achieved only through the disappearance of the past, and alongside discourses that lead to the end of any notion of future (as expressed in progressive notions of the end as "arrival" and end as "foreclosure").

In this way historical end brings together two strands of Enlightenment conceptions of the origin of personhood. "The end of history" suggests that personhood occurs in the (sometimes bloody) global advancement of reason as expressed in nation-states fully actualized through an elimination of the divergent desires of its population. Ironically, the resulting social coercion translates on the level of personal *Bildung* as *self*-development. Just as nation-states strive for the actualization of freedom, which has its roots in autonomy (and not justice), the narrative of individual development proceeds in the fashion of an Odyssean epic, with the leaving of home in order to create one's own self identity through increasing acquisition of mastery over others. "The end," in contrast, is concerned with the person only as a member of a species, and divides populations of people like branches of a phylogenetic tree in a Darwinian struggle for survival between nations. Armed with increasingly powerful, life-destroying technology, this battle (morally neutralized by the rhetoric of social evolution) is implicitly and explicitly coded as a war between races. The production of personhood in the latter of way of framing modernity requires the maintenance of divisions between populations and the management of life systems (food, housing, labor).

Feminist critiques of history and social power are relevant here; they have taken aim at Western structures of thought that take mastery to be the ultimate end for both

history and personhood. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* explains how biological discourses combine with progressive notions of development-as-mastery to imprison women. Indeed, a full account of the rise of biopolitical regimes must recognize the way in which woman as a category of being has been narrowly defined by a reproductive capacity that circumscribes the possibilities of her identity based on biological markers. As Beauvoir explains, dominant narratives of Western civilization imprison women in their sex: "[f]rom birth, the species has taken possession of woman and tends to tighten its grasp."[25] In other words, the intersection of what Foucault would call sovereign power and biopower have their origin in definitions of woman.

When thinking through the possibilities of a modernity marked by biopolitical regimes, *The Second Sex* cautions both women and men from entrapment within these discourses:

> But in truth a society is not a species, for it is in a society that the species attains the status of existence—transcending itself towards the world and toward the future. Its ways and customs cannot be deduced from biology, for the individuals that compose the society are never abandoned to the dictates of their nature; they are subject rather to a second nature which is custom and in which are reflected the desires and fears that express their essential nature.[26]

For Beauvoir the situation is particularly alarming for women. In particular, motherhood as the condition of female identity, as a responsibility to the species, leaves little room for

[25] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley(New York: Bantam Books, 1961): 23.
[26] Ibid., 32.

female agency. Motherhood in this context is nothing other than the most extreme form of biopolitical alienation: "Tenanted by another, who battens upon her substance throughout the period of pregnancy, the female is at once herself and other than herself."[27] Adorno and Horkheimer describe the situation in terms much like those used by Beauvoir; Western civilization has created a discourse of female weakness and "[w]hen domination of nature is the true goal, biological inferiority remains the ultimate stigma, the weakness imprinted by nature, the mark which invites violence."[28]

In the atomic age, this regime of domination results in a situation whereby the power to destroy entire populations of people has been inverted into its opposite: absolute power to give life. As noted by Evelyn Fox Keller, correspondence between military, political, and scientific personnel during the bomb's initial production refer to the bomb as Oppenheimer's "baby":

> As early as December 1942, physicists at Chicago received acknowledgement for their work on plutonium with a telegram from Ernest Lawrence that read, "Congratulations to the new parents. Can hardly wait to see the new arrival."…Two days after the Alamogordo test, Secretary of war Henry Stimpson received a cable in Potsdam which read: Doctor has just returned most enthusiastic and confident that the little boy is as husky as his big brother. The light in his eyes discernable from here to Highhold and I could have heard his screams from here to my farm.[29]

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[27] Ibid., 19.
[28] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: 206.
[29] Evelyn Fox Keller, "Making Gender Visible in the Pursuit of Nature's Secrets," in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Wendy Kolmar and Frances Bartkowsi (Mountainview, CA: Mayfield, 2000): 489. Quoted in

Keller argues that the correspondence reflects the cooption of maternal procreation in the act of nuclear production. Turning the act of maternal creation into destruction on a global scale amounts to a masculine takeover of what was previously shrouded by a feminine mystique such that "the secret of life has become the secret of death."[30] Carol Cohn also reported this strategy of paternalizing containment after her tour of a nuclear submarine in the summer of 1984. She writes of being encouraged by a naval officer to "pat" the bomb, and of receiving inquiries afterwards whether she had been allowed to "pat" it. In thinking through the strangeness of this encounter Cohn writes:

> The thrill and pleasure of "patting the missile" is the proximity of all that phallic power, the possibility of vicariously appropriating it as one's own. But patting is not only an act of sexual intimacy. It is also what one does to babies, small children, the pet dog. The creatures one pats are small, cute, harmless—not terrifyingly destructive. Pat it, and its lethality disappears.[31]

By claiming the birth of the atomic bomb, and tenderly patting it as it comes of age in a fully nuclear world, nuclear discourse makes the image of the mother disappear entirely, replacing it with that of by the scientific/military technocrat.[32] The myth of mastery

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Lisa Guenther, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction* (Albany: State University of New York, 2006): 35.

[30] Guenther, *Gift of the Other*: 35.

[31] Carol Cohn, "Nuclear Language and How We Learned to Pat the Bomb," in *Feminism and Science*, ed. Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino, *Oxford Readings in Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1996; reprint, 2004): 176.

[32] The absenting of the mother from narratives of development will be explored in more detail in following sections of this chapter; however it is important to note that this masculine-scientific takeover of "the secret of life" has its historical analog in the absenting from history of the Austrian female scientist, Lise Meitner, who has been called the "mother of the bomb." Meitner was a physicist who, together with Otto Hahn, made many of the breakthrough discoveries about atoms and radiation that directly contributed to the

unites these two discourses of motherhood. Firstly, the male of the species has a greater capacity to dominate the earth, thus the female is constrained by the demands of the pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing. Secondly, mankind has developed the capacity to unleash the fundamental power of the universe and destroy all life on earth, thus fully moving into autonomous development apart from the dictates of Mother Nature.

Feminist thinkers like Beauvoir have turned to the world of myths and stories in search for a way out of the cycle of mastery and domination that trap not only women, but also modern civilization itself, in increasing scales of violence. On the one hand, they become literary critics because it is through narrative that our current conceptions of universal history have been created and are reproduced. On the other hand, they see in literature the power to experiment with alternate histories and potentially undo ruling structures. In keeping with Buck-Morss' argument that in order to advance concepts such as freedom or justice (what she calls "human universality") we must turn to "the 'unhistorical histories' dismissed by Hegel,"[33] this chapter works through the atomic paradox of historical end by analyzing the narrative structures of two Japanese American orphans of history from the *Bildungsromane No-No Boy* and *Obasan*.[34] The *Bildungsroman* lends itself to an inquiry of this kind because from its earliest formations

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development of the atomic bomb. Based on her measurement of the energy released when an atom is split, she predicted the enormous power that would result from a large chain reaction of uranium atoms (she coined the term nuclear fission). Meitner was Jewish and lost her job when the Nazis took power. Hahn published her work under his name and won a Nobel Prize in 1944 based on their work as well as Meitner's discovery of nuclear fission. In the 1970s she helped Sweden design a nuclear reactor, the invention she claimed she had been working for all along. See Ruth Lewin Sime, *Lise Meitner: A Life in Physics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Patricia Rife, *Lise Meitner and the Dawn of the Nuclear Age* (Boston: Birkhauser, 1998).

[33] Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*: 148.

[34] John Okada, *No-No Boy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976); and Joy Kogowa, *Obasan* (New York: Anchor Books, 1981).

it existed as a way of thinking the fulfillment of the individual as an attunement to the whole. Since this attunement more often than not requires adjustment to injustice, working through and with this narrative mode places one squarely within debates over the nature of progress and history. A reading of this kind contributes to a reevaluation of universal history, such that "[t]here is no end…, only an infinity of connecting links."[35] Just as "the end" is a fabulous melodramatic narrative, "the end of history" is likewise a narrative; one that we have the power to read for its ideological assumptions and even to rewrite.

BILDUNGSROMAN AS NARRATIVE OF MODERNITY

The German *Bildungsroman* is the narrative form most associated with the Hegelian worldview that conceives of history as the unfolding development of the whole through the increasing synthesis and harmony of its parts. With its emphasis on the development and psychological growth of the central character, contemporary manifestations of this form of narrative are often referred to as the "coming of age" novel. In the classic *Bildungsroman*, the thematic conflict driving the diegesis centers on an everyman hero who must learn to shape private desire with the aims of the larger social totality. Unlike the melodramatic narrative mode discussed in Chapter 3, conflict does not unfold as tragedy or turn to mythic forms of resolution. Instead, conflict in the *Bildungsroman* is most closely associated with realism. And whereas middle-aged heroes commonly

[35] Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*: 151. The full quote reads, "There is no end to this project, only an infinity of connecting links. And if they are to be connected without domination, then the links will be lateral, additive, syncretic rather than synthetic. The project of universal history does not come to an end. It begins again, somewhere else."

populate melodramatic texts, the *Bildung* hero is a character in search of experience and in the process of identity formation.

Mikhail Bakhtin described this type of novel as one concerned with "the assimilation of real historical time and the assimilation of historical man that takes place in that time;" the central character thus takes "the image of *man in the process of becoming* in the novel."[36] He argues that the *Bildungsroman* emerged at the eighteenth century as a response to shifting perspectives of space and time brought about by new understandings of the world made possible by discoveries in the natural sciences. For the first time the earth was known as a discrete entity, circling the sun in a system of other individually distinct planets. Moreover, scientific theories such as Newton's law of gravity provided a means of describing the world as a single structure organized by demonstrable rules; in this way the world was filled in and in Bakhtin's words, "rounded out."

Franco Moretti points out that as a literary form giving narrative shape to Hegel's conclusion that "the true is the whole," the classic *Bildungsroman* "ends as soon as an intentional design has been realized: a design which involves the protagonist and determines the overall meaning of events."[37] He argues that the novel places emphasis on the life of a specific individual as a way to reshape the progress of universal history such that it becomes intelligible from the standpoint of the everyday. In the process, the whole

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[36] M.M. Bakhtin, "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Signficance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986): 19. Emphasis in the original.
[37] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000): 55. Both Bakhtin and Moretti identify Goethe as the master of the classical *Bildungsroman*, and give particular attention to the novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*.

(universal history) is channeled into the life of the particularity (concrete common existence), and therein reaffirmed. The diegetic emphasis on everyday life rather than the future of humanity as such belies the true aim of the classic *Bildungsroman*: the subsumption of the individual into the larger totality. This is the ideal model of modern processes of socialization, for by the narrative's end the character no longer perceives a conflict at all: "I *desire* to do what I in any case *should* have done."[38] What is achieved is not so much a synthesis of private self and society as it is a harmony built on the internalization of social norm by the individual.

An emphasis on youth is another characteristic feature of the *Bildungsroman*; indeed Moretti argues it is the central feature. Youth becomes a problem for modernity because it represents the social instability generated by capitalism. Although following in the footsteps of one's parents once provided a structure that fixed youth to social life, the increasing globalization of trade networks and mobility of labor brought about by industrial processes threw open the question of the future in new ways. Youth becomes an exploration of possible social spaces, a place of budding hopes and ever-present anxieties giving rise to the question: who might I become? The *Bildungsroman* is thus a response to a modern understanding of personal and social history that looks to the *future* as the guarantor of meaning. The *Bildungsroman*, like the subjects of modernity, internalizes the aporia of a history built on a future already present (unfolding through individual experience) and empty (already fully realized as a social totality).

The contradictions of modernity's embodiment in youth are most apparent in the ambivalent narrative endings of the *Bildungsroman*. These endings offer a "disturbing

[38] Ibid., 21.

symbiosis of homeland and prison."[39] In classic versions, the hero meets his happy fate after a period of discovery, but in order to enjoy the fruits of his spiritual/psychological development he must give up any claims to private self-fulfillment and conform to the social demands of stabilized relationships. Marriage and professional employment function as the contractual bonds that lead to the satisfaction of desire, just as they constrain the possibilities of future longings. The story always ends here, for the period of youth is over. The hero's personal pursuits have been overcome through his assimilation into the larger fold of time and history. The future promises a life of continued contentment into adulthood and old age, albeit in a less intense form than the adventurous excitement of youth.

As the narrative form of the *Bildungsroman* developed over time, the satisfaction promised by this resolution increasingly rings hollow. Characters internalize this dissatisfaction by developing a dual nature. The hero's actions are determined by the demands of social life, but alongside these external values there exists a separate internal moral code. Resolution comes not in the merging of these two sets of principles, "a wall is instead erected between two lives, which are then both lived to their limits."[40]

> Hence the modern world's unique valorization of unhappiness, the uncanny familiarity with which we welcome the unhappy ending, the paradoxical sense of security and stability we derive from the contemplation of an unjustly bitter fate. This melancholy helps us balance ourselves between two lives. It is the price we pay for—for bad faith of

[39] Ibid., 55.
[40] Ibid., 87.

course: which is not only a theme of the realistic *Bildungsroman* but also its objective result.[41]

In brief, Moretti argues that the rise of unhappy endings "helped European culture to adjust to the fortuitous-yet-inexorable nature of nineteenth century capitalism."[42]

The *Bildungsroman* as symbolic representation of the contradictions of modern socialization "is the most contradictory of symbolic forms."[43] This makes it complicit with a culture that requires bad faith as a means for social survival, at the same time making possible a reappropriation of the form for resistance to those very demands. Gregory Castle, in a study of modernist versions of the *Bildungsroman*, disagrees with Moretti's conclusion that its narrative possibilities have been exhausted. He argues instead that modernist desires "for autonomous self-formation both rescues a classical ideal of Bildung…and at the same time subjects that ideal to what Adorno calls an 'immanent critique.'"[44] Immanent critique of intellectual and artistic texts analyzes the relationship between form and meaning as a method for understanding the texts in question. For immanent critique, contradictions between form and meaning do not point to inherent inadequacy of the texts, but rather the inherent contradictions of the larger socio-historical world from which the texts emerge.

In the failure of the modernist *Bildungsroman* to conform to the narrative requirements of its classic ideal (exemplified by *Wilhelm Meister*), Castle finds critical success: "the failure of form leads to its rehabilitation under new conditions of

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[41] Ibid., 127.
[42] Ibid., 126.
[43] Ibid., 10.
[44] Gregory Castle, *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006): 3.

engagement."[45] In the hands of writers from marginalized communities, Castle argues that a literary "transculturation" occurs whereby the formal qualities of the dominant narrative tradition are transformed to better reflect the lived conditions of life from the margins.[46] In the United States, ethnic minorities have appropriated the Bildungsroman. As explained by Martin Japtok, this narrative mode appeals to "a sense of order in a world of crisis" in stark contrast to "the world of ethnic communities [which] tends to be subjected to constant change."[47] Through a process of transculturation, these "coming of age" stories do not present a harmonious, homogenous ethnic totality as posited by the dominant culture.

In the altered context of minority experiences, the *Bildungsroman* narrative focuses on an individual's struggle to find a place within both ethnic and dominant communities, offering resistance to the reification of ethnicity as fixed category of identity on the level of form itself. Such texts serve to reshape dominant representational conventions the better to reflect minority lives. They also highlight the contradictory demands to forego identification with the "motherland" in favor of mainstream values, and to then accept inferior status within that adopted society.[48] While the *Bildungsroman* of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries focused almost exclusively on the

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[45] Ibid., 252.
[46] Ibid. Castle identifies two types of modernist *Bildung* narratives in particular that perform this critique. In the Irish setting, novels by Oscar Wilde and James Joyce reflect the colonial conditions of their era. In the context of feminist history, the incorporation of *Bildungsroman* elements by Virginia Woolf challenges the masculine hegemony of the literary tradition that defines women just as it excludes them.
[47] Martin Japtok, *Growing Up Ethnic: Nationalism and the Bildungsroman in African American and Jewish American Fiction* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005): 24.
[48] As Japtok points out, however, this does not mean that essentialized notions of ethnicity are always rejected. He writes (24), "At the same time, they are, to a greater or lesser degree, beholden to essentialist conceptualizations of ethnicity, and thus they cannot avoid creating new stereotypes, which are sometimes old stereotypes with new valorizations…."

everyday life of a common man and not larger political and social conditions in which that life unfolds (though this relation existed latently in the very struggle of self-discovery in conflict with social norm), the ethnic *Bildungsroman* necessarily comments upon its social context more directly. By raising the question of the equal status of an ethnic minority in an unequal world these novels present an immanent critique of the homogenizing and alienating forces of liberal democracy and its related discourse of universal progressive history.

In the specific context of Asian American cultural formations, Lisa Lowe similarly argues that the *Bildungsroman* occupies a special position in the Western literary tradition, and thus serves as a potent site for critique. Moreover, she adds that these narratives offer an alternative mode for representing history itself:

> …the structural location of U.S. minority literature may produce effects of dissonance, fragmentation, and irresolution even and especially when that literature appears to be performing a canonical function. Even those novels that can be said to conform more closely to the formal criteria of bildungsroman express a contradiction between the demand for a univocal developmental narrative and the historical specificities of racialization, ghettoization, violence, and labor exploitation. The kind and degree of contradiction between those historical specificities and the national narrative served by the cultural institution of the novel generates formal deviations whose significances are misread if simply assimilated as modernist or postmodernist aesthetic modes. The effects of these works

> are more radically grasped in terms of their constant interrogation of the discrepancies between canonical historical narratives and what Walter Benjamin would term the material "catastrophes" that those histories obscure.[49]

The "catastrophes" referenced here are the very ones claimed by Hegel and Fukuyama as the necessary tragedies fueling history's progress. In contrast to this vision of universal triumph, Benjamin gives us instead the angel of history, suspended by the stormy winds of progress. The angel does not look forward eagerly towards history's end, but rather backwards at the "catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage." Buckling under the pressure of this wreckage, the Asian American *Bildungsroman* functions as anti-historicist text. There are no angels here, just readers, confronted with fragmented texts that never seem to arrive at their intended destinations.

Japanese American versions of the *Bildungsroman* written after World War II are particularly important to the production of alternate conceptions of history to the extent that they resist a politics that otherwise serves to radically contain domestic and foreign populations by indefinite detention and the specter of genocidal nuclear bombardment. In *No-No Boy*, accepting the promise of America's liberal democracy requires the novel's hero to disavow earlier attempts to develop an identity based either on his Japanese heritage or his American citizenship. As a constantly self-contradicting and self-hating *Bildungsroman* character, he proves the total acquiescence to authority required at history's end. Moreover, the homogenizing demands have become global in scope: from

[49] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 100.

concentration camp in the United States to atomic bombing in Japan, there is no escape from the coming of age for Western conceptions of progressive history.

No-No Boy: THE HOLLOWNESS OF HISTORY

Targeted as an enemy population by the United States government during World War II, Japanese Americans were subject to indefinite detention in internment camps, and through ancestral ties, to annihilation by the atomic bomb.[50] In the discourse surrounding this period in American history, significant cultural pressure suppresses examination of these experiences, either separately (Japanese Americans in concentration camps and Japanese Americans as victims of the atomic bombs), or as linked. It is thus not surprising that Japanese American counter-history is often represented by gaps, absences, and silence.

Fiction writer Ruth Sasaki explains the way her work must work on and through these historical gaps:

> I wandered ghostlike amidst the mainstream of America, treading unaware on a culture that lay buried like a lost civilization beneath my feet, unaware of the cultural amnesia inflicted on my parents' generation by the internment and the atomic bomb.[51]

[50] An estimated several thousand Japanese Americans were also direct victims of the atomic bombings (in addition to an unknown number of Japanese immigrants to the U.S. who returned to Japan during wartime). For a discussion of this little known fact about the atomic bombings see Rinjiro Sodei, "Were We the Enemy? American Hibakusha," in *Living With the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age*, ed. Laura Hein and Mark Selden (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).
[51] R.A. Sasaki, *The Loom and Other Stories* (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1991).

Significantly, the positioning of Sasaki's literary inspiration is itself buried on the back of the collection amidst the marginalia. Inside the book, an early story narrates the experience of a main character's Japanese American mother—including her imprisonment and efforts to reintegrate into the dominant culture after release. After humiliations at school the mother vows to maintain the image of Japanese as model minorities in America: "The Japanese who passed through her house could drink, gamble, and philander, but she would never acknowledge it. She could admit no weakness, no peculiarity. She would be irreproachable. She would be American."[52] The entire collection finds its title from this central story; those that follow "Loom" throw into relief the varied threads woven into the lives of her daughters that emanate from their mother's pledge. One has to dig deeper to find any clear traces of the atomic bomb.

Towards the end of the short story collection, one of the daughters recalls her father's visit to Japan while she was living abroad there, and a trip they took to Hiroshima where he had once lived. The death of the father's mother—a twenty-year immigrant to the U.S. who returned with an amassed wealth before the outbreak of war—casually slips into the story. She died alone in her home on the day of the atomic bombing. Little is said about the fact that at the time of the bombing the father was a private in the U.S. Army, fighting for the other side. Much more is said about the various foods that each location on the trip is known for: here you eat eel; here you look for wild mushrooms; at this place you will find tasty noodles. However, unlike regional cuisine, the people of the story have no home location of their own. They emigrate, return, and emigrate again; they go to war, study abroad, take a vacation, jump in and out of trains.

[52] Ibid., 21.

Given such mobility what does it mean to be Japanese, American, or Japanese American? The history of the atomic bomb that Sasaki calls from the depths of memory resists representation and defies the clear-cut national labels justifying dominant discourses of the event.

In her study of early Post-WWII America, Caroline Chung Simpson explains that because of this troubling lack of stable national identity Japanese Americans were a particularly problematic resident population during World War II and in the immediate postwar period.

> Indeed, the entanglement of concepts of Japanese and Japanese American identity was a constant part of the problem posed by the presence of Japanese Americans. Their lifelong ties to Japan and, in the case of Issei and even certain Nisei individuals, their ambivalent national and cultural statuses often continued to exceed the bounds of national imagination…[53]

With the term "absent presence" Simpson hopes to capture the irony articulated in Foucault's thesis about the silencing role played by discourses of sex from *The History of Sexuality*. In the constant discursive prohibition and containment of sex, the argument goes, sex emerges as a dominant mode of identity formation, one that has the effect of silencing other possibilities of understanding bodies and pleasures. Simpson similarly argues that it is their "unseen but nonetheless felt" presence "that made Japanese American experience and identity a powerful force in postwar American history and

[53] Caroline Chung Simpson, *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001): 10.

culture."[54] According to her argument, the presence of the Japanese Americans troubled post-war narratives that positioned the United States as the uncompromised hero of World War II and the moral superior of its communist rival, the USSR. Japanese Americans threatened this monolithic self-serving narrative in two ways: first as a community of people who survived imprisonment in American concentration camps, and second as reminders of America's use of nuclear weapons on the civilian populations of two Japanese cities.[55]

Already in the very start of the novel's preface, the world described in Okada's *No-No Boy* is one fundamentally structured by race and ethnicity. In the only scene that takes place before war's end (with unnamed characters whose relation to the narrative plot remains unknown), two American soldiers share a conversation from the belly of a B-52 flying over the Pacific. A farm boy from Nebraska incredulously asks his Japanese American compatriot why he's in the air flying missions for a country that has imprisoned his own family. The Japanese American soldier only repeats the simple reply "I got my reasons."[56] The presumably white soldier from Nebraska has the luxury of outrage: "Hell's bells…if they'd done that to me…They could kiss my ass." He immediately grasps the contradiction and the hypocrisy of wartime propaganda. America

[54] Ibid., 11.
[55] Chung Simpson (ibid., 139.) explains, American concentration camps were significantly different than those in Europe; however both shared the features of organizing all aspects of life through a "repressive regimentation" of all aspects of social life. She writes that "[t]he scene of masses being transported into the barbed-wire compound that was now 'home' makes the evacuation seem vaguely reminiscent of the removal of Jews during the early days of the Holocaust. Although the internment of Japanese Americans in no manner approaches the savagery of the treatment of European Jews, the imprisonment of citizens primarily on the basis of racial differences irrevocably disrupts any notions of the sanctity of private life and individual freedom and blurs the distinction between German totalitarianism and American democracy."
[56] Okada, *No-No Boy*: xi.

fights on behalf of the Jews and the people of Europe who face ruthless totalitarian regimes. Yet back home there are old men, women, and children uprooted from their lives, property lost, sitting and waiting indefinitely for their release from concentration camps. "What the hell are we fighting for?" he wonders. For the Japanese American soldier—who when asked is from "No place in particular"—the answer is more complicated. He can only answer, "I got my reasons."

Where are you from? It's a difficult question that the Japanese American soldier cannot easily answer. We assume he was born and raised in the West Coast, but his country has told him that despite his ties to America, he will always remain essentially Japanese. His parents are in a concentration camp in Wyoming, and most likely before joining (or being drafted into) the U.S. military he lived there as well. Does one call a concentration camp home? The struggle to answer the question—where are you from?—preoccupies nearly every character in *No-No Boy*. Those who side with the Japanese, like the central character's mother, have no way of accommodating their allegiance to Japan with their lives in America. They have no way of accepting visions of their sons flying over Japan in U.S. bombers. Even the Japanese American solider from the preface who fights for his right to call America home knows his claims to a national identity is tenuous. The accomodationists' fears come spewing to the surface in every slur and wad of spit directed towards the main character, a "no-no boy" who refused to accept the very terms of "earning" his rights and the rights of his parents to the country of his birth.[57]

[57] "No-no" refers to the resistant acts committed by a minority of Japanese and Japanese Americans (those born in Japan, and those born in America) with the answers "no" and "no" to questions 27 and 28 on the loyalty questionnaire they were required to fill out in the internment camps. Question 27 asked if the prisoner was willing to serve in the U.S. armed services; it was essentially the enforcement of the draft on

A sense of belonging eludes the other racial groups in the novel as well, most notably the blacks unhappily sharing the same run-down sections of the city with the newly returned Japanese Americans. While the novel begins with a sympathetic conversation between two racial groups—the Nebraska farm boy and his Japanese American war buddy—the novel ends on a decidedly more violent note. Freddy, another no-no boy, crashes his car into a wall as a result of a brutal brawl with an African American patron of a seedy neighborhood bar. Tensions between the two racial groups have mounted throughout the novel's unfolding plot. The Japanese American "boys" are begrudgingly allowed to frequent the same bars (mostly run by Chinese), but only if they remain quiet, sit in the back corners, and don't use the better pool tables. However, Freddy chafes at his lower status in the hierarchy and decides, "Ain't nobody tellin' this boy to stay on his side of the fence. I got teeth and hair like anyone else."[58] His refusal to know his place infuriates precisely those who have accepted their inferiority: the Japanese American GIs and the African Americans acting as the unofficial enforcers of the status quo.

Commonplace theories of race assert that race functions as a marker of difference for certain groups who then face persecution for these markers as the social majority purges the tensions associated with economic and social crisis. However, in the same series of lectures in which he introduces the concept of biopower, Foucault rejects these

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interned young men. Question 28 asked if the prisoner was willing to swear allegiance to the United States and foreswear any allegiance to the Japanese emperor; this had the effect of making those born in Japan and ineligible for American citizenship, stateless people. For in-depth treatment of the loyalty questionnaire see Michi Nishiura Weglyn, *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996): 134-55.

[58] Okada, *No-No Boy*: 243.

theories. Ann Laura Stoler succinctly explains Foucault's objections to scapegoat theories of race:

> For Foucault, racism is more than an ad hoc response to crisis; it is a manifestation of preserved possibilities, the expression of an underlying discourse of permanent social war, nurtured by the biopolitical technologies of "incessant purification." Racism does not merely arise in moments of crisis, in sporadic cleansings. It is internal to the biopolitical state, woven into the weft of the social body, threaded through its fabric.[59]

Moments of crisis certainly provide glimpses into structures that otherwise remain latent just under the surface of social life, but racism must be nurtured even in the absence of extreme crisis in order to become activated. The purging of Jews during World War II, like the internment of Japanese Americans, are examples of the use of race during times of crisis. Foucault argues instead that racism exists as a way of keeping a population in a constant state of crisis: even though the maintenance of racist ideologies may be ignored by the large majority of citizens, they remain as a backdrop of experience for those groups targeted for racist exclusion. In the opening lecture Foucault questions how politics has become "war by other means." By the end of the lecture series the category of race forms a partial answer.

No-No Boy starts with the question of race as a fundamental structuring principle of WWII, and a lingering discourse of displacement in the postwar years. Ongoing racial antagonisms threaten to break out in violent expression at any moment. The conclusion of *No-No Boy* can indeed be read as the continuation of racially charged domestic warfare,

[59] Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*: 69.

this time pitting one excluded group against another. Whereas classic versions of the *Bildungsroman* included the realization of a future that retrospectively provided meaning for the narrative, in the Japanese American transculturation of the *Bildungsroman* the future is instead empty of meaning. This is not a *Bildungsroman* novel of becoming as described by Bakhtin; it is instead a novel of stasis, for in place of the anticipation of future harmony, Japanese American identity is shaped by the catastrophe of their racist exclusion. The ultimate question for the hero is not "where are you going?" but "where are you from?" The question of origins, here coded racially, gives away the contradiction inherent in both the classic *Bildungsroman* and Hegel's progressive vision of history: the harmony of reconciliation was ever only imagined as applying to Western professionalized classes. The hero's development progressed in much the same way history was meant to: through the bourgeois institutions of marriage and professional employment. For the vast majority of the globalized world, the management of unwieldy populations calls for bureaucratic methods of discipline and regulation like those administered in the camps. Where marriage and employment constructed a "happy prison" for the classic hero of the *Bildungsroman*, for this Japanese American hero there is only a prison.

The most disturbing element of *No-No Boy* is Ichiro's self-loathing. His inability to reconcile his past imprisonment to his future would read heroically if only he could accept his refusal to fight for the United States and his insistent claim to full citizenship as such. Yet Ichiro continues to regret his "no-no" throughout the novel. Reminiscing on

his imprisonment in a concentration camp (before his incarceration in federal prison) Ichiro thinks to himself:

> That was all before I made a mess of everything by saying no and I see now that my miserable little life is still only part of the miserable big world. It's the same world, the same big, shiny apple with streaks of rotten brown in it. Not rotten in the center where it counts, but rotten in spots underneath the skin and a good, sharp knife can still do a lot of good. I have been guilty of a serious error. I have paid for my crime as prescribed by law. I have been forgiven and it is only right for me to feel this way or else I would not be riding unnoticed and unmolested on a bus along a street in Seattle on a gloomy, rain-soaked day.[60]

Appearing in the penultimate chapter of the novel, the passage reads in the classical *Bildungsroman* sense as Ichiro's acceptance of culpability for his "wrong." He seems to acknowledge his fateful "no-no" of insisting on his own identity in contrast to the vast majority of his peers who chose the more harmonious path of compliance with the racist exclusion policies (and the hypocritical demand to volunteer for armed service). He sees clearly that his private dreams and desires are only a small part of the larger whole—that indeed they are one and the same.

However, in direct contrast to Bakhtin's "wholeness of the world," comportment in this world of decay requires a cutting away of parts. His life and the world are one, not in fullness, but in misery. He claims to have been forgiven, ending his reverie with what at first reads as a defense of his reconciliation—"it is only right to feel this way." Yet

[60] Okada, *No-No Boy*: 232.

how Ichiro feels is not at all clear. He accepts reconciliation as merely freedom from harassment; his previous movements through the city over the course of the novel have been punctuated with violence and insult from other Japanese Americans, using shame as a way of containing his resistant "no-no" act.

Any feeling of reconciliation is undercut by his assessment of the rottenness lying just beneath the social-cultural surface. The memory that brings about what would be reconciliation with the world universal consists of disillusionment and refusal. At the urging of a fellow camp inmate, he finds acceptance by a white Christian church that allowed Ichiro and a fellow inmate to join the congregation and even offered opportunities to share dinner together. Ichiro soon discovers that their acceptance by this one exceptional congregation is still tainted by the exclusionary practices of racism. A black man appears one Sunday and he is silently shunned. Ichiro identifies with the black man who reads the congregation's disapproval: "Very distinctly through the hollowness of the small church echoed the slow, lonely footsteps of the intruder across the back, down the stairs, and into the hot sun."[61] Ichiro never returns to the church; he understands only too well that the hollowness from which the lonely footsteps rang out belonged not to the building but to the promise of reconciliation offered by the Christian church. In any other church in the area—in nearly any gathering in America—Ichiro would be the intruder walking out alone, accompanied only by his humiliation.

Ultimately, what makes Ichiro a dissatisfying *Bildung* hero is not his failure to align his personal desires with American ("universal") values, but his inability to articulate any set of coherent desires whatsoever. Where previous revisions of the

[61] Ibid., 231.

Bildungsroman represented the failed *Bildung* project through heroes with dual natures (private desires, public action), *No-No Boy* offers a series of dualities projected outside of the hero entirely. Ichiro's two closest friends represent the choice he faced while imprisoned in the concentration camp: volunteer to fight for the U.S. or resist governmental authority and go to federal prison. Kenji is a decorated war hero, dying bit by bit as his leg—like the apple that is America—slowly rots away. Tommy, another no-no boy, is nobody's hero. He gambles, drinks, chases women, and dies in a racially charged bar fight at the novel's end. Ichiro identifies with both these characters. He longs for Kenji's moral inscrutability, but sees the absurdity of dying for a country that rejects you based on your "ancestry." He admires Tommy's refusal to mold himself to the racial stereotype, but sees the despair behind Tommy's curses.

Ichiro's parents serve as another duality: his father dutifully accepts the inferior position of struggle while his mother stubbornly insists on the superiority of the Japanese. He refuses identification with either parent, and projects onto them the rage and pity that in truth Ichiro feels for himself. His mother's death is paired diegetically with Kenji's, thus forming another duality through which to read Ichiro's confused identity and failed *Bildung* reconciliation. Kenji's hero status aligns him with America, which meant that he "had every right to laugh and love and hope."[62] However, as a Japanese by birth and American by sacrifice, his racial / ancestral markers and the demands of citizenship keep him forever on uneven terrain, "hobbling toward death on a cane and one good leg." Ichiro's mother immigrated to the United States in her youth. Through hard work she ran a successful grocery and raised two boys on American soil, yet these American

[62] Ibid., 63.

experiences will never give her access to citizenship, or make her an American success-story (as it would for so many others), and thus she clings fiercely to her motherland. She is so closely aligned with Japan that acknowledging Japan's defeat leaves her broken. Once Ichiro's mother admits the defeat of Japan, she is likened to a "baby dog who has lost its mother."[63] She is unable to follow Hegel's advice to leave the wreck of history behind; she is defined as much (if not more so) by her origins as by her ambitions.

By the end of the novel, Ichiro is both without a motherland and without a mother. Both these losses are tainted by the specter of suicide. His unwise assertion of "no-no" is suicidal in the sense that his state of existential homelessness is apparently self-inflicted. Once he returns home from prison, he rejects his mother's Japanese nationalism, and because she is unable to bear the burden of Japan's defeat at home and abroad she commits suicide. In the context of concentration camps and atomic bombs, what may first appear as self-infliction must be reevaluated within the *Bildungsoman* as immanent critique. Suicide in this literary mode reads as the ultimate expression of a character's failure to align private desire with social norm. The inability and refusal to conform in *No-No Boy* reflects society's failure to make the promise of universal history universally available. The Japanese and Japanese Americans in *No-No Boy* are asked to conform to social norms that exclude them from any form of autonomous development: behind the Enlightenment myth of the self-made hero lies the biopolitical narrative of race. Ichiro's stems from his mother's ancestry. In order to develop an identity of his own, that past must be absented from his future. That his mother—representing the terms of this exclusion—must be absented from his future reflects the violence underlying the

[63] Ibid., 114.

myth of self-production and autonomy embedded within modern narratives of development. Likewise, the atomic bombings in Japan function as an absent presence in the text. To be Japanese is to be an enemy target, subject to total annihilation; thus incorporation into American society is not only desirable but necessary for survival.

The plot development of the *Obasan* likewise centers on the absenting of the heroine's mother, who is also aligned with the Japanese motherland. In this case, the narrative logic does not require the death of the mother, but rather hinges on uncovering her whereabouts, which are intimately bond with the lingering (though hidden) trauma of the atomic bomb. The heroine of this failed *Bildung* expresses a longing for the love of her lost mother, yet on second reading the narrative is striking for its abundance of mother figures. This abundance of characters who care for the orphaned heroine as though they were her mother suggests an alternate mode of developing personhood, in stark contrast to the alienation and dislocation effected through the biopolitical techniques of the concentration camp and the atomic bomb.

Obasan: In Search of Beginnings

Mothers in the context of Japanese American cultural representations symbolize Japan as *mother*land and Japanese as *mother*-tongue. By asking immigrants to abandon their ties to the country of their birth without correspondingly granting them full access to American citizenship and culture, Japanese Americans were culturally and politically orphaned. Understandably, the trope of the absent or lost mother haunts much of Japanese American fiction. Traise Yamamoto explains the *presence* of the absent mother:

> Fiction written by Japanese American women is striking in its steady use of the trope of the absent mother. While some novels represent the mother as literally absent, others depict the mother as emotionally absent. Still others textually absent the mother. I want to call attention to the absent/ed mother as a trope rather than as a condition because it highlights what at first seems to be a puzzling contradiction at the heart of these fictional narratives: despite her perceived absence, the mother remains a central figure.[64]

Yamamoto describes the absent mother as a trope to the extent that the absent mother drives the narrative or explains the actions/desires of the characters. In many Japanese American texts the absent mother functions symbolically, opening onto latent registers of meaning beyond the level of plot.

On the level of narrative, the mother's death in *No-No Boy* releases Ichiro from the pressure to remain faithful to his Japanese cultural heritage. His mother's vision of what it means to be Japanese is as rigid as the U.S. authorities' dictates of what it requires to be American. With the silencing of the mother through death, Ichiro is free to focus on his struggle to refashion himself as an American and to work through the possibilities and contradictions of that identity. As trope, the absenting of Ichiro's mother is the reassertion of national ties over the *trans*national ties of kinship and culture. His mother identifies as a Japanese living in America. If the nation is to remain the primary center of

[64] Traise Yamamoto, *Masking Selves, Making Subjects: Japanese American Women, Identity, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999): 152.

identification, then according to the internal logic of the story, the total defeat and devastation of Japan by atomic bombing must in turn result in her death.

The trope of the absent mother functions similarly in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*. In this novel, the central character returns home to care for her aunt after the death of a beloved uncle. Her return triggers the processing of painful wartime memories traumatically marked by her mother's disappearance and her family's removal to internment camps and forced migrant labor. The novel ends with resolution of the mother's mystery: she had returned to Japan to care for elderly relatives, was trapped there with the start of war, and was tragically maimed by the blast of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki. As in *No-No Boy*, the mother is structurally aligned with the country of her birth and absented from the central character's *Bildung* development. Indeed, the absent mother functions in both of these Japanese American novels as the very condition of *Bildung*—in order to access the potentialities of becoming American, the umbilical cord must not only be cut, it must be disappeared.

Like *No-No Boy's* Ichiro, *Obasan*'s Naomi is a failed *Bildungsroman* hero. This finds expression structurally as immanent critique through her delayed development—Naomi's *Bildung* occurs as a working through of past traumatic events that leave her alienated from present life. Rather than a celebration of youth, *Obasan* presents the disillusionment of youth in the now total confinement of social space. Naomi is only thirty-six but already feels older than her years:

> Megumi Naomi Nakane. Born June 18, 1936, Vancouver, British Columbia. Marital status: Old maid. Health: Fine I suppose. Occupation:

> Schoolteacher. I'm bored to death with teaching and ready to retire. What else would anyone want to know? Personality: Tense. Is that present tense? It's perpetual tense. I have the social graces of a common housefly. That's self-denigrating, isn't it?[65]

She can only describe herself as though filling out a bureaucrat's report form, reflecting the biopolitical mode of identity formation central to the administration of both American and Canadian concentration camps.[66] She begins with the kind of information that can be easily translated into population data: name, date of birth, place of birth, marital status, occupation. She attempts to insert non-statistically relevant commentary, but quickly concludes that there's nothing to distinguish her from any other living being; she's as insignificant as an insect. Her specific identification with the common housefly is striking when placed within the historical context of the internment of Japanese on the American continent. Like rats (the favored image the Nazi regime associated with Jews), houseflies and Japanese in America were described as agents of contamination. Kogawa uses the metaphor of the housefly in order to metaphorically represent this discourse of contamination. Her use of the *house*fly also underscores the rhetoric of domestic threat. Just as houseflies are household pests that contaminate food, Japanese Americans are political contaminants likely to sabotage the nation from within. In both instances, containment is described in biopolitical terms as threats to the continued existence of the populace.

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[65] Kogowa, *Obasan*: 9.

[66] Mine Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), most vividly illustrates the centrality of the administrative experience of the concentration camps in the title of her graphic novel, in which a number replaces her name.

Naomi senses the unfairness of the characterization, yet she continues to internalize the denigration rather than locating it externally as a product of institutionalized racism. Though delayed in Naomi's case, her character development as a transculturation of Japanese American experience can still be described in *Bildungsroman* terms as self-discovery (a movement away from "self-denigration") as she struggles to articulate a self-identity beyond that of pest or nuisance. This struggle to articulate identity operates through metaphors of absence and silence. Yet Naomi does not simply seek to "give voice" to the past in the sense of making tragedy comprehensible. These metaphors also indicate her desire to find a way of preserving the haunting presence that emphasizes the deliberate silencing of experience.

Self-discovery from the position of her racialized and silenced minority status requires a rewriting of the *Bildungsroman* form that centers on the recovery of the past rather than the realization of the future. The everyday present cannot form the backdrop of Naomi's narrative because it must first be filled in with meaning through the reappearance of the past through Naomi's memories, as well as the memories of others. Lowe describes this narrative effect as the construction of an alternative form of history:

> Out of the fragmentations of subject, family, and community, there emerges nothing like a direct retrieval of unified wholeness. Rather, the narrator retraces and recomposes an alternative "history" out of flashes of memory, tattered photographs, recollections of the mother's silence, and an aunt's notes and correspondence: dreams, loss, mourning.[67]

[67] Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*: 51.

The weaving together of fragments marks an important break from both the classic *Bildungsroman* and the Hegelian conception of history that lies sedimented therein. As Lowe points out, an alternate conception of history is at stake in *Obasan* as the text poses the question of what form of personal reconciliation with the past is possible from the position of historical tragedy.

The trope of the absent mother functions hieroglyphically in *Obasan* as the answer to the question of what this reconciliation would mean. She remains present by way of memory, but also through mystery. The mother's whereabouts remain a secret until the very end of the text, when a hidden letter finally finds its way to her children. The letter was written by a grandmother who accompanied Naomi's mother to Japan, in which she describes finding her among the dead and dying in Nagasaki after the atomic bombing:

> …she sat down beside a naked woman she'd seen earlier who was aimlessly chipping wood to make a pyre on which to cremate a dead baby. The woman was utterly disfigured. Her nose and cheek were almost gone. Great wounds and pustules covered her entire face and body. She was completely bald. She sat in a cloud of flies, and maggots wriggled among her wounds. As Grandma watched her, the woman gave her a vacant gaze, then let out a cry. It was my mother.[68]

Although the child is not her own, the badly injured woman is associated with motherhood as she attends to the dead child before dressing her wounds. The image of motherhood presented here is one of selflessness, but also of erasure (her face is missing).

[68] Kogowa, *Obasan*: 286.

Naomi earlier described her central identity by reference to the insignificance of a housefly. This association intensifies in this passage to the level of the abject: her *hibakusha* mother appears after years of absence literally covered in flies and maggots. Where Naomi used the metaphor of a housefly to describe her lack of socially distinguishing features resulting from growing up in a concentration camp, the atomic bomb has captured Naomi's mother inside the uncompromising movement of history, rendering her literally featureless.

Against this absenting of the mother, *Obasan* makes absence *present* as a haunting: despite the decades, the memory of her mother ties Naomi to the youthful possibilities of her childhood, to an enlarged notion of the motherland beyond the demands of the state, and to a non-progressive relation to universal history. What remains universal is not the nation, the happiness of the future, or even the perfection of the past; what remains is the longing for love, here embodied in the figure of a mother who positions the care for others as the last refuge of humanity. Ironically, this message comes from the community minister (another Japanese American), who in the silence after the letter's reading admits to the mourning family: "'That this world is brokenness. But within brokenness is the unbreakable name. How the whole earth groans til Love returns.'"[69] The priest's declaration reads ironically because this is a story in which the faith offered by the church plays an insignificant role. It is rather the women of the novel who offer various modes of mothering that keep the promise of love alive. Naomi focuses almost exclusively on her biological mother, who becomes in her dreamlike recollections the "Silent Mother." Yet the novel's title gestures toward an expanded concept of

[69] Ibid., 287.

mothers and mothering that would resist the homogenizing discourses of progressive history and the reification of categories such as Holy Father and Silent Mother.

Obasan posits a mother's love against the destruction of the concentration camps and the atomic bomb, but it is through varied and imperfect forms of mothering that the novel's meaning does not merely present a replacement ideology. *Obasan* literally means "aunt" in Japanese, but can also be used more generally in everyday conversation in reference or in greeting to older women who have no familial ties to the speaker. In the novel *Obasan* there are many older women, both aunts and grandmothers, who care for the orphaned Naomi (also recall that Naomi's mother is found attempting to attend to the death rites of another woman's child). Indeed, this is a novel filed with maternal figures who have never borne children of their own, most notably the character known as Obasan who dedicates her life to loving Naomi and preserving an immovable foundation of care, despite all their forced migrations.

In the words of Lisa Guenther, the ethics of care that goes beyond the simple biological fact of maternity reflects what it means to "become *like* a maternal body":

> To become *like* a maternal body for someone is to become responsible for her *as if* she were my child, as if I bore this responsibility in my flesh. In responding to the Other like a maternal body, I do not insert myself as her cause or origin, but rather give to her a past of forgiveness and a future of promise…The distance opened up by the word *like* in this phrase, "like a maternal body," opens up a gap between maternity as a biological fact and as an ethical response….In this sense, maternity would not refer to a

> biological or social imperative for women to reproduce, but rather an ethical imperative for each of us to bear the stranger *as if* she were already under my skin, gestating in my own flesh.[70]

To think of mothering and motherhood as an ethical position, rather than a biological destiny, frees women from biopolitical dictates just as it offers discursive alternatives to the paternalizing "pat" that would turn death into life. In *Obasan* the modernist *Bildungsroman* device of doubling reflects the possibilities of this ethics. In contrast to the graceful lost mother of Naomi's memory there is the largely silent but very present Obasan. Against the silence that characterizes both these mother figures there is Aunt Emily, whose mouth—like her mind—runs in perpetual motion. Finally, there is Uncle, who despite being a man serves *as if* he were a mother. Uncle is portrayed as the protector of childhood innocence, a difficult role to play in the midst of dislocation, imprisonment, and loss. The novel begins with the two of them sitting among the grasslands of interior Canada, where they had been banished. In this scene Uncle bridges exile to the motherland, urging Naomi to see the grass as the sea: "The hill surface, as if responding to a command from Uncle's outstretched hands, undulates suddenly in a breeze, with ripple after ripple of grass shadows, rhythmical as ocean waves."[71] It is indeed his death, and not her mother's, that occasions Naomi's journey through memory and history. It is Uncle's absence that acts as catalyst for her long-overdue *Bildung* development.

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[70] Guenther, *Gift of the Other*: 7. Emphasis in the original.
[71] Kogowa, *Obasan*: 2.

Naomi's growing awareness of her own selfhood, unlike those of classic *Bildungsroman* heroes, does not occur as a process of attaining autonomy. Rather, Naomi must first understand the way her life has from the start been connected to the stories of those around her and the history that defined nearly every aspect of their lives. Where classic coming of age narratives move from dependence, to autonomy, and finally to integration, Naomi's development starts from the position of exclusion, re-establishes integration, and ends with the promise of independence. This inversion of the narrative logic amounts to a transformation of classic definitions of modern subjectivity as well. In developing an ethics of reproduction, Guenther (inspired by Hannah Arendt) provides an account that describes the kind of revision at stake in Naomi's altered *Bildung*:

> No one is born alone, and no one acts alone—despite what the autonomous individual may intend or desire. As soon as I initiate an action, I find myself initiated into a complex interaction with Others whose response I cannot control or anticipate.[72]

> History is nothing other than this continually expanding web of stories that, thanks to natality, remain inconclusive and open-ended.[73]

As Guenther explains, Arendt's concept of natality describes birth as the coming to being of "a self who is both new and familiar, and whose identity is constituted through a web of interwoven narratives."[74] The opening of a space for a singular subjectivity that is also always an active participant in a community leads Arendt to critique melancholy

[72] Guenther, *Gift of the Other*: 32.
[73] Ibid., 36.
[74] Ibid., 30.

philosophical accounts of human life that unite us by the shared fact of mortality; she focuses instead on the fact of interdependence.

It is important to point out that Naomi's non-traditional *Bildung* emerges from the position of historical exclusion and atrocity. Under these circumstances it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the fantasy of autonomy. She knows only too well that this is a world filled with events no amount of preparation can master. The essential open-endedness of life can become a weapon of destabilization that creates and sustains nuclear regimes. Mastery by some comes at the expense of autonomy for others; this is the reality that reigning conceptions of history hide with the myth of progress. Only some are lucky enough to arrive at the comfort awaiting history's end. It is against this backdrop of injustice that we understand the different kind of *Bildung* presented in *Obasan*. The novel's plurality of mothers who are not mothers provides an understanding of history as an opening to something/someone new in contrast to the logics of containment-through-exclusion. Naomi's maternal figures suggest that an ethics of love offers a way of relating outside Enlightenment demands of value:

> Love remains a relation with the Other whose alterity interrupts any closed economy of exchange; when I love the Other, I give this love without demanding equal compensation. In the words of Cixous, I love the Other "without calculating…giving everything, renouncing all security—spending without a return—the anti-Ulysses."[75]

Obasan, Uncle, Aunt Emily, and all the others who care for Naomi ask nothing of her in repayment for their dedication (which is decidedly not the paternal sacrifice of the

[75] Ibid., 87.

nuclear family discussed in the previous chapter). Love operates paradoxically as that which shatters illusions of control, but also as that which is capable of making meaning out of the shattered remnants of history without erasing the contours of that brokenness. In the context of the nuclear age, this form of love is revolutionary, for it promises to undo a civilization structured around the specter of global end and to make good on Arendt's claim that although the end comes for us all, we come into this world not to die but to begin.

CONCLUSION:
The End?

FIRST CAME THE BOMB: NUCLEARISM AND ENLIGHTENMENT

In H.G. Wells' 1914 vision of the atomic future (which has now become our nuclear present), atomic power first makes its impact on human life as a source of industrial energy production.[1] Eventually, however, in the fictional setting of *The World Set Free*, atomic energy—once the exclusive engine for commercial and industrial revolution—transforms into use for the production of the ultimate weapon and leaves Europe a molten sea of destruction. Although Wells was uncannily accurate about much in the atomic technology (for example, the exact year of the discovery of artificial radiation), it is curious that he got it wrong: in actuality, atomic power first begins as a technology for war and is only later developed for "peaceful" uses. That atomic power first appeared as weapon rather than a source of electrical energy is not incidental to the history of modernity, but – as this dissertation shows – constitutes a fundamental structural feature of modern life.

Holsten, the scientist in *The World Set Free* who first discovers the radioactive chain reaction, foresees the danger of his research:

> He was oppressed, he was indeed scared, by his sense of the immense consequences of his discovery. He had a vague idea that night that he ought not to publish his results, that they were premature, that some secret association of wise men should take care of his work and hand it on from

[1] "It was in 1953 that the first Holsten-Roberts engine brought induced radio-activity into the sphere of industrial production, and its first general use was to replace the steam-engine in electrical generating stations." Herbert George Wells, *The World Set Free* (Lexington, KY: CreateSpace, 2011): 25.

> generation to generation until the world was riper for its practical application. He felt that nobody in all the thousands of people he passed had really awakened to the fact of change, they trusted the world for what it was, not to alter too rapidly, to respect their trusts, their assurances, their habits, their little accustomed traffics and hard-won positions.[2]

Despite his fears Holsten continues on with his work, writing in his diary, "It is not for me to reach out to consequences I cannot foresee….If I were to burn all these papers, before a score of years had passed, some other man would be doing this…" [3] A half century later, *Godzilla*'s Serizawa faces the same ethical dilemma, and acknowledges the same tragic inevitability that no matter what he does to his notes, it will only be a matter of time before his research becomes a tool for destruction. Yet, as a character conceived after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, after atomic power arrives in non-fictional form, Serizawa concludes that he must indeed attempt the impossible even at the cost of his own life.

Atomic power's origins as a weapon capable of annihilating entire populations in one blow, combined with the exponentially increasing kill-loads of nuclear bombs, makes it possible to think of the entire world as endangered. Indeed, atomic power not only makes it possible to realize destruction on a global scale, it *demands* that we restructure our thinking to this end. In short, atomic power, originating first as weapon—and not as peaceful means of generating cheap and abundant energy—signals the rise of a new, globalizing regime. Nuclearism describes a system of thinking and producing knowledge

[2] Ibid., 22.
[3] Ibid., 24.

reliant upon a biopolitical rhetoric of global threat. Nuclearism relies upon and perpetuates the imaginative capacity to conceive of any place as a virtual ground zero, and any population as the dead, the exposed, or the evacuated community. Although most Americans now associate the term *ground zero* with the site of the destroyed Twin Towers in New York City (a foreign terrorist attack on US soil), the term originates from the US government's survey of its destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[4] That the term "ground zero" is now most closely associated with American victimization – and not American aggression – is only the most recent example of the veiling and simultaneous perpetuation of nuclearist discourse in contemporary life.

As I have shown in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, this shadowy double-move has been characteristic of nuclearism from the start, motivating strict U.S. control over the images released from ground zero (a space that had previously been simply known as Hiroshima and Nagasaki). The documentary footage meant to serve as witness to the suffering experienced by the bombing was instead co-opted by the US government in order to scientifically assess the magnitude of the atomic bomb's blast range and the effects on the objects encountered therein. In this strategic calculus, the human bodies left in the bomb's wake were collectively transformed from victims to effect. Within the frame of the documentary suffering became data, and keloid scar was made tantamount to bubbled over clay tiles, the ruins of homes and businesses. The overall goal of amassing such documentary evidence was not merely to serve the interests of science, but above all more effectively adjust blast power with strategic aim and to defensively prepare for the

[4] "U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey: The Effects of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki," (President's Secretary's File, Truman Papers, June 19, 1946), 5.

arms race to come. In the process, the perspective of the victim fades from view even though it is from this human suffering that the documentary and the atomic bomb borrow their authority.

Within the space of a decade Japan became a site for the next phase of nuclearism's development: the successful incorporation of utopic fantasy into atomic discourse. According to this rhetorical turn, atomic energy holds not only the power to destroy, but also the power to generate unlimited amounts of energy for peaceful use. The central figure I discuss in Chapter 2, Atom Boy turned Astro Boy, served as the cultural emblem for atomic power's heroic rebirth. Like Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace project, *Astro Boy* became a way of domesticating the trauma of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the accelerating arms race with the Soviet Union for populations both at home and abroad. Through the promise of atomic energy, frightened Americans adjusted to their new atomic conditions and the former enemy, Japan, turned the terms of its defeat into economic boom. This transition to industrial uses of atomic power also provided cover for the continuing development of military nuclear technology. As electricity-generating nuclear facilities proliferated, so too did the bombs in ever more terrifying scales of power. *Astro Boy* serially reproduced the lingering anxiety over atomic power through a narrative repetition of constant technological threat, from which Atom must save his human companions and masters. Atom himself remains an ambivalent hero to the extent that the very source of his utopic heroism – atomic energy – also locates him a potential agent of planetary destruction. This television serial helped to domesticate threat as an

everyday banality, and at the same time kept the threat ever present as a structuring anxiety.

My analysis of this dialectic between domesticating and exaggerating threat continues in Chapter 3, where I focused on the strategic unreason of mutually assured destruction, a key component of nuclear ideology. Mutually assured destruction functions by first positing the inescapable inevitability of the ultimate war to end all wars in which the world is totally annihilated (thermonuclear war). It also transforms cold detachment to the inevitability of this suffering into the height of analytic rigor. Instead of inculcating the sense of a shared fate, nuclearism separates targeted populations into discrete units and instills in its place a myth of survival and self-preservation. The contradictory messages embedded within this ideology can only be resolved through the embrace of a nuclear faith in an apocalyptic ending that atomized individuals can escape (however marginally in a post-apocalyptic landscape) through vigilance and a heightened state of advanced preparation. Hence, the domestic space – the family home – must be mobilized as part of a strategy for waging and containing global conflict. Containment, from the home front to the battlefield, is the central element behind the strategic vision of nuclearism and mutually assured destruction: containment of empathy, containment of fear, containment of all forms of risk, difference, and critical thought. This finds expression in *I Live in Fear* and *The Nuclear Age* through father figures who cannot find a way to reconcile the nuclear demands to exercise total authority and control over their families, and to protect them; the father and his paranoid desire for control is the primary source of that threat.

The apocalyptic rhetoric engendered by nuclearist modes of thought exists in uneasy tension with dominant narratives of the nuclear family, reflecting a larger paradox within the intellectual tradition of Western history. On the one hand, proponents of progressive notions of history argue that the world is safer and faces less conflict than ever before as it approaches its inevitable ultimate end point of democracy and freedom for all, yet on the other hand the proliferation of nuclear weapons and nuclear discourse makes it possible to imagine the literal end of the world as we know it (along with a globalized condition of human suffering) for the first time as a scientifically detailed, plausible vision of the future. As argued in Chapter 4, this conception of history ultimately operates as a secular system of belief (much like the nuclear faith discussed in Chapter 3) that relieves its practitioners from the responsibility of critical thought. Despite an insistence that the world is less filled with conflict, dominant Western conceptions of peace are structured according to the principles of war and with a blinding reliance on technology. In this way, the two forms of faith—in the end and in the end of history—coincide. The triumph of the West operates in a nuclearist mode through biopolitical technologies of administration that survey, manage, and discipline domestic and foreign populations, just as it maintains a generalized state of war readiness by perpetuating latent hostilities through discourses of race and ethnicity. The war-years experience of Japanese Americans places them at the center of this biopolitical nexus: lured to the United States with mythic narratives of progress, they lived for nearly a decade in a state of racist exclusion. This state of exclusion as a transnational community in a globalizing world leaves them vulnerable to the biopolitical exercise of total control,

both through their immediate internment in concentration camps and their "ancestral" annihilation by the atomic bomb.

To critique nuclearism in this way is to critique the contradictions of an enlightened modernity that promises to free the world from suffering through increasing orders of mastery. That mastery manifests itself in the transformation of the experience of suffering into rationalized, scientific forms of knowledge. Scientists replace shamans; yet, as Hayashi's essay "Ritual of Death" forces us to confront, the bodies of the dead and dying in Hiroshima and Nagasaki demonstrate the uncomfortable truth that the desacralized world is not without its own ritualized forms of violence and sacrifice for the founding of new regimes of power. Despite utopic enlightenment values, mastery as the driving force of progress amounts to the objectification of all that is, including the human being who is putatively set free. The objectification of *hibakusha* transforms their pain into data points proving the utility and efficacy of a new form of war. The fictional cultural icon Atom embodies this objectification as a robot-boy who lives in an imprisoned condition at the service of a regime meant to protect the rights of others. Yet his existence is doubly complicated by the expectation that he mimetically reenact the life of another boy, a human whose death Atom is meant to eclipse. Atom is objectified by the political order, and he is also the technological objectification of another's life. Objectification and sacrifice unite in the body of nuclear-powered Atom, whose very existence announces the triumph of human technology over the forces of nature.

In the second half of the dissertation, my critique of nuclearism as a modern form of Enlightenment mastery has focused on the dialectic of reason and unreason. In the

nuclear world mastery and reason combine to form a kind of enlightenment science whereby autonomous subjects are transformed into objects of analysis for abstracted and rationalized calculations of death and destruction. In the process, consciousness of the whole gives way to a consciousness of atomization: the impulse towards solidarity, colored by a paranoid delusion of threat, transforms instead into a world-fragmenting impulse towards self-preservation. In Chapter 3 the unreason of nuclearism comes into view, making visible the infiltration of nuclearist ideology into the most intimate spaces of modern life. The patriarchs of Akira Kurosawa's *I Live in Fear* and Tim O'Brien's *The Nuclear Age*, trapped by their destructive desires for control, create the conditions of threat they fear in order to consolidate their sphere of mastery over their families and homes. This action corresponds to the process described in Chapter 2, whereby serialized images of destruction both promote and contain the trauma of experiencing the atomic bomb as a new historical condition. In this case, however, sacrificial violence finds expression as patriarchical violence: violence is visited upon the home as an exercise of the paternal right to control the conditions of the family's survival.

The globalizing threat of the nuclear situation makes it possible to extend paternal forms of mastery from the domestic space to the world. This is the truth gestured towards in one of the final scenes of *I Live in Fear*: after destroying his family's fortune and future, Nakajima stares through the window of the sanitarium and confuses the sun with the image of the Earth itself, enveloped in a nuclear holocaust. My discussion in Chapter 4 picks up from where Kurosawa's conclusion in *I Live in Fear* leaves off in order to examine how the logic of patriarchal sacrifice lies at the center of every biopolitical

regime. The image of the father replaces the image of the sovereign king as the metaphoric figure of governance, for in a biopolitical regime all aspects of life—both the living and the dying—fall under the purview of power. The homicidal / suicidal threat of thermonuclear power, a rhetorical device brought into being by the images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in ruins, makes possible a fully modern and global form of biopower. Under the discursive shadow of the end of the world, entire populations are managed and mobilized in the name of protection and survival. The fear induced by the nuclear bomb provides an ultimate mechanism of mastery, enabling the nation-state to assert dominance over transnational markers of identity. Enlightenment narratives of history are likewise mobilized for the rationalization of injustice. Achieving the perfect unity of the whole requires identifying enemy populations both within and without the nation-state and eliminating their dangerous differences. As the Japanese American experience of the concentration camp and the atomic bombings testifies, the continual process of identification and exorcism of enemy populations reveals that racism functions as a kind of biopolitical ritual. Racism both at the domestic and international level serves as a tool for exerting mastery over what would otherwise give way to transnationalism as a dominant element of social life rather than minority position. Thus the diverse identities of the central characters in John Okada's *No-No Boy* and Joy Kogowa's *Obasan* must be sacrificed on the altar of national consolidation.

NUCLEAR FISSION AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE FISSURE

Writing from between the twentieth century's two world wars, Walter Benjamin laments the loss of the art of oral storytelling as a feature of modern life. Though ostensibly Benjamin writes the essay "The Storyteller" as a eulogy for one storyteller in particular, it is the relationship between the technologies for telling stories and the historical experience of a particular moment in time that occupies his interest.[5] Benjamin's essay amounts to a thinking through of modernity. He argues that modernity has ushered in a series of alterations to the experiences of human beings such that it has become impossible to tell stories in the classic oral tradition. Benjamin is not merely concerned with the fact that change has come rapidly, but also with the fact that transformations to living conditions brought about by revolutions in military and economic technologies have impoverished the human experience:

> With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a

[5] Benjamin divides these techniques into two categories: mnemonic devices for passing along stories in an oral tradition and industrial processes made possible by the printing press.

> horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which *nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body*.[6]

In this passage Benjamin describes a Europe thrown into the crucible of history, out of which what we recognize as modernity emerges. The world he finds is one in which traditional values and ways of thinking are not merely stretched to accommodate industrialized forms of life, but also rendered wholly inadequate. Bereft of epistemological tools, Benjamin describes a historical subjectivity of powerlessness. According to his argument this powerlessness finds aesthetic expression aesthetically in the rise of the novel, a form of literary representation that in form and content reflects the isolation of the individual from previously communal structures of experience.

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki magnified the fragmentation of experience described by Benjamin. In their radioactive wake, not even the sky above remained unchanged. The immensity of this shattering remains evident in the prevalence of the sublime image of the mushroom cloud in contemporary consciousness. Not only does the human body appear more fragile than ever, but the world itself – from cityscape to planet – appears as something imperiled. As products of the nuclear age, the literary and filmic texts analyzed in this dissertation cannot help but likewise reflect the destructive forces from which they emerged. In other words, they are products of the dialectic of enlightenment through and through. Consequently, understanding the ways in

[6] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968): 84. Emphasis added.

which aesthetic representation is marked by the experiences of the atomic bombings and the subsequent nuclear arms build-up constitutes one of the primary ways through which this project critiques nuclearism's conceptual apparatus. Though the thematic content of the texts under discussion in "The End, or Life in the Nuclear Age" could be called "nuclear" (in that they all involve some element of atomic or nuclear threat as plot device), this project also emphasizes the formal quality of that content, for as Adorno explains:

> …the unsolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form.[7]

> In artworks, the criterion of success is twofold: whether they succeed in integrating thematic strata and details into their immanent law of form and in this integration at the same time maintain what resists it and the *fissures* that occur in the process of integration.[8]

By "immanent law of form" Adorno refers to the quality of art that separates it from other kinds of representation: art is such because it is the *how* of its production through which an artwork conveys its meaning. Unlike other forms of representation, an artwork does not claim to be "true" in the sense that there exists a one-to-one correlation between it and reality. Rather, an artwork can be said to be "true" to the extent that features of reality are challenged and re-presented in an altered condition in ways that require

[7] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*: 6.
[8] Ibid., 7. Emphasis added.

reconsideration of previous conceptions about the world, including the notion of reality itself.

In a world characterized by fragmentation, in a world in which not even the sky above remains unchanged, art (and questions of form) occupy a central critical position. To know the condition of our living we must better understand the condition of its shattering; all claims to mere presentation or transparent transcription imply a unity of experience that rings false. By staying true to the immanent law of form, an artwork incorporates modernity's fragmentation and offers it back to us in a condition that does not simply participate in the reproduction of powerlessness, just as it does not offer false promises that reconciliation in a broken world is possible in the current situation. We can hear traces of Benjamin in Adorno: "Scars of damage and disruption are the modern's seal of authenticity…"[9] However, the aesthetic theory presented here departs from the nostalgic, melancholic longing for what has been lost in Benjamin's "The Storyteller." In their artistic rendering these scars not only reflect on wounding; recall that in the section of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* quoted above, he points to the *fissure* as a product of an artwork's integration of thematic content and aesthetic form. Art produced under the conditions of modernity is a reminder of the wound, just as it provides an opening to something other than that wounding. In order to see the possibilities that inhere in the artwork it is instructive to think of the aesthetic fissure as both product and process. Taking aspects of reality and formally altering them amounts to a cracking open, an explosion through which perceptual openings become possible.

[9] Ibid., 23.

In a nuclearized world, an aesthetics of the fissure both incorporates and resists the fission of nuclearism. Whereas aesthetic fission is the cracking open of ossified conceptual practices for the production of new ways of thinking through crisis, nuclear(ist) fission is the destruction of previous forms of meaning production in order to create a new globalized biopolitical regime operating through the rhetoric of apocalypse, sacrifice, containment, and exclusion. It remains imperative that the indivisible relationship between these two forms of explosion remain at the center of critical analysis. As the artwork is a historical product of this world, forces of destruction inhere in it through its processes of taking in the world in order to alter it. Antagonism lies at the heart of aesthetic fissure, and it is only by tracing the fault lines that we approach the possibility of an opening.

Hayashi's "Ritual of Death" enacts the aesthetics of fissure through an incorporation of the cannibalistic power of the atomic bomb and an interruption of its ritual process. Unlike other forms of representing the experience of ground zero that mask the terrifying semiotic rupture by calling upon the authority of science, the essay refuses to move through the ritual liminality produced by the atomic bomb and bring closure to the event. Thus the essay refuses to complete the apocalyptic transfer of power that signals a movement into the nuclear age. Not only does the essay defy the order of things by withholding a conclusion to the experience of suffering, it also defies the regime of classification from which the atomic bomb draws its power by offering instead a narrative marked by a disjointed movement between points of view. This unsettling movement between the perspectives of the living and the dead contributes to the essay's

monstrous literary form, which forces a confrontation with liminality as a truth emerging from a place between fiction and non-fiction. When set alongside a figure like Godzilla, a creature whose bodily integrity—like the *hibakusha*—has been attacked by atomic radiation, the essay's mutant literary form can be read as an indictment of the monstrosity that is the atomic ritual of death. In this case the obscenity does not inhere in the *hibakusha*, but rather in the mobilization of science by the nuclear regime to transform the citizens of Hiroshima and Nagasaki into sacrificial objects, and thereafter into experimental subjects for the further development of nuclear technology.

Despite his utopic iconic status, the robot hero of the *Astro Boy* franchise likewise represents a nuclear monstrosity. As a nuclearized update to Frankenstein, his melancholic status of permanent exclusion re-presents the modern myth that cautions against humanity's technological hubris. In this case Atom's mimetic monstrosity is double: firstly, he embodies the promise and the threat of nuclear technology, and he does so in the body of a young boy; secondly, through technological mastery of the forces of life and death he takes on the machinic visage of the dead. In both these ways Atom and the franchise serve as a transitional nuclear object, brought to a global audience through broadcast technologies that replicated both the massification and isolation of the nuclear age. It should be noted here that broadcasting technologies play a central role in producing Godzilla's iconic status as well. Re-release of *Godzilla*, like *Mighty Atom*'s re-serialization, served to unite the post-war cultures of Japan and the United States in the production of a globalized nuclear culture. However, the strategic translation of Godzilla from nuclear victim into king of the monsters and Atom's translation into Astro (yet

another rebirth) indicates that dangerous critical content lies beneath their clichéd surfaces. Atom's ambivalent status as imperfect human copy magnifies the imperfect formal seams of *anime* itself. *Astro Boy*'s nuclear adventures formally set the foundation out of which the contemporary forms of *anime* emerge; rather than attempting to mask the gaps between the production techniques and our vision of "reality," *anime* functions by emphasizing and intensifying these gaps. Here the aesthetics of fissure function as a decoding and recoding process whereby technology is not marshaled to repeat the impoverishment of experience, but instead to question how new ways of living and thinking might serve as an act of creation rather than destruction in a world in which radical end meets radical possibility.

The two central characters at the heart of Chapter 3 reveal the terrifyingly irrational nuclear faith required of the properly empowered nuclear subject. Their paranoid exercises of power, like the ideal nuclear subject described by Herman Kahn (recall his example of the surgeon who enjoys the pain he inflicts in the name of salvation), commit them to acts of destruction against those they swear to protect in the name of love. That they destroy their families in the name of fatherly love reflects the dangerous monstrosity of a paternalistic ideology that promises to annihilate the world in order to contain any loss of control. The nuclear family, like the nuclear world, is one of disintegration rather than unity because of an allegiance to outdated visions of how and what comprises the whole. In first filmic and then literary form, *I Live in Fear* and *The Nuclear Age* absorb the conditions of the nuclear regime and translate those conditions as an essentially melodramatic text. This aesthetic translation of historical conditions

enables these artworks to reflect the social repression and disenchantment of a nuclearized instrumental reason. The contradictory demands of private desire and social norm appear as an ethical dilemma, one that offers the heroes no true reconciliation. In this way, both the film and the novel leave open a space for critical refraction by reversing melodramatic conventions, most notably by refusing to provide the expected mythic happy ending. Like Hayashi's "Ritual of Death," these endings remain mired in ambivalence and thus unavailable to perfect integration within the nuclear order.

While the melodramatic fissuring of *I Live in Fear* and *The Nuclear Age* concludes by placing their paranoid nuclear subjects, themselves agents of destruction, in states of exclusion, the novels discussed in Chapter 4 begin with the permanent exclusion of some as a necessary condition for general social cohesion. As in the earlier chapter, the aesthetic riddle of the novels *No-No Boy* and *Obasan* center on the contradiction between private desire and social norm, this time by asking what it means to come of age in a world that both requires and denies the terms of your abandonment. This question appears earlier through the figure of the robot-boy Atom; *anime* conventions aesthetically highlight the fracturing of the abandoned subject through the imperfect seams of its medium. These two Japanese American novels, in contrast, confront the Western myth of the unification of self and society through use of its corresponding aesthetic mode, the *Bildungsroman*. By leaving behind humble origins the classic *Bildungroman* hero accepts his place in society and fulfills his destiny. In the context of the nuclear age and dominant accounts of Western history to which the nuclear age belongs, the future looms as apocalypse (something made visible as well by Hayashi's "Ritual of Death") achieved

only through blood and sacrifice, but destined to a perfect ordering of the parts to the whole. In their failed attempts to bring together their Japanese origins with their lives in the West, the *Bildung* heroes of *No-No Boy* and *Obasan* contradict the classic conventions because they remain haunted by the absented past. Ichiro, in ways reminiscent of Atom's advanced development in comparison to his parents, returns from imprisonment to a reversal of the traditional family structure. Whereas Atom's parents are chronologically younger than him and thus developmentally behind, Ichiro's parents are associated with the Japanese motherland (the past) and are thus unable to fully appreciate or participate in American life. For Naomi, it is only in the recuperation of the past and the absented mother that she can begin to look towards the future.

The aesthetic fissure of the Japanese American novels, as with all the filmic and literary texts analyzed in this dissertation, occurs not merely in the reenactment of the fragmentation of the modern subject, but also through a fracturing of the aesthetic structures that participate in the construction of that subject. By formally highlighting the contradictions of the nuclear age, the texts pry open a space for encountering the aporias of the present moment and suggest a method for being both *of* and *in* this world without mindlessly replicating the conditions of the same. Adorno describes this as "the irreconcilable renunciation of the semblance of reconciliation," which promises to retain the hope of altered conditions by presenting something new; thus the artwork maintains a "claim to being an end in itself" against the demands of dominant ideologies that place the perfect ordering of the whole above a potential disruption of its parts.[10] Though he did not specifically discuss the role of art within the nuclear context, the stakes of this

[10] Ibid., 33.

aesthetic intervention can only be described as nuclear in scope: "This is the true consciousness of an age in which the real possibility of utopia – that given the level of productive forces the earth could here and now be paradise – converges with the possibility of total catastrophe."[11] In both the aesthetics of the fissure and the regime of nuclearist fission, the splitting of the discrete part aims towards a reordering of the whole. Yet as an aesthetic, that reordering is always provisional rather than final, gravitational rather than ossifying. The artwork is never fully atomized, despite a claim to being an end in itself, for its meaning can only be grasped as a complex relation of history and technique (what Adorno refers to as knowledge) brought out by the reader / viewer / critic. The aesthetics of fissure may present the conditions of destruction; however, this does not amount to the production of catastrophe because it requires an ethics of creation from those of us drawn into its orbit. This ethics of creation, like the maternal ethics of Chapter 4, not only necessitates knowledge and the ability to grasp the sedimented truth refracted in the cleavage of contradiction, it above all requires the desire to become that opening through which the meaning of the artwork emerges.

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN THE NUCLEAR AGE: REDEFINING WORLD LITERATURE

This dissertation has explored the ways in which nuclear criticism remains relevant for the fields of comparative literature and critical theory by focusing on the figure of the atomic bomb and conducting a series of close readings of literary and filmic texts that reflect and refract the experience of the atomic bombings. These readings aimed to critique the ideological structures that made the bomb possible and continue to mobilize

[11] Ibid.

it as a globalized regime of coercion, containment, and control through an emphasis on the formal aesthetic qualities of texts under discussion. It is my hope that this analysis not only makes it possible further to understand the impact that nuclear weapons continue to have on our structures for making meaning of the world, but also that it creates avenues of thought leading to ever more expanded critical engagement of nuclear power. The development of so-called peaceful uses of nuclear energy are intimately connected to the role of nuclearism in contemporary forms of globalization – as most recently made visible by the crisis in Fukushima – makes clear that critical reflection on this relationship is urgently needed. This crisis, like the ones that tragically came before it, likewise requires continuing engagement with theoretical attempts to understand the relationship between nature, the human environment, and the planet itself given the inevitability of the nuclear accident that carries with it consequences on a global scale.

From the perspective of comparative literature, a reengagement with nuclear criticism transforms the field of comparativism into an active participant in the construction and critique of modern world politics, just as it expands our notions of what a world literature in the nuclear age might mean. The world in the nuclear context includes the geopolitical boundaries and linguistic regimes properly captured by the term *globe*, but it also implies the entirety of the conceptual structures through which we make sense of our living and dying. Literature as a mode of aesthetic production in the nuclear age retains the possibility for the creative fissure, thus becoming an essential force in an active creation of the world we live in rather than a lament detailing its destruction. World literature in the nuclear age provides an opening for comparative literature to

champion the various forms of life that remain possible despite putative closure produced by discourses of the end.

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