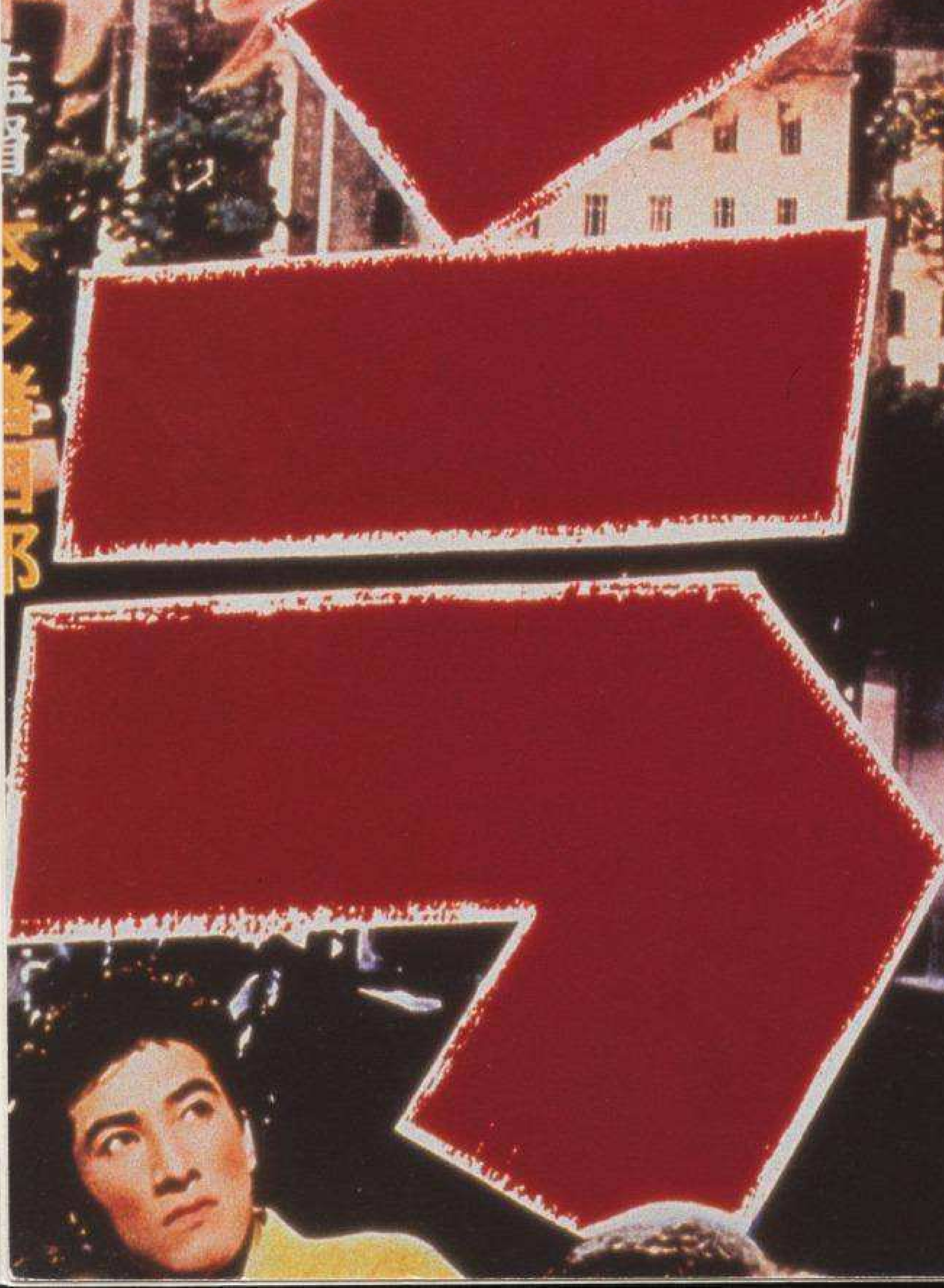


1948年

1948年



culture including manga, anime, and *tokusatsu* (special effects).<sup>2</sup> Upon hearing these terms, readers more or less familiar with Japanese popular culture may think of *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atom*), Hayao Miyazaki, and *Godzilla* (fig. 3.1). But Japanese Neo Pop is not a mere appropriation of the imagery of subculture—anime, manga, and *tokusatsu*—into the realm of fine art. Such a simplistic interpretation unduly consigns this Japanese phenomenon to a subcategory of Pop Art or its East Asian variation. I hope my discussion here will help clarify the cultural and critical meaning of Japanese Neo Pop and place it properly within the historical and social contexts of postwar Japan.<sup>3</sup>

Let us begin by examining Japan's situation in the 1960s, when the subculture that Japanese Neo Pop has mined so productively first arose. The early 1960s saw Japan struggle back to its economic and political feet after the chaotic postwar years, with the nation's goal shifting from recovery to rapid growth

Act. This was the key historical condition for the uniquely Japanese aesthetic which has dismantled the hierarchy of subculture and leveled the playing field of expression.

While Japanese children bonded with an unparalleled scale by means of the and homogenized media environment gap between them and their parents more profound—and far less bridged—experienced by any previous generation as these children (that is, the “subculture” reached adulthood and became active in society, mainstream Japanese society’s curious eye of the mass media, began to criticize their appearances, behaviors, and varied widely from the established norms) came to epitomize this conflict. *Otaku* “home”—is derived from a habit of the s

ing individuals from their extended families consisted of many relatives and were rooted in customs and traditions. Individuals moved to cities in search of jobs and rapidly formed nuclear families, whose smallest unit was the triad: "Mom, and me." Given the inhospitable urban environment of Japan, where land was scarce and nuclear families had only two housing options: to purchase land in the suburbs where they could afford a small house, or to live in *danchi*, "apartment complexes," usually consisting of modest multi-story buildings in which dwellings are partitioned into a grid. Families that chose the first option were affected by an explosive increase in the postwar population of the greater metropolitan area. In these families, husbands rose early to commute great distances to the city center on packed commuter trains, and wives, by high mortgage payments stretching over their lifetimes, stayed late to work overtime.

generation, utterly alien to that of the  
doubt their rooms appeared inex-  
creepy—to the eyes of the previous ge-  
had little passion for these subcultures.  
is ironic that the mass media, which  
youth as *otaku* and reported negatively,  
comprised the very men who spent  
waking hours at work and abandoned  
home. If *otaku* represented a trans-  
isolated communication among abandon-  
to their children, enthusiastic for the  
emerged in the postwar era of high e-  
then the men who found *otaku* so cre-  
unnerved by their very own wives and

In 1995, the vague sense of repulsion  
felt by mainstream society was validated  
gas attack on the Tokyo subway, in w-  
weapon was released on trains crowd-  
with rush-hour commuters. This extra-

time for Aum followers to unite and fight to overcome the greatest challenge he ever faced.

In this context, Aum's Sarin attack was a self-fulfilling prophecy and a punishment for the Japanese populace, which went peacefully about its business of life, oblivious to these (imagined) infiltrations. After the Sarin attack, the police conducted an exhaustive search of Aum's headquarters near Mt. Fuji, which comprised several buildings. They discovered *satyam* (derived from the Sanskrit *satya*) and arrested many followers and suspects. The police uncovered a vast Sarin repository within the ostensible *dōjō* (training site) and physical practices, such as meditation. In addition, they exposed a plot devised by a radical wing to mass produce Sarin and use a remote-controlled helicopter in order to attack morally corrupt Tokyo residents.

traditional disembowelment. In the next series of terrorist bombings hit domestic President Nixon's suspension of the gold standard and the introduction of fluctuating currency provoked the "dollar shock," and the 1973 oil crisis precipitated the "oil shock," which led to spiraling inflation.<sup>7</sup> These events spawned a deep doubt that the promised bright future would ever arrive. These years also saw environmental problems plague the whole nation, with city centers often advised against outdoor exercise due to air pollution. A new kind of pessimism spread, even among children.

In 1973, as Japanese society found itself in a state of widespread despondence, the science-fiction writer Komatsu published the novel *Japan Sinks* (*Nihon Botsu*). In this novel, far from achieving the economic miracle, the entire Japanese archipelago sinks into the sea in the wake of mammoth earthquakes.

writings of the sixteenth-century French astrologist were adapted to incorporate elements of science fiction and mystery, and became widely popular. His prophecy, "In the seventh month of the year 1999, the Great King of Fright will come from the sky and humanity will perish," was entirely without scientific basis. Yet given the tenor of the time, elementary- and middle-school children secretly began anticipating that the world would end during their lifetimes, and lived in terror of this apparent fate.

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Against this historical and social backdrop, a subculture landmark emerged: *Space Battleship Yamato*, first broadcast in 1974 (and broadcast in the U.S. as *Star Blazers*; fig. 3.2, pl. 27). This televised anime series gained the overwhelming endorsement of what would be called the subculture generation. It is almost



**Figure 3.3**

Downtown Tokyo after the U.S. firebombing  
of March 10, 1945

アメリカによる大空襲(1945年3月10日)後の東京

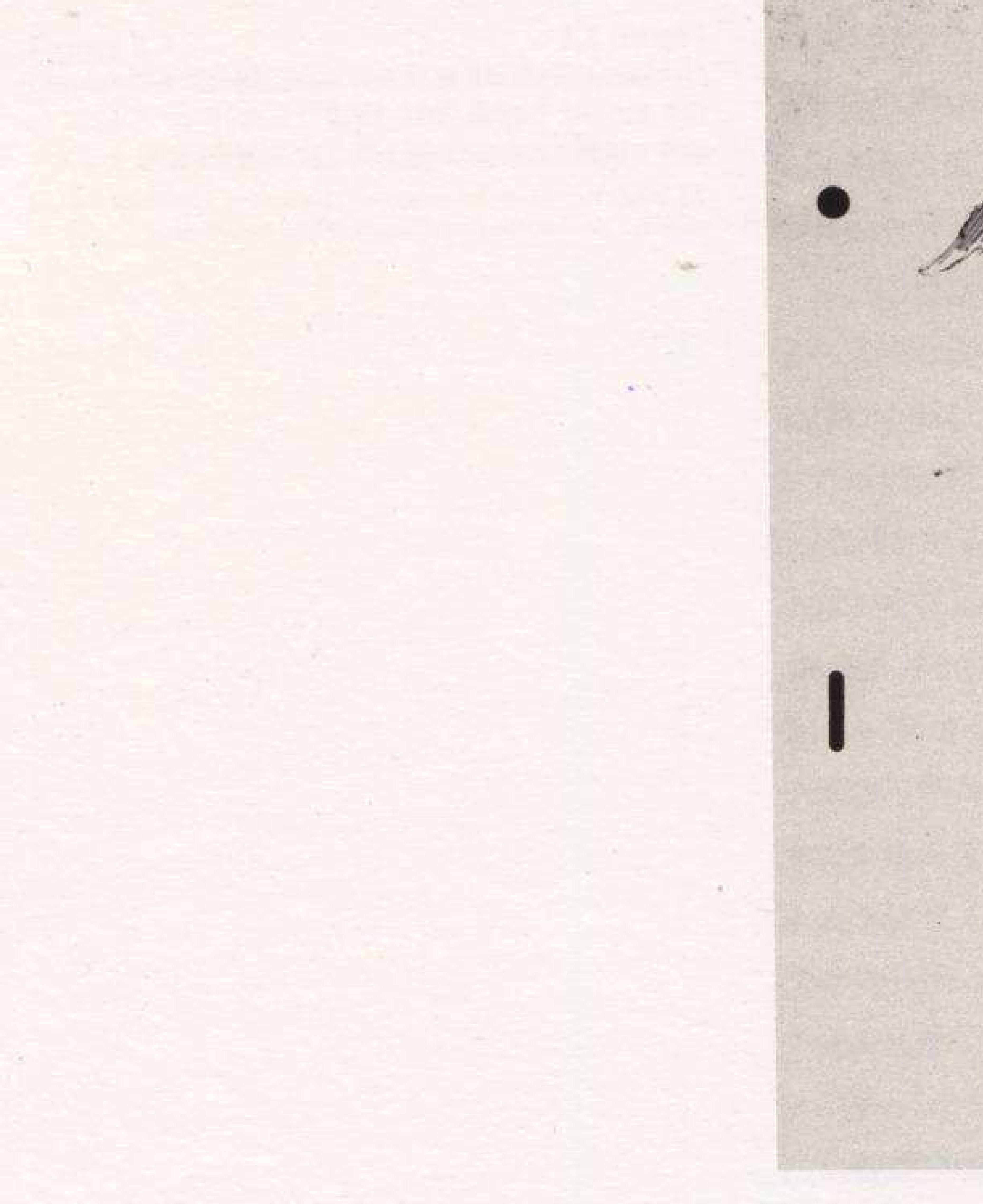
Courtesy U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

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Earth's survivors hope to plan for the purification and recovery of their radiation-polluted planet.

In all its absurdity, what is significant about *Yamato* is not so much the unreal fantasy it paints in typical science-fiction fashion, but the setting inescapably reminiscent of the Pacific War between Japan and the U.S. Beleaguered survivors eking out their existence in an underground metropolis conjures up a picture of Japanese citizens crouched in bomb shelters, desperately waiting for air raids to end. Aboveground, a civilization burned to ashes closely resembles the image of Tokyo after the massive firebombing by American B-29s (fig. 3.3). An earth transformed into uninhabitable ruins by nuclear weapons dropped by an alien race directly points to Hiroshima and Nagasaki (fig. 3.4, pl. 6). And throughout the story, characters who are driven into life-or-death predicaments often abruptly carry out suicidal attacks. Furthermore, endangered earthlings

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weapons (fig. 3.6, pl. 18). Another memorable example is the TV anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, introduced in 1995, the year of Aum's Sarin attack, which went on to become a record-breaking hit in the anime world (fig. 3.7, pl. 33). In *Evangelion*, the fourteen-year-old protagonists, endowed with unique powers, are called into duty—much like schoolchildren mobilized to labor at factories during World War II—and forced into nearly suicidal attacks against the unidentified invading enemies called Shito (or “Apostles”) in Japanese (and Angels in English). The list of examples goes on and on, but the important point is that while the postwar subculture that proliferated from the 1960s onward drew its narrative inspiration from the Pacific War, Japanese art from the same period rarely addressed this topic. Not that Japanese art never tackled the subject of war. Quite the contrary: during the Pacific War, the ongoing conflict was made an explicit theme of painting. This epoch-making genre

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Fukuzawa, w  
in the 1930s.  
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in 1970, und

remains unwritten.

In the world of subculture, however, things were entirely different. Most notably, the illustrator Shigeru Komatsuzaki was renowned in postwar years for his drawings related to World War II, which embellished the boxes of model kits. His depictions of battle scenes as well as weaponry, battleships, and tanks established a visual vocabulary of war among children (fig. 3.9, pl. 26). Prior to the defeat, Komatsuzaki was the best-selling illustrator of his time, contributing his powerful war images to such magazines as *Shonen kurabu* (Boys club) and *Kikaika* (Mechanization). Throughout his life, he proudly remembered the praise heaped upon his painting, *This One Blow*, by none other than Fujita, the foremost master of the genre. This painting, which depicted Zeros in an air battle, was included in an Army's Art Exhibition in 1942. Leiji (Reiji) Matsumoto, the creator of *Yamato*, was greatly influenced by Komatsuzaki's

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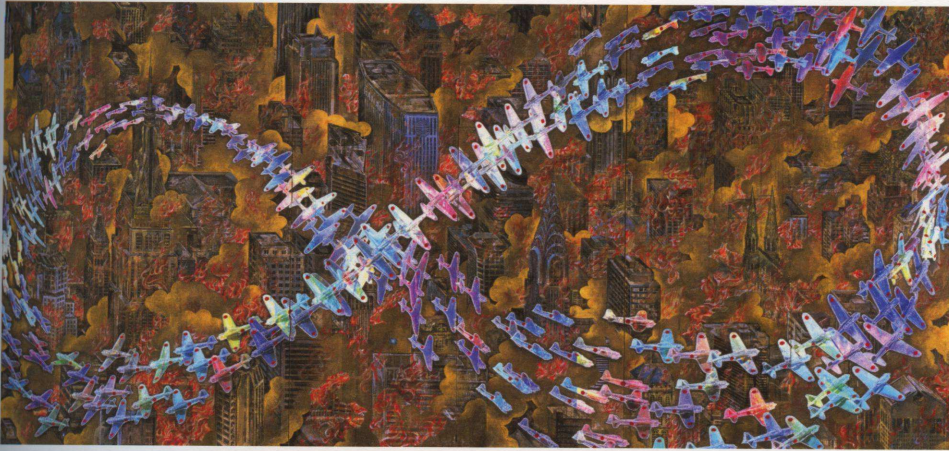
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**Figure 3.12**  
 Makoto Aida  
*A Picture of an Air Raid on New York City (War Picture Returns)*  
 紐育空爆之図(戦争画RETURNS)  
 1996  
 Mixed media on six-panel sliding screens  
 169 x 378 cm  
 CG work: Mutsuo Matsuhashi  
 Collection of Ryūtarō Takahashi  
 Courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo



**Figure 3.13**  
 Katsushige Nakahashi  
*ZERO Project #601-1XX*  
 2003  
 Approx. 25,000 c-prints  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy Kodama Gallery, Osaka and Tokyo

trafficked in an image almost inconceivable for children's programming in the only country that had ever suffered atomic bombing, Japanese children eagerly awaited its weekly installments—and its mushroom cloud. In a sense, it may be argued that Murakami has attempted to create "defeat record painting" (*haisen kiroku-ga*), ironically commenting on a post-war Japan that is oblivious to its wartime history and has become Superflat, so to speak, with no clear boundary between high art and subculture—which are, in fact, intricately entwined.

It then follows that, as absurd and preposterous as they may seem, the narratives favored by *otaku* are strewn with fragments of the distorted history of Japan. Similarly, the Superflat expressions of Japanese Neo Pop, which varyingly adapt these *otaku* narratives,

れていることがわかってくる。同様に、これらを多様に編集して作られる日本のネオポップによるスーパーフラットな美術表現の背景には、ファイン・アートの外部にあるサブカルチャーという回路を通じて残された、かつての日本の戦争美術の変形という側面が存在する。

ここで考えるべきなのは、ではなぜ、そのような戦争の記憶が、戦後、歴史的な遠近感を失って、まったく厚みを持たない、スーパーフラットでツルツルのマンガ＝アニメ的空間に閉じ込められてしまったか、ということだろう。これは、簡単には答えることが難しい問題だが、ここでは、そのことを考える上で欠かすことのできない論点だけ挙げておこう。

1947年に施行された日本国憲法は、その



(Studio Cubics) + MA Modeling Laboratory

1/3.5 Scale model: Bome (Kaiyōdō)

S.M.Pko<sup>2</sup> supporter: Miyawaki Shūichi (Kaiyōdō)

Mechanical design supporter:

Item Entertainment

Finishing of work: Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd.

Courtesy Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

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buying in the 1980s. It is no surprise, then, that the bubble suddenly burst in the early 1990s, as the Cold War order itself collapsed.

The generation of *otaku* and Japanese Neo Pop came of age in the aftermath of the demise of the New Left, when Japan's "self-withdrawal" was reinforced politically, economically, and militarily. To this generation, everything about war—the war Japan had waged, the proxy wars fought in neighboring Asian nations, and even Japan's own military (the so-called Self-Defense Forces)—was fiction; as such, it was fodder for their pastime fantasies of manga and anime. This may explain why Japanese subculture has often reveled in an obsessive fondness for military weaponry, engaging contently with this subject as fantasy while making no connection to its importance in the real-life issues of history and politics. Granted, the views presented in subculture may appear extremely right-wing, nationalistic, or militaristic. But the more

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legitimate political consciousness. Instead, it has been transformed into the monstrous caricatures and apocalyptic delusions depicted in the manga and anime. These images bespeak a deep psychological repression. What is repressed maintains the potential to force itself out whenever and wherever it finds the slightest opportunity. Japan's subculture must be understood as a set of ambivalent urges, vacillating between the desire to escape from historical self-withdrawal and

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By exploiting the creepy imagination of the postwar generation, which has spawned monsters, aliens, and supernatural wars—the generation that has defined Japanese Neo Pop has re-imagined a distorted history, which the nation chose to forget at the very beginning of its postwar life.

of the Cold War. If we find anything  
the work of Japanese Neo Pop that goes  
simplistic label of Far Eastern Pop Art,  
artists' sober acknowledgement of Japa  
cal history. The true achievement of Ja  
Pop, then, is that it gives form to the  
history that haunts Japan—by reassembli  
of history accumulated in *otaku's* pr  
and liberating them from their confin  
imaginary reality through a critical reco  
subculture. In doing so, these artists ha  
take the delusional path of resorting to  
Aum; instead, they have found a way ou  
universal means of art, transferring the  
the battlefield that is art history. In essen  
Neo Pop, as exemplified by the worl  
Murakami among others, visualizes th  
distortion of Japan for the eyes of the w

Emperor Hirohito accepted the Potsdam Declaration and the Japanese nation surrendered unconditionally. In contrast to the traditional view of the end of the period, the end of the period remains a point of contention. Some contend that the postwar era ended in 1951 when the Japanese government signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which announced the conclusion of the U.S. occupation. Others point to the rapid economic growth of the late 1950s and 1960s, and the hosting of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics in part as signs of the end of the postwar period. Others think that it ended in 1989 with the death of Emperor Hirohito, who was succeeded by his son, the reigning Emperor Akihito. Still others insist that the postwar period will never truly end until the Japanese Constitution, enacted soon after the war and amended in 1992, is amended. Personally, I believe that the postwar period will continue as long as Japan is bound by the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, signed concurrently with the San Francisco Peace Treaty. The U.S. has the right to maintain independent military bases in Japan. In other words, it is my opinion that the postwar period, which began in 1945, continues to this day.

4. Japan was awarded the 1940 Summer Olympics, which were subsequently cancelled due to the country's aggression in China.

5. There is a significant difference between *hiragana* and *katakana*. (This distinction is often lost when written easily into English.) *Hiragana* (cursive syllabary) and *katakana* (angular syllabary), syllabic scripts (similar to a syllabary) developed in the ninth century, carry significantly different connotations in Japanese written language. *Hiragana* was originally called "women's hand" (*onnade*), an alternative to the

other words, rendered in *katakana*, the word *otaku* exported as something “cool,” and the concept is in a “culture of value” supposedly legitimized in a process that may amount to a cultural laundering.

6. Mari Kotani, “Otakuin wa otakuia no yume o mita [dreamed of otaqueer], in *Amijō genron F-kai: Posu sekushuaritī* [Netlike discourse F, revised: Post sexuality], ed. Hiroki Azuma (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2000).

7. The suspension of the gold standard in August 1971 led to the abolishment of the fixed dollar-yen exchange rate. The yen had long kept the value of the yen low, thus benefiting exports. The drastic increase in oil prices and the oil supply by OPEC in October 1973 further accelerated inflation in Japan, and caused economic panic.