Anime's Atomic Legacy: Takashi Murakami, Miyazaki, Anno, and the Negotiation of Japanese War Memory

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Abstract

This thesis explores the cultural commentary by Japanese Neo-Pop artist Takashi Murakami in relation to Japan's war memory and its legacy in popular culture, addressing in particular the essays accompanying his 2005 exhibition *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*. Murakami constructs a genealogy of postwar *otaku* subculture— anime, manga, *tokusatsu*, and video games—which he sees as reflecting anxieties repressed within mainstream culture: namely, memory of defeat, occupation, and ongoing military protection by the United States, epitomised by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These concerns become intertwined with the social malaise of Japan's "Lost Decades", in which postwar narratives of endless economic growth through scientific innovation give way to nihilism and social withdrawal. While anime of the "Economic Miracle" period show empowered heroes overcoming apocalyptic trauma through technology and righteous ideals, those of the 1990s frustrate such heroism: as scientific optimism deteriorates, protagonists are forced to question their beliefs, affiliations, and self-definition.

While Murakami offers a wealth of socio-historical insights, clear limitations emerge, particularly the immediate post-Occupation release of films and artworks depicting the war and the atomic bomb, which challenges the notion that these topics were repressed exclusively into subculture. Furthermore, critics have argued the emphasis on Japan's defeat and the hardships faced by civilians downplays the broader history of the Japanese Empire and its wartime activities abroad, a tendency Carol Gluck terms "victim's history". This thesis proposes a revision of Murakami's theory which argues that memory of Japan as perpetrator emerges subliminally in subcultural narratives alongside memory of victimhood. Drawing on Hashimoto's, LaCapra's, and Elsaesser's insights on the transmission of perpetrator memory, I argue that many of anime's most iconic Sci-Fi and fantasy narratives are rooted in ambivalence towards national history, with heroes forced to identify

simultaneously with hero, victim, and perpetrator roles. I focus on directors Hayao Miyazaki and Hideaki Anno, identifying the recurring motif of the "perpetrator fathers" whose legacy young heroes must overcome, while at the same time experiencing a traumatic identification with their father figures. These narratives complicate questions of national identity, reflecting a simultaneous desire to escape from, and redeem, historical memory.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

In May 1945, at a meeting of the American Target Committee on the proposed use of an atomic bomb against Japan, US War Secretary Henry Stimson declared that the attack "should seek to make a profound psychological impression on as many of the inhabitants as possible" (Ham 2452). In the eyes of Japanese Neo-Pop artist Takashi Murakami, that impression would prove to be far greater than Stimson, or anyone from a pre-Hiroshima world, might have imagined. In his landmark 2005 New York exhibition, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, Murakami outlines a genealogy of Japanese art which he reads as stemming from an unresolved national trauma over defeat in the Pacific War and the atomic bomb attacks of 1945. He connects these themes to the emergence of uniquely Japanese postmodern aesthetic called *superflat*[1], exemplified by Japan's iconic popular media landscape—anime, manga, *tokusatsu* (special effects films), and video games—which by the early 1980s had coalesced under the umbrella of *otaku* subculture. *Little Boy*'s exhibition catalogue doubles as a collection of essays, written or curated by Murakami, which argue that Japan's postwar media landscape expresses prevailing sociological and psychological conditions amongst the general public.

Echoing Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), Murakami identifies within Japanese subcultural art a pattern of apocalyptic motifs and narrative structures that mark an unconscious attempt to grapple with the taboo subject of Japan's wartime past, particularly Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His genealogy outlines a body of work that has returned persistently to themes of war, political corruption, institutional failure, environmental destruction, apocalypse and its aftermath, and the image of the atomic mushroom cloud. For Murakami, these patterns are no mere accident, but a phenomenon akin to Freud's repetition compulsion, wherein the trauma of the atomic bomb remains repressed and unresolved. This, combined with America's imposition of a pacifist constitution and

external military protection, has left Japan in what Murakami perceives as a state of arrested development. In response, otaku subculture produces compensatory narratives in which the inciting trauma of the bomb is recreated as young heroes struggle with their own personal trauma during, or following, an apocalypse, disaster, or war. Contrasting the popular apocalyptic films of the West, anime's apocalyptic tales almost invariably centre on young characters who find themselves tasked with inheriting the mantle of responsibility for their decaying worlds. Unresolved memories of Japan's wartime past are thus intertwined with present-day anxieties, particularly regarding intergenerational conflict and the integration of youth into mainstream society.

Murakami's ideas align closely with recent commentary on postwar Japan. Themes of war and apocalypse in anime are widely noted, with scholars including Susan Napier and Motoko Tanaka positing these artworks as a response to Japan's memory of defeat, and critics including Masachi Osawa and Hiroki Azuma provide precedent for what might be called the postmodernity thesis: that postwar Japan experienced a declining faith in what Lyotard terms grand narratives—totalising worldviews providing a sense of stable, unified identity—during the "Lost Decade" following the asset bubble crash of late-1991. The wartime era was governed by rigid ideologies of militarism, State Shinto, and the *kokutai* ("Imperial Body"), wherein all Japanese were said to share a spiritual unity through their loyalty to the Emperor. These grand narratives were supplanted by the US Occupation, which instilled new ideals of pacifism, capitalism, and liberal democracy, and as Japan entered its postwar "Economic Miracle" in the 1950s, fuelled by industrialisation and scientific innovation, a new outlook was established: that of peaceful progress through hard work, technological advancement, and a thriving consumer culture. However, these grand narratives were challenged by events such as the Red Army Incident, which ended the radical political activism of the 1960s, and the oil shock of the early 70s, which threatened notions of infinite economic growth. The

collapse of the bubble economy in 1991 more thoroughly destabilised economic confidence, while in 1995, the Great Hanshin Earthquake and sarin gas attacks by the Aum Shinrikyō cult revealed previously unseen ruptures in the nation's social fabric. Aum drew heavily on apocalyptic visions linked to Japan's defeat in the Pacific War, fuelled by anime like *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, and their success in recruiting financially successful, middle-class professionals indicated a desire for meaning and identity beyond that offered by Japan's corporate work culture and affluent consumer lifestyles. The sarin gas attacks marked a rupture in the status quo, signalling the desire for a paradigm shift that would revive grand narratives and guarantee individuals a concrete sense of identity. Freida Freiberg, drawing on Furguson's concept of the postnuclear sublime, sees this reflected in the "apocalyptic desire" of many anime narratives, in which world-threatening disaster provides a liberating springboard for character growth and identity-formation.

Murakami's analysis is complicated in light of the often unspoken history of Japan's activity abroad during the Pacific War, and a recurring criticism of his writings warns of a potential nationalism in the vein of what Carol Gluck terms victim's history: framing the Pacific War exclusively in terms of Japan's defeat at the hands of US forces, with emphasis on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The topic of Imperial Japan's dark history is raised in passing by Murakami's colleague Noi Sawaragi, who states that Japan exists in an "ahistorical bubble," with a "double amnesia" concerning its simultaneous position of victim and perpetrator during the war. However, Sawaragi does not elaborate on the matter, and other essays in the *Little Boy* catalogue never offer more than brief asides, eschewing specific details of Japan's military past. Yoshitaka Môri and Thomas Lamarre both call attention to this trend, with Môri noting the tendency of anime to displace memories of fascism onto villains evoking Nazi iconography, who are then defeated by virtuous Japanese heroes (often fighting for humanity as a whole rather than the nation).

However, this thesis argues that perpetrator memory, while rarely addressed directly, appears subliminally in apocalyptic narratives which divorce sensitive themes and images from their original context. It is here that the notion of repressed collective memory carries more weight. Japan's role as aggressor in the Pacific War remains a point of contention domestically and internationally, leading to controversies such as the government screening of school history textbooks and ensuing legal battles over faithful representation on matters including comfort women and the Nanking massacre. As with memory of the bomb, Japan's perpetrator memory is not literally repressed, as evidenced by vocal opposition to attempts at censorship or historical revisionism, yet there are those in the nationalist camp—including former Prime Minster Shinzo Abe—to whom the term repression applies quite aptly. For these individuals, the redemption of the past is necessary to upholding a strong sense of national identity in the present, an identity that has faced ongoing threats of destabilisation during the postwar era.

While scholars like Môri note the potential for an uncritical nationalism in anime's apocalyptic narratives, I would argue that Miyazaki and Anno integrate aspects of Imperial Japan's wartime actions in a manner that can be read as critical, whether intended or not. The added dimension of perpetrator trauma complicates anime's idealistic, heroic narratives, suggesting that empowerment through supernatural abilities or advanced technology offers no guarantee of peace given the universal human potential for corruption. Economic Miracle narratives resolve this through dissociation of the "perpetrator fathers" (villains from older generations who are cleanly dispatched by virtuous young heroes), while Lost Decade begin to blur these dissociative boundaries: there is often a traumatic revelation of the father figure's negative aspects (drawn from Japan's imperial past), followed by the hero's identification with the parent and recognition of their own innate flaws. Militarism and apocalyptic desire are revealed as untenable, and the traumatic experiences of the heroes

cause them to reject their military roles in favour of safety and seclusion. It is here that

Murakami's emphasis on social withdrawal comes into play. Japan's relation to technology is

complicated by the emergence of virtual worlds and entertainment media which, in contrast

to military technology, facilitate a safe detachment from the world and its conflicts, which

Azuma describes as *animalisation*. In Freudian fashion, the military world is associated with

the father figure (a world of conflict and social demands), while the withdrawn virtual world

is linked (sometimes literally) to the mother figure, frequently symbolising a return to the

womb. Miyazaki and Anno both express deep skepticism of the postmodern fixation on the

virtual, particularly regarding the stereotypical *otaku* lifestyle, and their statements in

interviews echo many of Murakami's own ideas on the postwar infantilisation of Japan.

 If Japan cannot find meaning in national identity by affirming its military past, nor

withdraw into atomised worlds, is there a pathway forward? In Miyazaki's and Anno's

Economic Miracle narratives, the solution is the construction of new grand narratives that

supersede the corruption of the old. *Future Boy Conan*, for instance, ends with the destruction

of Industria's military dictatorship: the perpetrator fathers pass away, and humanity is free to

return to a communal, agrarian way of life in touch with nature. But in the nihilism of the

Lost Decade, no new grand narrative arises to replace the old, and revolutionary ideals appear

to have failed, leading the directors to focus instead on identity crises in their protagonists.

This transition is epitomised by Miyazaki's Howl in *Howl's Moving Castle* and Anno's Shinji

Ikari in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. As righteous ideals and scientific optimism disintegrate,

the hero's central conflict shifts from saving the world to saving themselves, achieved by

establishing intimate relationships that help them work-through their psychological discord.

Thus, both directors present narratives which encourage a resistance to social withdrawal and

engagement with local communities, even as visions of political transformation are frustrated.

 This thesis explores the ways in which anime's apocalyptic texts have responded to

national war memory. Chapter 1 explores the attempt of Takashi Murakami and fellow

Japanese Neo-Pop thinkers to construct a theory of national cinema around otaku subculture.

I explore the contrast between trauma narratives in mainstream postwar films concerning the

atomic bomb, which tend to document historicised experiences of victimhood, and the

tendency of subcultural films to facilitate heroic action that overcomes atomic trauma.

Chapter 2 introduces the concept of perpetrator trauma, examining the complex interplay

between narratives of hero, victim, and perpetrator roles. In particular, I focus on the

dissociative archetypes of the "perpetrator fathers," and the ways in which apocalyptic

narratives move between rejection of, and identification with, these father figures. Chapters 3

and 4 apply these ideas to case studies of Miyazaki and Anno respectively, showcasing the

increasing emphasis on perpetrator themes during the Lost Decades: in these later films, the

ability of young protagonists to break free of the past and forge their own identities is

frustrated by identification with troubled parental figures, resulting in nihilism towards

revolutionary political change.

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1. Spelling and capitalisation of "superflat" vary across publications, with the word

sometimes split in two ("super flat"), such as in the original *Super Flat* catalogue (2001).

Unless directly quoting an alternative spelling, this paper will use "superflat" to refer to the

aesthetic theory and "Superflat" when referring to Murakami's exhibition series.

Chapter 1: Superflat, Subculture, and National Trauma

The goal of this thesis is to explore how Japanese animation has responded to the historical trauma of the atomic bomb attacks, in order to test the applications and limitations of Murakami's critical framework. The primary focus of this analysis will involve a case study of Hayao Miyazaki and Hideaki Anno, perhaps the industry's two most iconic directors following Osamu Tezuka, the Godfather of Manga. These directors have been selected, not only for their immense popularity and influence over the anime industry, but their ongoing efforts over decades of production to grapple with the ramifications of Japan's wartime trauma and rapid postwar transformation. Famous for their handling of apocalyptic themes, the pair pay equal attention to the process of modernisation and the ever increasing role of technology in human life, exploring the complex interconnectedness of Japan's prewar, wartime, and postwar eras. Their works evolve dynamically with the times, responding to the changing contexts of the Japanese Economic Miracle and subsequent Lost Decade. Furthermore, the directors' contrasting styles enrich the discussion in light of Murakami's concept of superflat. Miyazaki's work continues Toei Animation's "Disney of the East" ideal, opting for a classical style of storytelling in a deliberate attempt to distance himself from anime subculture (he prefers the alternative label *manga eiga,* or "manga films"). Anno, meanwhile, is a product of Japan's media subcultures, doing his best to build and evolve the niche of otaku-oriented art while gradually becoming one of otakudom's fiercest critics.

This chapter will establish a theoretical framework for close analysis of their works, and to develop an understanding of the broader historical and artistic context to which they responded. To begin, I will introduce the core ideas presented by Murakami, including that of his colleagues whose writing he includes in *Little Boy*. This will be followed with a critical

breakdown of Murakami's thesis, drawing upon existing challenges to his ideas: namely, the questions of national identity implicit in his work. In doing so, this chapter will situate Murakami within the fields of national cinema and trauma studies, examining the ways in which representations of history respond to the memory of cultural trauma. The discussion will include examples of mainstream Japanese cinema and its response to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to be contrast against the world of otaku subculture and the unique aesthetic and narrative conventions it has established around apocalyptic themes. Chapter 2 will expand upon the concept of perpetrator trauma, exploring the ways in which anime narratives frequently dissociate elements of Japan's wartime history. Chapter 3 will look in-depth at the role of perpetrator trauma in the work of Miyazaki, while Chapter 4 will do the same for Anno. In doing so, this thesis will demonstrate that questions of national identity and collective memory are fraught with complexities and contradictions, precluding a simplistic nationalistic discourse.

Takashi Murakami and *superflat*

Takashi Murakami stands as one of the most successful contemporary artists of the past 30 years, establishing an international reputation around the turn of the century as one of Japan's premiere avant-garde creators. A doctoral graduate in *nihon-ga* (traditional Japanese painting) from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, Murakami is often styled as the Japanese Andy Warhol; his quirky postmodern style fuses fine art with Japan's commercial pop culture to create what he calls *superflat*, a theory of aesthetics which grapples with questions of postwar Japanese identity and cultural authenticity. His approach to art is explicitly commercial: Hiropon Factory, established 1996 and incorporated as Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd in 2000, employs a large and well-organised staff who, in addition to working as Murakami's assistants, produce and market a vibrant line of merchandise featuring the

artist's iconic imagery (Koh 400-01). Murakami has achieved explosive success in the international art world despite being a relatively minor figure in his homeland, in no small part due to his construction of a Japanese aesthetic that is distinct from Western fine art (a fact that has not gone unnoticed by critics). As such, his art and its wider context are inextricably tied to questions of Japanese national identity, an aim he makes explicit through the voluminous essay collections accompanying his exhibitions: these texts, particularly the 2001 catalogue for *Superflat*, frame his artworks as part of a wider mission to authentically represent Japanese history and culture.

As Yoshitaka Môri notes in his 2006 article "Subcultural Unconscious in Japan", Murakami's work is situated within the broader school of Japanese neo-pop (JNP), a term coined by cultural critic Noi Sawaragi in reference to an artistic movement emerging in the 1990s from artists born in the 60s (Murakami foremost among them). Their work drew heavily on the pop subcultures of anime, manga, and *tokusatsu* consumed *en masse* by this generation, blurring the lines between fine art and commercial entertainment. Môri notes that Japanese art history has often ignored or marginalised popular culture, which JNP artists attempt to remedy by introducing these elements into fine arts, renegotiating conceptions of national identity through both the eccentric juxtaposition and remixing of traditional and contemporary visual elements, and motifs drawn from World War II, particularly firebombing air raids and the atomic bomb (Môri 174-75). Given the bright, eccentric, and often absurd imagery on display, it would be easy at first glance to view these works as abstract imaginings divorced from the political sphere; on closer inspection, however, Môri observes that JNP "proposes a new relationship between culture and the national" (174).

This is exemplified by Murakami's *Superflat* (2000), which makes clear his critical view of the substantial Western influence upon Japanese art. The exhibition catalogue, which doubles as a collection of essays, proposes a brand of neo-pop art crafted deliberately to

evoke an aesthetic unique to Japan, blending elements of the nation's painting tradition (*nihonga*) with modern media (namely, otaku subculture). In "The Superflat Manifesto," he states his goal of presenting "super flatness" as a "sensibility that has contributed to and continues to contribute to the construction of Japanese culture, as a worldview, and [to] show that it is an original concept that links the past with the present and future" (5). He continues that Japan has been Westernised during the modern period, and that an understanding of super flatness, which he sees as a concept original to the Japanese, will lead to answers as to where the nation and its people currently stand (and where they are headed). The following essay, "A Theory of Super Flat Japanese Art," draws a lineage between the premodern art of Edo (isolationist) Japan, particularly its iconic *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, and the postmodern aesthetics of anime, focusing on the work of animation director Yoshinori Kanada.

Little Boy (2005) proposes a theory of Japanese national identity based upon a psychoanalytic reading of the arts: that the traumatic memory of the atomic bomb attacks and defeat in the Pacific War remains unresolved, repressed from public discourse due to the taboo nature of discussing Japan's wartime past, and thus finds expression through apocalyptic motifs repeated over decades through Japanese media subcultures, particularly anime. This, combined with the pacifist constitution imposed by the US and the material comforts of the postwar economic miracle, has resulted in a unique kind of infantilisation and struggle over self-definition. Many of these ideas were prefigured in his 2001 essay, "Impotence Culture: Anime," where he claims that "behind the flashy titillation of anime lies the shadow of Japan's defeat of the Pacific War. The world of anime is a world of impotence" (58). The otaku, he argues, have been perceived as the Other within the mainstream, cast as a group lacking the communication skills to relate to the outside world and thus retreating from reality into the imaginary worlds of anime (62); but Murakami sees this rejection of otaku and anime subculture as an act of repression by the Japanese mainstream, who wish to avoid

consciously recognising Japan's postwar impotence. As he writes:

> Japan—a country weakened, made impotent in its defeat. The more *anime* has attempted an honest understanding of this impotence, the more ripples it has cause, and the more the *otaku* have been shunned within Japanese society. Neither the *otaku* nor the *otaku*-haters realise that these works are merely a form of self-portraiture. No, they actively don't want to realise it. ("Impotence Culture: Anime" 66)

Thus, while Murakami's construction of Japanese national psychology foregrounds the atomic bomb, the political circumstances that followed it (namely, Japan's relationship with America) are also significant.

In the afterword to *Superflat* (161), Murakami notes that he is motivated by a number of big questions: not only the question of what defines Japanese art, but "What is Japan?" and "What is the nature of this period I live in?" Murakami claims that the Japanese are too unaware of history, including that of their own art, which he wants to change. He notes, however, that rather than devoting his life to thinking about the "concept of art", he is too interested in the mundane world. Thus, in keeping with his postmodern inclinations, Murakami offers no unified theoretical narrative, but rather a "patchwork of ideas." His volumes weave a path through myriad images, artists, and writers, laying out a loose genealogy with room for the reader to draw their own conclusions. With that in mind, this section will provide an overview of Murakami's intellectual patchwork, beginning with the "Plates & Entries" section that opens *Little Boy*. Here, we see a loose chronology of the origins of subculture and its *superflat* conventions, beginning with Japan's Expo '70 and ending with Hideaki Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-97), alongside commentary by Murakami explaining the significance of these iconic images.

Murakami's claim that postwar Japan exists in an infantilised state is a bold (and undoubtedly hyperbolic) assertion, one demanding qualification beyond the popularity of *kawaii* imagery and *yuru-chara* in Japanese media culture. There are two angles that can be

taken here: the cultural and the political. The idea of infantilisation in older children and adults can be traced to Freud's theory of regression, whereby an individual's psychology and behaviour revert to those of a prior developmental stage, often in response to unresolved trauma. As with the concept of repression, which Kracauer applies collectively to the interwar German population, it may be that Murakami makes the same collective diagnosis with the concept of regression (albeit without direct reference to Freudian theory). An appraisal of postwar social trends does give some credence to Murakami's base assertion, with a rise in chronic social withdrawal known as *hikikomori*. The term was popularised by psychiatrist Tamaki Saitō, whose 1998 book, *Hikikomori: Adolescence without End*, drew attention to an alarming number of Japanese who remained confined in the family home for periods of more than a year (sometimes spanning decades), with minimal social ties or workplace participation. Saitō's initial estimate put the *hikikomori* population at 1 million (ix), while a 2001 study by the organisation Rainbow gave a range of 800,000 to 1.2 million people (x). Psychological regression is raised as a common symptom of those in withdrawal, particularly a physical and emotional dependence on the mother uncharacteristic of the patient's age group (44).

While Western coverage has sometimes viewed *hikikomori* as a uniquely Japanese phenomenon, Saitō insists that the problem can occur in any society, linking withdrawal to a convergence of cultural and economic factors. Most importantly, it requires an affluent middle class society; a Thai psychiatrist responded in disbelief upon learning about hikikomori, asking how they take care of living expenses (75). Family culture is also significant. The Japanese family structure puts less emphasis on children leaving the home; thus, Saitō concludes, Americans responding to the same issues may end up as homeless youths, while those in countries like Japan and Italy tend to remain in the family home (6). Japan's high-pressure work culture is also seen as a factor: Saitō notes that the majority of

hikikomori are male, citing the pressure to perform in the job market as one of the prime drivers of withdrawal. In Saitō's conclusion, he states that we live in an "age of adolescence" (176), and that *hikikomori* epitomise this era, again stressing that the phenomenon is not limited to Japan. In this way, Saitō's position may echo Murakami's claim that Japan represents the future. The economic focus is reflected in Murakami's image of Japan as a high-tech consumer paradise in which one's every need and desire can be met through material consumption. Media discourse often highlights the relationship between *hikikomori* and otaku, with many withdrawn individuals occupying their time through anime, video games, and other subcultural works accessed through digital technology. While the withdrawal phenomenon is by no means limited to otaku, their association with *hikikomori* has added to the image of a socially isolated individual absorbed in worlds of fantasy, supported by a middle-class family in an affluent and high-tech consumer society. This image is significant in light of Hiroki Azuma's concept of animalisation, which entails a loss of the Hegelian desire for recognition when one's material needs are adequately met without need of struggle. By contrast, Saitō argues that while *hikikomori* may appear content, their position is by no means a happy one, as his patients invariably harbour a suppressed desire for recognition and constructive participation in society.

In the political sphere, Murakami's main claim to Japan's postwar infantilisation rests on the nation's relationship with the United States, both during the Occupation and subsequently under America's military protection. Article 9 of the constitution drafted by Douglas MacArthur prohibited the maintenance of a standing army or the right to wage war, leaving Japan reliant on Washington to guard it against the turbulence of the Cold War. Exemplifying this relationship was the transformation of Emperor Hirohito, once the nation's living deity, who was forced to declare himself mortal and transition to a British-style constitutional monarch. During the reconstruction years, he began exhibiting himself to the

public in a commoner's business suit, bereft of his royal regalia. The infamous photograph of a diminutive Hirohito standing next to MacArthur in his new attire, widely distributed in the newspapers, exemplified this transition for the Japanese.[1]

The Japan-US alliance continued to sway political developments decades after the Occupation ended. The NHK documentary *A Portrait of Postwar Japan* features an interview with Tomomitsu Oba, former Vice Minister of Finance for International Affairs, who represented Japan during negotiation of the Plaza Accord in 1985. The document aimed at maintaining low interest rates in Japan despite concerns over long-term stability, and was later seen as a contributing factor to the asset bubble that catalysed the Lost Decade. Oba recounts that the American representatives stressed Japan's position under their nuclear umbrella, such that he felt that Japan had no choice but to acquiesce, admitting that he "knew only too well that Japan was able to strengthen its economic might thanks to the protection the US military provided under the Japan-US alliance." This sense of infantilisation by America plays a prominent role in Japan's nationalist discourse, particularly calls for remilitarisation (see Chapter 2); so while Murakami's assessment may not apply to the entire population, it does characterise some segments of popular ideology.

A genealogy of *superflat* subculture

Murakami opens his "Plates and Entries" with Tarō Okamoto, a predecessor in the line of eccentric Japanese artists who, "To solve the thorny riddle of how to live with the nightmarish memory of nuclear holocaust in a way that anyone could understand, … boldly declared, 'Art is explosion!'" (*Little Boy* 4). Okamoto drew crowds with his *Tower of the Sun* at Expo '70, Asia's first World's Fair, which marked an iconic moment of future-focused optimism for the Japanese public in light of two and a half decades of postwar recovery. *Little Boy* is replete with references to the Expo as a symbol of progress during the postwar Economic Miracle, driven by faith in the power of science to build a brighter future.

It was this optimism that defined the progenitors of *otaku* culture, which emerged from the passionate science-fiction and *tokusatsu* fan communities (or *fandoms*) of the 60s and 70s, which relied heavily on works imported from the West. Indeed, both Murakami and Ōkada see Expo '70 as prefiguring the emergence of otaku over the next decade ("Otaku Talk" 177). This was driven, in part, by a strong sense of utopianism; as Japan's economy boomed in its role as the world's leading electronics inventor, the youth had a sense that, in contrast to the destructive potential of the atomic bomb, science would lead the way to a brighter future. Over time, with the increasing number of animated TV series like *Space Battleship Yamato*, anime and manga fans began to cross over into existing sci-fi communities, and the popular sci-fi fan conventions provided a pre-internet forum for social engagement and collaboration between likeminded pop culture enthusiasts. Attendees would often go beyond mere discussion, creating elaborate costumes, critical fan magazines (*fanzines*), and their own original works. This idea of an active (and even creative) engagement with art and pop culture is central to the kind of otaku that created the "DAICON IV" opening animation for the 1983 Japan Sci-Fi Convention in Osaka. A 5-minute music video animated by team of amateur artists, "DAICON IV" celebrated the remix culture of the otaku, drawing upon a breadth of pop culture icons from East and West. Commissioned by Ōkada and employing a Hideaki Anno (then a university student), this group would go on to incorporate as Studio Gainax.

As Murakami notes, the short film presents an apocalyptic narrative with the theme of "destruction and regeneration" (10), a motif replete throughout *otaku* subculture. Eschewing Japan's convention of political correctness around the atomic bomb, "DAICON IV" finds "something liberating in the devastating power of destruction":

> The energetic flight through the sky of a girl in a bunny costume is followed by the explosion of what could only be described as an atomic bomb, which destroys everything. In a pink-hued blast, petals of cherry blossoms—Japan's national flower—spread over the city, which is then burned to ashes, as trees

die on the mountains and the earth is turned into a barren landscape. When the spaceship DAICON, a symbol for *otaku* floating in the sky, launches a powerful "*otaku*" beam, the earth is covered with green, as giant trees sprout instantly from the ground. The world is revived, becoming a place of life where people joyously gather together.

The traumatic image of the atomic bombing is turned into a sublime spectacle, which empowers the young *bishōjo* (beautiful girl) heroine to reshape the world into a harmonious community through science.

Murakami addresses this motif of miraculously surviving the bomb in his *Time Bokan* painting series (2001), based on Hiroshi Sasagawa's 1975 anime series of the same name. Creating numerous copies of "the skull-shaped mushroom cloud that announces the villains' demise at the end of each episode," Murakami observes that:

> Week after week, children laughed upon seeing another happy ending with the protagonists' victory; they were not scared by the sight of the mushroom cloud, remaining certain that the villains would return to the programme in the following episode, completely recovered. Although the creators of the anime series could not have intended to send a positive message about the atomic bombing, let alone a safe return from it, children loved the indestructible villains. (*Little Boy* 14)

Murakami appears to anticipate Freud's repetition compulsion, as described in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), with his assertion that children delighted in the weekly return of the villains who miraculously survived last episode's atomic explosion. On the following page, "Mushroom Cloud," he states that "Since its development in the 1940s, the nuclear bomb has been represented as a symbol of terror in documentary, popular, and artistic imagery by the instantly recognisable mushroom cloud" (16), and on page 19, "Hiroshima," he notes the lasting psychological impact of this image:

> [the atomic explosion] symbolises the visual, aural, and other sensory imprints made on the Japanese psyche, which has been completely transformed in the wake of the collective subjection of the Japanese people to the horrendous experience of nuclear annihilation. Perhaps from this national trauma did *kawaii* and *otaku* cultures emerge in contemporary Japan." (*Little Boy* 19)

Thus, Murakami sees in *otaku* culture a tendency towards repetition of the traumatic nuclear image through endless transformative representations, including those of a *kawaii* (cute) sensibility, to construct narratives in which characters confront and survive the threat of atomic violence. These stories tell of heroes overcoming the power of nuclear technology, reflecting a sense of optimism in humanity's ability to forge a better future through mastery over science.

For instance, in Ishirō Honda's 1954 *tokusatsu* film *Godzilla*, the return of the repressed is not merely psychological, but manifests itself materially in the supernatural force of Godzilla, a gigantic dinosaur-like creature awakened by hydrogen bomb testing in the Pacific, which also grants it superpowers of vast destructive potential. In psychoanalytic terms, the atomic bomb and other wartime traumas are condensed into fantastical or technological imaginings with equal (if not greater) destructive power.

Godzilla is introduced through attacks on Japanese fishing vessels, reenacting the Bikini Atoll incident from earlier that year, where a fishing boat named Lucky Dragon #5 was exposed to an H-bomb test that left the entire crew with chronic injuries. The event brought *hibakusha* into the spotlight for the first time since the war, after the United States offered medical treatment to the fishermen for radiation poisoning, which had often been denied to survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This sense of institutional failure and corruption is reflected early in the film. At an initial meeting between scientists and government officials, one politician proposes concealing the truth about the H-bomb tests causing Godzilla's emergence, for fear of harming diplomatic relations and causing social panic, paralleling the denial after Hiroshima/Nagasaki that radiation was linked to long-term illness (in spite of the stringent safety precautions taken at Los Alamos). Thus, the *hibakusha*'s distrust of the authorities is established, and it must fall instead to the film's heroes to address the crisis.

In addition to reflecting the fate of the Lucky Dragon #5, the monster's full onscreen

reveal takes the form of a lengthly battle sequence in which its fiery breath incinerates most

of Tokyo in graphic detail. As Murakami notes, these images recreate the American

firebombing campaign that razed Japan's capital to the ground in March 1945 (20). We are

later treated to hospital scenes showing the desperate medical crisis in which Godzilla has

placed the Japanese people. The horrors of the Pacific War are not merely remembered, but

relived by proxy through a pastiche of images from Japan's experience of the conflict.

Murakami observes here a duality of victim and victimiser: Godzilla represents both the

physical and psychological trauma of the *hibakusha* who survived Hiroshima and Nagasaki,

and the destructive force of the bomb itself (20). Thus, the creature is simultaneously the

object of dread and pity, perhaps reflecting Japan's own conflicted memories of its role in the

Pacific War.

The true conflict of the film is less the threat of Godzilla itself than the question of how

humanity should respond to such a crisis, and what ramifications this might have beyond the

monster's defeat, drawing upon the core dilemmas of the Cold War as much as those of

World War II. The principal characters debate whether to study and understand Godzilla, or

destroy it. A scientist named Serizawa has invented the "Oxygen Destroyer," a superweapon

far more powerful than atomic weaponry, which may facilitate the latter option: but in

revealing this technology to government forces, humanity's survival could hang in the

balance of an arms race far greater than the nuclear weapons crisis of the Cold War. In the

end, Serizawa agrees to destroy all record of his post-atomic technology, using it only to

defeat Godzilla and sparing humanity from the responsibility over its future use. The

symbolic manifestation of the old atomic trauma is defeated only through the use of an even

greater superweapon by a Japanese scientist, in an act of self-sacrifice evoking the *kamikaze*.

The film's ending is both melancholy and foreboding; as the witnesses of Godzilla's

destruction mourn Serizawa's death, Professor Yamane offers a final warning: "I cannot

believe that Godzilla was the last of its species. If nuclear testing continues, then someday, somewhere in the world, another Godzilla may appear." In short, the defeat of the physical atomic threat does nothing to cure the psychological threat of a future repetition. In LaCapra's terms, the solution was one of acting-out, but the trauma has not been worked-through, and the cycle of repetition is open to continue (as indeed happened through the countless *Godzilla* sequels and spinoffs).

Murakami observes a turn towards cynicism in Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 anime film *Akira*, in which he sees a sense of *"*anxiety, a hope for escape from the coming catastrophe [the collapse of the bubble economy], and a craving for some supernatural power that would bring about salvation—in other words, the zeitgeist of the 1980s" (*Little Boy* 48). The corrupt and incompetent power structure of Neo-Tokyo tries (and ultimately fails) to control a new kind of psychic nuclear power, leading to the repetition of the apocalypse:

> In World War II, Tokyo was burned to ashes, half a century later, it had become a thriving global metropolis. Yet in *Akira*, the Tokyo of the near future is returned to ruins by a catastrophe comparable to a nuclear war, and a drama of destruction and regeneration is played out once again. (*Little Boy* 48)

The ending of the manga sees the surviving heroes reject foreign aid in favour of nationalism and the idolisation of the legendary Akira, even as they live amongst ruins of Neo-Tokyo. Murakami sees in this a symbolic rejection of the infantilising American Occupation, even though it brought material prosperity and democracy to Japan. This fits with the themes present in the film: of youthful rebellion against the decadent adult power structures that have failed once again to protect Tokyo. Again, we see this idea of the sublimation of nuclear trauma, which serves as simultaneous damnation and salvation: in spite of grievous hardship, the adolescent heroes embrace the apocalypse as a paradigm shift that empowers them to change the existing world order.

Murakami concludes his "Plates and Entries" with Hideaki Anno's *Neon Genesis*

Evangelion, which marked a decisive shift in *otaku* subculture. Premiering the same year as

Aum Shinrikyo's terror attack, four years into the Lost Decade, *Evangelion* marked a turn

towards interiority as *otaku* lost faith in the power of science to save them from their

predicament.

> Evangelion pushed its depiction of the psychological and emotional struggles of the young motherless pilots to the extreme … focus[ing] on Shinji, the central character among the pilots, and his painful search for what his life means both as a person and as an Evangelion pilot. … Shinji's identity crisis, apparently a reflection of the director Anno's own psychological dilemmas, epitomized the difficult obstacles faced by postwar Japan, a nation that had recovered from the trauma of war only to find itself incapable of creating its own future: like Shinji, Japan is probing the root cause of its existential paralysis. (*Little Boy* 88)

In these subcultural narratives, the apocalypse serves not merely as a disaster to be

overcome, but an event of transcendence and world-renewal. As Shapiro notes, these

narratives draw upon the Japanese tradition of *masse*: "Unlike the [Western] apocalypse,

masse describes the complete end of the world, and the beginning of an entirely new world"

(257). Evoking Frances Ferguson's idea of the *nuclear sublime*, such apocalyptic scenarios

provide an arena for the (typically young) protagonists of heroic narratives to discover and

assert their authentic self-identity, overcoming not only a natural or military disaster but the

control of old and stagnating authority figures and social systems. The emphasis on youth and

narratives of fundamental change (or, in darker cases, deadly stagnation), central to

Murakami's thesis of infantilisation and impotence, also relates to the notion in trauma theory

of the past and present existing concurrently.

This is sometimes represented literally (as with the psychic children of *Akira*, whose

aged features contrast with their pre-adolescent-sized bodies and matching voices), but more

often manifests in the adoption of adult roles, especially those relating to the military. During

the war, Japanese schools drilled children (both boys and girls) to embody the military spirit,

and as the situation grew more desperate, education was often replaced with manufacturing

work on weapons and military craft, while boys as young as fifteen were recruited (sometimes pressed) into the airforce as kamikaze pilots when adult men grew scarce. Even to this day, many of Japan's high school uniforms incorporate military motifs, such as the iconic sailor suit, which itself has become a subcultural icon through anime likes of *Sailor Moon*. This juxtaposition, exemplified by the fusion of cuteness and innocence with grim violence and mass destruction, can be traced back to Imperial propaganda animations like *Momotaro's Sea Eagles* (1942), wherein a Pearl Harbour-esque naval operation becomes the site of play for anthropomorphised animal children.

As Shapiro notes, "the childlike is connected to both playfulness and the creative spirit in Japanese art (or, as Jung calls the child motif, a 'personification of vital forces quite outside the limited range of our conscious mind')," and may even possess a divine quality (288). Thus the power to reshape the world, during or after the apocalypse, manifests itself in the hands of the youthful, often in conjunction with spiritual themes and imagery. We see this most explicitly in *Akira*, as Tetsuo's powers appear to manifest the creation of a new universe altogether, while Kaneda, backlit by heavenly rays breaking through the clouds, returns to the ruins of Neo-Tokyo to usher in the new social order. As Hikawa notes in Murakami's 2018 exhibition catalogue for *Under the Radiation Falls,* apocalyptic anime are fixated on constructing other worlds, where social institutions and regulatory mechanisms have been destroyed; worlds located "somewhere, but not here"[2]. Murakami sees this as a possible response to the *endless everyday*, whereby the monotony of first-world consumer comforts and static work routines, shielded from the outside world by foreign (American) powers, results in feelings of stagnation and uneasy identity formation.

It is perhaps from this combination of factors that the early otaku derived a sense of scientific utopianism, in which young heroes use the power of science and technological innovation to forge a brighter future in spite of apocalyptic forces standing against them. This

is a driving force behind the development of otaku in Ōkada's generation. The 1952 manga *Astro Boy* (animated for television in 1963) emerged around the time that nuclear energy was emerging as a peaceful use for the technology that ended the war. Named "Mighty Atom" in Japan on account of his atomic heart, Astro Boy represents a positive vision for a future utilising nuclear science. His military might as a fighting robot is balanced against his childlike, *kawaii* design (with elements drawn from Disney), providing a non-threatening means by which to engage with what is essentially a mobile nuclear bomb. As Hikawa notes, in Japanese Shinto belief, there coexists within humankind a good, rational side and an "evil, destructive spirit, and if the latter gets out of control, Nature (or the gods) take their revenge." Hence, the peaceful embodiment of nuclear power in *Astro Boy* and its destructive manifestation in *Godzilla*. The central dilemma at play in such subcultural works is whether the source of the trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki might be mastered as a tool for building a brighter future, rather than leading to a repetition of past mistakes (as many feared during the Cold War).

A recurring theme in the works of Murakami's genealogy is a return to the inciting trauma of the nuclear explosion and apocalypse, wherein the event may be confronted, understood, and overcome. Whether it be through preventing the use of apocalyptic weapons by a rising totalitarian power (as in Miyazaki's *Conan* and *Laputa*, and Anno's *Nadia*), surviving through, and after, a man-made apocalypse (*Nausicaä*, Otomo's *Akira*, and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*), or turning the apocalypse into a trivial, even joyous, occasion (*Ponyo*), Japan's postwar media landscape (and anime in particular) has a grand tradition of revisiting these themes, albeit thoroughly removed from the context of WWII Japan. Evoking Frances Ferguson's idea of the *nuclear sublime*, these apocalyptic scenarios provide an arena in which for the (typically young) protagonists of heroic narratives to discover and assert their authentic self-identity, overcoming not only a natural or military disaster but the control of

old and stagnating authority figures and social systems (Freiberg 95).

Related to this is a sense of techno-utopianism, in which young heroes use the power of science and technological innovation to forge a brighter future in spite of apocalyptic forces standing against them. This is a driving force behind the early development of otaku, and something which may have shifted profoundly in recent decades. *Astro Boy* (1963) emerged around the time that nuclear energy was emerging as a peaceful use for the technology that ended the war, and Astro, named "Mighty Atom" in Japan on account of his atomic heart, represents a positive vision for a future utilising nuclear science. His military might as a fighting robot is balanced against his childlike, *kawaii* (cute) design (with elements drawn from Disney), providing a non-threatening means by which to engage with what is essentially a mobile nuclear bomb. This idealism serves as a precursor to the ethos of Expo '70, the 1970 science exhibition that both Murakami and Toshio Okada (the self-described "Otaking") view as prefiguring the emergence of otaku over the next decade, many of whom were defined by a heroic, even utopian vision of science.

Otaku evolved out of the passionate science-fiction fandom which emerged in the 60s and 70s in Japan, which was heavily driven by works imported from the West. This was driven, in part, by a strong sense of utopianism; as Japan's economy boomed in its role as the world's leading electronics inventor, the youth had a sense that (in contrast to the destructive potential of the atomic bomb) science would lead the way to a brighter future. Over time, an overlap emerged with fans of anime and manga (exclusively Japanese works influenced heavily by sci-fi), and the popular sci-fi fan conventions provided a pre-internet forum for social engagement and collaboration between likeminded pop culture enthusiasts. Attendees would often go beyond mere discussion, creating elaborate costumes, critical fan magazines (*fanzines*), and their own original works. This idea of an active (and even creative) engagement with art and pop culture is central to the kind of otaku that would go on to form

Hideaki Anno's team: Studio Gainax.

Otaku-centred media boomed in the early 80s, where Japan's economy was flourishing and money flooded into the anime industry, fuelling OVA productions (direct-to-video anime) were able to explore themes unlikely to make it into TV anime. The 90s, known in Japan as the *Lost Decade*, marked a severe economic decline from which the country has never fully recovered, ending the economic miracle that began in the 50s, and marking a darker mood in Japan's media culture. Otaku had come into the spotlight in 1989 on account of Tsutomu Miyazaki (no relation of Hayao), a serial killer whose apartment was filled with 5,736 video tapes (including anime and slasher films). The media blamed Miyazaki's media obsession, suggesting that he had lost sight of the difference between fantasy and reality, leading to the killings. Then, in 1995, the new age doomsday cult Aum Shinrikyo carried out the infamous sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway (a few months before the premiere of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*). Aum had strong ties to anime and otaku culture, having integrated elements of popular sci-fi series into their belief system, even recreating the "Cosmo Cleaner" anti-radiation device of *Space Battleship Yamato*. Morikawa argues that Aum's attack finally shattered the otaku fantasy of post-apocalyptic scientific utopianism.

> In the 1980s, otaku dreamt of Armageddon; they fantasized about employing supernatural powers to create a new world after the end of the world.
> But Aum's subway attack in 1995 thoroughly shattered the post-apocalyptic otaku dream of creating a new world in which they would be heroes. ("Otaku Talk" 175)

This is significant to Murakami's thesis; if the utopian sci-fi obsession of early otaku marked an overcoming of the anxieties around science following the atomic bomb attacks, then the decline of this utopianism allows such anxieties to emerge anew. It is in this context that Murakami situates the contemporary Japanese psyche.

Susan Napier echoes Murakami's analysis in her 1993 article "Panic Sites." She writes

that Japanese science fiction revels in what Sontag called "the imagination of disaster," while at the same time emphasising "the darker side of modern Japanese society," contrasting "the stereotype of Japan as a secure, peacefully middle-class environment." It reflects upon the "complexities of the Japanese success story" by exploring the "rapidity of change, the ideology of progress toward some anticipated 'future,' and the omnipresence of the machine" within modernity (329). Like Murakami, Napier charts a genealogy of Japan's apocalyptic texts as reflections of its changing socio-economic conditions, seeing in these films attempts to negotiate both "Japan's imagination of destruction" and "Japan's imagination of itself" (331). These texts are "haunted either overtly or implicitly by shadows of the Japanese past" (351), fusing historical memory with present-day anxieties. Napier reads Godzilla as a "cathartic and compensatory" narrative that allowed the postwar Japanese to "rewrite or at least to reimagine their tragic wartime experiences": American nuclear science is demonised, while a happy ending is achieved "by allowing 'good' Japanese science to triumph" against the monster (331-332). She cites Tudor's concept of "secure horror" in which the collectivity is threatened by external forces before being reestablished through the "successful human intervention" of government and scientists (332). By contrast, the near-future Japan Sinks provides a "freeze-frame of the Japanese citizenry in 1973 with their sense of an eroding identity and an ambivalent attitude towards power and success," combining "insecurity about the state of society with pride in the traditional collectivity … that seemed on the point of disintegrating" (335). Akira provides a bleaker exploration of national history, juxtaposing the breathtaking Neo Tokyo metropolis—"an extrapolation of present-day Shinjiku's futuristic urban skyline"—with glimpses of the desolate wasteland of the "Old Tokyo" crater (338). Akira emphasises the personal over the political: Kaneda's interest in the young rebel Kei is purely physical, and the aims of the revolutionary group are never made explicit (339). Unlike Godzilla, trust in established authorities is undermined. Akira exhibits a postmodern

nihilism, celebrating the "constancy of uncertainty" (339-340), while Tetsuo's mutations

reflect a fragmentary postmodern identity (341). Instead, Akira foregrounds the perspectives

of outsiders who seek a sense of identity outside prevailing social institutions (344). Tetsuo

functions as "an image of and for the younger generation of Japanese": the shinjinrui ("new

human beings") at odds with their "conservative, corporate-culture parents" (341-341).

Napier notes his "struggle for maturity" (343), echoing Murakami's conception of an

infantilised postwar Japan that secretly desires empowerment. The foregrounding of the

Olympic stadium alludes to Japan's 1964 Olympics—an emblem of its rapid postwar

recovery—and Tetsuo's destruction of the building symbolises the decline of postwar

optimism (347).

Framing JNP: Japan's Postmodern Condition

Murakami and his contemporaries echo a particular vision of Japan's postwar recovery:

that the nation gradually lost faith in the power of its two grand narratives, those of capitalist

economic growth and scientific progress, to deliver prosperous and meaningful lives, leading

to widespread feelings of nihilism and social disengagement. The atomic bomb, then, serves

not only as a direct traumatic memory for those who witnessed its effects, but as the marker

of a turning point in history after which grand narratives began to diminish, culminating in

the traumatic repetition of the Aum Shinrikyo terror attacks of 1995. In this light, the atomic

bomb serves not merely as a dramatic event, but as the transition between distinct epochs of

history. The existence of the bomb and the potential for man-made apocalypse changed the

framing of the postwar era. In anime's apocalyptic narratives, the atomic bomb represents

more than a momentary act of destruction; it is the symbolic breaking point between two

eras, fundamentally changing not only the post-atomic society, but the very means of

conceptualising the world and one's place within it. It serves as a nexus around which other

questions are raised: questions dealing broadly with humanity's uncertain future in a world of

accelerating scientific prowess; and questions around Japan's postwar journey of rapid modernisation, as well as its relationship to a taboo Imperial past and the complexities of redefining a national identity. Thus, the trauma of the bomb is not merely literal, but also symbolic: of thrusting Japan into its peaceful but impotent postmodernity, where nationalism and military power (self-determination) are sacrificed in exchange for routine and consumer comforts.

The bomb thereby comes to be a thematic marker of a paradigm shift in subcultural works. As Tanaka notes, apocalypse often takes the form of "epistemic dislocation," destabilising established knowledge structures and forcing characters to reconfigure their worldviews (43). Anime's apocalyptic narratives are frequently eschatological; they concern not merely an event of mass destruction, but a figurative (or sometimes literal) end of the world. Such an apocalypse goes beyond the mere physical environment. It marks a social and psychological transformation, a fundamental revaluation of values that ushers in a new paradigm. The end of the world is thus ideological in nature: *yonaoshi* (world renewal) entails not only a physical transformation, but a transvaluation of values and the burgeoning of new perspectives and ways of being. Environmental and technological catastrophe are intertwined with a breaking point between contrasting worldviews and social orders. Furthermore, the apocalypse is often spiritual in nature, with supernatural forces involved with (and sometimes the catalyst for) the world ending. This frequently takes the form of deicide, where a god or spirit is killed or otherwise closes contact with the human world, evoking Nietzsche's concept of the Death of God, which metaphorically describes the rapid transformation of a culture's fundamental values. Japan's subcultural media have a long tradition of depicting this quite literally, with the destruction of a deific figure as the prelude to an apocalypse and the birth of a new era; Miyazaki's *Nausicaä* and *Princess Mononoke*, Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and Otomo's *Akira* are all prime examples. This can also

manifest in the demise of a physical structure, such as the Castle of Laputa or the Atlantean

cities of *Nadia*.

Thus, the apocalyptic world renewal is at once traumatic and liberating: a narrative of

death and rebirth. Destruction creates the foundations for growth by dismantling the

established order in its totality. This opens the possibility bringing traumatic memory into the

sublime, something Dominick LaCapra warns against, particularly when a sacralised

traumatic memory becomes the basis for collective identity:

> Here a crisis or catastrophe that disorients and may devastate the collectivity
> or the individual may uncannily become the basis of an origin or renewed
> origin myth that authorizes acts or policies that appeal to it for justification. A
> foundational trauma and a related myth of origins may be operative both in
> written histories and in collective (or individual) memory.[59] Unworked-
> through trauma, especially when it is foundational or structural, can become
> invidious and self-centered, lending itself to some very dubious uses and
> abuses. It can even assume an ambivalently sacred or sublime status, both
> terrifying and awe-inspiring in nature. ("Trauma, History, Memory, Identity:
> What Remains?", 2016, p. 394-395)

Writings by Murakami and Sawaragi identify two main eras of Japan's postwar history:

the Economic Miracle, comprising the Japanese economy's dramatic rise to global

superpower status in the decades following the Occupation; and the Lost Decade, the period

of economic recession beginning in the early 1990s after the collapse of the asset bubble,

from which Japan has yet to fully recover. In this way, *Little Boy* constructs a genealogy of

subcultural art marked by two paradigm shifts: from Imperial Japan to the post-apocalyptic

Occupation and reconstruction, followed quickly by the Economic Miracle and decades of

material prosperity; and the subsequent demise of this prosperity through an economic

apocalypse (the bursting of the asset bubble), leading to the Lost Decade and the conditions

that would lead to Aum Shinrikyo's 1995 terror attack. This transition is marked by a decline

in the utopian vision of Expo '70, which promised rapid human progress through science, and

the postwar ethic that hard work would sustain indefinite economic growth. The Aum cult, as

we shall see later, are seen as the most extreme outcome of the era; in attempting to overcome

nihilism, they retreated into an apocalyptic fantasy world influenced in part by anime like

Space Battleship Yamato, their revolutionary ambitions devoid of any practical vision of

social change.

In "On the Battlefield of Superflat", Sawaragi describes the subculture generation,

particularly otaku, as having lost faith in the utopian future promised at Expo '70, prompting

their retreat into a "private room": sublimating images recycled from the Pacific War while

remaining detached from genuine historical memory (204-205).

> the generation of otaku and Japanese Neo Pop has re-imagined Japan's
> gravely distorted history, which the nation chose to embrace at the very
> beginning of its postwar life by repressing memories of violence and averting
> its eyes from reality. Granted, Japan's subculture generation is seemingly
> suspended in a historical amnesia, having little sense of the past and
> withdrawing from reality. Yet commanding the imagination of subculture,
> which it acquired in childhood, this generation continues to mine the ancient
> narrative strata of the Pacific War and recast the reality of the Cold War into
> another form. (204-205)

The theoretical framework constructed in *Little Boy* by members of the JNP movement

ties into a broader field of scholarship on Japan's postwar condition, particularly from

thinkers writing on postmodernity. Anime is often described as a postmodern artform, and the

otaku subculture built around it exemplifies postmodern modes of media consumption and

social networking. Murakami, who has built his artistic career and Superflat movement

around this subculture, deliberately builds upon the postmodern tradition of pop-art (as part

of the wider art movement of Japanese neo-pop). Hiroki Azuma, whose essay, "Superflat

Postmodernity", appears in Murakami's original *Superflat* catalogue, provides useful insight

into the postmodern dimension of Murakami's thesis. Azuma presents three factors that help

to frame the otaku phenomenon and Murakami's response thereto: the foregrounding of the

spectator's role in shaping aesthetic meaning; the fragmentary nature of Japan's subcultural

aesthetics; and the declining faith in meta-narratives. In blurring the lines between fine artist,

commercial producer, consumer, and scholar, Murakami breaks down traditional binaries of production and consumption. Indeed, his Superflat project deliberately foregrounds the impossibility of discrete categories in art, seeing it instead as an evolving amalgamation of disparate elements over time.

Azuma draws upon Lyotard's conception of the postmodern condition as the collapse of grand narratives in his 2001 book, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*: having lost faith in stable, unified identities and historical narratives, society unravels into a sea of ever-changing micronarratives and individualised perspectives, which can be simultaneously liberating and anxiety-inducing (27-28). The fragmentation of experience and social structures can lead to a desire for renewed wholeness which, in extreme cases, may serve as the basis for fascism, cults, and other radical ideologies (Aum being the favourite example in Japanese postmodernity). Azuma places the beginning of Japan's postmodern condition at the start of the 1970s, wherein he perceives a diminishing faith in established grand narratives and the political motivation to forge a replacement:

> Modernity was ruled by the grand narrative. In contrast, in postmodernity the grand narratives break down and the cohesion of the social entirety rapidly weakens. In Japan that weakening was accelerated in the 1970s, when both high-speed economic growth and "the season of politics" ended and when Japan experienced the Oil Shocks and the United Red Army Incident. From this vantage point, we can view the otaku's neurotic construction of "shells of themselves" out of materials from junk subcultures as a behavior pattern that arose to fill the void from the loss of grand narrative. (28)

Looking back to the prewar era, the primary metanarrative of Imperial Japan can be found in the *kokutai*, which forged a sense of national unity during rapid modernisation. Prior to this, Japan lacked national cohesion, only becoming politically unified in the later stages of the Tokugawa Shogunate (early-mid 1800s). During the Meiji Restoration, there was a newfound effort to construct a sense of shared Japanese national identity, particularly as relations with foreign countries increased in prominence. The *kokutai*, translating roughly as

"national body," was a concept that developed within State Shinto to ground the new ideology of nationhood within the framework of established religion. It entails a spiritual union between the Emperor, the head of the nation, and the Japanese people, who serve as the body. In practice, this allowed for an ethic of political collectivism legitimised by the meta-narrative of the state religion and the Imperial dynasty. With the American Occupation's demythologisation of Hirohito, who declared himself mortal at their behest, the grand narrative of the *kokutai* was delegitimised, to be replaced (at least in theory) with Western liberalism. Just as Kracauer reads *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* as revealing a hidden desire for a dictator, later realised in Hitler, we might see in apocalyptic anime a desire to escape the fragmentation of modernity, while at the same time critiquing such a desire.

These ideas are not limited to scholars writing on anime or subculture. Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian's 2006 anthology, *Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, explores the impact of the Lost Decade on Japanese culture and the discursive responses thereto, with several writers echoing the ideas developed by Murakami, Sawaragi, and Azuma. Yoda's introductory essay, "A Roadmap to Millennial Japan", establishes a framework of theoretical responses which view the economic and social turmoil of the 90s as "a culmination of the historical process by which the apparatus for producing and reproducing the national community has undergone a complex course of decline" (16-17): in other words, a declining faith in meta-narratives as a means to national unity. Further on, she notes Azuma's view that the "absence of a master narrative appears to have become a banal fact of life" in 90s Japan, such that pronouncing "the impossibility of a transcendent point of view" was, by then, quite uncontroversial (37). Yoda names two events 1995 as epitomising this condition: the Hanshin earthquake and Aum Shinrikyo's sarin gas attacks. The earthquake "exposed the precariousness of life in this highly urbanised nation", with the government's "bureaucratic rigidity and ineptitude in crisis management" drawing

scrutiny (as would happen after Fukushima). The material hardships faced by vulnerable members of the population highlighted the oversights in assuming a "supposedly homogeneous "mass middle stratum society" (*chūkan taishū shakai*)" (20). Aum Shinrikyo shocked a public accustomed to low crime rates, avoiding police detection during the elaborate planning and acquisition of sarin gas (indeed, they were found to have been responsible for a sarin gas attack the previous year). Public faith in the safety and security of Japan was deeply shaken (20). Furthermore, Many of Aum's members were young, educated, middle-class citizens, including respected professionals: in short, beneficiaries of Japan's economic success. Two questions were raised: how had Japanese society failed to instil "ethical and social consciousness" in these individuals, and "why could it not offer them a more compelling and meaningful vision of their lives and their future than to follow the millennialist delirium of a charismatic cult leader?" (20-21).

In response to the "rapid erosion of the mythos of perpetual economic growth that had displaced history" and perceived disintegration of social institution, postmodernist perspectives gained in prominence. As far back as the 1970s, many thinkers linked Japan's rise to one of the world's most affluent societies with a "palpable weakening of its postwar values and norms", replaced with the "pursuit of individual identity and individuated lifestyles" (36). These social transformations were linked to the calamities of the 90s, especially amongst Japanese youth (36). Yoda gives the examples of cultural critics Shinji Miyadai and Eiji Ōtsuka, who highlight subculture (contrast against counterculture) as marking a shift from "mass consumption to individuated consumption, or advanced information society" stemming from decentralised communication networks which began emerging in the 70s. Ōtsuka distinguishes subculture from mass culture and folklore by its "fragmentary and acontextual characteristics". It is a "collection of disjointed ideas, phenomena, and artifacts that have become disembedded from their historical origins". He

further argues that subculture transcends the binary between high and low culture, no longer participating in a "hegemonic contest" with the mainstream, suggesting some overlap with Murakami's theory of Japan's super-flattening of distinctions between high and popular art (36-37).

In a similar vein, Miyadai argues that 90s Japan "consists of coexisting microcosmic groups that do not communicate with one another", no longer concerned with following social trends or reacting to the gaze of others (37). He gives the otaku as an example of such a group: "obsessed with particular elements of popular culture but indifferent to their broader social and historical contexts." He further clarifies that Japanese youth culture's shift away from socially informed trends has led to motives based on the "visceral, gut-level divide between pleasant and unpleasant (*kai fukai*)", an interpretation evoking Azuma's animalisation theory. Miyadai reads this "de-socialisation" of youths as potentially inhibiting their capacity for empathy, and even catalysing "explosive violence". He argues that Japanese society was glued together by the "codes of collective moral beliefs and customs rooted in premodern Japanese communalism that have survived all the way through the postwar economic high-growth period" (37). In the postwar, traditional collectivity was supplanted by the national community, "united under the singular goal of economic development"; however, once Japan overcame its material needs and established a mature consumer culture, "the unity of national community and thus the residual structure of collective morality" began disintegrating, "leaving behind nothing to counterbalance the fragmenting energies of capitalist modernity" (37-38). His solution is "not the revival of the lost community or collective morality but a system that complements the society in its very complexity and diversity." Contemporary Japanese youths, "already living postnational and postmodern realities", must develop the autonomy and communication skills to "navigate the world without a haven of stable collectivity."

Put another way, the goal is to cope with postmodernity by accepting its fragmentary nature and choosing to live with freedom and authenticity within this paradigm. While taking different angles and aesthetic approaches, Miyazaki and Anno grapple with a similar question: how can one find a sense of purpose and community while also embracing the individual freedoms of liberal postmodernity? This is more apparent in Anno's case; Miyazaki shows some signs of a unifying worldview in his handling of environmentalism and technology, whereas Anno seems to forego any unifying ideology and instead emphasise inner psychology. Miyazaki's emphasis on the external environment and our existence within it contrasts Anno's emphasis on interior psychology and human beings' emotional alienation from their surroundings.

The *Database* & Animalisation

Azuma applies Alexander Kojève's Hegelian concept of *animalisation* to contemporary Japan. In the safety of a "post-historical" consumer society, he argues, individuals cease to struggle politically, which allows consumers of art and entertainment to "detach form from content" and become an "idle spectator". It is this aspect of subculture to which Miyazaki and Anno react critically, as we shall see. Otaku subculture exemplifies this idea through what he calls the *database*: instead of grand meta narratives, consumers of subculture can be content with personal micro narratives drawn from the database of recycled tropes and images, which appeal to *moe* (personalised emotional connection with a character) rather than broad socio-political ideals. In other words, social context loses its relevance, giving way to private worlds of intricately personalised fantasy. He positions otaku as the ultimate spectators, who deliberately seek out fantasy while consciously embracing its illusory nature.

Azuma's theory of the database draws on Eiji Ōtsuka's *Theory of Narrative Consumption*, which describes the otaku's consumption and creation of "small narratives", built using fragments drawn from their cumulative experience of media images (29-31). The

database approach to consumption becomes especially prevalent in the 90s, when consumers

began caring more about "fragmentary illustrations or settings" than the broader dramatic

narrative or themes of a given work (36). The *DAICON* shorts, created by Anno and his

colleagues between 1981 and 1983, mark the beginning of this transition: their core appeal

lies in remixing fan-favourite characters into a grand spectacle with minimal narrative

content but striking audiovisual flair. Azuma pays particular attention to the heightened

emotional attachment felt towards anime characters, which the otaku called "*chara-moe*"

(36), as a feature distinguishing 90s subculture. He gives the example of Tomino's military

mecha series, *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), whose fans fell in love with the show's highly

detailed sci-fi setting; by contrast, fans of Anno's *Evangelion* in the mid-90s cared not for the

setting, but its characters; *Eva* fans required a setting to empathise with the characters and

appreciate the giant robots, but "seldom immersed themselves into the world of the works."

Instead of generating endless sequels like *Gundam*, *Evangelion* lived on in derivative works

which had little to do with the original story or setting, remixing the beloved cast of

characters into entirely different narratives (37-38).

In short, Azuma characterises otaku consumption as rooted in a highly personalised

emotional engagement, isolated from any broader political or ideological narratives.

Miyazaki and Anno have made statements suggesting similar conclusions, evoking

Murakami's ideas on subculture and the symbolic infantilisation in postwar Japan. As

Miyazaki writes in *Starting Point*:

> One of the things that seems to first surprise foreign journalists who come to
> Japan is in fact this sight of adults, wearing business suits, engrossed in
> reading weekly manga magazines. I try to tell them that no other country has
> undergone such traumatic modernization, and that manga serves as an
> important form of stress release when we need to cope. (97)

Anno expresses a similar sentiment when interviewed in *The Atlantic*:

> "Japan lost the war to the Americans," he explains… "Since that time, the

education we received is not one that creates adults. Even for us, people in their 40s, and for the generation older than me, in their 50s and 60s, there's no reasonable model of what an adult should be like." ... "I don't see any adults here in Japan," he says, with a shrug. "The fact that you see salarymen reading manga and pornography on the trains and being unafraid, unashamed or anything, is something you wouldn't have seen 30 years ago, with people who grew up under a different system of government. They would have been far too embarrassed to open a book of cartoons or dirty pictures on a train. But that's what we have now in Japan. We are a country of children."

Azuma's analysis echoes the ideas expressed in 1992's *The End of History and the Last Man* by American political scientist Francis Fukuyama. Drawing on Alexander Kojève's reading of Hegel, Fukuyama argues that following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, humanity would "have trouble imagining a world that is radically better than our own, or a future that is not essentially democratic and capitalist" (46). Life may improve incrementally, but no fundamental systemic change or revolution would carry any nation beyond liberal democracy, bringing the dialectic of "Universal History" to an end (51). Fukuyama's outlook is in large part optimistic: he notes the risk of formerly socialist regimes being replaced by an intolerant nationalism, but expresses confidence that these states will make a "rapid and smooth transition to stable democracy" (36). However, he acknowledges potential limitations of liberal democracy, reflecting that such societies give primacy to comfortable self-preservation, but "do not at tempt to define any positive goals for their citizens or promote a particular way of life as superior or desirable to another"; individuals must forge their own identity and life path, which, while liberating, can result in alienation, particularly when "'higher' goals" are replaced with the "open-ended pursuit of wealth" (160). With reference to Kojève, Fukuyama argues that humans are driven by more than desire for physical satisfaction or security, introducing the concept of *thymos*: a demand for dignity in the eyes of others. In order "to have subjective certainty about one's own sense of worth, it must be recognized by another consciousness" (165-166). This aligns with Saitō's observation that extreme social withdrawal ultimately fails to satisfy *hikikomori* despite their steady supply of

consumer comforts and a life free from overt conflict. Fukuyama connects the *thymodic* drive to nationalism, which he argues stems from an irrational desire for recognition "not for oneself as an individual, but for the group of which one is a member" (201). He writes that patriotism and self-sacrifice may appeal to the desire for "self-transcendence," as individuals find "satisfaction in the sacrifice of the narrow concerns of the body for an objective or a principle that lies beyond the body" (161). In this light, liberal democracy may be destabilised by conditions of liberty and equality that fail to provide a sense of purpose or community (334), potentially undermining the promises of modernisation. Fukuyama identifies the rise of totalitarianism as a crisis stemming from the uneasy transition to modernity, which led to regimes seeking stability through total control of their populations, while new technologies facilitated total war and unprecedented levels of destruction (5-6). He argues that Germany and Japan "immolated [themselves] for the sake of national recognition", only to discover in the postwar era that prosperity is more easily achieved through free trade (336). The ultimate question, then, was whether the liberal End of History would persist into the 21st century.

Fukuyama returns to this question in his 2018 book *Identity*, which addresses the shortcomings of his End of History thesis in light of the prior 27 years. He identifies a growing dissatisfaction with liberalism in many parts of the world, including long-established Western democracies, citing Donald Trump's election as US President as symptomatic of a trend towards populist nationalism (64). Questions of identity in uncertain times come to be intertwined with national narratives, which is relevant in the context of postwar Japanese film.

Superflat and National Cinema

A precursor to Murakami's *superflat* project might be identified in Siegfried Kracauer's landmark text, *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947), which examines the German Expressionist

cinema of the Weimar Republic through the lens of national cinema. Kracauer posits that such a unique trend in both the style and substance of Germany's interwar filmmaking was no mere accident or creative experiment, but the manifestation of psychological patterns amongst the population following the defeat of WWI, the flight of the Kaiser, and the political and economic turmoil that emerged in the aftermath. His core argument aligns with Murakami's: that "generally and compulsively repeated motifs" occur across a nation's cinema, including both high and popular culture, which act as symptoms of a 'collective mentality' and shared 'inner life' (Rosen 19). These motifs can be objects, images, and actions within the film world, as well as broader thematic and aesthetic tendencies in the films' construction (19). Like Murakami, Kracauer casts a traumatic military defeat as the inciting incident for a widespread psychological transformation that led to the creation of (and demand for) a radically different kind of art, one that emphasised the supernatural and surreal, utilising cinema's power to bring to life the material objects and settings of the screen world. But beyond this point the two nations diverge dramatically: where Kracauer charts Germany's ruinous path towards fascism and the escalation of armed conflict, Murakami emphasises the fall of Imperial fascism and Japan's substantial demilitarisation through the postwar constitution's "Article 9". Where Germans in the Weimar Republic were met with economic degradation, the Japanese moved swiftly into the Economic Miracle, which brought them unprecedented prosperity from the 1950s to the end of the 80s.

A member of the Frankfurt School who fled Germany for the United States during the Nazi's rise, Kracauer was deeply interested in mass media as a means by which the culture that generated it might be reflected (and, in turn, shaped). Kracauer's thesis emphasises the importance of popularity and commercial success; it is not the critic or the politician that determines a text's importance, but the consumer, for whom direct emotional engagement is the primary mark of quality (rather than intellectual or ideological fidelity). Furthermore, he

argues that the collaborative nature of filmmaking precludes the possibility of a single creative figure asserting their vision in its totality, resulting in works that synthesise common ideas and inclinations across the production studio (5). That so many filmmakers were inspired to create these distinctive Expressionist works, and that consumers were so enthusiastic as to make them a commercial success, speaks to a prevailing psychological need that these films were able to satisfy: namely, representing the trauma of defeat, a sense of foreboding about the future, and a hidden desire for strong national leadership, removed from the context of present-day Germany. Critical to Kracauer is the role of the unconscious in determining these trends: unlike a war drama, which reminds people directly of the historical trauma, or a propaganda film, which posits an overt ideological perspective, German Expressionism was largely removed from the realms of immediate history or politics, at least in its superficial story elements. These films appealed to Germans on a more subtle level, he argues, with their emphasis on creating an atmosphere of unease and manifesting their characters' inner psychology through the physical world of the story. This allowed cinemagoers in Weimar Germany to confront the deeper emotions and complex thought patterns stemming from the loss of WWI without the stress of direct confrontation by historical reenactment.

As Rosen observes, Kracauer's approach can be seen as psychoanalytic in nature, taking the kind of framework used to assess individual psychology and applying it to a collective of consumers (the nation), which necessitates a "massive unification" of the population into a coherent national character (20). Thus, as with Murakami (and the field of national cinema more generally), Kracauer runs the risk of reductionism and national essentialism; he relies on assertion that middle-class sensibilities permeated all strata in Weimar Germany as the basis for such homogeneity, which seems at odds with the social and political turbulence of the period. But Murakami avoids such a singular view through his

presentation of subculture as a force that complicates national cinema, frustrating the possibility of a unified cultural identity and accounting for conflicting creative forces and aesthetic tendencies within the nation state.

Regarding the issue of national essentialism, combined with the prospect of psychologically analysing the entire Japanese population, it may be useful to draw upon the field of national cinema. Like Murakami's *superflat* project, national cinema studies aim to form an understanding of the unique characteristics evoked by a nation's artistic output, taking into account contrasting aesthetic tendencies between nations and the social, political, and economic forces shaping creative decisions and consumption patterns within each nation state.

Such an endeavour raises a number of dilemmas, which Andrew Higson addresses in his 1989 essay, "The Concept of National Cinema." He argues that to proclaim a national cinema tends us towards specifying a unique identity comprised of a stable set of meanings, leading to "invariably a hegemonising, mythologising process, involving both the production and assignation of a particular set of meanings and the attempt to contain, or prevent the potential proliferation of other meanings" (37). He further states that the search for a stable national identity "can only be successful at the expense of repressing internal differences, tensions and contradictions" (43). Higson draws here on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), noting that national identity is often a recent construct stemming from modernisation and the need to construct a shared language that facilitates economic mobility (44). This is particularly relevant in the case of Japan, which only assumed the structure of a modern nation state following the Meiji Restoration in the 1860s, prior to which the feudal territories bore variable loyalty to the shogun. The ensuing decades saw a concerted effort by the new constitutional government to cultivate a unified national identity with the Emperor at its centre, giving rise to the *kokutai* and its attendant ideal of absolute sacrifice for the

collective.

Vitali & Willemen make similar observations in *Theorising National Cinema* (2006), noting that early films were sold to exhibitors as "novelty objects" without national affiliation; it was only later that country of origin gained relevance as a market differentiation tactic once the commercial film industry was established (1). Over time, the idea of national art cinema emerged as a means to compete with ubiquitous Hollywood blockbusters (Higson 41), which has parallels in Murakami's construction of the *superflat* narrative to promote a distinctly Japanese aesthetic to the Western art market. Kristen Sharp notes in "Superflatlands" (2007) that Murakami's *superflat* project, designed specifically to target the Western art world, is framed in "The Superflat Manifesto" as an attempt at resisting a perceived Western hegemony (Sharp 39). She reflects, however, that there may be more nuance to Murakami's outlook, as (in keeping with his postmodernist character), he simultaneously undermines national essentialism by acknowledging the multiplicity of influences between Japan and the West under globalisation, frustrating the quest for a transcendental Japanese identity (41).

Higson argues that the study of national cinema is capable of escaping the narrow view of nations as collective entities. He identifies four main conceptions of national cinema: (1) economic (who controls production and distribution?); (2) textual (how are film techniques used to construct notions of the national?); (3) consumption patterns (of both domestic and foreign films); (4) art cinema (national cinema viewed as a quality art cinema stemming from the nation's aesthetic tradition) (36). While each of these lenses holds merit, Higson inclines towards the third, noting that prescriptive notions of what national cinema ought to be efface "the actual cinematic experience of popular audiences" (37). He also observes that discourses often emphasise the differences between nations, but that national cinema can also be approached as an "inward-looking process", exploring the complexities within a single nation

(38). In this view, national cinema must be conceived of "as histories off crisis and conflict, of resistance and negotiation" (37), which necessitates analysis of a population's engagement with their media (and not just the media itself). Higson asserts that the ways in which films are consumed hold even greater importance than the patterns of production, noting that individuals and groups within a nation engage with cinema on their own terms, including niche critical discourses and remix cultures (45), a quality exemplified by the transformative creativity of *otaku* subculture.

Given Murakami's foregrounding of subculture, it is possible to read him within a Higsonian model. Subculture complicates perceptions of a unified aesthetic identity within a given nation, reframing national cinema as an ongoing dialectic between diverse social actors, thus precluding the existence of a unified set of national themes and conventions. Sharp observes that the idea of "detachment from specific representations of space and place," prevalent in anime's fantasy, sci-fi, and post-apocalyptic works, "offers audiences a flexibility of alternate identities, free from specific geo-cultural connections" (44). As Murakami admits in *Superflat*, he "cannot give Japan a fixed shape," which is why he relies on a "powerful procession" of images which express more than he could manage in mere words (Sharp 42). It is precisely the diversity and inconsistency of Japanese art that shapes Murakami's outlook.

With the above in mind, a contemporary approach to national cinema recognises that nations are not static entities, often undergoing drastic changes within a short span of time, sometimes to the point of becoming new legal entities. The goal is to chart a genealogy of film production, distribution, and reception, allowing for both an appreciation of artistic progression over time and an understanding of how film has been shaped by (and in turn shaped) the social, political, economic, and environmental factors at play in the nation's history. There is an implicit assumption as to the sociological power of art (and of cinema in

particular), both as a conduit for the prevailing concerns of the population and a means by which society might be materially influenced. Should this assumption prove true, the value of national cinema as a field of study extends well beyond mere aesthetic appreciation into the realm of a practical tool of governance. That political powers have acted to weave an ideological narrative through film is no secret; Nazi leaders such as Goebbels were explicit in their understanding of cinema as a tool for shaping and enforcing national identity. In this light, the Japanese government's recent "Cool Japan" endeavour (an example of "soft power"), influenced in part by Murakami's superflat theories and international reception, shows that national cinema is an idea circulating well beyond the ivory tower.

Trauma Theory

It is here that trauma theory becomes essential for understanding Murakami's position: literary trauma studies attempts to bridge the gap between psychology and the humanities, and helps to contextualise the psychoanalytic dimension of the national cinema projects undertaken by the likes of Murakami and Kracauer. Established by authors including Cathy Caruth and Kali Tal in the 1990s, the field examines the ways in which the traumatic experiences both of individuals and communities may be mediated through the arts, particularly in cases where those affected find themselves unable to express (or even fully recall) their experiences using ordinary language. While Murakami never references these ideas directly, he appears to have arrived at them intuitively, with his claim that superflat is "an original concept that links the past with the present and future" (*Super Flat* 5); a sense of temporal distortion, of "haunting," seems to accompany the subject of traumatic memory. The study of collective trauma stemming from momentous historical events has focused especially on the Holocaust, but attention has also been paid to the experiences of *hibakusha* (survivors of the Hiroshima/Nagasaki attacks), as depicted in many of the films to be discussed in this section. A common consensus amongst scholars is that the atomic bomb

attacks were never fully confronted and resolved by the general public, as argued in Mick

Broderick's *Hibakusha Cinema* (1996) particularly in light of both American and local state

suppression of information about the bombs, and the poor treatment of the *hibakusha* who

long struggled for adequate recognition and medical care.

Perhaps the most influential repression model can be found in Caruth's 1996 book,

Unclaimed Experience, which explores the idea of *belatedness* in traumatic memory.

Drawing on Freud, she argues that trauma's defining characteristic is the impossibility of its

being immediately processed by the conscious mind, creating an inability to accurately recall

or describe the event; this results in an *unclaimed* trauma that precludes emotional closure

(Caruth 17). Caruth draws upon the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition of repression: in this

model, traumatic memories are never truly forgotten, instead descending into the

unconscious. Repressed memories will continue to plague the subject by finding expression

in dreams or through the repetition compulsion, where reminders of the inciting trauma are

instinctively sought out in the hope of achieving mastery over the memory. The return of the

repressed occurs as an intrusion of sensory details that are not fully grasped by the conscious

mind, giving the survivor a sense of experiencing unprocessed fragments of the past within

the present (92). Unable to consciously process the memory, survivors must find other ways

of responding to the trauma, one of which may be the creation or consumption of artistic

works which mediate the traumatic experience indirectly, an idea shared by the likes of

Kracauer and Murakami. The event need not be depicted directly; in discussing *Hiroshima*

mon Amour (1956), Caruth remarks that the indirect use of Hiroshima as a setting in which to

tell *another* story (one related to WWII but divorced from the Japanese/nuclear contexts) may

actually be more powerful in representing the trauma of the *hibakusha* than the documentary

Resnais had originally planned (Caruth 27). Thus, a Caruth's style of analysis looks for

characters who are unable to accurately recall or describe a traumatic event or experience, as

well as "gaps" in the text: areas where traumatic events escape direct representation, but where their presence is implied. This may involve displacement of traumatic themes from their original context, or referencing traumatic events peripherally within another story.

Dominick LaCapra, a historian and trauma theorist in the Freudian tradition, proposes two means of responding to trauma: *acting-out* and *working-through*. For LaCapra, the post-traumatic condition may involve "a state of disorentation, agitation, or even confusion", and one may remain "haunted by the past" (LaCapra 699). Acting-out is a reliving of the past in which "distinctions tend to collapse, including the crucial distinction between then and now wherein one is able to remember what happened to one in the past but realise one is living in the here and now with future possibilities" (699). LaCapra explains this in simpler terms in his interview with Goldberg: traumatic memory manifests through "the repetition-compulsion – the tendency to repeat something compulsively," with survivors having "a tendency to relive the past, to exist in the present as if they were still fully in the past, with no distance from it" (2). This may occur through repeated experiences or through flashbacks, nightmares, and patterns of compulsive speech that express the traumatic memory, albeit often displaced from its original context. In the alternative, "working-through," the subject "tries to gain critical distance on a problem, to be able to distinguish between past, present and future" (Goldberg 2). The subject does not fully disengage from the trauma, but grounds it in the past and allows for the development of new identities in the present (or, as LaCapra puts it, "the possibility of being an ethical agent" (3)). In short, working-through is a process of empowerment that frees survivors from their identification with traumatic memory without the need to suppress it. As will be seen in the works discussed below, trauma narratives are often structured as a shift from the repetitive cycle of acting-out to the direct confrontation and closure of working-through.

Atomic Trauma in Mainstream Japanese Cinema

Contrary to Murakami's assertion that the traumatic memory of the atomic bomb was relegated largely to subculture, there are a number of examples of mainstream works addressing precisely that topic, which warrants some investigation. This section will offer brief analysis of four mainstream filmmakers' responses to the bomb, in light of the trauma theory discussed above: Kaneto Shindo's docudrama *Children of Hiroshima* (1952); Hideo Ōba's 1950 adaptation of Takashi Nagai's *The Bells of Nagasaki*; Shohei Imamura's *Black Rain* (1989); and the three bomb films of Akira Kurosawa, along with *Seven Samurai* (1954), a film which receives special attention from Murakami.

Children of Hiroshima serves as an excellent introduction to trauma theory in Japanese film, constructing a narrative around its central character's return to the site of her repressed atomic trauma, and her process of confronting and reconciling these memories. With the end of the American Occupation on April 28th, 1952, media censorship regarding Hiroshima and Nagasaki was lifted, opening the gates for a number of works directly addressing the atomic bomb. Released on August 6th of that year, *Children of Hiroshima* follows the return of a Hiroshima survivor, Takako Ishikawa, to her hometown, having lived and worked as a teacher on a small coastal island in the seven years following the war. As she revisits old friends and acquaintances, Takako is exposed to the horrific effects of the atomic bomb that still affect Hiroshima's residents, and must come to terms with the deaths of several people who were dear to her in youth. The film is framed around the revisiting of repressed traumatic memories; upon hearing of Takako's plans, an elderly neighbour remarks that "I don't like to recall the past, but sometimes I can't help it." Takako responds by saying that she has forgotten the past, having built a comfortable life away from Hiroshima, but her uneasy expression indicates that the truth may be more complicated.

As she arrives in Hiroshima, the film establishes a recurring motif: that of the past coexisting with the present. The city is cast as a place in which the events of August 6th still

linger in spirit, even where it has been materially constructed, as evidenced by the narration upon entering the harbour: "Her beautiful piers still flow just as they did that fateful day. Her beautiful sky is just as big as it was that fateful day." As Takako gazes upon her family's grave, a tiny monument amidst a sea of rubble, the film cuts to a flashback: first of her parents and sister on the day of the attack, then a montage of the moments across Hiroshima leading up to the bomb. The sequence cuts back repeatedly to a ticking clock until the flash of the explosion, the hands jumping forward as if time is speeding up in anticipation of what is to come. Then, with the detonation, time appears to slow down and distort, as though each of the images shown occurred within the same instant: victims of the attack hold frozen poses, and horrific injuries appear on their bodies instantaneously through rapid shot transitions. The flashback ends with shots of the iconic Hiroshima Dome, before abruptly cutting back to Takako in the present, who now stands observing the ruined building. This transition forces the viewer to share Takako's temporal disorientation; it seems, initially, that we are observing the Dome immediately following the explosion, but after restating the ruins within Takako's gaze in the present, it is impossible to tell when that footage was meant to be situated. It exists in equal parts between past and present. Noticeably, there is a gap in the information presented: Takako herself. Her memory of the event is abstracted to Hiroshima as a whole, obscuring her own experiences (and those of her family).

Takako's encounters in Hiroshima reflect the concept of *mono no aware*: an acceptance of the transience of life and inevitability of death. Drawn-out, contemplative sequences emphasise the gaze: Takako's role is primarily that of an observer, powerless to resolve the plight of the *hibakusha* yet unable to look away. Her role as protagonist is not one of action, but acceptance of and reconciliation with the inevitable as she witnesses her former students and their relatives pass away.

The most significant subplot comes in the form of Iwakichi, an elderly *hibakusha* and

former employee of Takako's parents. Near-blinded and reduced to begging on the street, he retains the will to live due only to the presence of his orphaned grandson, Taro, who must spend most of his time at an underfunded orphanage. Iwakichi's character is marked by denial, both of his own mortality and his ineffectual guardianship of Taro. His view of their relationship is one of sublimation; even when Takako offers to take the boy in, Iwakichi refuses, arguing that his grandson is better off in his care. Thus, through its two principal characters, *Children of Hiroshima* articulates LaCapra's two modes of addressing trauma: Takako's deliberate journey to confront her repressed memories of Hiroshima represents a successful working-through of the trauma, where Iwakichi's inability to resolve his traumatic relationship to the bomb results in his recreating the horror of the event via self-immolation. The latter is marked by death, a closed ending to the apocalypse, while Takako's departure with Taro represents renewal: the chance for new life in the wake of the apocalypse. It is only through Iwakichi's suicide, through a symbolic recreation of the apocalyptic event, that Taro is freed to travel to the island and prosper in paradise. Thus, the death of the old is necessary for the symbolic rebirth of the young. That being said, Taro remarks (carrying his grandfather's ashes) that Iwakichi is going with him to the island, suggesting once more the continued presence of Hiroshima's ghosts: the past is not truly forgotten.

Arriving two years later, Kurosawa's most famous film, *Seven Samurai* (1954), reflects for Murakami the prevailing national identity in the early years of postwar recovery. The film broke new ground among samurai films, dealing with such themes as human resilience, poverty, hunger, pride, loyalty, the futility of Japan's feudal hierarchy (warriors/peasants/artisans/merchants), and the folly of strife. The world may be a complex place where happiness eludes many, yet humans survive. *The Seven Samurai* was a hymn to the triumphant right of the peasant or the common man to live.

> Although the Japanese had achieved a miraculous postwar revival and no
> longer scrambled for food, hunger was still an indelible memory, tinged with

> nostalgia. As they searched for self-respect while acknowledging defeat, *The Seven Samurai* was no mere costume drama: it was their own struggle. The film defined the Japanese people. ("Earth in My Window" 102)

Murakami's mention of nostalgia is significant; the poor villagers, militarily and economically destitute, turn for salvation to the mythologised symbol of premodern Japanese valour: the samurai. The magistrate will not lift a finger to protect them, in spite of taxes paid, so there can be no faith in bureaucracy. Instead, the altruistic rōnin (masterless samurai) come to the farmers' aid with little prospect of reward. Their fine costuming, composure, and dignified manners set them apart from the bumbling villagers and savage bandits. Their leader Kambei (Takashi Shimura) shaves his head to disguise himself as a Buddhist monk at his introduction, adding a spiritual quality to his persona. The film embodies a collectivist ethos; guided by the samurai's wisdom, the villagers (who bicker amongst themselves throughout the film) must set aside their personal desires and grievances and work together for the group's survival. Those living on the outskirts, for example, must sacrifice their homes to better fortify the main village. In Kambei's words: "You must protect others to save yourself. That is the nature of war."

The central trauma narrative comes in the form of Kikuchiyo, the seventh samurai, who hides the truth of his origins (as a farmer, much like the villagers) through a poorly-forged document. Where the other rōnin act out of altruism, his involvement marks a desire to confront his repressed past. He insults the villagers at every turn, berating them for their weakness and passivity, but in the midst of one of his rants lets slip his true identity, breaking his facade and revealing the projection at work. During the climactic battle scenes, Kikuchiyo' memory is triggered while carrying a baby away from a burning shack, where its parents have perished: "This baby... is me! This is just what happened to me!" He breaks down in tears, forced to confront the repressed memories of his past. The cycle repeats and he is forced to confront the traumatic identity of the poor and helpless farmer from which he has

tried to break free.

Thus, the film represents a return to the past on two counts: within the narrative, Kikuchio must confront the repressed trauma of his past as a farmer; and, metatextually, the audience returns to a nostalgic reconstruction of the samurai that guides the villagers (reflections of the wartime Japanese) to victory against hopeless odds, symbolically overcoming the trauma of the Pacific War. Yet the final moments suggest a subtle criticism of such nostalgia: the farmers celebrate the harvest, but Kambei remarks to his remaining comrades that they achieved a phyrric victory; the final shot lingers on the hill of burial mounds, topped with the swords of the four fallen samurai (a sight reminiscent of the scorched earth in Hiroshima or Nagasaki). The time of the samurai lies in the past, and the nation can no longer look to them for salvation. Thus, the ending is bittersweet. Just as in postwar Japan, times will improve; yet the traumatic experiences and losses of the war linger on.

The Subcultural Split from Mainstream Cinema

This survey of mainstream postwar cinema casts some doubts on Murakami's assertion that memories of the bomb were repressed into subculture; despite taboos surrounding Japan's experience of the war, mainstream Japanese cinema has, in examples from both the 1950s and 1990s, made explicit reference to Japan's wartime past, including the trauma of the atomic bomb. Furthermore, these narratives address trauma as a central mechanism of characterisation and plot structure, not merely referencing it as background information. While discourse around the bomb and its effects was suppressed during the Occupation, it would appear that post-Occupation Japan (particularly following the Lucky Dragon #5 incident) quickly synthesised the traumatic memory of the bomb into its public consciousness, which in turn shaped the anti-nuclear movements of the subsequent decades.

On closer inspection, however, a partial truth may remain in Murakami's claim. While

postwar Japanese art as a whole has explored themes relating to the atomic bomb, Japan's postwar subculture does so in unique ways which paint a far more complex sociological picture. Mainstream works like *Children of Hiroshima*, *Seven Samurai*, *I Live in Fear*, and *Rhapsody in August* are all rooted in believable representations of history: as Murakami argues, it is the realism of the *Seven Samurai* that made it so relevant to postwar Japanese ("Earth in My Window" 105). These films set out to capture the experiences of those who survived the war, crafting narratives in which protagonists must confront and work through their unresolved traumatic memories. They are, furthermore, the stories of adult survivors, targeting an adult cinemagoing public.

It is perhaps here that subculture differs most dramatically from the mainstream. In the works that have influenced Japanese neo-pop, unresolved traumatic memories of the past manifest literally in the present, not merely through flashbacks or symbolic reenactments. The heroes are tasked, not merely with reconciling past traumas, but with decisions that will shape the future of humanity itself. Where the protagonists of *Children of Hiroshima* and *I Live in Fear* are cast as observers, largely powerless to shape the world around them, the heroes of subculture works are tasked with action, affording the possibility of remaking the world rather than coming to terms with it A recurring theme in Murakami's genealogy is a return to the inciting trauma of the nuclear explosion and apocalypse, wherein the event may be confronted, understood, and potentially overcome. Whether it be through preventing the use of apocalyptic weapons by a rising totalitarian power (as in Miyazaki's *Future Boy Conan* and *Laputa*, and Anno's *Nadia*), surviving through, and after, a man-made apocalypse (*Nausicaä*, Otomo's *Akira*, and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*), or turning the apocalypse into a trivial, even joyous, occasion (*Ponyo*), Japan's postwar media landscape (and anime in particular) has a grand tradition of revisiting these themes, albeit thoroughly removed from the context of WWII Japan. Discussing Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (along

with the likes of Otomo's *Akira*), Murakami perceives a "longing for some fundamental human power to awaken when humanity is backed into a corner" (122-123), noting the backdrop of man-made apocalypse as a catalyst for the awakening of superhuman abilities. Moreover, these abilities and world-saving duties are primarily placed in the hands of children and adolescents, combining coming-of-age narratives and images of innocence with roles of responsibility usually reserved for adults. Thus, feelings of impotence are overcome as child heroes face the atomic spectre again and again, emerging victorious if not entirely unscathed. As we will see (particularly in the works of Anno), this empowerment by no means guarantees an easier path; during the Lost Decade and the years leading up to it, apocalyptic works begin emphasising the psychological toll of the messianic role, suggesting that the ability to save and reshape the world may not be worth the emotional cost involved.

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1. Photo available at "Emperor Hirohito and General MacArthur meeting for the first time, 1945" (Rare Historical Photos).

2. Hikawa, Ryūsuke (2018). "Radiation and Postwar Anime and Tokusatsu Culture". https://garagemca.org/en/exhibition/takashi-murakami/materials/poslevoennaya-kultura-anime-i-tokusatsu-i-radiatsiya-ryuske-hikava-radiation-and-postwar-anime-and-tokusatsu-culture-by-ry-suke-hikawa

Chapter 2: National Identity and Perpetrator Trauma in Anime Subculture

The discussion in Chapter 1 illustrates that while Japan's onscreen representations of the atomic bomb are not limited to subcultural works, there is an observable difference in the manner of those representations: where mainstream cinema tends to depict the bomb as an inevitable tragedy to be endured, emphasising the disempowered experience of its victims, subculture empowers its heroes and villains to take an active role in shaping, or preventing, the apocalypse, often by means of advanced scientific or supernatural abilities. Instead of representing history directly, the atomic bomb is displaced into fantastical settings which afford the possibility (whether realised or not) of overcoming this trauma. This chapter will elaborate on a further point of divergence between mainstream and subcultural responses to the bomb which raises far more profound implications regarding the thesis of Murakami and his fellow JNP artists: that being the often unspoken presence of Japan's own wartime transgressions in the Pacific. Critics of Murakami and JNP often highlight their emphasis on Japan as victim of American invasion, fixating particularly on Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the firebombing of Tokyo while overlooking the broader conflicts in Southeast Asia which long predate Pearl Harbour (a narrative Carol Gluck terms *victim's history*). However, closer analysis reveals that elements of Japan's Imperial history are referenced indirectly throughout subculture, displaced from their original context in such a way that makes them harder to recognise than recreations of the atomic blast. I intend to argue that anime's subcultural narratives, particularly those of Hayao Miyazaki and Hideaki Anno, draw extensively upon these ideas (whether deliberately or unconsciously) in ways that challenge notions of a simplistic victimhood narrative and in some cases subvert the allegedly nationalistic messages criticised by the likes of Môri, complicating questions of national identity and historical memory.

Miyazaki and Anno stand as the two most recognisable anime directors active today

(the former for films, the latter for television). Their works have garnered commercial

success and critical acclaim at home and abroad, with Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001) and

Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) achieving widespread reception with their English-

language localisations. On top of their reception as entertainers, the pair have long been noted

for their centrality within the cinematic legacy of the atomic bomb in Japan. Thematically, the

directors have grappled with similar questions over Japan's postwar condition, linking issues

of identity formation and ideology to traumatic memories of the Pacific War (particularly the

atomic bomb). Over the course of several decades (Miyazaki from the 60s and Anno from the

80s), each director has accumulated a diverse filmography that returns repeatedly to the

themes of apocalypse, war, technology, memory, identity formation, and psychological

trauma. Despite the wide-ranging blend of styles, characters, and settings, each work adds to

a complex web of ideas around the nexus of Japan's taboo memories of the Pacific War, with

the atomic bomb (or its supernatural allegory) as a nexus for exploring these ideas.

Furthermore, these apocalyptic motifs are not limited to explorations of the past, but tie into

the socio-political issues of postwar Japan and concerns about its future. As Napier observes

in discussing the impact of the Lost Decade on anime:

> Given the dark events that have permeated Japan's twentieth century, it is
> hardly surprising that many of anime's most important texts, from Miyazaki
> Hayao's 1985 *Nausicaä* to Anno Hideaki's 1997 *Evangelion*, are not simply
> dystopian but deeply apocalyptic, suggesting a society with profound anxieties
> about the future. (*Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, 29)

However, the presence of more subtly encoded references to Japan's own wartime

activities is largely overlooked: while discourses on anime often note a reluctance to directly

address the broader history of the Pacific War, such analyses overlook presence of subliminal

references to these events. This is critical to fully understanding Miyazaki, Anno, and other

subcultural artists in their responses to Japan's historical memory. Murakami is correct in so

far as he identifies the directors' works as emblematic of the nation's unresolved war trauma, which he links to anxieties stemming from the postwar relationship with America and eventual socio-economic breakdowns of the Lost Decade. However, his emphasis on Japan as passive victim of the bomb ignores the crucial impact of the fascist regime on historical memory, which, when taken into account, precludes the possibility of a simple narrative of defeat and infantilisation at the hands of the United States. With the decline in the Economic Miracle's prevailing grand narratives of progress through pacifism, scientific innovation, and corporate loyalty under consumer capitalism, there emerged a desire to overcome the ideological fragmentation of the Lost Decade by reconsidering questions of national purpose, identity, autonomy, and community (as we will see shortly in discussing trends in Japanese nationalism). Given the nation's Imperial past, however, attempts to draw upon a nostalgic vision of the pre-Occupation Japan are immediately frustrated by the need to reconcile an idealised national image with taboo memories of the crimes committed under nationalist ideology. It is here that I identify the greatest critical potential of Miyazaki and Anno as directors: their films serve as an attempt at grappling with these questions of ideology, asking whether it is possible to avoid militant collectivism on the one hand and a withdrawn, nihilistic individualism on the other. The following section will explore the relationship between Japanese postwar nationalism and the complications of trauma theory caused by identification with a perceived perpetrator nation. The chapter will then conclude by explaining how Miyazaki and Anno respond to these ideas through their distinctive cinematic styles, which will be analysed in-depth in Chapters 3 and 4.

National Identity & Perpetrator Trauma

The subject of Japan's wartime activities in the Pacific is something which appears entirely absent from mainstream works and, at first glance, from subculture. In this light, the

issue of nationalism and the selective nature of Japan's war memory is a point of contention in critical responses to Murakami and the Japanese Neo-Pop movement, with Yoshitaka Môri describing Sawaragi's writings as an "essentially nationalist" conception of art history which foregrounds the experiences of victims of the Allied invasion while downplaying Japan's own acts of aggression in the Pacific War (181). Môri observes that the apocalyptic works favoured in the analyses of Sawaragi and Murakami evoke images of the atomic bomb and the firebombing of Tokyo, such as *Godzilla* and *Yamato*, while violence committed abroad by the Imperial military is rarely touched upon (182). Thomas Lamarre writes in "The Multiplanar Image" (2006) that "this insistence on the impotence of the Japanese (male) in relation to the potency of the United States … is clearly part of a cultural nationalism that would erase the history of Japanese militarism, reconstructing national values by lingering on Japan's subordination to the United States" (135). Similarly, Koh (2010) argues that "the highly victimised position, almost mythologized in his art and theories, might seem to imply nostalgia for a militarised state of Japan before the Second World War" (395), a statement echoing LaCapra's concept of traumatic sublimation (to which I will return shortly).

Môri carries this criticism to his discussion of anime works themselves: *Space Battleship Yamato* features the Empire of Gamilus, aliens bent on irradiating and colonising Earth, whose uniforms and onscreen presentation evoke the style of *Triumph of the Will* (1935). Many sport Germanic names, clearly drawing parallels to the Nazis in contrast to the Japanese crew defending Earth aboard the Yamato, Japan's flagship WWII battleship, whose shipwreck has been refurbished as an advanced spacefaring fortress (183). This marks a trend wherein negative traits pertaining to the Imperial Japanese government and military are displaced onto icons of Western fascism (the Nazis), while idealisic qualities like the *Yamato damashii* (Japanese spirit) are exemplified by the heroes. *Mobile Suit Gundam*'s (1979-80) villainous faction, the Zeon Federation, is cast along similar lines, sporting German-inspired

uniforms and performing the Roman salute during military ceremonies. Zeon's dictator even

admits in a moment of contemplation that his regime may be following the path of Adolf

Hitler. Anno, who draws heavily on *Yamato* and *Gundam*, presents *Nadia*'s villains the Neo-

Atlantians, a fascist regime clearly modelled on Nazi aesthetics (with the addition of Klu

Klux Klan-style pointed hoods), while Miyazaki's *Future Boy Conan* presents the post-

apocalyptic Industria, a militaristic regime that brands its social undesirables with a star-

shaped icon and imprisons them for slave labour, again suggesting a Nazi influence.

Thus, we might conclude that memories of Imperial military activity during the war are

more repressed than the bombings that ended it, a trait visible both on the left (who have

emphasised pacifism in the wake of wartime destruction) and the right (as in the case of

Nippon Kaigi's revisionism). Indeed, I have been unable to identify any anime that directly

depict Japanese war crimes. Even Mori Masaki's *Barefoot Gen* (1983), which expresses a

pacifist message openly critical of the Imperial regime, does so from the perspectives of

homeland civilians who live through the bombing of Hiroshima, with overseas military

campaigns going unseen by both cast and audience. The same is true of *The Wind Rises*

(2013), which, despite Miyazaki's fierce detraction of the Imperial regime, avoids depictions

of war crimes (including the use of Korean forced labourers at the Mitsubishi factory, for

which he received criticism from the left-wing press), instead emphasising the internal decay

of Japan's social and political order. While the JNP artists and critics featured in *Little Boy*

largely avoid direct discussion of Imperial Japan's actions abroad, Sawaragi alludes to the

concept of a twofold repression, describing Japan's postwar mindset as a "double amnesia":

> …the Superflat world of manga and anime was created amidst post-1970
> political oppression, which encouraged a double amnesia concerning the two
> kinds of violence experienced by Japan in the war: the nation's own
> aggression in Asia, and the violence inflicted upon Japan by the U.S. in the
> form of myriad firebombs and two atomic bombs. (Sawaragi 204)

Otaku subculture, Sawaragi argues, absorbed images and themes from the wartime

years which the Japanese public were not ready to confront directly, effectively depoliticising Japan's military history through fantasy and sci-fi narratives that could be consumed in isolation from their broader context (203-204). The depoliticised depiction of war in Japanese media is widely noted: Napier, Sakamoto, and Gerow each observe a trend by which national governance and geopolitical conflicts are obfuscated in favour of narratives focused squarely on heroic individuals caught in the midst of battle. War is not so much the outcome of political ideology as it is an existential force that must be struggled against, often providing an opportunity for those in its midst to demonstrate personal virtue and teamwork.

But close analysis paints a more complicated picture, revealing gaps and ruptures in these heroic or victim-centred narratives. I intend to argue that while direct depiction of war crimes committed by Imperial Japan is absent from the surface layer of anime, closer inspection reveals more subtle elements which seem to allude to Japan's military past, albeit displaced from their original context. Indeed, it may be that the more obvious imagery of the atomic bomb serves to prime our minds to draw parallels to World War II more generally. In short, explicitly confronting the historical trauma of the bomb may as a vehicle to indirectly explore the more deeply repressed traumatic memory of Imperial Japan's role as perpetrator in the Pacific Theatre.

Close analysis of subcultural works, particularly those of Miyazaki and Anno, reveals two tendencies suggesting this connection. First (and more broadly), there is the frequency with which the apocalyptic threat stems, not from an allusion to the United States (as might be expected from a straightforward nationalist narrative), but from a fascistic or imperial regime that invites parallels to Japan's wartime government. In cases like *Space Battleship Yamato* where the heroic faction are identified more overtly with the Japanese, we might read a dissociative split between the idealised image of Japan (the heroes) and the transgressive aspects of the Japanese Empire (the villains). Second, there is the more specific use of motifs

evoking the unique cultural attributes of the Japanese Empire and the Pacific War, which could not have been drawn from the Nazis (or their Wester pop culture representations). These include: state religion and emperor worship; the puppet monarch controlled by militarists; propaganda and government corruption; personal sacrifice for the collective (including suicide attacks); military conscription of children; the *kokutai*; human experimentation (Unit 731); *Yamato damashii* (Japanese spirit) and the *bushido* warrior ethos; fascism and national/racial supremacy. These elements stem, not from the apocalyptic destruction and radioactive fallout of the atomic bomb, but from a culturally transmitted memory of the Imperial regime and its activities abroad. Moreover, these tropes are frequently subsumed under the archetype of the tyrannical father, whom the (almost invariably younger) protagonists must overthrow, while at the same time sharing some form of identification with this father figure. This Freudian tendency is observed more broadly in the trauma theory of LaCapra and Elsaesser, writing mainly in the context of Nazi Germany, who perceive a dissociative effect in the relationship between a "perpetrator generation" and its descendants.

LaCapra proposes in the essay "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?" (2016) a need for further investigation of the "so-called transgenerational transmission of trauma to descendants and intimates of both survivors and perpetrators" (375). He notes that descendants of victims and perpetrators may share feelings of guilt and shame in response to historical trauma, and warns against the dangers of denying or sublimating the trauma of the past generation:

> I would rather refer to descendants' feelings of guilt and shame related to a transgenerational transmission of symptoms or effects of trauma—a process that for Schwab should not be denied, melancholically affirmed, or rendered sublime but arduously worked through. Here the descendants of victims and of perpetrators may possibly share something significant, for they inherit a burden for which they are not, but may feel, guilty and for which they are within limits answerable and may assume responsibility. (379)

LaCapra criticises the tendency of some theorists to posit trauma as as incomprehensible, unsymbolisible, and irreconcilable (Caruth is given as the principle example), noting that while a comprehensive, objective understanding of this psychological phenomenon is unattainable, we must accept that at least some understanding of trauma is possible. The conception of trauma as an incomprehensible "experience of shock", he argues, may grant it "a valorized or even sublime status that stymies both historical understanding and perhaps even limited processes of working-through" (377-378). In the context of historical memory, trauma can assume an "ambivalently sacred or sublime status", taking the form of an origin myth that serves as the basis for collective (as well as individual) identity (394-395). He gives the example of Holocaust memory in the Palestine-Israel conflict (note 57, p. 394) and of the French Revolution and American Civil War in subsequent national rhetoric (note 59, p. 394-395), describing these belief structures an "identity-forming civil religion". Such mythologisation of trauma can serve to obscure nuance in political discourse, demanding an absolute observance of the trauma as justification for a desired course of retribution. This tendency, he proposes, can be combatted by working through the past, rather than displacing it onto the present and compulsively repeating it (394).

We see this represented in countless subcultural works. For instance, the eponymous child psychic of *Akira*, whose powers unleashed the atomic-style explosion of the film's opening scene, is worshipped as a god by millenarian cultists in Neo-Tokyo, and the corrupt government's obsession with resurrecting and controlling Akira's power leads to a repetition of the apocalypse through Tetsuo's psychic awakening. Miyazaki's and Anno's apocalyptic works largely follow the same trend: the apocalypse is rarely an isolated event, but the repetition of a past trauma invoked by mankind's misuse of advanced science or supernatural power (typically a weapon of mass destruction). We see this play out in *Conan*, *Nausicaä*, *Laputa*, *Nadia*, and *Evangelion*. The villains (and, in some later works, morally neutral

parties) rekindle the conflicts of the past, believing that with the inciting apocalyptic power in their possession, they can master the traumatic event; it falls to the heroes to prevent the past from repeating itself, by gaining an understanding of the human failings that brought about the disaster and working to overcome them. Humanity progresses, not by regaining control of superweapons with the promise that this time, they will work in our best interests, but through an evolution in social relations and self-understanding that renders such weapons unnecessary.

Historical memory is further complicated when forced to confront not only the plight of the victims, but the role of the perpetrators. LaCapra observes that the descendants of the perpetrator generation face a complex task of reconciling their personal attachment to parental figures with knowledge of the political regimes in which they participated. Transgenerational perpetrator trauma may cause a dissociative split of the father into "good and bad personas" which allow the descendant to "hold onto and affirm the good while, however indecisively, rejecting the bad" (379-380). In the example of the Nazi regime, the good father typically dwells in the domestic sphere, a "private family man", while the bad father is a "political man" complicit in historic crimes. This "political man" is further dissociatively split into the good (or at least neutral) "cog" in the machine, and the evil regime itself, conceived as an autonomous entity, which imposed its duties upon the unwilling father (381). LaCapra's points to Philippe Sands's 2015 documentary *A Nazi Legacy: What Our Fathers Did*, and the unwillingness of the interviewee Horst, son of Otto von Wächter (Gauleiter of Galacia), to come to terms with his father's crimes; the ideal parental image is maintained by divorcing them from the actions of the regime they served (380). As a counter-example, LaCapra gives Gudrun Burwitz, daughter of Heinrich Himmler, and her lifelong mission to "redeem his image" by blaming Allied propaganda for the postwar perception of Himmler and the Nazi regime (381).

Thus, we have two modes of dissociation: one which dissociates the regime's crimes

from the parental figure, and another which redeems the regime itself and thus dispels the

label of perpetrator altogether. This desire to redeem the wartime generations can be observed

to this day in Japan's political discourse, particularly around Yasukuni Shrine, where visits by

politicians draw accusations of valorising war criminals. Of particular interest here is a

passage from Shinzo Abe's *Towards a Beautiful Country* (2007), wherein the Prime Minster

links his present day political leanings to memory of maternal grandfather Nobusuke Kishi,

who oversaw the conscript labour programme in Manchuria before becoming Prime Minister

himself in 1957, having escaped prosecution during the Occupation.

> "Some people used to point to my grandfather as a 'Class-A war criminal
> suspect,' and I felt strong repulsion. Because of that experience, I may have
> become emotionally attached to 'conservatism,' on the contrary," (trans. Reiji
> Yoshida, *The Japan Times*)

Contemporary Japanese nationalism demonstrates a desire to reclaim a sense of unity

and independence, by redeeming the country's Imperial past and allowing for a continuity of

identity unbroken by defeat and the American Occupation. A prominent example is Nippon

Kaigi ("Japan Conference"), formed in 1997 from two constitutional reform groups founded

in the 70s, which sets out to conceptualise and promote an explicit Japanese national identity,

primarily by revoking Article 9 and strengthening military forces. It also presents a

revisionist view of history that downplays or denies Imperial war crimes, including the

Nanking Massacre and enslavement of Korean "comfort women," by reframing the Pacific

War as a war of liberation against Western powers. These issues are exemplified by the

discourse around public figures' visits to Yasukuni Shrine, a Shinto establishment

commemorating many of Japan's wartime dead, including those convicted of war crimes at

the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals of 1946-49. Such controversies are indicative of Japan's

complex and politically sensitive relationship to memories of its wartime past. The very act

of remembering, and of reconstructing memory, is fraught with emotional complications even

73 years on from the surrender of 1945. The group also proposes reviving elements of prewar

culture and political organisation that emphasise the centrality of the Emperor, which evokes

the State Shinto notion of the *kokutai*: the unifying grand narrative of Imperial Japan. Again,

we see a desire for escape from the alienation of fragmentary postmodernity by way of

narratives providing a sense of collective meaning, direction, and belonging.

Many of Nippon Kaigi's influential participants are standing members of Cabinet,

including current Prime Minister Abe, who has long pushed for constitutional revision

concerning Article 9. In *Toward a Beautiful Country*, he alludes to an interpretation of

postwar Japan with notable similarities to that presented in *Little Boy*:

> When we line up all the issues that Japan faces, not just the North Korean
> kidnapping issue, but even the territorial questions, the U.S.-Japan relationship
> or even economic issues like the TPP, I believe they all come from the same
> root. Is this not the price we have had to pay for enjoying economic prosperity
> while kicking these problems down the road, without a clear consciousness
> that the life and treasure of the Japanese civic nation (*Nihon kokumin*) and the
> territory of Japan are to be protected by the Japanese government's own
> hands? Truly, "escape from the postwar regime" is still the most important
> theme for Japan. … I'll go so far as to say that we are in a battle to take back
> the country of Japan from postwar history by the hands of the Japanese
> people. (Translated by Doak, 2013)

Whether *Little Boy*'s appraisal of the national psyche applies to all postwar Japanese, it

evidently applies to at least a certain sector of the population. Abe expresses a desire to

"escape" from postwar history, represented by Japan's subordination to American foreign

policy and impotence against North Korean aggression, so as to "take back" the country

through the establishment of independence and military self-sufficiency. While Japan has

enjoyed economic prosperity under the protective wing of the US, there is a sense that it has

become infantile (in Murakami's terms), having lost the full scope of its agency as a

sovereign nation and, by extension, its true sense of identity.

Similar insights can be found in Thomas Elsaesser's *German Cinema: Terror &*

Trauma (2014), which uses German postwar cinema as a vehicle to explore the nation's

complex relationship to the traumatic memory of the Nazi regime. What he finds is a

paradoxical mix of both guilt and victimhood; this is relevant to Japan, where the fascist

government, although not directly responsible for the atomic bomb attacks), is implicated in

creating the circumstances that led to the attack. At the heart of Elsaesser's theory is the idea

of *parapraxis*, translated from the German *Fehlleistung* (originally referring to a Freudian

slip), which he expands to encompass the slippage of expression where a traumatic incident

has not been fully processed nor closure achieved, revealing a discrepancy between conscious

and unconscious (or socially suppressed) thoughts and memories.

The issue of memory lies at the core of Elsaesser's inquiry; in particular, the

collectively shared memory of historical events, which comes to be shared by those who did

not personally experience them. It is for this reason that he turns to the cinema, on the

premise that historical knowledge is constructed, in large part, through photographic media

which blend fact and fiction (24).

> The sound—and—image media have, over the last half-century, so thoroughly
> altered our relation to the past and to memory that it is still hard to get a
> conceptual grip on the full implications of this change, however much we may
> feel its effects or even know of its consequences. (24)

Elsaesser argues that personal memory is constructed through photographs and videos

collected either by us or our forebears, while collective memory is delivered via television

and films. Such collective memories, once absorbed, become personal memories that one

enjoys sharing with others, which can lead to collective identity amongst groups of any size,

bound by a common memory palate or taste in media (24). Indeed, he asserts that memory,

perhaps even more so than ideology, "has become one of the chief markers of identity,

individually as well as collectively" (7). In the context of historical trauma, this mechanism

of collective memory creates complications for the following generation, who have "inherited

the same traumatic mandate of mastering the past, but now so removed from first-hand

experience of the event" (26). It is by this mechanism that Anno and the subculture

generation obtained their vivid picture of military conflict, despite coming of age after

Japan's pacifist reconstruction.

For countries marked as "perpetrator nations", the complication is twofold, as

"mastering the past" requires either the task of "guilt-management" or "reclaiming for itself,

too, the status of history's victims" (6). Elsaesser highlights the expectation of postwar

Germans to internalise guilt over Holocaust memory as a component of national identity,

resulting in an uneasy relationship with the "Täter-Väter" (perpetrator-fathers) (26); indeed,

parapraxis often manifests through intergenerational tensions, "where oedipal conflicts

between fathers and sons were doubled by the son generation appearing to act out hidden or

missing agendas of the father generations" (9). One possible outcome of this is "a general

tendency to consider victimhood a desirable subject position" (264). He notes the tendency of

Holocaust memory to cycle through frames over time: "between Germans seeing themselves

as victims and acknowledging their direct and indirect roles as perpetrators" (291). He also

observes the complexities around attempts to access the perpetrator perspective, which

"always involves both the question of a shared humanity ("could it have been me?") and the

recognition of distance (of time, of place, of circumstances: "thank God, it wasn't me")"

(293). In other words, empathising with the perpetrator provides at once a comforting

distance from their crimes, and anxiety over the possibility of that distance being closed

under the right circumstances. It serves as an uncanny reminder of the insufficiency of simple

good-versus-evil binaries, and the ever-present potential of a reversion to primal instincts of

aggression experienced in Germany and Japan in the 1930s.

Akiko Hashimoto draws similar conclusions to LaCapra and Elsaesser in her 2015

study titled *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan*. Reflecting

upon her own experiences growing up in 1960s Tokyo, she argues that while adults were often reluctant to speak to directly about the Pacific War, the children of her generation were very much aware that "something dreadful had happened" in the past, gradually building an "understanding of the war as a national trauma" from the traces that permeated daily life (1). As an adult herself, she came to recognise that memories of national trauma remain relevant long after the original event, shaping narratives of collective identity in the present; in the case of a defeated nation like, there is an additional need to "explain grievous national failures, mourn the dead, redirect blame, and recover from the burdens of stigma and guilt" (2). Creating a coherent narrative for the vanquished becomes "a project of repairing the moral backbone of a broken society," a project lies at the heart of Japan's "culture of defeat" (2). In facing the question of why the Japanese fought and died for a what was ultimately shown to be a lost cause, different people and political factions adopt different answers; but in all cases, historical narratives must respond to "memories of massive failure, injustice, and suffering," and entail questions "not only about war responsibility but also about national belonging, the relations between the individual and the state, and relations between the living and the dead" (2-3). Memory of cultural trauma is transmitted through discourse that normalises it within the national consciousness over time, such that it becomes ingrained within collective identity (4). This phenomenon is not limited to Japan: Hashimoto notes that the post-Civil War American South responded to defeat by mythologising the "lost cause", while some interwar Germans martyred the dead soldiers of World War I (3). The "persistent negative emotions" associated with cultural trauma result in a drive to "overcome" memories and feelings about the past which have been passed down to successive generations (5). For Hashimoto, this process can include:

> …the desire to repair a damaged reputation; the aspiration to recover respect in the eyes of the world; the wish to mourn losses and recover from censure; the longing to find meaning and dignity in the face of failure; the hope to shield family and relatives from recrimination; and the urge to minimize the

event or pretend it never happened. Satisfying these yearnings and hopes is a long, ongoing project not only to refashion memories but also to mend a broken society. In this recovery project, memories are realigned and reproduced—to heal, bring justice, and regain moral status in the world—with varying degrees of success. (5)

Hashimoto sees this desire to reconfigure collective memory as lying at the heart of Japan's "history problem", in which different "carriers of memory—Japanese intellectuals, educators, politicians, lawyers, commentators, media critics, activists, and others who retell the past—assign different meanings to the national fall, complicating the prospect of forging a unified national metanarrative" (6). Her analysis echoes the arguments of Murakami, Azuma, Tanaka, and Tamura that postwar Japan has struggled to maintain unifying grand narratives throughout the postwar period; however, Hashimoto's analysis draws particular attention to the problem of perpetrator memory, particularly regarding the comfort women, events like the Nanking massacre, and attempts by the likes of Yasukuni Shrine to rehabilitate war criminals.

The complex interaction of conflicting aspects of war memory has given rise to innumerable perspectives and ways of framing the past, which Hashimoto divides into three narrative archetypes: heroic, tragic, and perpetrator. Heroic narratives emphasise the sacrifices of war, reframing them as the foundation upon which the peace and prosperity of the postwar era are built; the aim is to "cultivate pride in national belonging" while diverting attention from the culpability of the state (8). Tragic narratives promote "empathy and identification" with the victims of defeat, accentuating the "destruction wrought by ferocious military violence"; the suffering of Japanese civilians takes centre stage, particularly victims of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki of indiscriminate air raids. Such stories are critical of the fascist government for inflicting the war upon its own people; however, the scope of these narratives does not generally expand to encompass victims of the Japanese Empire in East Asia. Perpetrator narratives, by contrast, emphasise precisely these matters,

showcasing the brutal acts committed by the Imperial Japanese military abroad and the "dark descent to hell" experienced by soldiers and other individuals who found themselves complicit in the regime. Such stories remain controversial in Japan, and are more often found in journalism, academia, and documentaries rather than fiction.

Corresponding to these narratives are three approaches for moving forward: nationalism, pacifism, and reconciliationism (120). The nationalist approach seeks to overcome the past by "advancing national strength"; it emphasises "collective attachment to a historical community and derives a social identity from that traditional heritage" (124). Nationalists tend to resent the loss of national pride and international prestige that came with defeat, and seek to overcome the past by removing the stigma of the war and and "gain equal recognition from the United States and the West." The pacifist approach "espouses an antimilitary ethos" in "atonement" for the past; war itself is the enemy, while the state is mistrusted as an agent of peaceful conflict resolution. Pacifism functions both as a "source of humanist pride" and a "collective identity that allows Japan to recover its moral prestige from the deviant past." The reconciliationist approach goes a step further, seeking atonement for Imperial Japan's actions in East Asia; the goal is to improve regional relations by acknowledging and redressing past wrongs, emphasising international belonging over national identity.

All three of Hashimoto's narratives play out across the genealogy of apocalyptic anime, but rather than following only a single archetype, most of these films integrate elements from two or more. A common occurrence is what I will refer to as the heroic-tragic narrative: stories in which the sacrifices of noble soldiers are valorised, while at the same time showing the hardships imposed upon victims of war. But as earlier established, perpetrator themes often emerge through more subtle avenues, resulting in a blend of all three narratives. This often involves a moment of uncanny recognition, where the protagonists realise that they

possess the same destructive potential as the villains they fight against.

We see this dilemma play out during the climactic events of *Space Battleship Yamato*, where the ship's crew arrive at the Gamilan Empire's home planet and lay waste to their enemies against all odds. The Yamato's victory combines two national motifs: the wave motion canon (a stand-in for America's atomic bomb technology) is fired into dormant volcanoes (evoking Japan's national icon of Mount Fuji), causing a chain reaction that destroys most of the planet and its population through violent eruptions. Audiences would likely have been satisfied with a triumphant *Star Wars*-style overthrow of the evil empire, but Matsumoto's story withholds a sense of victory from his heroes, instead reflecting feelings of confusion and horror in the aftermath of war. Despite their bitter enmity with Gamilus, the crew break down in remorse at the annihilation of the planet's population. The protagonist Kodai laments that values of competitiveness and a drive towards victory were always instilled in school, but that he now recognises the plight of the losers; what should be emphasised, he realises, is love and compassion between people. In this moment, the Yamato crew occupy two historical allusions. At the surface level, there is the more obvious reflection of American uncertainty over the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, particularly the large-scale killing of civilians; the human characters shift from being the victims of atomic bombing on their home planet to the perpetrators of a similar attack against Gamilus. But there is a more subtle reference to the Japanese Empire in Kodai's implicit critique of the *bushido* code taught in Japanese schools during the war, along with his embrace of the liberal and pacifistic values imposed by the postwar Occupation. His revelation evokes the inner turmoil of many Japanese in the wake of the Allied victory, as they were forced to reconcile the Empire's propagandised image of nobility with the revelations about its brutal campaign in the Pacific. Thus, while *Yamato* is identified by the likes of Môri as a nationalistic narrative, these inclinations are subverted as simple good-versus-evil binaries break down in

favour of a universal humanism. Likewise, the Japanese heroes' position as victims is inverted in an uncanny dual identification with the perpetrators of both the atomic bomb and Japan's historic war crimes.

But perhaps the most striking example of these themes in action comes from a later Matsumoto tale: the 1982 *Captain Harlock* film *Arcadia of My Youth*. Earth is occupied by a militaristic alien race, the Ilumidas, in a manner evoking Vichy's collaboration with the Nazis. The free-spirited spaceship pilot Harlock arrives home, where humans are now second-class citizens, and strikes up a friendship with engineer Tochiro Ōyama, before leading an armed resistance against the invaders. Shortly after meeting, the pair are captured by the Ilumidas and have their "genetic memory" scanned for useful information, which triggers an extended flashback showcasing their ancestors (also named Harlock and Tochiro) and their affiliation with the Axis during WWII.

Harlock, descended from a Germanic "pirate-knight" clan, is an ace pilot fighting for the Nazis as a means of "paying rent". Tochiro is a Japanese engineer traveling in Europe as he develops a new sight for fighter planes, though he values creativity over military prowess (paralleling Miyazaki's Jiro Horikoshi). The pair strike up an unlikely friendship during a chance encounter, sharing a disdain for the war and romantic dreams of adventure. Tochiro boards Harlock's plane during a dogfight with Allied forces and, when the steering mechanism is shot by, Tochiro secretly uses his body as a stopgap for the severed cables, embodying the self-sacrificing Yamato damashii to ensure victory. Harlock then returns the favour by ensuring Tochiro's safe passage over the Swiss border before returning to face Allied gunfire.

This sequence perfectly illustrates the heroic-tragic narrative: war exists as an abstract force which our heroes regard as futile, while simultaneously granting opportunities to forge meaningful friendships and demonstrate nobility of character. The men describe the war as

"pointless" and "stupid", noting that in better times, they would rather devote their energies toward a "brighter future" (for instance, by flying to the moon). There is a hint of scientific idealism, implying that the men's character strengths, so useful in war, are equally suited to technological progress in peacetime, reflecting the role of former wartime engineers in Japan's machine-driven Economic Miracle.

At the same time, no detail is given regarding the conflict's political motives, and the matter of fascist ideology is never alluded to. War stems from foolish governments, yet the nature of that folly is left to the viewer's imagination or historical understanding.

Nazi iconography (swastika included) is visible on Harlock's plane, though his family's skull & crossbones emblem is painted atop the Iron Cross, elevating his individual identity over Nazi loyalties.

The flashback sequence holds no plot-relevance, existing purely for thematic value. Matsumoto evidently finds significance in his heroes being descended from reluctant Axis-collaborators who nonetheless prove to be noble free-spirits, and this return to the past is used to contextualise their exploits during the main sci-fi storyline.

The film's climax sees its villain, an alien military leader, asks to duel Harlock as a

"samurai", and ends the fight by ramming Harlock's ship in a kamikaze attack. The decision to associate the Ilumidas (brutal alien invaders) with the Imperial Japanese military speaks to Matsumoto's ambivalence: both heroes and perpetrators are linked to Japan's Axis past. The crucial differentiator is that the actual German and Japanese characters' involvement in war is sublimated by their heroism, comradeship, and detachment from fascist politics, whereas the alien invaders run a brutal empire guilty of persecution and (on other planets) genocide. Thus, we see the dissociation between the "good Japan" (noble soldiers who gave their lives in the line of duty) and the "bad Japan" (the militarist regime, with its fascist ideology and war crimes record). Harlock and Tochiro, inheriting the strengths of their Axis-affiliated ancestors (a warrior's courage and creative engineering, respectively), defeat alien invaders representing the Axis regimes' worst aspects.

Miyazaki and Anno: Negotiating Historical Memory

Takashi Murakami's writing in *Little Boy* highlights Miyazaki and Anno as artists whose work reflects the Japanese postwar condition. This is especially true of Anno: the second entry in the opening "Plates & Entries" section is the music video "DAICON IV" (1983), a manifesto for the emerging otaku identity of the early 80s, and the section ends with *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, one of the cornerstone anime presented in the *Little Boy* catalogue (and discourses on otaku more generally). Murakami analyses Miyazaki at the beginning of "Earth in My Window", wherein *Howl's Moving Castle* is described as both an autobiographical work and a reflection of the modern Japanese people.

At the same time, the two directors are distinctly different in their creative styles and life stories, each emerging from wildly different historical eras. While Miyazaki's fixation on themes and motifs from World War II stems from his direct experience as a child during the conflict, Anno grew up within the rather more fortunate subculture generation, deriving his

fascination with military stories (and associated technology) from the mass of pop-culture works available throughout the 60s and 70s. Thus, where Miyazaki's works are an expression of personal trauma, Anno's works indicate the presence of an ongoing cultural memory which has been transmitted despite the subject's taboo nature. A common thread between the directors and JNP thinkers like Murakami and Sawaragi is their call for a renewed historical consciousness in contemporary Japan; their filmographies make continual reference (sometimes overtly, others subtly) to Japanese war memory, and it is often by connecting to memories of the past that their heroes succeed in averting apocalyptic crises in the present.

However, as I intend to argue, awareness of Japan's role as perpetrator as well as victim in WWII is very much present in works by Miyazaki and Anno, albeit encoded beneath the surface details of the narrative. Marisol Cortez analyses Miyazaki through the lens of trauma theory in "Environmentalism without Guarantees" (2005), drawing particularly on Caruth alongside Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1993). The essay is framed around the concept of *haunting*, citing Avery Gordon's proposal that haunting be considered "a constitutive feature of social life" necessitating "an alternate "politics of accounting" attuned to the very real, material effects of what is ordinarily unaccounted for" (39). Cortez draws on Derrida's concept of the *revenant*: "that which has been rendered anterior to narratives of progress, but which returns within the present as a material force or political urgency that demands response" (39). This is juxtaposed against Caruth's model of belatedness, which comprehends trauma through "an alternate mode of referencing history, one that is recursive rather than narrative or progressive", acknowledging that "our understanding of past events is never total or complete and hence is always to some degree inaccessible to us" (45). Traces of the past continue to "affect and speak to the present" (45), disrupting contemporary experience with unresolved aspects of history. Cortez does not cite LaCapra, but their models overlap: disruptions born of unresolved historical memory (the return of the repressed) lead to acting-

out and necessitate working-through in order to put the "haunting" to rest.

For Cortez, Caruth's notion of history as recursive "gives us a way of responding ethically to experiences of historical violence that we may not have caused, but which we nonetheless inherit affectively and politically" (45-46). Indeed, they argue that "the trauma that repeats throughout Miyazaki's entire body of works can be summed up as the problem of inherited suffering—a human and ecological debt acquired through the heedlessness of previous generations" (48). Their analysis of *Spirited Away* points to three characters—Haku, the Stink Spirit, and No Face—who undergo harmful metamorphoses as a result of implied corruption in the human world, leading them to reenact the alienating and consumptive processes which placed them in their predicament. While Cortez fixates on Miyazaki's economic and environmental themes, the motif of traumatic reenactment applies equally to instances of violence, militarism, and political authoritarianism. For instance, the villains Monsley in *Future Boy Conan* and Kusharna in 1984's *Nausicaä* are revealed as survivors of apocalypse or violence, leading them to act-out their unresolved trauma as perpetrators of violence against the next generation.

This concept of inherited historical trauma is particularly significant in Miyazaki's case, given his feelings of collective guilt stemming first from his family's neglect of stragglers while escaping from American firebombing, and later over Japan's military history as he heard stories of the Pacific War. Cortez cites a 1998 speech in which Miyazaki expresses his lifelong desire to return to the evacuation scene and overcome his sense of perpetrator trauma by taking a struggling woman and child aboard the vehicle (46-47). He reasons that if he had simply spoken out at the time, his parents would surely have listened and stopped the vehicle. Miyazaki thus frames his animated films as response to the trauma of the war, noting the suffering of both the Japanese people and the Empire's victims in Southeast Asia. He admits that even if he could have satisfied his conscience in that personal incident, it wouldn't have

solved the broader problems of Japan's military campaign; nevertheless, he states that "after all those years, I realized that I wanted to make an animation with a kid who can say, "please stop the car" in such a situation, not giving up [just because] humans can't say so after all" (47). In this light, Miyazaki's films can be read as an attempt to work-through his feelings of collective responsibility through a symbolic return to the past in which his inciting trauma is mastered and overcome, and in which a personal act of selfless virtue does have the power to end violent conflict and authoritarianism.

Perpetrator themes increase in prominence following 1991, when Japan's post-bubble recession is thought to have begun in earnest. My analysis will thus fixate the Economic Miracle and the Lost Decade as distinct eras of postwar history. As discussed in Chapter 1, the former is cast as a time of optimism, exemplified by Expo '70, which foretold a brighter future to be built with the same science and technology that enabled the atomic bomb; the latter, by contrast, is marked by disillusionment with grand narratives of progress, leading to a nihilistic identity crisis that brings memories of Japan's wartime past into sharper focus.

Miyazaki and Anno began their careers during the years of Japan's Economic Miracle, with Miyazaki's first role as in-between animator commencing at Toei Animation in 1963, and Anno lending his animation talents to the amateur short "DAICON III" in 1981. They first met in 1983, with Anno becoming something of a protege to Miyazaki as a key animator on the iconic God Warrior sequence of 1984's *Nausicaä* adaptation. This was the first of many partnerships; Miyazaki would later recruit Anno as the voice of Jiro Horikoshi in *The Wind Rises* (2013). Their connection continued in 1990 with Anno's *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*, a TV series based on a story proposal written Miyazaki in the 1970s, ideas from which he had recycled for *Future Boy Conan* (1978) and *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986). This overlap offers a rare opportunity to assess how the two directors differ in adapting the same basic premise.

During the Economic Miracle, the anime created by Miyazaki and Anno primarily follow conventional heroic archetypes, in which the protagonists' virtue and determination overcome the apocalyptic conflict and restore balance to the world. The question of perpetrator guilt is raised, but a clean division exists between immediate father figures (who bear a connection to past apocalyptic trauma but achieve redemption and reconciliation in the end) and the dictators who assume ultimate responsibility for the return of the repressed. In this way, ideals are able to triumph and usher in a more enlightened social order.

The directors take a noticeably cynical and psychological turn with the onset of the Lost Decade, particularly in the wake of the sarin gas attacks by Aum Shinrikyo in 1995. Analysis will centre on Miyazaki's *Porco Rosso* (1992), "On Your Mark" (1995), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Spirited Away* (2001), and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), to be compared with Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-97) and *His & Her Circumstances* (1998). Anno's directing evokes Brecht's *verfredungseffekt* ("alienation effect"), deliberately breaking down audiovisual coherence so as to take the audience outside the fictional space and make us reflect on our role as spectators.

As noted in Chapter 1, themes of nihilism and existential anxiety emerging in the Lost Decade are intimately linked to Japan's Imperial past, a connection exemplified by Aum's attempt to resurrect the apocalyptic conflict of 50 years prior in response to the economic and social disintegration of the 90s. Looking to the radical collectivism of the past as an escape from the postmodern condition is inevitably frustrated by reminders of the failure of fascism, and, more recently, the revolutionary movements of the 1960s. Thus, our heroes find themselves stuck in limbo, unable to find salvation either by resurrecting the past or forecasting visions of a utopian future. All that remains to them is, as Miyadai puts it, to live the endless everyday: in other words, to embrace the absence of grand narratives and find meaning in a fragmentary present with all of the uncertainties that might bring. The central

question faced by Miyazaki and Anno is how alienation between human beings can be overcome, particularly in conditions of industrial modernity or postmodernity. The simpler heroic narratives of the past give way to identity crises and uncertain moral outcomes, along with skepticism towards science and technology as potential saviours of humanity.

These stories reflect a lack of faith in the power of institutional authorities to achieve progress, and in the capacity of heroism to reform institutions; rather, heroes must reluctantly acquiesce to the hegemony of established power structures. The perpetrator father figure becomes a site of conflict here, often presiding over the institutions with which younger heroes find themselves identifying against their will, eschewing clean dissociation between nobility and corruption. Unable to reshape the world despite their supernatural empowerment, the directors' heroes face two choices: work within the system and derive identity from your role, or withdraw into isolation. The alienation emerging from this dilemma lies at the heart of Miyazaki's and Anno's stories from the 1990s onward, and both directors place character psychology at the forefront of the films, with external conflicts often falling to the periphery. Given these observations, a key question is whether a third path is available in which alienation might be overcome, despite the downfall of grand narratives and faith in institutional power.

The above discussion establishes three main dimensions to the theoretical framework. First, there is the motif of apocalyptic trauma through atomic superweapons, which stems from the national postmemory of Japan as survivor of the atomic bombs detonated in Hiroshima & Nagasaki. Memory of the bomb is displaced into Sci-Fi and fantasy settings wherein young protagonists must confront apocalyptic threats, often a repetition of a prior disaster: in short, they must overcome traumatic memory through mastering the return of the repressed. The hero achieves this through supernatural or technological abilities, which empower them either to prevent the apocalypse entirely or mitigate its destructive effects.

These abilities often take the form of atomic energy, whether literally (Astro Boy's nuclear-powered heart) or symbolically through superweapons which generate dome-shaped explosions and mushroom clouds. Japanese subculture thus presents a duality in its depiction of nuclear-inspired apocalypse: alongside traumatic scenes of destruction, apocalyptic power is sublimated into positive forms that allow this destructive potential to be held in check by the goodwill of heroic characters. A classic example is Sheeta's volucite pendant in *Laputa*, which turns out to be made from the same mineral that powers the floating castle and its nuclear-style superweapon. The crystal holds both creative and destructive potential, and it is the virtue or vice of humanity that determines the outcome; Miyazaki thus presents a moral narrative that warns of apocalyptic disaster as the price for human folly. Such narratives reflect Japan's postwar embracing of nuclear power, support for which remains widespread even in the wake of Fukushima and the resulting anti-nuclear movements: thus, the question of whether science and technology are a positive or destructive force is negotiated throughout these works. Epic conflicts of world destruction and renewal to small personal narratives of surviving and overcoming trauma (Napier's intimate apocalypse), intertwining the personal with the political.

Second, the memory of Japan's role as perpetrator in the Pacific War complicates simple narratives of overcoming trauma. While pacifist ideals were embraced postwar, they were framed in terms of Japanese civilians' experiences at the hands of the American military (particularly aerial bombers) and their own fascist government; details of the Japanese Empire's actions overseas did not disappear from public memory altogether, but were largely excluded from the new national narrative and identity. The memory of defeat and atomic trauma is not as repressed as Takashi Murakami and his colleagues suggest, given the release of *Children of Hiroshima* (with its graphic depictions of the atomic bomb) and *The Bells of Nagasaki* immediately after the American Occupation ended; rather, memories of war with

America and victimisation by both the militarists and US invasion forms the dominant historical narrative, while the history of Imperial Japan's expansion and military campaigns might be viewed as repressed. Local artworks rarely make overt reference to Japan as perpetrator, though such works do exist, even going as far back as the 1950s with films like *Fires on the Plane* and *The Human Condition* trilogy. However, Japan's postwar subculture is replete with more subtly encoded allusions to Japan as perpetrator, often emerging within apocalyptic narratives. This reframing lends greater credence to Murakami's thesis in *Little Boy*, which Sawaragi seems to hint at this with his mention of Japan's "double amnesia": we can read the surface layer (atomic bomb, trauma of defeat, social paradigm shift leading to infantilisation) as masking the more heavily repressed dimension of perpetrator memory. Some of these references emerge in heroic narratives, which sublimate war into a tragic lost cause, or a chance to display heroism, teamwork, and the *Yamato damashii* while fighting against the odds. In other cases, however, a more critical edge emerges, wherein heroic characters find themselves traumatised by unwilling complicity in morally dubious acts.

What makes this interesting is that both the positive and critical approaches tend to appear in tandem, rather than each work taking a definitive stance. An example can be found in one of the most common perpetrator motifs, the *kamikaze* pilot, which manifests as young heroes piloting fighter planes and military robots on life-threatening missions. This appears repeatedly in the works of Tomino, Matsumoto, Miyazaki, and Anno. Indeed, Shapiro sees in Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* a possible reference to *kamikaze*, which means "divine wind", though Nausicaä is Slavic rather than Japanese. There is a duality to many of these narratives, including *Gundam*: the protagonist's role as fighter pilot often provides them with a sense of purpose, comradeship, and identity, while their traumatic experiences (especially having to use violence against others) threaten to destabilise that purpose and identity. War and military hierarchy appear to deliver meaning, identity, and

freedom from social alienation, while simultaneously precluding those very things. This ambivalence blurs the lines between heroic, victim, and perpetrator narratives: the characters' ethos of nobility and selfless sacrifice that would seem to affirm *bushidō* values, yet there is also a sense of tragic futility as young pilots are sacrificed in questionable military conflicts, and even become perpetrators of violence against their will.

Finally, there is the dimension of social withdrawal, which is frequently juxtaposed against heroism and militarism: rather than embrace their military role, protagonists may retreat from the world, often into a consumer bubble or the protection of a mother figure. Demand for recognition is cast aside and animalisation embraced as characters accept their lack of a stable, socially-defined identity. The withdrawal motif emerges during the Lost Decade, often accompanied by themes of nihilism and infantilisation. Anno's *Evangelion* presents the most iconic instance of this dilemma, as protagonist Shinji is torn between embracing his instrumental social identity as coded *kamikaze* pilot, which grants him recognition and purpose, or withdrawing from this world to avoid the traumatic experiences it entails (including several instances of perpetrator trauma). He desires the unconditional love of the mother over the conditional love of the father, and submits to the symbolic return to the womb offered by Human Instrumentality. In the end, however, neither option brings him satisfaction. He is forced to conclude that he cannot live without social recognition, resolves to seek meaningful connections with others outside his role instrumentalised role as a pilot, even as he realises that this means living without guarantees and that alienation may return. A similar dilemma appears in Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle*, where the titular hero is torn between his military persona and his desire for social isolation. Howl is incapable of forming meaningful long-term relationships and spends his life in hiding, while his involvement in the war threatens to consume his identity and render him a mindless monster. Both directors construct stories in which grand narratives of progress and heroism break down, rendering

their protagonists unable to form righteous identities through military conflict; instead, fear of becoming perpetrators leads them to a nihilistic retreat from the world. The heroic and tragic narratives collapse as neither nationalism or pacifism prove sufficient to save the world. The question, then, is whether to retreat into animalisation, or to embrace the endless everyday and find meaning through small narratives and communities.

Chapter 3: Hayao Miyazaki

This chapter will explore Miyazaki's directorial style and worldview, focusing primarily on his work from 1978 (*Future Boy Conan*) to 2013 (*The Wind Rises*), with emphasis on thematic and structural changes occurring between Japan's Economic Miracle years and its "Lost Decades" of economic recession.

As established in Chapter 1, Japanese subculture approaches national war memory in two ways: first, the protagonists' agency in events of war and apocalypse (often by high-tech or supernatural means) facilitates heroic narratives in which apocalyptic trauma (frequently evoking imagery of the atomic bomb) is symbolically overcome, in many cases through the efforts of children or young adults. Chapter 2 responds to criticisms raised by Môri and Lamarre, who argue that the model advanced by Japanese Neo-Pop thinkers like Murakami and Sawaragi evokes a "victim's history" narrative, framing the Pacific War around the experiences of Japanese civilians under American invasion. In response, I propose that subcultural works do contain subtle allusions to Japan's own wartime activities in the Pacific, including abuses within the military and war crimes committed against foreigners. These two sides of war memory—simultaneous identification as victim and perpetrator—become intertwined: many Japanese felt that responsibility for the bombs fell, not merely on the Americans, but on the militarists who refused to surrender due to unchecked ambition and Japan's *bushido* code. Hence, in anime's atomic narratives, the forces threatening to reawaken apocalyptic technology are rarely allegories for the USA (or Soviet Union), as we might expect, but exhibit traits of the Japanese Empire (though as Môri notes, often sporting the surface aesthetic of Western fascism).

A common theme in subcultural works—particularly apparent in Miyazaki—is thus a fear of apocalyptic trauma repeating through failure to reign in the human vices that led to

Japan's takeover by fascism and the ensuing military conflicts. Miyazaki's early post-apocalyptic works—*Future Boy Conan*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, and *Laputa*—all present an idealistic take on this theme: the heroes' virtue (combined with their affinity for nature) allows them to save humanity from its own worst instincts, overthrowing authoritarian military regimes and preventing their detonation of revived superweapons. At the same time, Miyazaki presents alternatives to capitalist modernity in the form of *Conan*'s High Harbour and *Nausicaä*'s Valley of the Wind: small, agrarian, communal societies with minimal social hierarchy. From the 1990s onwards, this idealism gives way to a growing cynicism towards revolutionary themes, coinciding with Japan's economic downturn, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the final stages of Miyazaki's gradual disillusionment with Marxism. His works of the Lost Decades eschew successful revolutionary narratives, emphasising instead the inner struggles of his heroes to balance virtue with their own destructive or reclusive impulses (*Ponyo* being the notable exception).

What all of these works share in common is the undercurrent of perpetrator trauma and guilt management in the manner described by LaCapra, Elsaesser, and Hashimoto, whereby Miyazaki processes traumatic memory through the dissociation of historical elements across characters and political factions. This manifests in two ways: first, his construction of settings in which the heroic faction represents his conception of an ideal (pastoral) Japan combined with the positive aspects of *Yamato damashii* (Japanese spirit), while the villainous faction represents the militarism, corruption, and industrial technology of the Japanese Empire. As Napier writes, Miyazaki's films often feature a binary conflict between *furusato* ("hometown" or "native place") and *kokusaika* ("internationalisation"), and his apocalyptic narratives typically pit a small agrarian community against a larger, more advanced industrial power. Second, the recurring motif of the "perpetrator fathers", which splits responsibility for the apocalypse across the "good father" representing family intimacy, the morally neutral

"cog in the machine" who serves the regime out of necessity (perhaps as a scientist or engineer), and the tyrannical father whose vices are reflected wholesale in the regime's actions and ideology.

In *Future Boy Conan*, Doctor Lao is the good father, representing High Harbour, while the dictator Lepka helms the totalitarian regime of Industria. In *Nausicaä*, the peaceful Valley of the Wind faces the aggression of the Tolmekian Empire. *Laputa*'s conflict stems from two opposing lines of the Laputian royal family, one of which seeks peace and the other domination through technological might. Miyazaki earlier employed the same trope in the non-apocalyptic heist film *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro*, in which a historic power struggle between the good and evil lines of the royal Cagliostro family reaches its culmination. So in Miyazaki's three main apocalyptic narratives of the Economic Miracle, we have a clear dissociative split between the good and evil sides, descended from the same ancestral empire. The heroic faction wishes to avoid the mistakes of the past by suppressing, controlling, or outright destroying atomic technology, while the villains seek to resurrect it in a vain hope of achieving the glory of the past.

These are stories of inheritance: the young protagonist is handed the mantle of responsibility by the good father, and must overcome the threat posed by the evil father. In overthrowing their regime, the hero ushers in a new era in which humanity can prosper: despite hardships and setbacks, these are overall idealistic narratives in which youthful virtue triumphs over corrupt power structures. While the Economic Miracle years keep distinctions fairly clean-cut, Miyazaki's Lost Decade works blur the lines: his heroes find themselves identifying with the corrupt authority figures, despite their virtuous intentions, calling into question the veracity of utopian visions. Rather than a clean break, there is a sense of traumatic identification with the father figure, which comes with recognition of the hero's own limitations. In other cases, the protagonist is an older man who fulfils the role of the

father, often combining elements of Miyazaki's middle-aged self and memories of his father

Katsuji. Miyazaki's shifting depiction of the father figure reflects his evolving perspective,

changing dramatically in the 1990s. Discussing his motives behind *Future Boy Conan*, he

says that the solar energy expert Dr Briac Lao, consumed by guilt for his contribution to the

apocalypse, had to die so that the new world order could be ushered in (*Starting Point*, 298).

Miyazaki's later works feature a pragmatic reconciliation with the father's undesirable

elements. *The Wind Rises*' Jiro Horikoshi, whom Toshio Suzuki describes as a reflection of

Katsuji Miyazaki, is told at the end of the film to "live" in spite of his regrets.

  This chapter will argue that for Miyazaki, ecological and military trauma are

intertwined. Heidegger's technological condition is what ultimately gives rise to perpetrator

trauma: alienation from the land and between beings creates the conditions that lead to

fascism and eventual apocalypse, resulting from the loss of identity and drive for domination

of people and resources. Thus, it is in overcoming the enframing mindset that Miyazaki's

protagonists restore social relations and prevent the return of the apocalypse. It is worth

noting that for Miyazaki apocalyptic power is not contrary to nature, but an aspect thereof.

The tsunami in *Ponyo* is born of a primordial life-creating magic that replenishes Earth's

aquatic species, and *Princess Mononoke*'s apocalypse is an inversion of the life-giving power

of the *Shishigami* (Deer God). *Future Boy Conan*'s apocalypse is framed in part as nature's

retaliation against humanity for using weapons of mass destruction, beyond the impact of the

weapons themselves: indeed, the reoccurrence of tsunamis and earthquakes in the story's

final stages appears like an act of divine intervention, helping to bring the high-tech

dictatorship of Industria to an end. *Laputa*'s volucite crystal is shown early on as a mineral in

its natural state (much as nuclear weapons stem from metals mined from the Earth, and

replicate the life-sustaining power of the sun), a source of beauty and wonder for Pazu and

Sheeta without destructive potential. Furthermore, the crystal casts off the castle's

superweapons when the Spell of Destruction is uttered, preserving intact the overgrown plantlife that has made its home there. The Angel in "On Your Mark" might likewise be read as a personification of atomic potential, imprisoned by government agents in what resembles a nuclear reactor before the heroes free her, returning to the green landscapes of the surface world that humanity has abandoned. And at the end of the *Nausicaä* manga, the scientists of the Crypt of Shuwa reveal that the Ohm, giant insects who serve as guardians of nature, were genetically engineered by the same civilisation that birthed the apocalyptic God Warriors: indeed, all surviving lifeforms are revealed as creations of science, blurring the distinction between nature and technology.

Murakami on Miyazaki

Murakami makes two references to Hayao Miyazaki in *Little Boy*, which, while brief, place Miyazaki at the heart of his discourse on anime's atomic legacy. His main essay, "Earth in My Window", begins by naming Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* as the film that defined the Japanese in 1954, in part because of its "relentless pursuit of realism" and themes of futile strife (102). Japan may have escaped the hunger and ruin of the immediate postwar, but these were "still an indelible memory, tinged with nostalgia", and the Japanese "searched for self-respect while acknowledging defeat" (102). In 2005, by contrast, it is the animated fantasy film *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) that "defines" the Japanese people. Being "overwhelmingly popular", Murakami argues, it reflects the desires of the Japanese public (103). He sees in the film a reflection of the Japanese people's "quest for the meaning of life", along with Miyazaki's attempts to work-through his personal trauma from the Pacific War; indeed, Murakami describes the film as a "self-portrait" of Miyazaki (104). The director is compelled to portray the "folly of war" by the "vestigial phantoms that [he] failed to conquer in his youth", resulting in themes which resonate with the contemporary Japanese (105). Just as protagonist Sophie must travel back in time to Howl's childhood to discover the

secret to restoring his humanity, Miyazaki changed the original novel's plot substantially to reflect his memories of the Pacific War, while adding existentialist themes drawn from his later years (103-104).

> Miyazaki's adaptation is rooted in the protagonist's quest for the meaning of life, which mirrors the same quest of contemporary Japanese. It also incorporates Miyazaki's corrosive yet genuine struggle through personal traumas during the Pacific War. Gradually, Miyazaki has transformed Wynne Jones's story into a self-deprecating portrait of himself, concluding that if he must live in a land of complete defeat, which has chosen apolitical involvement in war, he has no choice but to keep making movies. (103-104)

Murakami identifies three main themes in *Howl's Moving Castle*: set at "the dawn of the twentieth century, an era of unsurpassed nationalism" (103), the film holds that war is untenable, meaningless, and, "no matter how righteous its cause", breaks the human spirit. It also emphasises the need for community, and that ageing and maturation are inherent in human life (104). Howl becomes a monster in the fires of war, losing sight of his identity, which can only be salvaged through a return to the past. Murakami notes parallels to Miyazaki's own feelings of trauma and guilt over his family's refusal to take other children aboard their vehicle as they escaped a firebombed Tokyo during the war (105). Howl also reflects the "shattered dreams" of Miyazaki's youth, when he still believed that ideology could change the world; Howl, who has no real goal, is transformed from a "gentle, charming man into a demon" by the meaningless conflicts of war (105). Murakami notes here the importance of of the animation artform: while *Seven Samurai* achieved relevance through its realism, Miyazaki appeals to the contemporary Japanese by "spinning a children's fantasy": a "fairytale" cloaking Miyazaki's protest against the "meaningless[ness] of war" (105).

Later in the essay, Murakami situates *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* in a lineage shared by *Space Battleship Yamato* and Yoshiyuki Tomino's *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), both post-apocalyptic war stories in which heroes fighting in Earth's defence find themselves empowered with new technology and supernatural abilities. In the former, the goddess-like

alien Princess Starsha grants the Yamato crew the "Cosmo Cleaner", an anti-nuclear device

capable of purifying Earth's irradiated surface. The latter series features not merely the

cutting-edge Gundam fighting robot, but the evolution of a new class of human called

Newtypes who boast psychic powers and enhanced cognitive abilities. Nausicaä, too, finds

herself in possession of superhuman powers: unsurpassed instinct for aerial manoeuvres, the

ability to communicate with and pacify animals, and (downplayed in the film version)

shamanistic spiritual powers including telepathy and astral projection. As with many

Miyazaki heroines, her supernatural capabilities stem from her affinity for the natural world

and abundant empathy for fellow living beings; and, as in the aforementioned works, these

powers serve as humanity's final protection against their apocalyptic predicament. As

Murakami notes:

> There is a longing for some fundamental human power to awaken when
> humanity is backed into a corner. Hayao Miyazaki's original manga and
> animated film, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, also begins in a world that
> has suffered a man-made apocalypse. This is true of Ōtomo's *Akira* as well.
> (122-123)

Thus, Miyazaki builds upon a legacy in which fantastical abilities allow survivors of an

apocalypse to overcome their traumatic circumstances, and (as in the case of *Nausicaä*)

prevent a return of the repressed (i.e. a new apocalypse). Murakami's word choice is

significant here, as the powers of Miyazaki's heroes are fundamentally *human*, stemming

from the innate virtues of the characters. Thus, the capacity to save the world is coupled with

the qualities necessary to construct a new world, one in which the mistakes that created the

apocalypse are not repeated.

Murakami's assessment of Miyazaki reflects the common reading of the director's

filmography as a response both to his personal experience of the Pacific War and its

aftermath, and to the collective trauma of Japan's defeat in the Pacific War (particularly

Hiroshima and Nagasaki), a reading that Miyazaki himself affirms across numerous

interviews and essays. Miyazaki's early childhood was shaped by the war: born in 1941, he

grew up around the Miyazaki Aeroplane Factory where his father produced vehicles for the

military, and experienced the trauma of firebombing firsthand at the age of four. In his fiction

and personal writings, he states his position as one of conscious response to the wartime

generations, making him unusually politically outspoken among anime directors. Miyazaki's

films centre squarely on themes of modernisation, particularly industrialisation and the urban

encroachment on the natural world, and the possibility of simultaneously resisting and

embracing these changes. A man of contradictions, he attempts to negotiate a balance

between technology and nature. For Miyazaki, technology has the power to set people free

and unlock new ways of seeing the world (hence his love of vehicles, particularly those of

flight), but brings with it the risk of alienation. A socialist and union leader in his youth,

Miyazaki gradually lost faith in dialectical materialism. As he neared the conclusion of the

Nausicaä manga, the Soviet Union's collapse and the Yugoslav civil war claimed the last

vestiges of his early radicalism; no longer able to ignore the doubts that had accumulated as

he wrote, he concluded that a fundamental change in worldview was required. Declaring in

1994 that "Marxism was a mistake" (*Starting Point*, 400), he rejects political idealism and

class consciousness, instead espousing a universal humanism without revolutionary leanings

(401). His later works reflect this turn towards ideological uncertainty, with the Bogart-esque

anti-hero of *Porco Rosso* holding a mirror to the director's own mindset at the start of the

Lost Decade.

     Perhaps the greatest insight into Miyazaki's worldview can be found in his 2013 essay,

"Constitutional Amendment is Out of the Question", first published in *Neppu* (Studio Ghibli's

monthly magazine) as a response to Prime Minster Abe's calls to revise Article 9 of the

Constitution. The article received significant media attention, and was shortly made available

online. A Ghibli spokesperson later clarified the goal of the publication: to combat "the

apathy of the Japanese people" and the failure of the media to generate an effective discourse around the constitutional question, "an issue that will determine which direction Japan moves in the future" (Park, 2013). These motives carry through in Miyazaki's text: he argues that the Japanese are unaware of their nation's history and insulated from the true nature of geopolitical affairs, insisting that developing a historical consciousness is vital for preventing a repetition of past mistakes. As reflected in his films, Miyazaki worries about the resurgence of a long-forgotten militarism and nationalist idealism that will recreate the traumatic destruction of the wartime era. At the same time, he warns against complete apathy towards higher ideals, which he sees as leading to a narrowly individualistic focus which is not sustainable in the long-term (a tendency which he has long observed in himself, and within otaku subculture). In attempting to balance these two extremes, he proposes an alternative relationship to national identity that warrants closer inspection.

Growing up hearing anecdotes (including some proud boasts) about war crimes committed in China, as well as the suffering of the Japanese people in American air raids, he "felt strongly that Japan fought a stupid war. … I came to truly hate Japan, thinking I was born in a country that did stupid things" (1). Miyazaki read many books on the Pacific Theatre, which told of a war where the reality was different to what people had thought or been taught, and "thought it was a pathetic war, even as a child" (1-2). At the same time, he came to understand the appeal of militarism. After reading Westall's novel *The Machine Gunners* (1975), Miyazaki realised his "true nature" as one willing to sacrifice his life for a higher cause, something more important than himself; had he been born earlier, he would have become a devoted patriot willing to die for the military (2). This youthful idealism gave rise to a rift with his father, Katsuji Miyazaki, who ran the Miyazaki Aeroplane Factory during WWII. The income supplied by lucrative government contracts granted their family lives of relative comfort amid the widespread deprivation of the war. Miyazaki often argued

with his father about having supported the war by selling planes to the military, but Katsuji disclaimed all responsibility for the conflict, a fact that infuriated his son (3). Miyazaki describes his father as "a realist and a nihilist, the kind of person who would say something like, 'I don't care about the world'" (2). He was a man who lived for the moment and lacked a "broad perspective", thinking strictly of business to the very end of the war: "He did not want to acknowledge what was happening in the world," which outraged his idealistic son.

This dichotomy is central Miyazaki's thought: humanity is drawn between ideological enthusiasm on the one hand, which can lead even well-meaning people to assert power by destructive means, and an individualism that pays no heed to social structures or long-term issues, which manifests in its most extreme form in the *hikikomori*. The interplay of these two extremes becomes prominent during the Lost Decade, where Miyazaki foregoes the unwavering nobility of his early protagonists in exchange for heroes lacking the surety and confidence required for bold political action. Greater emphasis is placed on the duality of his heroes, who recognise their innate destructive instincts and (unlike Miyazaki's early protagonists) understand that youthful idealism will not save them from corruption.

Here Miyazaki introduces an alternative pathway, drawing on his affinity for nature and Japan's animistic Shinto religion to provide a model of national identity disassociated from the fascist era, and, more broadly, from post-Meiji modernity. As a young man, Miyazaki found himself in a state of nihilism. He lacked firm beliefs, but "thought there might be something more important than [him]self to believe in", wishing for a homeland that he could love but incapable of patriotism given Japan's recent history ("Constitutional Amendment" 3). Thus, while he condemned his father's individualism and lack of broad perspective, he also saw the dangers of passionate idealism (with the risk of blind nationalistic aggression). His goal was to find a balance between the two extremes, and he began to formulate such a view in his 30s following a research trip to Sweden. He was struck upon his return by the

beauty of the natural environment, coming to love the Japanese islands, which he thought would be even more beautiful without the people: this utopian vision reflects misanthropic inclinations to which he later turns a critical eye, most notably in his depiction of *Ponyo*'s Fujimoto, who erroneously seeks to destroy humanity so that nature can flourish untainted. Miyazaki displays a kind of national pride without nationalism: loving not the nation or its flag, but the soil itself, which he sees as holding "tremendous power" independent of political and economic structures. This love of Japan's natural landscape, which both predates the Japanese nation and survives beyond the Imperial regime, allowed Miyazaki to embrace Japan for the first time. He complicates this view, however, by noting that the great forest around Meiji Shrine is man-made, not naturally occurring (3); rather than seeing nature in isolation to human culture, Miyazaki acknowledges the possibility of harmony between nature and society. This is reflected at the end of the *Nausicaä* manga, where the eponymous heroine learns that all living beings, including humankind and the forest, have been genetically engineered by the scientists of a pre-apocalyptic civilisation; rather than reject this complex state of affairs, Nausicaä chooses to embrace the newfound knowledge in forging humanity's future.

Miyazaki's repeated use of nature spirits (*kami*) as sources of guidance for humanity reflects the influence of Shinto. He rejected the institutional religion from a young age, but later embraced a kind of animistic spiritualism upon discovering Japan's broad-leaf evergreen forests, and many of his later films explore this duality. Miyazaki references the State Shinto ideal of the *kokutai* in *Princess Mononoke*, wherein the Emperor (unseen throughout the film) seeks the head of the *Shishigami* (Deer God), which he believes will make him a god in his own right. It is this plot to subsume a nature spirit into a human political authority that marks the climax of the film; the Emperor's plan is thwarted by Miyazaki's heroes, with the *Shishigami*'s power returned to the Earth. Thus, Miyazaki rejects the prospect of a top-down

institutional nationalism, but finds appeal in the concept of a dehierarchicalised,

communitarian social order in which collective identity is drawn from a relationship to the

natural landscape rather than institutional power.

Miyazaki's work serves a response to this history, calling attention to what he sees as

the shortcomings of Japan's modern era through what Napier terms a "critical" or "activist

nostalgia" ("Matter out of Place", 293): the privileging of traditional cultural values and

practices as a solution to the perceived flaws of modernity. Writing on *Spirited Away*, she

observes a tension between *kokusaika* ("internationalisation") and *furusato* ("native place or

hometown") (287), noting that Miyazaki has a particular vision of the latter (288). This

manifests in fictional worlds wherein a series of binaries have been thrown out of balance:

natural/artificial; pastoral/industrial; traditional/modern; child/adult; simple/decadent; low-

tech/high-tech; peaceful/hostile; virtuous/corrupt. Antagonistic forces see the natural world as

a resource to be captured, controlled, and consumed, leading to social and environmental

conflict. Technology plays a prominent role in this dynamic, serving as a means of

destructive military force and mass industrial production. This contrasts Miyazaki's awe and

reverence for the natural environment, a trait often reflected in his protagonists, which aids

them in bringing about cultural rehabilitation towards a more peaceful social order, one in

harmony with nature and less reliant on technology.

These factors are often seen to indicate an anti-technology sentiment; however, closer

inspection complicates this view. Miyazaki exhibits an overt enthusiasm for many modern

inventions, aeroplanes in particular, which he began drawing from a young age, including

those manufactured by his father for the Japanese Empire. This passion manifests through the

frequent depiction of vehicles and machines that serve as aids to his virtuous and free-spirited

protagonists quite as much as they are tools of villainy and destruction.

Lamarre attempts to reconcile these contradictions in *The Anime Machine* through

analogy to Martin Heidegger, who (much like Miyazaki) is often seen to hold an anti-technology sentiment. Lamarre argues, however, that this is a misinterpretation: that both parties seeks to transform our relationship to modern technology rather than rejecting it entirely. Heidegger argues that modern technology is not fundamentally different to more antiquated inventions. What sets modernity apart is the mindset behind its technology, which Heidegger terms the *technological condition*.

> …the "essence of modern technology is to seek more and more flexibility and efficiency simply for its own sake." The only goal becomes optimisation. Everything—nonhuman and human—is seen in terms of how its usefulness might be technologically optimised. … As such, the problem of technology is not only its destruction of nature and culture but also (and more importantly) its restriction of our thinking. (Lamarre 52-53)

This mindset subjects all things (including the Earth, plants, animals, and even humans) to what Heidegger calls *enframing* (*gestell*), reducing them to standing-reserve: potential resources that have not (yet) been exploited (Wheeler). Everything is consumable as a means to an end, its intrinsic value forgotten. Thus, the technological condition is innately anthropogenic: all things are distinguished as Other from humanity, and assigned value based upon a narrow definition of utility. The result is the *oblivion of Being*, whereby beings are reduced to *not-beings*, diminishing the "sense of awe and wonder in the presence of beings" and "obliterating the secularised sense of what is sacred." Feelings of alienation ensue as people lose any sense of emotional connectedness to the world around them; humanity compensates for its sense of lack through a "drive for entertainment and information, 'exaggeration and uproar'" (Wheeler), an outcome exemplified by Spirited Away's No-Face who, upon entering the alienating, materialistic atmosphere of the bathhouse, embarks upon a mindless quest of endless culinary consumption.

The solution is not to reject technology, but to overcome the technological condition in exchange for a new mindset. Human beings must achieve a "free relation" to technology, one

that "resists technological ordering" (LaMarre 53). Under this paradigm, technology remains a source of utility and enjoyment, but does not control or direct our way of viewing and interacting with the world. This can be accomplished in part through what Heidegger terms *poiesis*: "a process of gathering together and fashioning natural materials in such a way that the human project in which they figure is in a deep harmony with, indeed reveals … the essence of those materials and any natural environment in which they are set" (Wheeler). In other words, human inventions exist in harmony with (and as part of) the natural world, rather than standing apart from and in opposition to it.

In this light, Miyazaki's solution is to undo this alienation by breaking down our sense of separation from the beings and objects surrounding us. His films frequently employ techniques of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, blurring the lines between the human beings and animals of his worlds, thereby resituating humanity as a part of nature rather than as a separate entity. Miyazaki opposes anthropocentric thinking, along with the related anthropogenism, whereby value is attributed to objects and organisms solely by human imposition; rather, he promotes a holistic biocentrism that pays heed to the symbiotic relationship of all beings. It is here that Miyazaki shows the influence of Japan's native *Shinto*, an animistic religion that recognises spirits (*kami*) in both animate and inanimate objects. Miyazaki attributes *kami* to the natural environment of Japan, a trait reflected in many of his films (particularly *Totoro, Mononoke, Spirited Away*, and *Ponyo*), which use spirits as a means to explore humanity's conflicted relationship with nature. Under a modern scientific worldview, the Earth becomes desacralised as we lose sight of its attendant spirits, recontextualising nature as a resource for consumption (i.e. enframing), resulting in feelings of alienation from the world (and between fellow human beings). This can be remedied through a shift in one's mindset known as *makoto no kokoro* (pure heart), whereby one is able to experience the presence of *kami*. It is achieved through recognising the interdependent

relationship between humanity and the natural world, and a respect for all beings that precludes a dominant or destructive approach to the environment.

I would argue that Miyazaki extends this principle to inanimate objects through Shinto-inspired animism, attributing sentient spirits (both literally and figuratively) to non-sentient aspects of the world, including technology. This phenomenon, prevalent throughout Japanese culture, is known as techno-animism, and holds the key to understanding Miyazaki's worldview. By attributing lifelike qualities to machines, technology becomes an extension of the human, and of the natural world, rather than something to be controlled, exploited, or fought. In achieving the ability to view the technical world with the same reverence as the natural, experiencing an emotional connection to machines, Miyazaki's characters overcome the technological condition and pave the way for a more harmonious relationship between humanity and the environment. Thus, it is not technology itself (nuclear energy, for instance) to which Miyazaki attributes the apocalyptic impulse, but a defect of culture in which misuse of machines is but one component.

Cortez's analysis of *Spirited Away* echoes Napier's intimate apocalypse, observing that where Miyazaki's early works feature literal "narrative reenactments" of the apocalypse, his 21st century debut never shows us the inciting incident directly, instead constructing visual references to the displaced memory of past events (48). Indeed, it might be argued that *Princess Mononoke* is Miyazaki's last truly apocalyptic film, in so far as a full-scape apocalypse—the death of the *Shishigami*—actually takes place onscreen. *Ponyo* is a close contender, but the eponymous heroine's magical tsunami serves as a subversion of environmental disaster: an inverse apocalypse creating life rather than death. In *Spirited Away*, conversely, ecological trauma is conveyed via the representation of personal trauma, wherein collective trauma is symbolically acted out through individual characters. This is Napier's intimate apocalypse at work, though instead of running parallel to the environmental

apocalypse as in prior works, here the personal conflict stands in place of the large-scale

disaster. As Cortez writes:

> If the trauma that repeats throughout Miyazaki's entire body of works can be summed up as the problem of inherited suffering—a human and ecological debt acquired through the heedlessness of previous generations—then what distinguishes *Sen* from previous Miyazaki films is its replication on the level of the individual text of the very mechanisms of displacement and return that result in a repetition of themes across texts, lives, societies. In other words, where previous films were themselves narrative reenactments of some original traumatic experience (the literal failure of one's parents to stop the car) *Sen* makes visible on both formal and thematic levels the ways in which displaced events and realities later return to consciousness and social life as real material effects or forces. (Cortez 48)

Thus, ecological trauma is embedded in the past, yet its traces are felt in the present.

> …[*Spirited Away*] figures ecological violence as outside of and anterior to narrative, a prior trauma we glimpse only imperfectly through its uncanny return as a set of textual effects—both momentary allusions to the "real world" and repeated scatological imagery. Both of these effects engage in a kind of literalization, a re-enactment of the global capital flows responsible not only for human and ecological displacement, but for the placement of Miyazaki's films within a transnational nexus of critical and popular renown. (Cortez 40)

Cortez calls attention to three characters (Haku, the Stink Spirit, and No Face) who

undergo harmful metamorphoses as a result of implied corruption in the human world,

leading them to reenact the alienating and consumptive processes which placed them in their

predicament. Haku's trauma is one of displacement: as the spirit of the Kohaku River, he

loses his identity when his home is filled-in for the construction of apartments. For Miyazaki,

one's connection to the natural landscape is the ideal source of identity ("Constitutional

Amendment", 3), without which individuals may find themselves alienated by modern life or

else seek to overcome alienation through collective identity of the kind that led to Japan's

fascist era. Having lost his name and home, Haku falls under the spell of Yubaba, becoming

her most ruthless agent and committing acts of violent theft in service of her greed. It is the

grace of Chihiro, Miyazaki's shōjo protagonist, who is able to save Haku by retrieving buried

memories of her own past trauma (nearly drowning in the Kohaku River as a toddler).

Cortez applies a similar interpretation to No Face and the Stink Spirit, *kami* who "In a visual language that is concrete to the point of scatology, … re-enact on a narrative level the flows of money and desire responsible for the originary act of ecological violence at the absent center of the film" (43). As a "displaced effect" postwar Japan's environmental transformation and "ecological trauma", they compulsively recreate conditions of pollution (the Stink Spirit) or excess consumption (No Face) that caused their initial displacement (44). Cortez focuses here on Spirited Away's response to ecological trauma, but this model of displacement and acting-out can be applied to Miyazaki's apocalyptic war narratives.

Troubling Parental Figures: the Perpetrator Fathers and Earth Mothers

For Miyazaki, the maternal archetype is closely intertwined with the natural environment and its life-giving qualities. As he says in *Starting Point*, "We Japanese have changed our environment so much that we must either change ourselves or … try to regenerate the trees that once functioned as our mother" (*Starting Point* 163).

Miyazaki's female villains and authority figures tend to play a more complex role than his males, able to integrate into the new social order rather than be sacrificed to bring it about. Amongst Miyazaki's older women, there is a tendency for their characters to reveal a hidden maternal instinct as the narrative progresses, allowing for reconciliation rather than defeat. *Conan*'s Monsley goes from cold-blooded killer to the children's protector, before donning a wedding dress for the series' finale as she casts aside her former identity as a soldier. Similarly, *Laputa*'s ruthless pirate captain Dola gradually drops her tough exterior as she takes Pazu and Sheeta under her wing, revealing a protective maternal instinct (indeed, her crew are comprised entirely of her children). *Mononoke*'s Lady Eboshi shares this dualism, industrialising the landscape with cold efficiency whilst providing shelter and

community for Japan's leppers and social outcasts. Despite Ashitaka's misgivings, he decides to help rebuild Irontown, evidently seeing Eboshi's potential to craft a more just social order than the unseen Emperor, despite her complicity in the *Shishigami*'s death. *Spirited Away*'s Zeniba, bent on slaughtering Haku in her initial appearance, acts as a doting "Granny" to Chihiro in her idyllic thatched cottage, while Yubaba's control and exploitation of her workers is contrast against an excessive coddling of her infant son. The Witch of the Waste, upon losing her powers midway through *Howl's Moving Castle*, transitions from spiteful antagonist to grandmotherly mentor figure to Sophie, and Madame Suliman agrees in the film's denouement to put an end to the war.

As Murakami notes, apocalyptic narratives like *Nausicaä* reflect a desire for empowerment in the face of societal collapse. This raises questions as to what kind of power is achieved, how it is used, and whether it leads the heroes to salvation or not. In Miyazaki's films, we see the enjoyment he takes in images of military vehicles and dramatic combat scenarios contrast against his pacifistic values and condemnation of violence. He calls explicit attention to this near the beginning of *Nausicaä*: the eponymous heroine, finding her father murdered by invading soldiers, flies into a frenzy and slays a man for the first time. Her rage is quelled by the entry of her mentor, the pacifistic warrior Lord Yupa, who uses his body to halt both Nausicaä's and her enemy's blades at once as he talks them through a diplomatic solution, sustaining injury as he holds them apart. Horrified at discovering her violent instincts, Nausicaä falls into a depression, finding solace only in the creative act of nurturing plantlife in her basement.

I would argue that this extends to an implicit critique of nationalist nostalgia: looking for empowerment by recreating the Japan of the past will not work. Miyazaki and Anno display several anxieties over modernity and postmodernity, and exhibit a desire for escape from these conditions. However, the themes of their narratives show that far from an

uncritical nostalgia, they are well aware of the problems of these counter-modern ideals: in particular, the impossibility of a return to a primordial Japan (*furusato*), with their continued references to Japanese fascism and the resultant trauma. Thus, they conclude with a frustrating and uncertain position, rather than one of overt political activism. Their focus has turned inward to the individual subject, and their message is simply to "live". There is a definite cynicism, but at the same time a tentative optimism that nihilism can be overcome, even if the future is uncertain and we can't put our faith in a single grand narrative: in short, to embrace the postmodern condition and live the endless everyday, thus overcoming the destructive spiral of Aum.

The key through-line in Miyazaki's and Anno's work from the Lost Decade is a critique of both utopian visions of the future and a return to the national unity of the past. The Japanese are unable to find salvation in a return to the nationalism and collective identity of the past except by redeeming historical memory; Miyazaki and Anno reveal that this only results in greater trauma, and fails to save their protagonists from their troubles. In the end, they are forced to abandon grand narratives and find meaning in their absence; as the postmodernist philosopher Shinji Miyadai put it, they must "live the endless everyday" and overcome the alienation that led to Aum Shinrikyō. This ethos reaches its apex in Miyazaki's most recent film, *The Wind Rises*. At the end, Jiro is given no easy answer to his question (was it right to design the planes that became tools of war?). Instead, he is simply told to "live". Thus, the politically vocal Miyazaki opts for a seemingly individualistic message: that we must carry on as best we can in the absence of revolutionary potential, and hope that our contribution will be used to create value rather than destroy it.

The Economic Miracle: 1978-1989

Miyazaki's Early Apocalyptic Narratives

In 1978, Miyazaki made his directorial debut with the 26-episode post-apocalyptic television series *Future Boy Conan*, shortly followed by two further entries in the genre: *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (a manga beginning 1982 and a film in 1984), and *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986). Despite their unique settings, these three tales follow a similar formula: untold years ago, an advanced civilisation unleashed superweapons of immense destructive power, which invoke the image of an atomic mushroom cloud or the firebombing of Japanese cities. The resulting apocalypse eradicated much of humanity's technological advancement, leading to a more primitive age. As the story begins, our young heroes are faced with a revival of the legendary superweapons, driven by the same hubris and militarism that caused the original disaster; with a new apocalypse on the horizon, these children must come of age in order to save humanity from its own worst instincts. Their virtue, determination, and affinity for nature allow them to overcome the corruption and alienation of the adults' established power structures, ushering in a new social order in which harmony with nature and communitarianism replace aggression and the insatiable drive for resources.

At the heart of these films is the affirmation of grand narratives. Miyazaki's revolutionary ideals are on full display, with traditional heroes crafted to inspire political and environmental progress. Miyazaki makes clear his intentions in a 1983 interview on *Conan*, contrasting his adaptation against the pessimism of Alexander Key's *The Incredible Tide* (1970):

> It seems to me that Key wrote the story believing that modern America's basically no good, and that the Soviet Union isn't either, but he doesn't really know what to do… there's not a shred of hope there, or even much vitality in the characters. Key puts all of his energy into the negative aspects, and in one sense it's easy to write about the negatives. In real life, humans are filled with weaknesses and cowardice after all. But that's not what I want to depict. (*Starting Point*, 289)

While Miyazaki confesses nihilistic feelings of his own, he abhors the idea of

promoting such a vision to children, instead creating worlds which inspire hope for the future. This comes through especially in his heroes: he designed Conan "to embody the vitality, resolute spirit, and understanding of others that his world needs", which in turn transforms those around him (including the villains Monsley and Dyce) into better people (295). By the end of Conan, the "characters are all rejuvenated", becoming more "innocent", "childlike", and "youthful", which opens "the door to a possible future" (304). The same can be said of Miyazaki's later heroes, who have an ennobling and pacifying effect on all but the most hard-hearted adversaries. Miyazaki's child protagonists exhibit few character flaws of their own, instead serving as an idealistic counterpoint to the corruption exhibited by the adults of their world. Conflicts are largely extrinsic, a force for the hero to fight against, and we rarely witness the protagonists' inner turmoil; such internal struggles fall largely upon the adults (a trend that shifts markedly from the 90s onward). In this light, Miyazaki frames *Conan*, and animation as a whole, as a source of cathartic escapism:

> [Animations] allow us to escape from ourselves . . . We live trapped in ourselves, imprisoned in the real world. But if we can free ourselves from the various complexes we have and the tangled relationships we are in to live in a freer, more open world, we might be able to become strong and heroic. (*Starting Point*, 306)

Miyazaki implicitly frames animation as a tool for working-through trauma by freeing ourselves from the psychological complexes that restrict our everyday thinking. His aim is not to detachment from the world, but to inspire new ways of seeing and experiencing it:

> It's true that they're a form of escapism. Cartoons are a fake world. Because cartoons are fake, they disarm viewers, making them think that they're "just cartoons." Liberated from reality and relaxed, viewers find themselves pulled into scenes showing the protagonists and a cartoon world and then may find that the experience evokes secret hopes and longings in themselves. They may start feeling braver and more heroic, more generous in spirit. And then they may also find that they feel a little more energized, or that their lover's face looks even prettier than it did before. (*Starting Point*, 307)

What sets Miyazaki's brand of escapism apart from the otaku works he later criticises is

a strong verisimilitude, connecting the fantasy to the viewer's lived reality. The imaginary world "should seem to actually exist as an alternate world, and the people who live there should appear to think and act in a realistic way" (307). In short, Miyazaki creates his animations as didactic exercises that immerse the audience in a "thoroughly believable fake world" to inspire positive action in the real world by appealing to a grand narrative. My analysis will attempt to extrapolate the grand narratives and moral lessons constructed in Miyazaki's early works, before discussing his ideological shift during the Lost Decade.

Of the three early apocalyptic films, I look primarily at *Future Boy Conan*: partly because of its relative lack of scholarly coverage, but mainly on account of its prominent perpetrator themes (which are less evident in *Nausicaä* and *Laputa*). With 26 episodes at his disposal, Miyazaki has ample time to develop his supporting cast, allowing him fully explore the traumatic motivations of ambivalent mentor figure Dr. Lao and villain-turned-hero Monsley, who each blur the lines between perpetrator and victim. The contrast between these flawed adults and the young heroes, Conan and Lana, establishes the thematic basis upon which Miyazaki's subsequent works continue to draw.

Future Boy Conan: Trauma, Nature, and Industry

Each episode of *Conan* opens with a two-part sequence comprising a prologue and OP (theme song),[1] each 80 seconds long, which establish the series' post-apocalyptic setting alongside Miyazaki's trademark themes of war, technology, and environmental destruction. The prologue opens on a futuristic metropolis, where a fleet of giant moth warplanes fly overhead. The camera pans down to a street where terrified crowds scurry for cover, before a blinding flash of light signifies their obliteration. An establishing shot then shows the Earth's surface as three titanic explosions engulf the horizon, again washing out all colour with stark white light (all images alluding to atomic detonation). A narration begins: in the year 2008, mankind brought itself to the brink of annihilation with "super electro-magnetic weapons, far

more destructive than atomic weapons," which tilted the Earth's axis and fractured the continents, leaving only small islands above sea level. The camera pans across landscapes of blazing, half-destroyed buildings, which echo photographs of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the firebombed cities of WWII (perhaps drawing directly on Miyazaki's childhood experience of the latter).

A group of survivors (later revealed as Conan's forebears) board a spaceship in a desperate effort to flee the cataclysm, but the vessel is struck by flaming rocks before escaping orbit and falls back to Earth: even with advanced technology, Miyazaki's humans cannot leave their natural habitat. The prologue ends with a pan across a bleak, overcast seascape, though in the final moments, shafts of golden light begin to break through the clouds. The accompanying score, which for most of the sequence has a grim, heavy tone, turns suddenly lighter, signifying that despite the devastation we just witnessed, there is hope for recovery.

That hope is realised as a fade to black ushers in the OP[2], where dark skies and infernal wastelands give way to pristine oceans and lush greenery, accompanied by an upbeat duet.

The burning skyscrapers of the prologue are now topped with greenery, emerging from the ocean against a painterly blue sky; nature has claimed the ruins as her own, with fish and bird populations making new homes inside.

A small yacht appears, sailed by protagonists Conan and Lana. No goal or context is provided for their excursion, so we can assume their motivation is the fun of exploration for its own sake. The boat ride is an experience divorced from instrumental aims like resource extraction or military conquest, a trait common to Miyazaki's heroes, who invariably find joy in flying, sailing, driving, cycling, and other small-scale modes of transport; this contrast with his villains, whose giant vessels function more like mobile fortresses in which the occupants are disconnected from the intimate movements of the craft. Critically, where Conan's forebears attempt to escape the Earth, enclosed in their metal spacecraft and protective suits, Conan and Lana glide through sea and sky in an open-air vessel; indeed, for Conan, the boat is more an extension of his body than a distinct entity (a trait shared by Nausicaä and her glider). This is reinforced by an undersea low-angle shot in which the children's boat moves parallel to the fish, implying that they live in harmony with wildlife rather than seeing themselves as separate from it. Miyazaki presents a world in which machine-dependent adults

have given way to children completely in tune with the natural environment, reliant only on primitive wooden contraptions to survive.

The sequence returns to land as the children run across the verdant hills of Remnant Island in a manner reminiscent of Takahata's *Heidi*, on which Miyazaki worked four years prior. This shot demonstrates Lamarre's concept of animetism: by sliding the background layers up or down, Miyazaki creates the illusion of moving through an expansive natural landscape while avoiding the objective, enframing gaze of Cartesian perspective. The children glide through the environment, which unfolds as a place of wonder rather than a resource to be seized.

The background landscape slides upwards, and the two hills in the midground slide downwards, to create the illusion of movement.

In the final shot, Conan and Lana climb atop a metallic structure recognisable as the spaceship from the prologue, which, having been embedded in the ground, is now overgrown with moss. Conan points at something offscreen and the children gaze into the distance, the shuttle granting them new ways of seeing.

The opening sequence provides an early example of one of Miyazaki's favourite motifs: nature reclaiming terrain once destroyed by war and industry. High-tech urban society is

destroyed in a superweapon-induced cataclysm sparked by mankind's hubris, but nature soon returns, laying the foundations for a simpler world in which alienation is overcome and people live communally without conflict.

This ties into Miyazaki's spiritual motifs, which become more pronounced in later works. The prominent religious themes of Key's novel (which makes frequent mention of a non-denominational "God") are replaced entirely with Miyazaki's trademark Shinto-inspired animism: where the novels' characters place hopes of salvation in God, the anime's cast must put their faith in Mother Earth, recognising their place as symbiotic organisms within a greater whole rather than conquerers. On his deathbed, Conan's Grandfather recounts his failed attempt to escape into space: the shuttle crashed on a then-barren Remnant Island, leaving the crew with no hope of survival, but they discover that the ship's nozzle has penetrated into a freshwater reservoir deep underground. As the old man puts it, "When we tried to abandon the Earth, our ship would not let us. Then, carrying us to this island and becoming a pool, it was declaring to us: 'You will live! You will survive!'" As Napier notes, "live" is something of a catchphrase of Miyazaki's (*Miyazakiworld*, 173), of which this may be the first occurrence. The crew then find grass beginning to sprout, and realise that life is returning to the Earth, giving the survivors faith that they can rebuild humanity in the reborn world. Nihilism is overcome. As the series progresses, there is a sense that nature watches over humanity, guiding it with a protective hand. The people of High Harbour are saved from conquest as a tsunami strikes the island in their hour of need; their homes are saved, but Industria's soldiers (who had ignored nature's warning signs) are caught unawares and defeated. In the series' final scene, the Conan returns to Remnant Island with a view to building a new colony, only to find it far larger than before; the Earth rewards the heroes who saved it from apocalypse by revealing new foundations for life.

In sum, *Conan* is a classic example of the postnuclear sublime: the traumatic wartime

destruction of Miyazaki's childhood is overcome through the combined power of nature and a more enlightened generation, such that the apocalypse is not the end of the world, but its rebirth. The heroes' virtue is rewarded in the end as nature "recovers and forgives humans", returning to the once barren landscape and providing the foundation for the next generation (*Starting Point* 290). Miyazaki admits that he "incorporated [his] own hopes in [*Conan*]", and the series' narrative progression evidently reflects his vision of a future in which humanity has overcome its fatal flaws.

The Return of the Repressed: *Conan's* Trauma Narratives and the Perpetrator Fathers

Miyazaki's idealistic narrative is complicated by its themes of guilt and trauma. A series of trauma narratives lie at the heart of *Conan*, evoking Napier's concept of the intimate apocalypse: alongside social and environmental destruction, the series is home to small personal narratives of loss. Of Conan's forebears, only his Grandfather survives, the others having died throughout Conan's childhood; the reason goes unspecified, but we can infer, in a subtle paralle to the *hibakusha,* pollution and radiation as likely causes. Conan's Grandfather is killed in an altercation with Monsley, and before Conan departs his homeland, Miyazaki devotes a lengthly sequence to his grieving process: he painstakingly gathers rocks and flowers for a new addition to the long line of mossy grave markers, which signify the boy's gradual loss of adult oversight as he inherits the mantle of responsibility. Likewise, Lana's solemn outlook may be driven by the death of her mother, memory of whom is signified by the jewelled pendant Lana carries. *Conan* can be read as a working-through of Miyazaki's own traumatic memories, as Napier argues in discussing the scene wherein Captain Dyce, an Industrian officer, has been shacked in the desert as punishment for betraying Lepka (*Miyazakiworld*, 54). When the heroes discover him, Dr. Lao points out that their vehicle has no room for the extra passenger, yet the children insist on saving him regardless, tying a

board to their flying machine to tow Dyce along the ground. She cites Mitsunari Ōizumi's interpretation that the scene draws on Miyazaki's inability to take stragglers aboard his family vehicle while escaping a 1945 air raid as a child, entrusting to his characters what he could not accomplish himself.

But beyond Miyazaki's personal experience of the war, there is the matter of Japan's political history, and the role of perpetrator trauma cannot be understated here. *Future Boy Conan* plays out as a conflict between two factions that have emerged post-apocalypse: the pastoral communist utopia of High Harbour, and the high-tech totalitarian regime of Industria. In Key's novel, Industria is what remains of the "Peace Union" (a stand-in for the Soviet Union), leading to a reading of High Harbour as representing America, but Miyazaki rebuffs interpretations of the anime's feuding states as allegories for the Cold War superpowers, which he sees as reflecting a problematic mindset (*Starting Point*, 291). Indeed, he sought to displace the setting entirely: his original desire was to make *Conan*'s cast entirely Japanese, with High Harbour's residents working rice paddies rather than grain fields, and Industria as a vestige of mainland Japan (290). This did not come to pass, leaving Miyazaki "a little frustrated by the fact that the world of *Conan* turned out looking a bit like the American West" (291), but his remarks provide critical insight into his intentions: while Miyazaki ultimately retains the surface layer of Key's setting, the subtext draws on the director's conflicted vision of his home country. High Harbour is the romanticised, pastoral Japan (*furusato*) described in Miyazaki's *Constitutional Amendment* essay, while Industria represents both Western-style industrialisation (*kokusaika*) and the post-Meiji totalitarianism of Imperial Japan. Exactly why the Japanese setting was dropped is open to speculation, but it may be that Miyazaki (or other members of the production) felt that Industria would too easily draw parallels to Japan's fallen fascist regime, leading the repression of what would have been politically-charged images.

Whatever the reason, these themes are displaced onto Western-inspired settings. High Harbour's painterly villages evoke rural Italy and the South of France, while Industria's regime draws parallels to the Nazis: its underclass are branded with a star-shaped icon, forced to wear prison uniforms, and live in cramped underground quarters, likely a conscious allusion to concentration camp inmates. As previously noted, Môri points out this trend in anime like *Space Battle Ship Yamato*, and it appears in full force in Anno's *Nadia*, which draws heavily on *Conan* and *Laputa*. Even so, there are hints at Pacific War memory: Industria's might stems from its naval fleet and fighter planes, both hallmarks of the Imperial Japanese military, which allow the regime to invade neighbouring islands. The climactic battle even sees Monsley crash-land her hydroplane into Lepka's giant warplane, and Miyazaki cannot have missed the resemblance to a *kamikaze* attack. But more significant are themes of guilt surrounding the series' father figures, complicating the simple heroic narrative of the younger heroes.

Just as High Harbour and Industria represent a dissociation between Miyazaki's ideal Japan and the history of militarism he condemns, the two factions are attended by male authority figures bearing different degrees of responsibility for humanity's crises. Lana's grandfather, Doctor Briac Lao, is the chief representative of High Harbour, while Industria is presided over by two father figures: the Council of scientists and the dictator Lepka. Each of these men falls into the dissociative paternal archetypes described by LaCapra, Elsaesser, and Hashimoto. Doctor Lao represents the good father who desires an ethical life, but whose talents (expertise in solar energy) are co-opted by a regime in which they want no part. Lao is plagued by guilt over the use of his science in weapons of mass destruction, and devotes his life to undoing the mistakes of the past. The Council of Industria represent the neutral father who serves the regime out of circumstance but does not support. The scientists are shown to be reasonable, even fatherly, authority figures, but they lack the backbone to overrule Lepka's

political abuses, just as they failed to prevent the role of their science in the superweapons that caused global cataclysm. They remain confined primarily to maintaining Industria's infrastructure and factory production, perhaps turning a blind eye (like Miyazaki's father) to the failings of the regime they serve. They may not approve of its atrocities, but remain complicit through participation. Lepka, as Industria's military commander, represents the evil father who orchestrates the regime and its crimes, believing whole-heartedly in an ideology of political repression and military expansion. Later in the series, when Doctor Lao tries to negotiate peace with the scientists, Lepka stages a coup and takes total control, possibly alluding to the militarist subversion Taisho-era democracy.

In the end, Lao is victorious, as Industria collapses and its people find refuge in the communist paradise of High Harbour. However, Miyazaki does not allow Lao the clean heroic image of Conan and Lana, blurring the lines between the good and complicit father archetypes. As he states in his 1983 interview:

> I incorporated my own hopes in the work. It may seem odd to say this, but those lines in the animated story—where Dr. Lao talks about taking responsibility for having killed billions of humans and exterminated tens of thousands of animal and plant species—are personally meaningful to me. (*Starting Point*, 290)

This personal connection likely stems from Miyazaki's early feelings of collective responsibility for the Pacific War, and his indignation at his father's detachment from the consequences of supplying the Imperial Japanese airforce, which the latter viewed purely as private business. We might read Lao as an idealised Katsuji, one who shares his son's early feelings of collective responsibility for the war and youthful Marxian idealism:

> Whether we're talking about Mao Zedong or others, it's always the bad guys who try to change history dramatically, so in that sense I think Dr. Lao is essentially an evil character. He felt responsible for the destruction of the previous world, and has been living down his shame by trying to act as a bridge for the next generation. (*Starting Point*, 298)

Speaking in 1983, Miyazaki already shows signs of the cynicism towards revolutionary politics that would overcome his radical leanings in the early-1990s, as well as the recognition expressed in "Constitutional Amendment" that passionate ideals can easily be turned to destructive ends without our realisation. At the same time, Lao appears to manifest as a working-through of Miyazaki's feelings on family and national history; as Cortez notes, recursive history "gives us a way of responding ethically to experiences of historical violence that we may not have caused, but which we nonetheless inherit affectively and politically" (45-46). In *Conan*, apocalyptic history threatens to repeat itself, but through Lao's efforts, historical trauma is overcome.

The series ends with the deaths of its perpetrator fathers, whose scientific knowledge is forever lost. As Industria's people flee their disintegrating homeland, they discover that the scientists have left the escape boat in secret, standing atop Triangle Tower as it sinks into the ocean. Their suicide signifies not only the willing forfeiture of science, but, in a Japanese context, repentance for failing in one's duties. As Lao lies on his deathbed, he tells the children that he has finally found peace, saying, "Now a new era will begin. Please work together and create a wonderful world." Thus, Miyazaki assures us of a clean break from the past; the original sin that engendered the apocalypse is redeemed through the messianic sacrifice of the perpetrator fathers, allowing the younger generations to built a prosperous new world untainted by history. Miyazaki describes a kind of Freudian transference of Lana's attachment from Lao to Conan (*Starting Point*, 298): Lana, like many of the directors' idealised *shōjo*, serves as the series' moral centre, and the shifting of her affections symbolises the passing of paternal authority from old to young.

Becoming the Perpetrator: Monsley and Intergenerational Trauma

The younger characters do not escape entirely untouched by perpetrator themes, however, as seen in the characterisation of Monsley, Industria's ace fighter pilot, who

narrowly survived the apocalypse before going on to serve those who caused it. Monsley loosely fills the role of Doctor Mansky, the Industrian officer who first discovers Conan's island in Key's novel; but while Mansky is a middle-aged Soviet veteran, Miyazaki presents Monsley as a young adult. This change moves Monsley closer in age to Conan and Lana, inviting us to draw parallels between them. Monsley is a failed Miyazaki heroine, one who was unable to maintain her virtuous qualities and instead served the regime responsible for her traumatic past. She straddles the line between child and adult, initially representing Industria's military might to Conan and Lana before the spotlight falls upon her own coming-of-age journey. From the outset, her hardened exterior gives the impression of a far older woman, her youthful age only confirmed later on. Upon learning her backstory, it becomes clear that she has deliberately distanced herself from the disempowered state of childhood, adopting the mechanical, matter-of-fact persona shared by Industria's military leadership. Indeed, Industria appears entirely devoid of children outside its lowest social strata. Monsley's character arc centres on a return to the repressed memories of childhood disempowerment, which coincide with her loss of military power and recognition of High Harbour as a superior social order.

Monsley first appears as she arrives on Remnant Island in pursuit of Lana, where she confronts Conan's Grandfather. The old man berates her for waving weapons around, saying, "Did you learn nothing from the great disaster? That way of thinking destroyed the world! Don't you see that?" But Monsley counters angrily: "You were the adults then; you started the war! We were still children. We children went through many painful experiences in order to survive!" She accuses him of being one of the "irresponsible adults" who triggered the war, saying that he has no right to "talk big" and should do as she commands. This scene establishes *Conan*'s themes of intergenerational conflict, framing Monsley as a righteous anti-hero who seeks to prevent a recurrence of the apocalyptic trauma. However, she lacks

Conan's noble spirit or Lana's pacifism, instead embracing totalitarian militarism. Her altercation with Conan's Grandfather mortally wounds him, leaving the young boy traumatised: a victim herself, she has become a perpetrator who inflicts further abuse on others. Later on, when she has Conan captive, she even plans to train him as her apprentice (as she was evidently trained by Industria), reinforcing a vicious cycle.

Monsley remains a ruthless warrior throughout most of the series, but Miyazaki begins to explore her motives in the 19th episode, when she has captured High Harbour with a team of soldiers. During a lull in the conflict, Monsley finds herself alone in a cottage, free from the gaze of her military subordinates. In the ensuing silence, she finds herself drawn outside to the garden, where she slowly relaxes her stiff martial posture and removes her uniform's hood, lying back on a bench with her eyes closed. While her character thus far has been defined by action, she finds herself alone with her thoughts as she basks in the sunshine and greenery — an instance of Miyazaki's signature *ma*, where plot and dialogue give way to moments of peaceful contemplation (often set against painterly backdrops). Surrounded by nature, her toughened facade begins to fall, as Miyazaki prepares to disclose her underlying vulnerabilities.

A dog walks by and Monsley excitedly beckons it over, calling "Muku, Muku!", but the creature walks away, signifying her alienation from the natural world (even as she longs to reconnect with it). The camera lingers on her crestfallen, wide-eyed expression—quite unlike her usual exterior—as the episode transitions to a flashback, where a younger Monsley (around Conan's and Lana's age) frolics in grassy fields with her dog, Muku. Her parents call out to her from the distance, where we see a brick country house not unlike those of High Harbour. In her early years, it seems, she was much like Lana, in touch with animals and the pastoral landscape.

Their games are interrupted by the roar of engines, as a fleet of giant moth warplanes flies overhead. A hard cut-to-black (and dead silence) indicates an inability to recall the full details of the incident. Monsley awakes alongside Muku, parents gone, in a fiery wasteland of broken buildings and blackened skies, stripped of all plantlife, which likely draws on Miyazaki's childhood memories of his burning hometown. A great wall of water emerges on the horizon as Monsley looks on in terror, before the tsunami engulfs her. She awakes for a second time adrift at sea, clinging to a wooden door, but this time alone. Rescue arrives in the form of the gunboat, where the chief scientist embraces her like a father and invites her to safety in Industria. Monsley weeps for the loss of Muku, and the flashback ends.

Monsley's conquest of High Harbour stems from a desire to reclaim her lost childhood; however, in doing so, she comes to act-out her inciting trauma. Her experience in High Harbour and encounter with Conan brings these repressed memories to the surface, beginning a process of working-through. The return of the repressed arrives in the form of a tsunami, the sight of which causes her soldiers to break ranks and flee, freeing the people of High Harbour. Monsley's military strength is no match for nature's wrath, which disempowers her utterly: she goes into shock as the wave looms over the horizon, incapable of moving as she relives her childhood trauma. Saved by Conan and company, she grudgingly admits defeat, and in an act of what can only be described as symbolic castration, the local women force her out of her soldier's uniform and into a feminine outfit not unlike that which she wore as a

child (with a colour scheme matching that of Takahata's Heidi). This costume change marks the start of her recovery from military indoctrination and emotional repression; over the following episodes, she forms intimate bonds with Conan and the other heroes, willingly aiding their overthrow of Industria's dictatorship. While still capable of adopting the role of soldier for the series' climax, she concludes her journey with a wedding, casting aside her military persona altogether and setting sail for a new life on Remnant Island.

Monsley is a product of her environment, a reflection of what Miyazaki admits he might well have been had he been old enough to join Imperial Japan in battle, devotedly serving the regime as it brings the world to the brink of destruction. Indeed, as an ace fighter pilot, Monsley invites association with the *kamikaze*. The director notes a personal connection with the character:

> I tend to pour myself into the characters. And when I do so, I start to empathize with the characters, to feel sorry for them. Monsley's such a sad case that she nearly brought tears to my eyes. (*Starting Point* 299)

Thus, where Conan and Lana reflect Miyazaki's ideals, Monsley reflects the realities of young people forced to live through the Pacific War and its aftermath. Nevertheless, her portrayal is ultimately optimistic: while the series' aged father figures must die to overcome their perpetrator guilt, the young adult Monsley is able to safely transition into a mother figure, taking her place within the new social order. Within Miyazaki's early perpetrator narratives, there remains hope for future progress driven by the younger generations, despite the traumatic events of the war.

The Grand Narrative Preserved

Miyazaki's early apocalyptic narratives uphold grand narratives of progress as his heroes boldly overcome apocalyptic trauma and usher in a freer, more enlightened age where humanity lives in harmony with nature and foregoes militarism. The stories follow a

traditional Hero's Journey structure: the protagonists venture from their homes into the unknown, face conflicts, obtain new knowledge, undergo symbolic (or literal) rebirth, and returns to their pastoral home, ready to enrich the community with their newfound understanding. The return home is a key motif, upholding the nature-rich *furusato* as ideal living space: *Conan* ends with a return to Remnant Island where a new human settlement will be built; the *Nausicaä* film ends with its heroine returning to the Valley of the Wind just in time for her messianic sacrifice, following which the invaders leave and peace is restored; and *Laputa* concludes with its young heroes flying off the pastoral land from which Sheeta was captured. As Tanaka writes, the *Nausicaä* film is a traditional dialectic between humans and the Other of nature; through the hero's messianic sacrifice, a peaceful symbiosis is achieved in the post-apocalyptic world, with the promise of a brighter future in which the conflicts that caused the planet's degradation will not be repeated (92). *Conan* also reads as messianic— though it is Doctor Lao and Industria's scientists, not the protagonists, that are sacrificed—and similarly ends with a newfound harmony between humanity and nature, assuring viewers of a bright future for the survivors.

With that said, Miyazaki gradually tones down the revolutionary themes with each successive work, likely reflecting his diminishing faith in Marxist ideals. *Future Boy Conan* functions as a classic revolutionary narrative: with Conan's aid, Industria's oppressed underclass overthrow the regime and establish a non-hierarchical social order. Industria sinks beneath the sea, its council of scientists willingly perishing atop Triangle Tower, leaving the survivors to unite as citizens of High Harbour's pastoral communist society. Orlo, once the leader of property-holding bandits, appears to have reintegrated into the community, and as an apparent reward for their heroic efforts, Mother Nature has raised Remnant Island further out of the sea, providing fertile ground for a new human settlement.

Nausicaä's climactic battle concludes with the God Warrior disintegrating due to its

premature awakening, and the Tolmekian forces prove no match for nature's fury as the Ohm stampede. With Nausicaä's messianic death and resurrection at the hands of the giant insects (restored to calm upon witnessing her sacrifice), pacifism is upheld as the only viable path for humanity's survival. Her superweapon destroyed and the forces of nature victorious, Kusharna withdraws the Tolmekian Imperial forces from the Valley of the Wind, leaving Nausicaä's people to continue in their traditional ways as an autonomous agrarian collective, where (much like High Harbour) no signs of commerce are found. But unlike *Conan*, the oppressive regime is not overthrown in its entirety: the Tolmekian Empire remains, and we are left to speculate on the fate of its people.

Laputa is less revolutionary still, with its climactic events limited in scope to the castle of Laputa itself. Muska is defeated, as are the General and his troops, but there is no indication of broader social change resulting from the adventure. Military corruption presumably remains intact, and the miners of Pazu's hometown will likely continue facing economic struggles. Nonetheless, the thwarting of Muska's plans averts a disastrous path for humanity: Laputa's superweapons are destroyed, and the volucite crystal remains out of reach until a more advanced (and hopefully more enlightened) age. The world is liberated from one potential evil, but its other problems persist.

This trend accelerates in the Lost Decade, where Miyazaki's films undergo a pronounced ideological shift. While he maintains themes of overcoming apocalyptic repetition through his empowered heroes, and of finding salvation through escaping technological enclosure to reconnect with nature, revolutionary ideals fall away. His protagonists cannot save the world as they did before, and must instead save themselves through psychological introspection. They are forced to make peace with corrupt social orders rather than overthrow them, opting for pragmatism over idealism. Thus, Miyazaki's grand narratives of progress are not maintained, conveying a sense of nihilistic outlook for

humanity's future.

The Lost Decade: Miyazaki's Nihilism and the Decline of Grand Narratives

With the onset of the 1990s, Miyazaki's filmmaking changes markedly in tone and ideological construction: clear moral choices are absent, trauma is not completely mastered, and themes of guilt and perpetrator trauma take centre stage. In Miyazaki's early works, protagonists are faced primarily with extrinsic conflicts: despotic regimes and apocalyptic machines, defeated through a combination of virtue and physical prowess. Perpetrator roles are reserved for adult supporting characters (particularly father figures), while pure-hearted child protagonists provide an antidote. As these young heroes inherit the mantle of leadership and prevent the onset of a second apocalypse, historical trauma is mastered, while the legacy of guilt passes away with the older generations. *Porco Rosso* marks a dramatic departure from this formula: while external conflicts exist in the form of airborne foes and the looming threat of Mussolini's Italy, it is Marco's inner turmoil that drives the narrative. The personal supersedes the political, as Marco must be saved from his psychological conflicts and troubled relationships before he can bring himself to save the world. The intimate apocalypse supersedes the apocalypse proper. This direction continues in Miyazaki's subsequent works: the end of the *Nausicaä* manga, the music video "On Your Mark", *Princess Mononoke*, and *Howl's Moving Castle* are all marked by an ambivalence that precludes heroic resolve. Miyazaki's protagonists are no longer capable of political idealism, as revolutionary ideals are tempered by doubts and ambiguities, with characters unsure which side (if any) to support. They must accept their personal weaknesses, including the innate human capacity for destruction and their susceptibility to personal and collective guilt. Identities are fragmented, and the return home to an idealised *furusato* no longer possible. In short,

Miyazaki moves away from grand narratives of progress, instead emphasising small narratives of personal resilience within a hostile and uncertain world.

Several factors can be attributed to Miyazaki's ideological transformation, including Japan's declining economic and social fabric, as well as the growing international discourse around Japan's Imperial past, which may have spurred Miyazaki's renewed attention to perpetrator themes. But perhaps the biggest influence was the director's ultimate abandonment of Marxist ideals in light of the Yugoslav civil war and the Soviet collapse, which occurred during production of *Porco Rosso* and serialisation of the *Nausicaä* manga's final stages. Napier notes that Yugoslavia had been "something of a poster child for seemingly enlightened and independent socialism during the Cold War", and that Miyazaki's "admiration for the European ideal" only made the brutal civil war more disconcerting (*Miyazakiworld*, 146-147). She reads *Porco Rosso* as a response to the crisis, reflecting "Miyazaki's flickering optimism about the state of the world in general and the possibility of hope for the future" (147). After the film's release, Miyazaki explained in an interview that his generation of Japanese had grown up with visions of progress in the postwar: "We felt that the world was getting better, bit by bit. Our history was that things would get better. So when the Yugoslavian ethnic wars happened we were dumbfounded. What was going on? Were we just going backward?" (cited by Napier, *Miyazakiworld*, 147). The Yugoslav conflict taught Miyazaki that his historical understanding was "completely naïve" (*Starting Point*, 399), and, unable to deal with the doubts that had accumulated as he worked on *Nausicaä*, Miyazaki finally relinquished his revolutionary leanings:

> …I clearly abandoned Marxism. You might say I had to abandon it, but it wasn't easy to decide that Marxism was a mistake, that Marxist materialism was all wrong, that I had to look at the world in a different way. (*Starting Point*, 400)

The Lost Decade marks for Miyazaki a declining faith in grand narratives. He "sensed

that we had reached the turning point of an era" during *Porco Rosso*'s production, and that

making the film led him to a realisation: that "no matter how messy things get, we have no

choice but to go on living" (*Starting Point*, 386-387). He reflects critically upon his early

apocalyptic sublimation, admitting that he had hoped that the end of the world would leave

him feeling "cleansed", but that a large scale disaster would in reality result in greater

suffering rather than a social rebirth:

> At the beginning of 1990s [sic], just when the Porco Rosso project got going, the Soviet Union collapsed, there was an escalation in ethnic conflict, we witnessed the start of people again starting to do all sorts of stupid things, and saw Japan's economic bubble burst all around us. I came to realize that the End Times were not going to be as neat an affair as I had once imagined. (*Starting Point*, 387)

It comes as no surprise that Miyazaki's protagonists are now challenged as much by

their own innate shortcomings as those of the villains, and apocalypse no longer appears as a

desirable paradigm shift that "cleanses" humanity of its past mistakes. This is not to say that

Miyazaki has given up on ideals entirely. Rather, he foregoes grand unified visions of

progress through large-scale political change, instead emphasising the need for solidarity

amongst small communities. He claims in a 1996 interview that "there has never been a

fundamental solution" to global environmental crisis; instead of "Worrying about the fate of

the world", we should approach ecological issues by dealing with nature courteously "in

specific ways", such as by cleaning up a local river (*Turning Point*, 171). The director

describes his position using Yoshie Hotta's term "transparent nihilism", explaining that:

> If we can live like that and be moved and be kind, rather than giving up in desperation, wouldn't that be the best? I'm one who insists that I'll drive an automobile to the end even if I have to pay a carbon emission tax. Yet I intend to live out my life by leaving this tree uncut, or donating some money to the Totoro Fund", or limiting parking spaces in order to increase the number of trees when I designed this studio. (*Turning Point*, 171)

Miyazaki is clearly conflicted on this point, as he states in 1992 that we should avoid

falling for "some cheap nihilism or living for the moment", and that we should be willing to take some risk to preserve the environment, though he adds that people should not not spend too much time or money on it. The key takeaway is Miyazaki's growing resistance to overtly ideological movements. In a 1994 interview, he mentions his support for the Totoro Forest Project, explaining that he supports the movement and its use of his character as mascot not because they are "right", but because they are "good people" with a long-standing love of their local environment (*Starting Point* 402). He now tries to interact with people, "not on the basis of whether they are correct or not, but whether they are good people or not", stating that he has no interest in helping "ecology fascists"; evidently, he is keen to differentiate his personal brand of environmentalism from radical political ideology. Miyazaki's words echo Miyadai's call to "live the endless everyday" and Fukuyama's notion of the End of History: citizens of the post-Soviet world must be content with incremental progress and personal development in place of foundational social transformation. By investing in meaningful relationships, local communities, and small-scale ecological restoration, Miyazaki sees a pathway to escape the animalisation predicted by Azuma and the social withdrawal reported by Saitō, despite the absence of a unifying cultural or national ideology.

The practicality of this ethos remains open to debate in the context of global climate crisis, and it must be noted that Miyazaki has remained politically engaged even into his old age, publishing open critiques of the government and supporting the campaign against US military base construction in Okinawa. Nevertheless, this ethos of "transparent nihilism" manifests across his films from the 1990s onwards, where personal relationships and small acts of kindness take precedence over political change. Indeed, Miyazaki's example of cleaning a local river, which he once undertook with his neighbours, manifests in *Spirited Away* as Chihiro and company cleanse the Stink Spirit; Yubaba's exploitative social order is not overthrown in the end, yet there is a sense that Chihiro's small acts of courage have left

the world a better place. Indeed, aside from the *Nausicaä* manga's conclusion, none of Miyazaki's post-bubble works end with the overthrow of a regime; as in *Spirited Away*, progress lies at the level of personal relationships, not political upheaval. In this way, Miyazaki's films partially maintain the hopeful outlook and uplifting tone of his earlier works, as his characters ultimately succeed in changing themselves, and those around them, for the better. Humanity may be unable to resolve its contradictions, but it can learn to live in spite of them.

The key point of interest is the way in which Miyazaki's trauma narratives change to reflect the new paradigm, particularly the more complex depictions of guilt and perpetrator trauma that result. Where early heroes fought against externalised manifestations of fascism wielding atomic superweapons, Miyazaki's Lost Decade heroes—particularly older male figures—must also contend with their own destructive potential, reflecting the experience of those complicit in the Japanese Empire despite their better intentions. As Cortez describes in her analysis of *Spirited Away*, traumatic memory is internalised and acted-out rather than mastered or worked-through, resulting in a vicious cycle of traumatic repetition (48). The result is fragmentary identities and dissociative thought patterns, which frequently manifest as a physical metamorphosis. As Napier notes, curses add a "darker undercurrent" to Miyazaki's later films (*Miyazakiworld*, 220), and many of Miyazaki's male characters bear curses, a trait associated with their position as outcasts (182). Marco (*Porco Rosso*), the policemen from *On Your Mark*, Ashitaka (*Princess Mononoke*), Haku (*Spirited Away*), the wizard Howl, Fujimoto (*Ponyo*), and Jiro Hirokoshi all find themselves cursed, literally or figuratively, as their heroic ambitions are tainted by destructive impulses or risk being utilised as a tool by corrupt power structures. The central narrative question is not whether they will overthrow a despotic regime, but whether they can reconcile their inner contradictions and establish a coherent identity.

Fragmented Identity and Survivor Guilt in *Porco Rosso*

Miyazaki's first entry of the Lost Decade marks a notable departure from his convention of youthful protagonists, presenting instead a cynical middle-aged veteran defined by the trauma of his wartime experience. Marco's failure to prevent his comrades' deaths in a WWI dogfight leaves him with deep-seated survivor guilt that plagues his mind more than a decade later, resulting in a "curse" that gives him the appearance of a humanoid pig. Rather than distancing himself from aerial combat, he devotes himself to the profession of an airborne bounty hunter, perhaps out of a desire to master his memories of the past. This high-stakes lifestyle provides a sense of purpose, appealing to Marco's competitive spirit, but proves insufficient to overcome the deeper psychological scars of war. He remains emotionally isolated, cutting himself off from deeper social connections and devoting himself almost entirely to his work. Marco feels himself responsible for failing to save his fellow pilots, leaving him unable to form close emotional bonds lest he experience a repetition of the inciting trauma by failing to protect those he loves. Thus, Miyazaki presents a hero who is alienated not merely by prevailing social conditions, but by his own inner turmoil, unable to escape the constraints of traumatic memory. Marco's lifestyle functions as a form of acting-out by reliving his past trauma: as an ace fighter pilot, he successfully overcomes the physical dimension of the inciting incident, but fails to process the underlying emotional aspect.

The animation reflects this dichotomy: in the air, Marco is defined by his agility and daring manoeuvres, exhibiting the energy and vitality of Miyazaki's prior male heroes; on the ground, however, he carries reserved and cynical presence. As excited diners congregate in Gina's restaurant following the opening battle, the film cuts from the noise and bustle of the main dining area to a near silent shot of Marco sitting secluded in a private corner, isolating himself from the vibrant social atmosphere. Gina approaches and attempts to engage, and it is here that Marco's vulnerabilities begin to emerge. He reiterates his dislike of a photo Gina

displays of the pair in their youth—her only picture of Marco in human form—upon which he has scribbled out his face. The image represents the more innocent past that Marco associates with his traumatic losses, and he seeks total discontinuity from this past identity in order to escape the associated memories, refusing all ties and relationships. The curse, then, functions as symbol of his dissociative identity, a motif that continues in *Princess Monoke* and *Howl's Moving Castle*. He keeps Gina at arms length, yet has clearly never overcome his attachment to her, resulting in a ceaseless orbit.

Marco's psychological drama forms the central conflict of the film, with the main narrative question being whether Marco will overcome his self-imposed withdrawal. Mussolini's fascist Italy looms in the background as an imminent threat, yet it never takes centre stage, nor is the idea of overthrowing the regime ever suggested. Marco does resist fascist ideology: when his old comrade insists that he rejoin the Italian airforce, he utters the famous retort, "I'd rather be a pig than a fascist." However, he refuses to endorse any ideals of his own, adding, "I only fly for myself." Much like Miyazaki after giving up on Marx, he knows very well what he is against, but maintains incredulity towards grand narratives. Yet there are hints that Marco does hold ideals beyond personal profit. Fio recalls a rumour that Marco one landed his plane in a storm to rescue an enemy pilot, and as he duels Curtis, it is revealed that Marco refuses to shoot a pilot on principle, aiming only at his enemies' wings. Much like *Casablanca*'s Rick Blaine, Marco is a sentimentalist in denial, suppressing his old ideals to shield himself from further emotional trauma.

A flashback contrasts the forlorn middle-aged Marco against his younger, prewar self, who is shown to be an enthusiastic, innocent, and emotionally vulnerable young man. It may be that Miyazaki, having reached middle-age himself, is comparing his newfound cynicism with the righteous idealism of his youth. It is worth noting that Miyazaki often represents himself as an anthropomorphised pig in illustrations, strengthening the idea that Marco is a

stand-in for the director. Marco's survivor's guilt may be inspired by Miyazaki's experience of forsaking other children and families as he fled his burning hometown, as well as his broader sense of collective guilt for the deaths caused by his father's complicity in the Pacific War. A parallel definitely exists between Marco and Katsuji, as middle-aged men without ideological commitments who pursue money through aircraft-related enterprises. Furthermore, the climactic scene sees Marco teaming up (albeit reluctantly) with his former enemy, the American pilot Curtis, just as Miyazaki describes his father making friends with Americans during the Occupation. In this way, Marco functions as an updated version of Doctor Lao—a hybrid of Katsuji Miyazaki's wartime complicity and his son's sense of inherited guilt—with the key difference that he the resolve to fight totalitarianism head-on.

The film's ending is fraught with ambiguities. Audiences are set up to expect Marco's social recovery by the end, especially if they are familiar with Miyazaki's earlier films, but this moment never arrives. Marco fails to maintain lasting intimate bonds with the women in his life, leaving Fio behind with Gina before flying off alone. There is some hope as Marco invites Curtis to join him in fighting the Italian airforce, and his former rival hints that he glimpsed Marco's human face, implying that he may have finally embraced interpersonal bonds and overcome his identity crisis. However, the audience do not see the transformation, nor is it clear whether the curse is permanently broken. Likewise, Fio's closing narration hints that years later, Marco may finally have visited Gina in her garden, but she decides to keep it a "secret", leaving the audience to speculate on the outcome. In short, Miyazaki presents a world without guarantees.

Complicity and Withdrawal in *Howl's Moving Castle*

Twelve years after *Porco Rosso*, Miyazaki returns to the archetype of the withdrawn idealist in *Howl's Moving Castle*, adding new psychological dynamics which further complicate the narrative. In particular, Marco's survivor guilt is replaced by a more active

sense of perpetrator trauma, as Howl finds himself consumed by a monstrous metamorphosis as he attempts to intervene in an ongoing war. The theme of social withdrawal is further exaggerated, as Miyazaki accentuates the infantile nature of his protagonist: indeed, Howl appears a perfect fit for Murakami's "little boy" archetype, though Murakami surprisingly overlooks the connection in his own analysis. These extremes of militarism and infantile withdrawal form a binary that entraps Howl, resulting in a fractured identity that precludes peace of mind or lasting happiness. This dichotomy reflects two demographic trends of 1990s and early-21st century Japan: on the one hand, the pursuit of meaningful identity through nationalism by redeeming memory of Japan's military history; and on the other, the *hikikomori*'s refusal of socially-constituted identity in favour of complete withdrawal from the outside world. Miyazaki presents a hero who pivots between both extremes and is alienated by each, finding salvation only by forming a meaningful social connection with co-protagonist Sophie. While *Howl's Moving Castle* is ostensibly a war film, the core narrative arc centres rather on the protagonists' quest to overcome their dissociative identity crises, which they achieve through a return to the past to uncover repressed traumatic memories. As in Miyazaki's earlier Lost Decade films, the personal supersedes the political: his heroes can no longer save the world though ideological righteousness, and must be content with saving themselves, finding meaning in the absence of grand narratives.

Murakami's analysis of *Howl's Moving Castle* identifies the decline of Miyazaki's idealism: set at "the dawn of the twentieth century, an era of unsurpassed nationalism", the film holds that war is untenable, meaningless, and, "no matter how righteous its cause", breaks the human spirit ("Earth in My Window", 103). It also emphasises the need for community, and that ageing and maturation are inherent in human life (104). Howl becomes a monster in the fires of war, losing sight of his identity, which can only be salvaged through a return to the past. Murakami notes parallels to Miyazaki's own feelings of trauma and guilt

over his family's refusal to take other children aboard their vehicle as they escaped a firebombed Tokyo during the war (105). Howl also reflects the "shattered dreams" of Miyazaki's youth, when he still believed that ideology could change the world; the young wizard, who has no real goal, is transformed from a "gentle, charming man into a demon" by the futile conflicts of war (105). Murakami asserts the importance of of the animation artform, arguing that while *Seven Samurai* achieved relevance through its realism, Miyazaki appeals to the contemporary Japanese by "spinning a children's fantasy": a "fairytale" cloaking Miyazaki's protest against the "meaningless[ness] of war" (105).

Murakami echoes the analyses of Napier and Tanaka, perceiving Miyazaki's filmmaking as an attempt to work-through his unresolved memories and guilt regarding the Pacific War while reflecting a decline in his youthful ideals of progress. As is the case throughout Murakami's writings, he does not go quite so far as to raise the matter of perpetrator trauma within Japanese war memory; he does, however, describe the "heroic sight" of Howl as "a *kamikaze*-like flying fighter amidst a landscape reminiscent of firebombed Tokyo" (105), moving beyond the simple analogy to civilian firebombing victims. Murakami frames *Howl's Moving Castle* as a heroic-tragic narrative in which a noble protagonist struggles in vain to fight heroically and protect their loved ones as they are afflicted by a war outside of their personal control. This is an accurate reading of the film's surface layer, but closer inspection also reveals a subtextual perpetrator narrative.

Howl's Moving Castle hosts Miyazaki's sole European-inspired setting post-*Porco Rosso*, but he leaves an important clue linking Howl's homeland with Imperial Japan: while visiting a village market, Sophie witnesses an aerial harbour bombing by the enemy followed by the release of propaganda leaflets from the aircraft, which local police command the civilians not to read. This detail echoes the historical dropping of leaflets on Japanese cities by the US Airforce to warn residents of the atomic bomb, reading of which was forbidden by

the authorities. Furthermore, as Murakami notes, Howl fights as a self-sacrificing *kamikaze* in brutal aerial warfare, convinced of the righteousness of his cause, only to find that his actions are ultimately futile and self-destructive. The *kamikaze* parallel is inexact, as he resists enlistment in the King's military, working rather to undermine the government and its war efforts. However, Howl encounters an uncanny recognition of the self in the Other as he confronts fellow wizards who, having agreed to fight for Suliman, have undergone in full the monstrous transformation against which Howl struggles. Miyazaki deliberately blurs the lines between Howl and the wizards who serve the militaristic state, and Calcifer states that Howl may lose his humanity entirely by continuing to fight. He suffers a traumatic identification with the perpetrators he opposes, slowly becoming a monster that imbibes and acts-out the violence he seeks to prevent. It is the uncanny realisation of Howl's own capacity for violence that transitions the film from heroic-tragic to perpetrator narrative. Recognising this identification, the solution is to forego military engagement altogether in favour of a private life devoid of heroism. Thus, *Howl's Moving Castle* marks Miyazaki's most extreme rejection of ideological conflict. Where *Conan*'s Monsley also parallels the *kamikaze*, devoting her life to serving Industria as a fighter pilot before discovering the futility of this path, she ultimately achieves salvation by adopting a more enlightened grand narrative and fighting to protect High Harbour instead. But for Howl, perpetrator trauma cannot be avoided without rejecting grand narratives and the action-oriented heroism of Miyazaki's earlier works.

Indeed, Miyazaki appears to refrain from combat animation as a means of narrative progression. Miyazaki's early protagonists all function as action heroes who rely on physical prowess to save the day; despite the pacifistic ideals of Conan, Nausicaä, and Pazu, they each employ some measure of force against villainous aggressors, and much of the appeal of their films stems from thrilling battles and chase sequences in which the heroic youths triumph

over tyranny. This continues to some extent in the Lost Decade: where characters like Marco and Ashitaka lack the righteous clarity of his earlier heroes, they still overcome conflicts using prodigious combat skills. By contrast, Howl's engagement in war is presented as utterly futile, degrading his spirit while achieving no discernible victories. Miyazaki avoids presenting battles as exciting spectacles, showing only brief flashes of Howl's fights that emphasise his monstrous transformation and downplay high-speed aerial manoeuvres. Instead, uplifting action sequences take place away from combat, such as Sophie's haphazard escape from Suliman via hovercraft, a scene which also establishes the bond between Sophie and the now-disempowered Witch of the Waste. Miyazaki's message is clear: the conflicts plaguing his contemporary world cannot be resolved through epic clashes of good and evil, and must instead be addressed at the level of human relationships.

Juxtaposing these military conflicts are themes of withdrawal, regression, and infantilisation, which take a decidedly Freudian angle. Sophie is introduced as a reclusive, emotionally reserved workaholic who devotes her life to the family hat shop on account of her attachment to her late father. She is forced beyond the protective bubble of her shop by the Witch's curse and sets out from the urban metropolis into untamed nature, which initiates a journey personal growth. Sophie's maturation occurs in two ways. First, by assuming the persona of ninety-year-old woman, she feels liberated to explore hitherto repressed aspects of her personality, exhibiting a newfound physical vitality and forging a *de facto* family by adopting a maternal role. At the same time, the elderly mask serves as a cover for her vulnerabilities: Sophie reverts to her natural appearance during moments of intense emotional honesty, but when her insecurities catch up with her, the old age returns. While she regains her youthful appearance at the end, the silver hair of her elderly form remains, signifying the successful integration of her two personas. Second, she transfers her primary object of affection from her father to a younger man, whose love she secures by challenging his

maternal figures, Madame Suliman and the Witch of the Waste. As if to reinforce this point, when Howl rebuilds the castle interior after their encounter with Suliman, he recreates Sophie's workshop and links his portal to her family home. Sophie thus undergoes her own trauma narrative (one more subtle than Howl's), overcoming grief over her father's death by escaping urban enclosure and forging new relationships.

Howl presents a more complex picture still, as his identity is fractured into numerous personas: a heart-stealing playboy, the wizards Pendragon and Jenkins, a childish recluse, a laid-back nature lover, and his shadow side as an airborne killer. Miyazaki's detailed physical settings always signify aspects of his worlds and characters, and the eponymous castle symbolises the dissociative personality of its owner, with each colour on the magic doorway leading to a location that corresponds to one of Howl's many identities. The castle's mobility stems from Howl's reclusive nature, while its cluttered interior reflects his disorderly psyche. Sophie's role as Howl's housekeeper ties into Miyazaki's motif of cleansing and ritual purification: just as Chihiro cleanses of No Face and the Stink Spirit, Sophie must cleanse Howl of his psychological baggage, gradually reforming him into a mature individual capable of long-term interpersonal relationships.

It is here that Howl's infantile nature comes to the fore, which appears to be driven by his dominating mother figures, particularly his former mentor Madam Suliman. Howl spends his life fleeing from Suliman, who seeks to control and discipline his magical abilities in line with her own values; she represents a domineering social super ego, which causes Howl to retreat from social engagement altogether. In Oedipal fashion, he overcomes his troubled relationship with Suliman by transferring his affections to Sophie, who confronts Suliman on his behalf while pretending to be Howl's mother at his request; in short, she must first become his mother before transitioning to the role of his lover. The theme of infantilisation also appears in *Spirited Away*, where Bo, Yubaba's baby, is implied to be far older than he

appears: forced to remain secluded in a padded room filled with toys and cushions, he has grown to monstrous size while retaining a baby's anatomy. This upbringing results in a narcissistic personality, leaving him capable of regarding others only as objects for his gratification. Bo has a character arc in parallel with Chihiro's: he too is thrust out from the safety of parental oversight, embarking on a journey to distant (pastoral) lands and maturing as he builds meaningful friendships. In the film's climactic scene, he challenges his mother's authority and asserts personal agency, implying that he may retain his independence and perhaps even develop an adult form as a result. Howl's bedroom, crammed full of plush cushions, toys, and other trinkets, bears a resemblance to Bo's, and he explains that these objects are enchanted to help him escape the Witch's prying eyes.

Left: Bo's bedroom in *Spirited Away*. Right: Howl's bedroom.

As in *Spirited Away*, the curse can only be cured by a return to the past to recover lost memories, which completes the purification narrative. Earlier Miyazaki films contain surreal, expressionistic scenes that delve into the psychology of his characters, revealing traumatic experiences in the past which they strive to overcome through their actions in the present. For instance, Nausicaä's flashback to her failure to protect a baby ohm as a child is presented through sketchy lines and a sepia-toned monochrome colour palate. As *Laputa*'s heroes fly into the storm surrounding the floating castle, Miyazaki's blends sketchier linework with heavy shadow and stark colour contrast as Pazu sees fleeting visions of his lost father. Such sequences take on greater significance in the Lost Decade: Marco's experience of an afterlife in *Porco Rosso* and Chihiro's fragmented memory flashes of her early encounter with Haku play a vital role in the plot, as it is by reconnecting with these repressed memories that a

pathway to recovery is opened. What distinguishes *Howl's Moving Castle* is the placement of

the time travel scene at the very end of the narrative: Sophie's journey to the past and the

restoration of Howl's heart constitute the film's climax, followed only by a few minutes of

denouement. Where Miyazaki's earlier flashbacks take place during the second act, providing

room for further dramatic action during the climax, *Howl's Moving Castle* has no concluding

action scene in which Suliman's military is defeated or the regime overthrown. The central

narrative conflict lies within the lead characters, while the external military conflict is

brushed aside by Suliman remarking offhandedly that she plans to put an end to it. The film's

feuding nations are painted as warmongers who blindly indulge in grand military spectacle

(parades feature frequently throughout the film), but there is no sense that either faction

represents a distinct ideological leaning. Neither regime is overthrown, nor is there any

indication of political progress beyond Suliman's apparent intention to end the war. Howl's

salvation comes, not through choosing to fight for the righteous side, but by shunning

worldly conflict altogether in favour of domestic life. Politics serve merely as a backdrop to

character drama and Oedipal dynamics. It is the private lives, relationships, and inner

psychology of the protagonists that matter, while overt ideological positions are abandoned.

In short, the grand narratives of Miyazaki's early apocalyptic films give way to small

narratives of personal struggle.

  Where Miyazaki's psychological focus develops gradually across his career, Anno

begins his own tenure as director with a firm emphasis on his characters' interior worlds. As

Chapter 4 will establish, Anno's apocalyptic narratives arrive at a similar position to

Miyazaki regarding grand narratives.

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  1. The first episode reverses the order, playing the OP first, followed by the prologue.

  2. The term "OP" refers to an anime's opening theme song.

Chapter 4: Hideaki Anno

Murakami bookends his "Plates and Entries" genealogy by examining two iconic Studio Gainax productions: 1983's otaku manifesto "DAICON IV", on which Anno worked as mechanical animator, and 1995's *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, with which Anno created "the landmark otaku anime film" in order to challenge otaku subculture from within ("Earth in My Window", 127). For Murakami, these texts exemplify the contrast between the otaku's optimism in the early 80s and the pessimism of the mid-90s, when Japan's Lost Decade was showing no signs of ending; in doing so, he reads otaku as a barometer for Japan's ideological transformation. Where "DAICON IV" envisions a brighter future birthed by scientific progress and an evolving international pop culture network, *Evangelion* presents a dark post-apocalyptic universe in which technology serves to imprison human beings even as it empowers them to survive in an inhospitable world. As with Miyazaki, Anno's films reflect a shift away from grand narratives towards small narratives of in which the personal supersedes the political: in the Lost Decade, heroic ambitions are frustrated by ideological uncertainty and the protagonists' inner struggles increasingly draw focus away from epic military conflicts. Unable to save the world, *Evangelion*'s Shinji must be content with saving his own ego and will to live on in a world without guarantees.

What Murakami's genealogy overlooks are Anno's interceding works: namely, his debut as anime director for the 1988-1989 OVA *Gunbuster* and subsequent directing role on the 1990-91 anime television series *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*. Indeed, Nadia has seen little Anglophone scholarship outside *The Anime Machine*, while *Gunbuster* is scarcely mentioned at all. As I intend to argue, these texts provide the key to Anno's ideological transformation, showcasing an ongoing effort to negotiate questions of man's growing reliance on technology, psychological trauma, and Japan's national identity in light of its

complex war memory. As Clements and McCarthy argue, *Gunbuster* and *Evangelion* each present a "deeply personal, psychological odyssey" that "replay[s] the Pacific War from the Japanese point of view, specifically the final apocalyptic events" (16065), a reading that extends equally to *Nadia*. Across these three texts, Anno presents increasingly critical responses to Japan's experience of defeat and nuclear annihilation, and, in the latter two, perpetrator memory. At the heart of these narratives are questions of technology and military power as solutions to—or causes of—conflict, intertwined with themes of family drama, alienation, and withdrawal. Thus, as in Miyazaki's films, an intimate apocalypse of personal trauma accompanies the heroes' quest to save the world from annihilation, with the perpetrator fathers connecting the two narrative threads. As the Lost Decade commences, perpetrator themes take on greater prominence, as do questions around progress through science, leaving protagonists uncertain about their identities and potential complicity in acts of war.

Gunbuster, a 1988-1989 OVA[1], couples the scientific optimism of the Economic Miracle years with a covert nationalism: a new Japanese Empire now rules the Earth, and their Space Force must employ advanced fighting robots to protect humanity from apocalyptic spacefaring monsters. Anno sublimates Japan's war memory by presenting a romanticised Imperial Japan that protects humanity from atomic trauma by wielding its own nuclear-coded superweapons. The influence of *Yamato* is clear, as the kindly father figures of the Space Force appear as trustworthy authority figures; but unlike *Yamato*, *Gunbuster*'s mindless enemies allow no recognition of the self in the Other. War exists as a cosmic force devoid of political motives, allowing for enthusiastic identification with military institutions and willingness to fight to the death for the cause. As I will discuss, Anno leaves room to question nationalism and scientific idealism, as his heroes display moments of resistance to technological enclosure. Nevertheless, the world is saved through the combination of

technology and the heroes' fighting spirit, while grief and alienation are overcome in the uplifting final scene. The grand narrative of postwar progress is affirmed.

Anno's later narratives challenge *Gunbuster*'s simplicity: here, young protagonists struggle to forge stable identities as they resist identification with complex father figures and question their ideological surety. In *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* (1990-1991), the titular heroine struggles to reconcile her pacifist values and distrust of science with her estranged father, Captain Nemo, who relies on his Nautilus submarine and its high-tech weapons to fight the fascist Neo-Atlantis. Where *Gunbuster*'s father figures represent an idealised Imperial Japan, *Nadia* echoes the ambivalence of *Future Boy Conan*: Nemo is plagued by guilt for his role in the inciting apocalypse, blurring the lines between good father and complicit father, while the Neo-Atlantean leader, Gargoyle, represents the evil father responsible for the regime's ideology and crimes. While both factions draw on European and African iconography, Anno connects them to Japanese history through Nadia's brother, the Neo-Atlantean Emperor Neo, who turns out to be a figurehead manipulated against his will; thus, *Nadia* evokes the MacArthur narrative of Hirohito as a puppet controlled by the militarist faction, which allowed postwar Japan to redeem aspects of its prewar past and retain a sense of continuous identity. The series delivers a back-and-forth exchange of arguments for and against technological progress, questioning whether humanity is doomed to repeat the self-destructive path of the Atlanteans once it achieves their scientific knowledge. In the end, humanity is vindicated as Jean, the young otaku-like inventor, demonstrates his purity of heart, and Nemo expresses confidence that humanity will be able to resist militarism as it develops advanced technologies in the 20th century. The grand narrative of Japan's postwar economic recovery is affirmed: the young heroes achieve a clean break from the militarism of the past while maintaining faith in technology as a force to improve human lives.

By contrast, Anno's post-bubble *Evangelion* (1995-1997) removes the dissociative split between factions and father figures. Japan is secretly controlled by NERV, a military organisation tasked with protecting the planet from extraterrestrial invaders called "Angels" using biomechanical *mecha* called "Evangelion". These giant robots can only be piloted by a select handful of fourteen-year-olds, whose mothers' souls have been absorbed into the machine, rendering maternal loss a central theme. Protagonist Shinji Ikari is summoned by his estranged father Gendo, NERV's commander, and compelled to serve as pilot; while repeatedly traumatised by his military duties, the empowerment and social affirmation of the role grants Shinji a sense of identity within NERV's institutional structure. He despises Gendo for abandoning him as a child yet simultaneously seek's his affirmation, signalling a desire to identify with the his father figure. However, as Shinji is confronted with the brutal military tactics used by NERV, this identification becomes traumatic, as he finds himself first becoming complicit in perpetrating extreme violence before later carrying it out with his own hands. Faith in institutions that act for the greater good is shattered, and Shinji retreats from social roles entirely, withdrawing into psychological landscape divorced from the anime's external conflicts. The final television episode takes place entirely inside Shinji's mind, as does much of the *End of Evangelion* film that retells the series' ending. Instead of defeating the Angels conclusively in battle with his empowering high-tech weapons, as occurs in *Gunbuster*, he must conquer his traumatic memories and reforge a stable identity separate to that of his perpetrator father. Grand narratives give way entirely to small narratives of personal overcoming: the world is not saved, and the hero's journey ends with nothing more than a resolution to live and pursue meaningful relationships.

In sum, Anno directs three contrasting narratives that explore Japan's national war memory and the trauma of the atomic bomb, each providing a more critical view of national identity. *Gunbuster* presents a heroic-tragic narrative in which valiant soldiers sacrifice

themselves in the fight to save humanity, while the hardships of war are exemplified by the *hibakusha* Ohta and the separation of friends and family, all within the backdrop of a remilitarised Japanese Empire. *Nadia* maintains the heroic-tragic structure, with the Nautilus' noble military crew and the foregrounding of traumatic loss through war and nuclear-coded weapons; however, a perpetrator narrative is added with allusions to the Japanese Empire as fascist power, while the good father Nemo feels a degree of complicity for failing to save his people from military takeover and weapons of mass destruction. However, as in *Conan*, the young heroes are provided a clean break from the past and its perpetrators: Nadia reconciles with Nemo and the puppet Emperor Neo, but these figures die in the climactic conflict, leaving Nadia free to forge a new identity divorced from her Atlantean heritage. The grand narrative of the postwar Economic Miracle—progress through pacifism, hard work, and scientific innovation—is maintained. Finally, *Evangelion* downplays the heroic narrative in favour of foregrounding victim and perpetrator narratives. The nobility of NERV as humanity's saviour is undercut by moral dilemmas around enlistment of teenaged pilots (a parallel to late-stage *kamikaze* recruitment), and Shinji is forced to undergo a traumatic identification with his father as he becomes complicit in the war's brutality. Furthermore, it transpires that the apocalyptic Second Impact was triggered deliberately by Gendo and his affiliates at SEELE, a secret society that controls world affairs from the shadows, which undermines the credibility of institutional authority and scientific progress. Grand narratives collapse as Shinji cannot find stable identity through his connection to his father or role as a pilot; he retreats within his own mind, relinquishing any desire for social affirmation.

Anno's 1990s narratives suggest a mistrust of those who pursue grand narratives too keenly. Where the fascist leader Gargoyle seeks to revive the lost Atlantean culture and unify the world under a single hierarchical ideology, Nadia sacrifices her inheritance—the powerful Blue Water crystal—to save Jean's life: the jewel turns grey and shatters into fragments as a

result, forever losing its power, which represents Nadia's acceptance of a fragmentary identity. She forfeits her heritage as an Atlantean, instead choosing an uncertain future within industrial modernity. Similarly, *Evangelion*'s villains, the Illuminati-inspired SEELE cult, instigate the Human Instrumentality Project, which aims to fuse the souls of all people into a collective being without individual egos by forcibly dissolving their AT-fields (ego barriers). Here, Anno evokes the *kokutai* grand narrative of Japan's Imperial past, as well as the Aum Shinrikyō cult and its desire to find meaning in the grand narratives of earlier eras. Shinji bears a strong desire for escapism, but ultimately chooses to revoke Instrumentality and embrace individual identity, despite the uncertainty and emotional turmoil it entails. Like Miyazaki, Anno seems to embrace a kind of "pragmatic nihilism", promoting community-level relationships while foregoing visions of unified social transformation.

Anno's goals as artist

Anno is more reserved with his opinions than the outspoken Miyazaki, it difficult to identify anything akin to the overt political stances of his mentor. Details on Anno's family life are especially sparse. He has, however, made efforts to express his conflicted feelings on otaku subculture and the anime industry, reflecting self-critically on his role within these phenomena and their implications for Japanese society. Perhaps his most candid discussion comes in the essay "Director Anno Discusses Director-kun" (2014), which appears as an afterword to the manga *Insufficient Direction* (2014) by his wife, Moyoco Anno. This semi-autobiographical story follows the antics of "Director-kun", a caricature of Hideaki Anno, as he attempts to train his wife as an otaku. Director-kun a pop culture fanatic who fires off an endless stream of quotes and references to his favourite media; his encyclopaedic knowledge of subcultural artworks allows him to passionately communicate thoughts and feelings which he might struggle with using everyday language. A similar characterisation of Anno appears in the live-action television drama *Blue Blazes* (Fukuda, 2014), a fictionalised account of

mangaka Kazuhiko Shimamoto's days at Osaka Arts alongside the Gainax co-founders; here, Anno appears as an artistic prodigy obsessed with analysing animation and special effects in minute detail. While these depictions contain a measure of exaggeration, Anno affirms their authenticity: while *Insufficient Direction*'s events are embellished for comedic effect, the base scenarios are drawn from actual events ("Director Anno Discusses Director-kun", v). Anno is acutely aware of his otaku identity, including the tendency towards Azuma's *database* consumption and animalisation, and his short essay reflects upon the resulting anxieties, which he places at the heart of his artistic career. Anno describes otaku as withdrawn and narcissistic, taking refuge in fiction to avoid engaging with reality:

> we're introverts with poor communication skills unable to determine a suitable distance toward others; our identity is supported by our store of information and knowledge; we're very obsessive, self-righteous and cliquey for self-preservation, and can only talk about ourselves and suck at two-way communication; we're extremely self-conscious and can only look at things from our point of view, love narcissists [sic], have a bloated sense of self that yearns to identify with our idols, and are sensitive to attacks… That's a long list of negative descriptions, but I like how it's shown as is. It's not an idealized form of an otaku but a truthful portrait for all to see. (v)

This harsh self-analysis applies equally to Anno's protagonists Nadia and Shinji; like Miyazaki, Anno is a director who pours his own inner struggles into his characters. *Evangelion* in particular functions as an attempt by Anno to work through his frustrations with his own communication inhibitions and otaku subculture's detachment from reality. He reveals that following the series, "there was a time when I wanted to stop being an otaku. I was sick of the stagnation of the anime industry and fans. I was filled with self-hatred back then. I was desperate" (vi). Anno links his critique of otaku to Japan's Lost Decades, perceiving a social decline in tandem with the rise of information culture:

> Currently in Japan, the economy is saturated to the point that we can allow otakus to stand tall and prosper. We have such an overabundance of information and our material civilization is full to the brim, but at the same time our spirits are impoverished, we lack imagination, and our social base is weakening. (vi)

Anno balances this pessimistic outlook with a message of hope, revealing his personal

success in overcoming communication difficulties and establishing meaningful relationships.

In particular, he thanks his wife for helping him to overcome his limitations, stating that

while his "core otaku-ness" is not diluting, their marriage has added more non-otaku aspects

to his personality. Anno holds up his wife's manga as a solution to otaku media, stating that

they do not create any "out" from reality, whereas he sees most contemporary manga as "no

more than a device to provide readers with a refuge from reality" which cause the biggest

fans to "become one with the fantasy" (vi). Conversely, Moyoco's stories preclude such

escapism:

> My wife's manga leaves a bit of energy to readers as they return to the real
> world. Instead of making you want to dwell in yourself, her manga makes you
> want to go outside and do something, it emboldens you. It's a manga for
> tackling reality and living among others. (vi)

Like Miyazaki, Anno resolves his ambivalence towards his passion for entertainment

media by framing it as a tool to inspire viewers, prompting them to approach life with

newfound enthusiasm and changed perspectives. He states that Moyoco's manga

accomplished what he "couldn't do in Eva to the end" (vi), reflecting his frustration with the

contingent *Evangelion* fans who, rather than embrace Anno's warning against withdrawal,

maintained database consumption patterns by fixating on the series' heroines. At the same

time, he sees in animation the potential to overcome alienation by enhancing communication,

a view he expresses in the 1999 NHK documentary, "Extra Curricular Lessons with Hideaki

Anno". Recently made famous by *Evangelion*, the director visits his old primary school to

teach the basics of animation and engage the students in a dialogue. Here, he explains that the

appeal of animation stems from its expressionistic and communicative power:

> I think animation is best for visualising images that come from inside
> you. No doubt, you can develop a very individualised expression. The image

keeps getting closer to what you imagine. There's really no limit. It can become purely visual. The essence of anime is in expressing the individual's pure image.

Expression is … basically the process of creating something that's missing, attempting to get an idea across to someone else... trying to make yourself whole at the same time... for those people who have a hard time relating to the people around them, it's, at the very least, kind of like being able to pass something along to maintain a relationship between you and those people. That's what I think expression is... Anime and movies are ways I am able to continue relating to others.

In short, much as Miyazaki seeks to renegotiate technology rather than rejecting it outright, Anno seeks a relation to information media that resists animalisation. Rather than abandoning pop culture entertainment, his solution is to use art as a catalyst for communication networks that allow individuals to exchange perspectives. As he bids farewell to the class, Anno offers his final words of advice: a school test may have a right or wrong answer, but in the real world, "things aren't so black and white, so you should think about things for yourself and express them in words or pictures. This is how you communicate with people". These remarks reflect Anno's postmodern worldview: the key to thriving in contemporary society lies in understanding small narratives and subjective viewpoints.

This ethos is reflected in the *DAICON* animations, which were created as part of the burgeoning remix culture that would come to define otaku fandom. "DAICON IV" presents a montage of short scenes, each introducing a new setting and characters, which achieve a sense of continuity only through the presence of the DAICON girl. Many scenes emphasise fictionality, breaking the sense of a cohesive universe: for instance, as the heroine fights giant *tokusatsu* monsters, the sky is replaced by the Toho Studios opening logo screen. Another scene sees the girl flying over a landscape divided into hexagonal squares, a mark of a tabletop boardgame. Some moments even present robots and vehicles as toys instead of real machines. "DAICON IV" fluctuates between high-fidelity representations of iconic characters and depictions which emphasise their constructed nature; the Gainax animators

thus remind their otaku audience that they are ultimately playing with toys, but the power of imagination brings those toys to life and inscribes them with new meaning. By reminding the audience of this fictionality, "DAICON IV" highlights its role as a social nexus, both for its student creators and the Sci-Fi subculture fans who attended the 1983 convention where the video premiered.

Murakami sees in "DAICON IV" two core characteristics of the otaku: abundant subcultural references, and an extreme attention to detail in pursuit of quality, showcasing the animators' enthusiasm for their favourite artworks (113). At the same time, it employs the atomic bomb, Japan's "symbol of "destruction and rebirth"", as a symbol of hope: a pink atomic blast unleashes a flurry of Sakura petals (Japan's national flower), before the DAICON spaceship regenerates the planet's natural landscape using its science-powered beam, which Murakami sees as symbolising the otaku. Following this death-and-rebirth cycle, the camera pans across an endless stream of fan-favourite characters, "their chests puffed up proudly at the light of hope"; despite never having shared a screen together, they stand united, "a perfect encapsulation of the science-fiction conference's message" (117). In short, "DAICON IV" sublimates Japan's nuclear trauma into a beacon of hope for progress through science, much as postwar Japan found a constructive use for atomic science through nuclear energy. Murakami argues that this sublimation was made possible by the dehistoricisation of nuclear apocalypse, perceiving "an affirmation behind total annihilation that had nothing to do with the politics or ideology of the atomic bomb" (117-118); instead, the bomb is appreciated for its aesthetic impact, as "a kind of revolution" in isolation from revolutionary politics. Anno himself animated the cherry-blossom explosion in meticulous detail, which Murakami feels reflects a "pathological obsession" with the bomb (118); indeed, if one takes a glance through Anno's early career, it is clear that his specialisation lay in high-fidelity representations of explosions, machines, and vehicles, typically in a military

context. In light of these observations, Murakami compares otaku to American hippies, characterising them as optimistic sentimentalists with a "tremendous curiosity for the internal world of the self" (118).

Of central importance to Murakami's analysis is the notion of withdrawal from real-world political engagement in favour of idealism mediated through lavishly crafted fictional settings. He points to Expo '70 as an event that inspired Japanese children with a vision of "progress for the future" that heralded international peace through technological advancement; this appealed to the Japanese, "their hearts newly healed from post-war trauma", but the utopian ideal never arrived in reality (119). The children of this era were "unable to relinquish those dreams" (119), giving rise to otaku who suffered disillusionment as they came of age and yet, with the notable exception of Aum Shinrikyō, "won't plan their own revolution" (121). Rather, they seek to "express their honest feelings in the world of anime", where utopian dreams survive intact; but even this is prone to cause feelings of resignation, as "they know it's just an empty fantasy" (121). Murakami's analysis aligns with Masachi Osawa's assertion that Japan shifted from the idealistic age to the fictional age in 1970: as Tanaka writes, fictional age is marked by a declining faith that grand narratives as valid in the real world, such that "ideals are quested for in fiction" as a substitute for the failed political activism of the 1960s and early-70s (45). In this light, Murakami situates "DAICON IV" as a work in which utopian ideals are celebrated in purely fictional spaces; it speaks to the otaku's "internal world of the self", disengaged from real-world politics. In order to understand how this interiority manifests in Anno's directorial works, it is worth examining the role of animation techniques more critically.

Interior Perspective and Hyperlimited Animation

Anno's anxieties regarding social withdrawal, mental health, and technological progress are reflected in his use of limited animation techniques, which Lamarre frames as a

marked deviation from Miyazaki's aesthetics. *The Anime Machine* reads *Laputa* a desire to minimise (but not reverse) modern technological development by proposing a new relation to technology which escapes enframing: the perception of nature, and by extension, humans, as standing-reserve. Miyazaki's animation embodies this new relation by animetically sliding layers of the image; the result is a relative movement that produces "sensations of a world whose vastness and depth is somehow ungraspable" (62-63). In other words, the setting appears to move independently of the characters, taking on a life of its own: the world is not a static standing reserve, but a dynamic entity that escapes the rational control of human subjects. It is the dynamism of nature, not its inert plentitude, that creates "an absolute and abiding frame of reference" (105). Miyazaki's heroes favour small, whimsical vehicles that glide across the layers of the image by harnessing the wind, contrasting the villains' hulking engine-powered planes that tend towards ballistic projection (63); thus, heroic characters move through the natural world with a sense of awe, perceiving a living entity that escapes their total grasp or control.

By contrast, Lamarre sees in Studio Gainax's animation a "flattened" relation to technology that exemplifies the otaku lineage of limited animation (128). Responding to Murakami's *Superflat*, Lamarre sees in the *DAICON* animations a "superflattened" image where movement occurs on the surface, rather than movement into depth, which he calls the "exploded view" (132). The animators' use of vinyl sheets instead of celluloid as a cost-cutting measure made it difficult to stack as many image layers as in a Miyazaki film; instead, viewers are bombarded with an endless stream of pop culture icons rendered on the surface of the image. "Density of information" takes "precedence over movement within a world": information constantly rises to the surface, and "any element may generate a field of potential depth" (133-134). Lamarre likens this to a "logistics of retrieval", as viewers are "asked to skim and scan fields" and draw connections in the manner of a network. Each

element of the image offers "potential depths": opportunities for viewers to "generate links and connections" (136). Thus, where Miyazaki proposes a return to a "longer, slower, human-scaled world", the *DAICON* animations embrace technical optimisation with their "density of information, the dizzying rapidity of cuts, the explosion of projectiles across the screen, not to mention the attention to spaceships and powered suits" (138). These animations serve as celebrations of otaku, and exemplify Azuma's observations on database modes of consumption within the subculture.

However, Lamarre sees in Anno's later works a more ambivalent relationship to technological optimisation, framing the otaku lineage around a key question: "how can you enjoy your war and rue it too?" (147) He sees these works as a space in which war can be enjoyed aesthetically but not endorsed, as the flattened, relativised movement gives rise to a "personalizable" world. Destruction and generation can thus be sustained within the animated image through the exploded view. Napier identifies this duality in describing *Akira* as a "tech noir", wherein technology is aestheticised through breathtakingly-detailed images even as the film showcases its devastating social and military impacts ("Panic Sites", 337-338). This description applies equally to *Evangelion*, which follows in *Akira*'s footsteps, and Anno's earlier works: machines which serve as tools of destruction take on a different aspect when interfacing with his characters' perspectives. Like Miyazaki, Anno approaches machines with both enthusiasm and cynicism. On the one hand, there is his trademark otaku passion for science and technology, not merely as the root of human progress, but as an object of beauty in its own right. Thus, we see the aestheticisation of machines, particularly weapons and military vehicles, which Anno sublimates these objects into works of art, even as he acknowledges their role as tools of war.

Anno's specialised in mechanical animation from the earliest days of his career, with particular emphasis on robots, vehicles, and explosions. Notable examples include the

DAICON animations (especially "DAICON IV"'s nuclear explosion), space warfare in *Macross*, the climactic God Warrior scene in *Nausicaa*, and the opening of Aramaki's 1987 OVA *Metal Skin Panic MADOX-01*, as well as live-action special effects work on Gainax's *tokusatsu* shorts like *Return of Ultraman* and *Patriotic Squadron Great Japan*. Emotionally-driven character work is hard to come by, though the flipbook animation "Girl at Bus Stop" from his university years provides an early hint of Anno's talent for character-centred storytelling. It was only with his debut as anime director with *Gunbuster* that this talent finally surfaced, leading to a dichotomy within Anno's style: dynamic, energetic, intricately detailed mechanical movements and explosions contrast against slow, still, intimate character moments. His mechanical designs and animations often sport an astonishing level of detail, demonstrating a commitment to realism at odds with the simplified, impressionistic style applied to characters and backgrounds. The goal seems to be to show as many individual mechanical components as possible, almost as if to make the machines come alive (as happens literally in *Evangelion*). An excellent example is Anno's key animation for the opening sequence of *MADOX-01*, which depicts a soldier interfacing with biomechanical equipment. The solid metal components display as much fluidity and dynamism as the living person, as the machine becomes a physical and psychological extension of the human organism.

Opening sequence of *MADOX-01*. Anno's animation emphasises the physical power granted by technological enclosure, which his directorial works complicate with themes of trauma and alienation.

It is here that a contrast emerges between Miyazaki and Anno. Lamarre argues that unlike *Laputa*'s animatic illusion of depth, *Nadia* presents flattened panoramas which resemble schematic diagrams that contrast Miyazaki's painterly backdrops (*The Anime Machine*, 159-160). This flattening of layers removes the sense of separation between character and background, creating a sense of space "without a preestablished frame of reference" (161-162). Instead, Anno rapidly moves new visual elements into, often through high-speed editing (162). Miyazaki's animations produce character movement "relative to a preexisting depth", presenting nature as an "absolute or universal" frame of reference (166). Conversely, Anno's animation in *Nadia* "works with relative depth and relative movement", such that "our sense of what is inside and outside becomes thoroughly relative", blurring the boundaries between the objective world and characters' subjective perspectives. Editing and flattened composition take precedence over the compositing of layers (162). Thus, nature no longer provides an objective frame of reference, and the lines between nature and artificiality are thoroughly blurred: environments can be manufactured, just as the humans in *Nadia* turn out to have been engineered by ancient Atlanteans. As the series progresses, it becomes clear that most environments are artificial, and clear boundaries between nature and technology break down (167).

Lamarre sees this relativisation reflected in the story structures of *Nadia* and *Evangelion*: both series lack a unitary narrative frame, instead proposing multiple frames of reference (165). *Nadia* marks a postmodern turn as the narrative frequently shifts attention from epic conflicts towards the personal concerns of the characters, facilitated by the serialised format (170). From episode 9, when the children board the Nautilus, large-scale conflicts give way to small narratives centred on characters' personal relationships, desires, and anxieties, particularly Nadia's conflicted feelings towards Captain Nemo (174-175). *Nadia* retains its overarching epic narrative "in the form of an exploded projection" in which the focus disperses into small "personalized fields": characters' "agonized choices, personal anxieties, questions, regrets, and impasses constitute affective or emotive fields whose movement produces potential depth" (176). Anno suffered extreme burnout during *Nadia*'s production and fell into a four-year depression before returning to work with *Evangelion*, which, as Lamarre notes, reworks many of *Nadia*'s structures and questions from a more pessimistic angle (180). The grand narrative of world salvation gives way entirely to small personal narratives, all of which are mediated by human engineering and mechanical interfaces.

Anno represents his psychological turn through experimental techniques which Lamarre terms *hyperlimited animation*. As *Evangelion* shifts focus action-driven battle sequences to emotion-centred scenes of introspection, detailed mechanical animations give way to simple, flattened compositions containing minimal animated movement. To create a sense of dynamic energy, Anno instead relies on unconventional editing techniques, particularly rapidfire cuts between still images (193). Lamarre raises the example of Shinji's inner monologue in the final television episode, which takes place during Human Instrumentality (183). As Shinji works through his identity confusion via voiceover narration, an outline of his face appears, inside which flashes a rapidfire sequence of frames recycled

from the series. Shinji himself thus becomes a relative frame of reference onto which

flattened images are projected. As the sequence progresses, his psychological deterioration is

mirrored by the dissolution of image composition until all that remains is a sketch of Shinji

floating within a white void, which Murakami reproduces this on the cover of his *Little Boy*

catalogue: Shinji's inability to define a stable identity or place in society epitomises

Murakami's psychological reading of post-bubble Japan. The sketch then unravels into a

series of abstract lines that dissolve and recombine in different forms, symbolising the

complete dissolution of Shinji's ego.

Left: Shinji's face becomes a frame within which his past observations are
projected, reflecting his need to define his identity in relation to the Other.
Right: Shinji in limbo (the cover image of Murakami's *Little Boy*).

Lamarre describes this shift towards hyperlimited animation in terms of Deleuze's

concepts of movement-image and time-image (198), observing a narrative trend towards

inaction and uncertainty reflected in Anno's visual style:

> …the grand narrative of world salvation [is] folded over on itself, to be
> refolded into minor focal concerns. This is also where the action-image enters
> into crisis; heroes or protagonists emerge who are less and less sure about their
> goals. Inaction and disorientation undermine goal-oriented action, to the point
> that we are not sure where this is going and what a good resolution would be.
> This is precisely where the famous (or infamous) episode 26 of *Evangelion*
> takes limited animation: the action-image opens up from within, exploding
> into anxiety, uncertainty, disorientation, and also reverie, recollection, love,
> and confidence. (*The Anime Machine*, 199).

This dynamic goes hand-in-hand with narratives about computers and robots that possess a consciousness of their own, or develop an empathic connection with their human pilots (200). As I intend to argue, Anno's apocalyptic anime employs hyperlimited animation to reflect a dichotomy between empowerment and withdrawal in which technology plays a central role. Empowerment is emphasised through detailed animations of mechanical movement and explosions, reflecting the protagonists' ability to overcome external conflict in their giant vehicles. At the same time, withdrawal is highlighted by the protagonists' enclosure within the cockpit, which transitions back and forth between a space of empowerment and one of alienation as his narratives progress. Anno's protagonists begin interacting with these machines during induction into military hierarchies, which initially serves both as a means of overcoming trauma and of forging a socially-affirmed identity; however, prolonged fusion with technology begins to alienate these characters from human relationships while also facilitating retraumatisation as the battles' intensity escalates. Like Miyazaki, Anno does not move between a simple affirmation or condemnation of technology: rather, he attempts to negotiate the relationship between man and machine by exploring positive and negative outcomes of his heroes heightened connection to technological apparatuses. His warning seems to be that technology must be kept at arm's length to avoid the alienation of the individual within mechanical enclosure, much as he warns against the withdrawal of fellow otaku into fictional worlds through digital interfaces. At the same time, a cautious embracing of technology can facilitate relationships and allow human survival within a harsh environment.

Lamarre's conception of hyperlimited animation is particularly relevant to scenes dealing with psychological trauma, where Anno shifts from realistic depictions of physical locations to expressionistic scenes set within his characters' minds: psychological space is represented through still images, rapidfire editing, eerie music, and voiceover narration, while

character animation and compositing of layers are minimised. In some cases, images flash by so quickly that the viewer may struggle to register what they have seen; the implication, in line with Caruth's trauma theory, is that the characters themselves may not consciously grasp these memories, instead experiencing them as a stream of unprocessed feelings. In other moments, Anno employs extended long-takes, sometimes with a slow pan or zoom, which last so long as to unnerve the audience. The complete lack of motion forces viewers to dwell upon the characters' inner monologues regarding their darkest thoughts. In these cases, memories which are no longe repressed come to dominate the frame with their intensity. Repetition plays a key role in all cases, as frames and voice lines are recycled both within and across psychological sequences. This not only informs the viewer of the deep impression made upon the characters by their traumatic memories, but has the potential to break immersion in the text as the filmmakers' tools become visible. Anno's postmodernist sensibilities emerge in the form of a Brechtian distancing effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), as *Evanlgeion* purposefully breaks the viewer's immersion, forcing them to question their investment in its fictional world and characters.

The Economic Miracle: *Gunbuster* as Nationalist Fantasy

Gunbuster is Anno's only overtly nationalist text, drawing heavily on Matsumoto's *Space Battleship Yamato* while making references to the Japanese Empire even more apparent. Yet, as with *Yamato*, these themes are not represented uncritically. *Gunbuster* presents a synthesis of heroic and tragic narratives. The heroic aspect emerges from an idealised military hierarchy whose young pilots loyally sacrifice themselves in *kamikaze* fashion for the sake of humanity, demonstrating strength of character despite the unfavourable circumstances of war. At the same time, a tragic angle is provided through the emphasis on victims of war's hardships, as loved ones are killed or separated and Earth's

continents are decimated by the impact of battle.

Gunbuster centres on Noriko Takaya, the daughter of a Space Force captain, who resolves to train as a *mecha* pilot in order to accompany her father on spacefaring adventures. Following his death at the hands of intergalactic "space monsters", she enrols at a pilot training school in Okinawa, and her military career becomes a source purpose and identity, fostering a sense of connection to her lost parent. The series opens with a narration by a younger Noriko, who describes her adoration of her father over a montage of family photographs and newspaper articles concerning military affairs. After the initial explanation, her monologue pauses, before resuming in the present day: her father has been killed in action, and she has enrolled at the Okinawa academy with a view to joining the Space Force in his stead. As in Miyazaki's films, an intimate apocalypse lies at the heart of the narrative: *Gunbuster* is introduced as a tale of tragic familial loss in tandem with an apocalyptic threat, which Noriko sets out to overcome by assuming her father's career path and defeating the aliens that caused her inciting trauma. Her journey is one of overcoming grief as she is empowered by advanced technologies—namely the titular Gunbuster robot—which, combined with "hard work and guts" alongside her innate enthusiasm and empathy, allow her to conquer the space monsters and save humanity from near-certain annihilation.

While nuclear technology is not mentioned directly, it is clear that both the space monsters' and Gunbuster's attacks are inspired by images of atomic explosions, much like Anno's iconic animation of a nuclear blast in "DAICON IV". Anno thus presents a sublimation of nuclear technology and a symbolic mastery of nuclear trauma: heroes enter colossal explosions and emerge physically (if not psychologically) unscathed thanks to advanced technological enclosures, a trend that continues in *Nadia* and *Evangelion*. Furthermore, *Gunbuster* foregrounds the *hibakusha* as victims of war. Coach Ohta, a survivor of Noriko's father's fleet, struggles with radiation sickness as he trains Noriko as Gunbuster's

pilot, before finally passing away between the fifth and sixth episodes. Ohta has a romance subplot with Noriko's co-pilot, Kazumi, who experiences her own intimate apocalypse as her lover fades away. In the final episode, as Kazumi visits Ohta's grave for the last time, her students at the academy gift her a collection of paper cranes to take on her final mission. Here, Anno recreates an iconic symbol of the *hibakusha*—particularly young female *hibakusha*—which is often made as a get-well gesture; legend has it that acquiring 1,000 paper cranes will grant one's wish for good health. In sum, *Gunbuster* presents a narrative in which a remilitarised Japan wields advanced technology in order to overcome atomic annihilation and prevent the tragedy of the *hibakusha* from repeating.

This is epitomised by the story's climax, in which a planet-sized superweapon is brought to the space monsters' home and detonated, wiping out the apocalyptic threat once and for all. However, as the bomb's ignition sequence fails, Noriko and Kazumi must make the ultimate sacrifice and trigger the explosion from within the device; while they have the means to survive the event, the resulting time dilation will thrust them far into the future, cutting them off from all social ties. *Gunbuster*'s final scene opens on the image of a giant dome-shaped cloud—the aftermath of the ultimate bomb—accompanied by melancholic piano music from the prologue in where Noriko first discusses her father's death. Nuclear apocalypse is tied once again to the intimate apocalypse of family loss. A montage shows the fallout gradually dissipate until only the starry vacuum of space remains, followed by a caption revealing that 12,000 years have passed. At this point, the mangled exterior of Gunbuster appears; inside, Noriko and Kazumi contemplate the extent of their alienation, knowing that they will never see their friends again. As they approach the Earth, which lies shrouded in darkness, they wonder whether humanity survived the calamity, or whether their sacrifice was ultimately futile. Noting the lack of light from Okinawa, Kazumi turns tearful eyes upon the paper cranes, no doubt considering the possibility that the entire human race

may have died as *hibakusha*. This moment reflects the bitter realisation of defeat for the wartime Japanese as they were forced to come to terms with the futility of their military campaign and the widespread death and destruction inflicted upon their homeland, epitomised by the victims of the atomic bomb.

However, just as all hope seems lost, a collection of lights appears on the planet's surface, arranged to spell the word *okaerinasai* ("welcome home") in giant *katakana*. The music swells as the heroines discover that they have not been forgotten: in an instant, alienation is overcome. As they fly towards the Earth, colour bursts back into the frame, signifying the emotional healing of the pilots. Grief for loved ones lost in the war is overcome, and advanced technology secures the protagonists a new life of peace and prosperity in the future that their sacrifices allowed to exist. In a final nod to Japanese iconography, a sunrise bursts forth from behind the Earth as the credits roll.
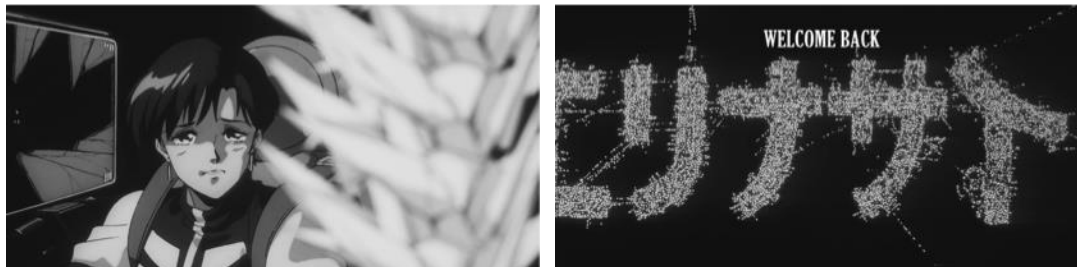
Left: Kazumi gazes upon the paper cranes as she fears that Okinawa, and humanity at large, may not survive. Right: The final katakana of the "Welcome Home" sign, イ, is rendered backwards.

The New Japanese Empire and Nationalist Nostalgia

Anno's references to the Pacific War go a step beyond *Yamato*, which is built around the resurrection of Imperial Japan's naval flagship; while the Yamato's crew members all bear Japanese names, the government they fight for appears to lack any national affiliation. *Gunbuster*'s setting includes a resurrected Japanese Empire which appears to rule the Earth in its entirety. As the blog *Kritik Der Animationskraft* observes in its series *Imperialism, Translation, Gunbuster*, this fact is seldom acknowledged in dialogue, nor must the viewer

notice it to understand the plot. Instead, clues to the Imperial Japanese setting appear in small visual details, often onscreen text which might escape the viewer's notice. The full backstory is revealed only through supplemental materials: a declining USA sell Hawaii to Japan, only to regret the sale and stage an attack on Pearl Harbour, leading to the Second Japanese-American War. A victorious Japan supersedes the US as superpower and establishes a new global empire, creating the Space Force shortly thereafter. Thus, Anno presents an alternate history in which Japan's Economic Miracle allows it to overtake America as world leader, and in which remilitarisation results in a just global order free from the corruption of the historical Japanese Empire.

A *hinomaru* flag hangs in the background during a Space Force induction.

Gunbuster's heroic-tragic narrative is entirely free from perpetrator themes. The space monsters appear as mindless creatures bent only on destruction: war is not a political conflict, but a cosmic force against which humanity must struggle. Unlike Anno's later works or influences like *Yamato* and *Gundam*, *Gunbuster* entails no uncanny confrontation with the Other, nor are perpetrator themes hinted at. The closest example would be the sentimental Captain Tashiro uttering "forgive me" as Noriko makes her final sacrifice; however, as the plan was proposed by Noriko herself, Tashiro is free from direct responsibility for her fate.

Whether Anno consciously identified as a nationalist in his youth remains unclear,

though there are hints of nationalist themes in some of his early collaborations, which see Japanese heroes piloting giant *mecha* to defeat representatives of Japan's old Russian and American military foes. A standout example is Shinji Higuchi's amateur *tokusatsu* short "Aikoku Sentai Dainippon" ("Patriotic Squadron Great Japan"), with Anno credited for design and optics. The short delivers a loose parody of the Russo-Japanese War mixed with Cold War tensions: a team of five *Power Rangers*-style warriors sporting the Rising Sun flag fight communist infiltration masterminded by the Red Bears and their sinister leader, Death Kremlin. Each of the *sentai* are named after Japanese cultural emblems—Kamikaze, Harakiri, Geisha, Sukiyaki, and Tempura—and the giant robot they summon for the final battle powers-up its sword with energy from Mt. Fuji. With their abilities drawn from Japanese cultural aesthetics, they defeat the thinly veiled Soviet menace. While likely intended as a tongue-in-cheek comedy short, it nonetheless serves as a precursor to Japanese nationalist themes in future Gainax works and Higuchi's own cinematic projects, such as his 2006 adaptation of *Japan Sinks*: that film ends with the sublimation of nuclear trauma as hero sacrifices himself *kamikaze*-style detonates a string of atomic bombs to halt tectonic movement and save the Japanese islands from annihilation.

Another example is1987's *MADOX-01*, on which Anno worked as key animator. In this pulpy OVA, a Japanese university student accidentally activates an experimental "MADOX" robot fighting suit, which places him in the sights of Lieutenant Kilgore, a warmongering American who declares that "Tokyo or Vietnam, it's all the same battlefield to me." As he prepares to lead the chase and retrieve the MADOX, he adds that the JSDF can "direct traffic", a clear nod to Japan's Article 9 and their place within the US military umbrella. Kilgore's rampage across Tokyo is short lived, however, as he is outsmarted by the student and the robot's Japanese inventor before falling to his death. In short, the narrative is one of Japanese postwar science triumphing over a caricature of American military might. At the

same time, the film hints at a critique of nationalist nostalgia: at one point during the chase, a group of hooligans approach the MADOX in a car sporting the Rising Sun flag on its bonnet, with which they deliberately cause a roadside crash. As in the anime discussed in Chapter 2, there is an ambivalence towards Japanese military empowerment.

Left: the giant *mecha*'s interior in "Dainippon". Right: the hooligans' car in *MADOX-01*.

While *Gunbuster* might appear at first glance to promote a simple sublimation of national war memory, Anno does show signs of the ambivalence that permeates his later works. One of his notable influences is Kihachi Okamoto's *The Battle of Okinawa* (1971), which recreates the first and only land invasion of the Japanese islands during the Pacific War. The film begins with a more lighthearted and comical tone, before slowly shifting into graphic violence and an unflinching depiction of the suffering of the Okinawans. Children's perspectives are foregrounded, and the war zone becomes, in many ways, a site of play, before undermining this presentation as the brutality and futility of the conflict becomes clear. While not overtly critical of Japan's military activities within the Pacific, it does emphasise the suffering imposed on recruits and civilians by the ideology of the *kokutai*, particularly sacrifice for the collective. Anno explores the duality of this theme of sacrifice, wherein traumatic experience (usually within a military context) gives his young heroes a sense of identity and purpose, even as they are openly sacrificed by a military establishment.

This influence returns from a more critical angle in *Evangelion*, where protagonist Shinji Ikari finds his only sense of purpose in fighting for Tokyo-based military organisation NERV, even as he faces repeated traumatisation through high-stakes battles. Noriko is fifteen years old, while Shinji is just fourteen, reflecting the recruitment of boys as young as fifteen to sacrifice themselves as *kamikaze* pilots for the *kokutai*. This motif appears in several of Anno's influences, especially Tomino's *Gundam* and *Ideon*, which emphasise the negative impact of war on children thrust into military service.

While Noriko finds purpose and meaning in her role as pilot, to the point of spiritual rebirth and apotheosis, there is a theme of alienation running throughout *Gunbuster*. As the series progresses, Noriko remains a teenager due to the time dilation accompanying space travel, while her friends on Earth appear to age rapidly. While technological enclosure empowers her to overcome apocalyptic trauma, it also isolates her socially. In the end human, it is human relationships that give *Gunbuster* its dramatic power, precluding a simple narrative of overcoming external threats through advanced technologies and military hierarchy. Noriko's sacrifices are made willingly, motivated by her desire to avenge her father and protect humanity rather than loyalty to the state. Furthermore, by emphasising friendship over marshal loyalty, Anno partially subverts the *kamikaze* sacrifice narrative: as Noriko and Kazumi head out for their final operation, it is revealed that they are not on a suicide mission: because Kazumi has chosen to accompany Noriko, they will be able to use Gunbuster's spare engine to survive the symbolic nuclear explosion and return home. Rather than die in a blaze of glory, they embrace a message of hope, pledging to live on after the conflict. In the end, it is the individual relationships built between the characters that take precedence, not their military roles. Right before Noriko is thrust forward in time, she cries out a final goodbye to her old classmate Kimiko: it is friendship that is on her mind, not thoughts of victory in battle. Likewise, the paper cranes hanging in Kazumi's cockpit represent the human lives she

fought to protect.

Anno also alludes to a possible critique of nationalist nostalgia through a small detail of the "welcome home" sign: its final *katakana* (イ) is flipped horizontally, implying that Earth's future inhabitants have reconstituted a script that they no longer use themselves. If so, it may be that Earth's language and culture have moved beyond the point of being recognisably Japanese, invoking themes of universal humanity over nationalism. Noriko and Kazumi free to establish new lives and identifies, independent of military hierarchy or conflict.

Furthermore, technological enclosure is discarded when the heroines return home. As the credits roll, we see the ruined husk of Gunbuster drift by in Earth's orbit, having outlived its usefulness. Noriko and Kazumi are no longer defined by their roles as pilots, and are able to move on from Gunbuster and their war with the Space Monsters. Trauma is overcome on both an epic scale and a personal level: if Gunbuster represents Noriko's desire to reconnect with her lost father, then relinquishing the machine signifies a resolution to her process of grief. This is by no means a rejection of technology; Noriko and Kazumi still rely on spaceships to fly home, and the "welcome home" sign is made possible only by the coordination of Earth's electrical lighting infrastructure. Indeed, Noriko says "Thank you, Gunbuster," before departing the robot. Anno's heroes do not abandon technology but move to reduce its isolating potential, turning their attention to intimate relationships and communication.

It must also be noted that *Gunbuster* is an unabashed celebration not merely of the otaku's idealisation of science, but of otaku subculture itself. The serious dramatic narrative periodically gives way to reflexive nods to the viewer, with countless references to pop culture icons like *Aim for the Ace*. Furthermore, Noriko herself is hinted to be an otaku by the plethora of anime posters in her bedroom, some of which—namely *Yamato* and *Nausicaä*—

representing *Gunbuster*'s influences. Her otaku identity is made explicit in a bonus "Science Lesson" *omake* released in the mid-90s, where Noriko cosplays as characters from *Sailor Moon*, which Anno was a big fan of at the time. We might read Noriko as a kind of anima for Anno: a beautiful fighting girl who serves as an inspiring (and eroticised) hero who shares the interests of otaku viewers. Anno's directing embodies the early Gainax spirit of "DAICON IV", which celebrates the fusion of tropes and images from beloved works of fiction into a manifesto for the otaku and their passionate fusion of pop culture with scientific ideals. It is this celebratory outlook that Anno would begin to question in his later works.

Anno's Turning Point: Fascism and Technological Ambivalence in *Nadia*

Nadia began airing in 1990 and ended in April 1991—the tipping point prior to the asset bubble's collapse—and marks a transition between the idealism of *Gunbuster* and cynicism of *Evangelion*. Anno explores his trademark existential themes while turning a more critical eye on humanity's relationship to technology and Japanese military picture: the heroine's flaws and pessimistic outlook often supersede her strengths, and themes of perpetrator trauma emerge in sharp contrast to *Gunbuster*'s romanticised nationalism. In the end, however, these conflicts are overcome, preserving the grand narrative of progress through science and painting an optimistic picture of humanity's future.

Anno adapted the series from a story treatment written by Miyazaki in the 1970s, ideas from which he recycled for *Conan* and *Laputa*, and Miyazaki's influence is evident in *Nadia*'s structure. In 19th century Paris, Jean, a young aeroplane inventor, meets Nadia, a foreign girl on the run from thieves seeking her magic jewel. The children pair up and set out on an adventure, where they learn that they live in a post-apocalyptic world: the ancient civilisation of Atlantis destroyed itself with advanced superweapons long ago, and Nadia's

jewel turns out to be the key to reviving those weapons. This makes her the target of the fascistic Neo-Atlantean nation and their dictator, Gargoyle, who seeks to restore Atlantis to its former glory and govern the world through military might. Jean and Nadia work to oppose this regime, and with the aid of the Nautilus crew (loosely inspired by Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*), they succeed in saving humanity from a further apocalyptic disaster. Parallels to *Laputa* are immediately apparent, but where Pazu and Sheeta enjoy a harmonious relationship, Anno emphasises conflict between his characters by contrasting Jean, an optimistic, science-loving inventor, against Nadia, a pessimistic pacifist and vegetarian who sees science as the pathway to militarism and alienation. *Nadia* thus functions as a dialectic: an ongoing debate between Jean's scientific utopianism and Nadia's distrust of technology, which intersects with the political conflict between the humanist Nemo and fascist dictator Gargoyle. The question at the heart of the narrative is whether Atlanteans (and, by extension, humans) are doomed to repeat the cycle of war and apocalypse as long as advanced technologies remain within reach. In the end, Anno seems to favour an optimistic reading: the return of the repressed is overcome as Gargoyle's apocalyptic superweapons are foiled by the heroes' valour, leaving humanity free to pursue constructive technological development in the coming 20th century.

Anno's narrative reflects the ideals of Japan's postwar pacifism and Economic Miracle. *Nadia* is Anno's sole major work set outside Japan, yet much like Miyazaki's apocalyptic texts, there are subtle allusions to Japanese war memory and, unlike *Gunbuster*, the war crimes of the Imperial regime. The remnants of Atlantean civilisation draw cultural aesthetics from Europe and Africa, with the city of Tartessos hidden somewhere on the African continent. Meanwhile, the Neo-Atlanteans draw on iconography from Western fascist and racialist groups: they make Nazi salutes while chanting slogans in unison and sport pointed hoots reminiscent of the Klu Klux Klan, while their military uniforms follow 19th-century

European style. The Nazi connection is further highlighted in the bonus *omake*, one of which is a Neo-Atlantean propaganda film in the style of Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935). Further, it is revealed in the end that the dictator Gargoyle is not ethnically Atlantean, but one of the very humans he seeks to oppress, possibly alluding to the popular theory that Hitler had partial Jewish ancestry. However, *Nadia* deviates from the direct Nazi parallel by introducing Emperor Neo, a puppet ruler whom Gargoyle controls to serve his own ends. Anno thereby shifts introduces an allegory for Japanese history, particularly the controversial McArthur narrative of Hirohito as a powerless figurehead overruled by the militarist government.

On the heroes' side, parallels to Japan are less apparent, but it is clear that Anno styled the Nautilus crew after *Space Battleship Yamato*: as Jean and company board the upgraded N-Nautilus, *Nadia* goes so far as to mirror shot-by-shot the scene where *Yamato*'s protagonists first board their resurrected battleship.[2] The willingness of the Nautilus crew to sacrifice themselves in battle is highlighted repeatedly throughout the series, and in the final battle, Nemo does give his life to detonate the Red Noah spacecraft in outer space, thus saving Earth's residents from a catastrophic explosion. It is evident that for Anno, *Nadia*'s heroic resistance fighters reflect the *Yamato-damashii* of *Gunbuster*'s idealised Japan, which is now dissociated from the memory of the Imperial regime itself: Nemo and his crew represent the good Japan, while Gargoyle's fascist Empire represents the bad Japan and its brutal military past.

## Nemo and Gargoyle: Reconciliation with the Perpetrator Fathers

As in *Future Boy Conan*, which Anno ranks as one of his favourite anime, the dissociation between ideal and villainous representations of Japan is not absolute. Miyazaki's influence is clear, as Captain Nemo evidently draws on Doctor Lao in both design and characterisation: plagued by guilt over his role in the apocalypse that destroyed his homeland,

Nemo fills the role of an ambivalent perpetrator father caught between the "good father" and complicity. In the series' backstory, Nemo was the king of Tartessos, the last surviving Atlantean city, where he failed to prevent the rise of Gargoyle's fascist movement. As Gargoyle prepared to activate the Atlanteans' superweapon, the Tower of Babel, Nemo disrupted the attack by removing its control mechanism, an act that spared humanity but turned the weapon's apocalyptic energy upon Tartessos itself. In attonement, he devotes his life to thwarting the regime responsible for the disaster, and, like Lao, sacrifices himself during the series' climax, which allows the young generation to inherit the mantle of responsibility. At the same time, however, he is forced to rely on the same advanced technology that caused the disaster, contradicting both his own pacifist ideals and those of his daughter, Nadia, which causes her to reject him as a warmonger.

Nadia's encounter with her father and the Neo-Atlanteans triggers an identity crisis as she is forced to confront the legacy into which she was born. Having been separated from her family as a baby upon Tartessos' destruction, Nadia's only connection to her past is her Blue Water pendant, which brings her back into contact with her kin throughout the series; indeed, the narrative is structured around a continued return of the repressed, as Nadia finds herself unable to escape the echoes of the past. During key moments, she is confronted by representatives of the Atlantean legacy—Nemo, Red Noah's artificial intelligence, Gargoyle, and her mother's spirit—who each teach her about the past while forcing her to question its implications for her identity. For instance, when the Nautilus stops for supplies at its base in Antarctica, Nemo takes Jean and Nadia on a tour through what can only be described as a museum of the ancient past; here, he impresses upon the children their role as inheritors and the responsibility this entails, noting the fall of countless prior civilisations. Jean receives this news with enthusiasm, particularly as Nemo speaks of humanity's potential for peaceful technological development. Nadia, however, resists identification with her father, whom she

sees as a perpetrator for his pragmatic participation in war. They are unable to reconcile, and shortly thereafter the children are separated from the Nautilus.

During this period of separation, Nadia encounters a surviving Atlantean starship named Red Noah, which draws her into its control centre. The ship's artificial intelligence expounds upon the war-torn history of Atlantean civilisation, before declaring that it is Nadia's destiny to rebuild it as inheritor of the Blue Water crystal. Nadia is given the opportunity to control the ancient technology of Atlantis, including its superweapons, which might enable her to overcome Gargoyle and the Neo-Atlanteans; however, she rejects this offer, saying "what good is the rumour of a dead country?" She resolves to forge her own path independent of the Atlantean legacy, instead affirming an identity born of her relationships with Jean and other humans. At the same time, she resists the technological enclosure of Red Noah, which threatens to absorb her into a digital world. Anno employs hyperlimited animation to emphasise the artificiality of the space, which blurs the boundary between material reality and Nadia's inner world, as well as the confusion between self and machine. Character animation is minimised, replaced with static shots and abstract special effects. Nadia's resistance champions interpersonal relationships over mechanical interfaces, a theme Anno returns to with *Evangelion*.
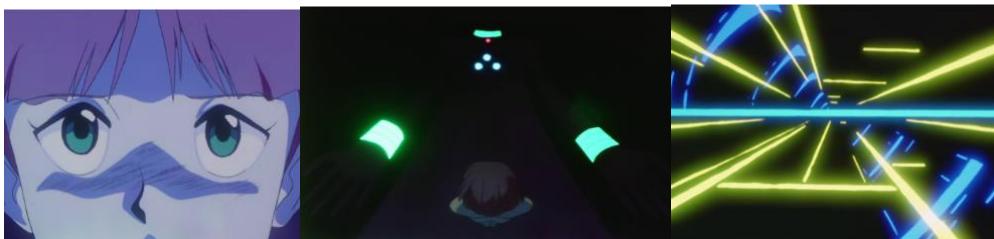
Left: long-takes centred on Nadia's eyes. Middle: Nadia stands before Red Noah's computer, which functions as a mechanical enclosure. Right: a tunnel of light from Nadia's perspective, evoking Kubrick's *2001*.

Nadia's choice is not without consequences, as Gargoyle succeeds in capturing Red Noah for himself before taking Nadia hostage. Here, Nadia comes face to face with the evil

perpetrator father, as Gargoyle, adopting a paternal attitude, attempts to induct her into

Atlantean culture as princess. In a scene that parallels Nemo's tour of the Antarctic base,

Gargoyle takes Nadia through a history museum onboard the ship; however, this sequence

reveals the darkest aspects of the Atlantean past, likely alluding to Unit 731, as she bears

witness to genetic engineering laboratories containing the grotesque remains of ancient

experiments in which humans were first created. Nadia furiously resists identification with

Gargoyle, disavowing any affiliation with the Atlantean legacy and its associated perpetrator

trauma.

Left: Nemo takes Jean and Nadia on a tour of his Antarctic base. Right: Gargoyle takes Nadia through records of Atlantean history aboard Red Noah.

In the end, both Jean and Nadia demonstrate their willingness to break free of the

Atlanteans' violent path: Jean refuses to shoot the brainwashed Nadia at Nemo's command,

and Nadia forfeits the immense power of the Blue Water crystals to save Jean's life. Thus, the

audience are left with the promise that someday, when mankind reaches the nuclear age, it

may be saved from the cultural dead-end faced by Atlantis. As in *Gunbuster*, Anno

acknowledges the limitations of such optimism. *Nadia*'s prologue warns that World War I

lies on the horizon, and mentions the European colonies being built in Africa and Asia; thus,

viewers are reminded that even as Neo-Atlantis is defeated, humanity prepares to make the

same mistakes. It may be that Jean's inventions end up being used as tools of war, just as

Jiro's planes are subsumed into the Imperial machine; however, it is also possible that Jean
and Nadia will apply the lessons of the Neo-Atlantis conflict to steer humanity in a better
direction and change the course of history.

Where *Conan*'s Doctor Lao believes that human salvation demands a forfeiture of
advanced technology and return to nature, Nemo believes that while the Atlanteans are
doomed to repeat their original sin, human beings may one day achieve the same level of
scientific advancement but manage the responsibility without resorting to militarism. If
humanity can overcome enframing, it can change its relation to technology (even advanced
technology); whereas Gargoyle enframes everything in sight, seeing humans as a resource to
control given that the Atlanteans manufactured their species. As Nemo sacrifices himself and
Nadia gives up the Blue Water, all connection to the past is severed, suggesting a critique of
nationalist nostalgia: Nadia is willing to forego her identity as an Atlantean princess in favour
of an uncertain future within human modernity. In the end, Anno embraces Japan's postwar
ideology of pacifism and progress through economic growth driven by scientific innovation,
with a nod to otaku subculture by way of Jean's technophilia.

Nadia marks a dramatic break from *Gunbuster*'s nationalist nostalgia: where the latter
series attempts to rehabilitate Japanese war memory as the potential basis for identity, *Nadia*
proposes a clean disconnect from the past. While both anime entail heroic and tragic
narratives, *Nadia* leans more towards the tragic side, upholding Japan's postwar pacifist ethos
in contrast to its failed fascist era. Perpetrator themes do emerge in *Nadia*, and there are hints
at a reconcilationist narrative through the union of human and Atlantean heroes. However, as
in *Conan*, Anno's heroes are able to escape direct experience of perpetrator trauma, which is
limited to representatives of the older generations; destructive potential lies in all humans, but
can be resisted. His message is one of hope for Japan's postwar youth, who had succeeded in
building a thriving peacetime economy through scientific innovation. In sum, *Nadia*

maintains faith in grand narratives of postwar progress and otaku subculture while discarding

nostalgia for the grand narratives of the Imperial era. Following the onset of the Lost Decade,

Anno would return to these question a more pessimistic outlook.

The Lost Decade: *Evangelion*, Withdrawal, and the Decline of Grand Narratives

Murakami frames *Neon Genesis Evangelion* as "the landmark otaku anime film": a

work that "points to the complicit relationship ... between the creators and audience" of

anime subculture by highlighting the consumer's "inner world" (127). In this reading, Anno

strove to "transcend the otaku tradition" by creating a "meta-otaku film", achieved both

through its avant garde techniques ("white-on-black subtitle graphs and speedy, almost

subliminal construction of action sequences"), and by the extremity of its depiction of its

heroes psychological struggles while paying homage to prior cultural landmarks (128).

Murakami rightly situates Evangelion as "the endpoint of the postwar lineage of otaku

favorites - from *Godzilla* to the *Ultra* series to *Yamato* to *Gundam* - in which hero-figures

increasingly question and agonize over their righteous missions to defend the earth and

humanity"; he notes that by the final two episodes, the focus has shifted entirely to Shinji's

interior drama as he struggles to figure out "what his life means both as a person and as an

Evangelion pilot" (128). In doing so, Anno "raised a challenge to works that refused to allow

audiences any escape from the reality of their own self-consciousness" (128).

It is worth comparing the aforementioned anime, *Yamato* and *Gundam*, to *Evangelion*

in light of Murakami's remarks. As he states, all of these series feature heroes who question

the supposed righteousness of the brutal military conflicts into which they are thrust;

however, in their cases, the grand narrative of heroism is ultimately maintained. *Yamato*'s

perpetrator themes result in a bittersweet ending, but the crew are ultimately victorious,

saving humanity from the irradiation of its homeland. As the battleship flies into Earth's atmosphere and disappears from sight, the planet transforms before the viewer's eyes from a barren wasteland to a pristine blue orb. The grand narrative of progress through science is preserved, as the cosmo cleaner technology obtained from Iscandar heals the Earth from the scars of radiation. The heroic deeds of the Yamato crew are vindicated, despite the trauma of destroying Gamilus.

Gundam takes a more critical approach to military Sci-Fi. Protagonist Amuro is an obvious precursor to Shinji and undergoes a similar conflict: as he develops psychic powers, he is torn between continuing his role as a fighter pilot or retreating into a spiritual realm free from conflict. In the end, however, he concludes that his life is given meaning by the emotional bonds he forged with his ship's crew, and returns to the real world, where his comrades await him with open arms. Heroism is ultimately affirmed, as it is only through embracing his military role that Amuro achieves this social affirmation, despite the trauma he suffers in battle. However, where the Yamato crew achieve decisive military victory and fly home to a happy ending, Gundam's heroes do not ultimately resolve the overarching conflict; a closing narration reveals that diplomatic talks between Zeon and the Earth Federation eventually put an end to the war. Tomino constructs a setting in which heroic resolve is repeatedly questioned, and in which young protagonists are forced to accept their limited agency over world affairs. Instead, as in Miyazaki's films of the 1990s, characters' inner worlds and personal relationships begin to take precedence over external conflict. Likewise, progress through science is called into doubt: while the superior Gundam mecha and White Base ship give the heroes a decisive combat advantage, humanity shows few signs of advancement beyond 20th century militarism.

The destabilisation of heroic narratives reaches its zenith in Evangelion's conclusion: Shinji is rendered incapable of fighting in his giant robot, and the true conflict takes place

entirely within his inner world. At the heart of the narrative is Shinji's simultaneous desire

for, and resistance to, the recognition of others. In the TV series' more positive ending, Shinji

appears to reach a similar conclusion to Amuro, reflecting that his life is given value by the

relationships forged during his time as a pilot, though as Takana observes, we cannot know

whether Shinji will go on to embrace these relationships in reality (118). But Anno's

alternative ending, *The End of Evangelion*, presents a more cynical angle. During the film's

climax, Shinji experiences Human Instrumentality, the fusion of all human souls into a

collective entity without ego boundaries, which is represented visually by his fusion with the

heroine Rei (*Evangelion*'s fan-favourite character). But after long introspection he rejects

Instrumentality, concluding that he cannot have self-definition without the gaze of others (in

Azuma's terms, he foregoes animalisation). His physical body is restored, along with that of

fellow pilot Asuka, and they wash ashore together on a beach in a post-apocalyptic world;

however, Shinji cannot bear Asuka's scrutiny and attempts to choke her. Asuka,

understanding Shinji's struggle, raises her hand to stroke his cheek, and he relents, breaking

down in tears. She utters the words "How disgusting," and the film ends, its final shot leaving

us the image of a blood-red wasteland. Anno paints a bleak picture of the human condition

both internally and externally, with no indication as to how humanity is to recover beyond

this point.

Murakami comments on Shinji's depiction in *The End of Evangelion*, describing the

young protagonist as "only capable of self-involved communication", which draws Asuka's

(and society's) disgust ("Earth in My Window", 131). In this way, Shinji can be seen as a

stand-in for the withdrawn otaku that Anno set out to criticise, but may also reflect broader

anxieties. Murakami reads Shinji as Anno's alter-ego (a reading affirmed by the director's

own remarks) and as a reflection of Japanese postwar nihilism:

> In a sense, the search for a place in the world, which so torments Anno's alter-
> ego Shinji, is the insurmountable challenge facing Japan. Our relief at finally

putting the trauma of the war behind us was brief, for we immediately were
confronted by our inability to devise an independent future. Japan is now
enmeshed in the search for what it means to have a self. (131-132)

Tanaka's discussion of *Evangelion* overlaps with Murakami's. She introduces her
analysis by noting that 1995 was marked by two apocalyptic events—the Kobe Earthquake
and Aum's sarin gas attack—which "revealed not just the fragility of the Japanese
infrastructure and emergency system that had previously been thought inviolable, secure and
coordinated, but also that human lives can come to a sudden, violent end even in a highly
modern society" (111). The result was a destabilisation of Osawa's fictional age, alongside
recognition of "the uncanny Other within the self". Tanaka argues that apocalyptic Sci-Fi
works of the 1970s and early 1980s maintained idealistic grand narratives through stories
with a linear chronological structure; conversely, those from the mid-1980s emphasise ideals
being sought within an "explicitly fictive space by introducing multiple linear timelines." In
1995's *Evangelion*, Tanaka posits a further development. Where *mecha* anime typically
showcase "the growth and maturation of the young protagonist", Tanaka argues that
Evangelion "does not explicitly portray Shinji's growth", instead emphasising the "dark,
bleak aspects of the process of growth"; the series "foregrounds his withdrawal from conflict
with his father and from his responsibility to save the world, and the psychological collapse
he suffers as a result of the ensuing trauma" (115). Additionally, where conventional Sci-Fi
anime usually explain the reason for the apocalyptic crisis and provide a vision of the world
in its aftermath, *Evangelion* "dispenses with explanations" of basic plot details, such as the
origin of the Angels and their conflict with humans, focusing largely on Shinji's personal
experiences and inner world (115), which function as a distinct timeline from the "reality" of
the series' military and geopolitical conflicts (126).

As with *Akira* and the end of the *Nausicaä* manga, Tanaka posits a transition from
modern to postmodern apocalypse: instead of a dialectic of progress that reconciles binary

oppositions, binaries disintegrate as "moral standards and social ethics" become "nebulous, equivocal, and problematic" (115). For Tanaka, *Evangelion* takes this deconstruction a step further, arguing that "society is insignificant in the story", with minimal exposure of communities outside the NERV and SEELE organisations, and that moral questions of what is good or evil are not presented. The relationship between self and society is superseded by that between self and Other; Shinji is motivated not by a desire to save the world, but by a desire for his father's recognition and the meaning provided by his special status as Eva pilot (116). In addition to an uncanny identification with both his father and mother, he later discovers that he bears a biological connection to the grotesque enemies he fights, blurring the boundary between self and enemy Other (118). Furthermore, the TV series leaves viewers frustrated regarding the outcome of its world-shaking conflicts: while there are hints that Gendo and Rei initiate Human Instrumentality, the final episode largely limits its perspective to Shinji's "inner psychological world" as he undergoes an identity crisis (114). There are signs of internal maturation, as Shinji farewells his parents and discovers that his identity extends beyond his role as pilot, but it is impossible to know whether this maturation will carry over to the external world, nor what decisions he will make within Instrumentality (118).

A vocal contingent of fans expressed outrage at the unclear resolution, with a few sending death threats, which led a disgruntled Anno to direct a revised theatrical ending in *The End of Evangelion* (1997). The film explores Instrumentality more explicitly: ego boundaries are destroyed as all human minds are fused into a collective consciousness, which eliminates the existence of the Other and resulting alienation. In the end, Shinji rejects Instrumentality, accepting the existence of the Other in order to preserve his individual identity; however, upon seeing his fellow pilot, Asuka, he attempts to strangle her "out of fear of refusal" (119). The conclusion thus presents a bleak reality in which Shinji fails to

achieve stable identity and in which there appears "no hope or restoration after the apocalyptic catastrophe", presenting viewers with an image of "disillusionment" (119). Tanaka reads *Evangelion* as an "unflinching depiction of the difficulty of becoming mature in a contemporary society without the Symbolic, by portraying the reality of living in a world where one can neither meet true Others nor establish inter-subjective relationships", which she sees as the source of the anime's popularity (120).

Tanaka does not mention *Nadia*, but the divergence between the two works reflects the shift from modern to postmodern apocalypse. *Nadia*'s apocalyptic conflict functions as a dialectic in which hidden truths are revealed and opposing forces reconcile. The union of Jean and Nadia signifies a successful reconciliation of technological optimism and nature-oriented romanticism, and of the human and Atlantean races, presenting a vision of progress in which the conflicts of industrialism and ethno-nationalism are overcome. Despite Nadia's ambivalence towards Nemo, he and the Nautilus crew are shown to be reasonable authority figures in whom she can trust, and the narrative is one of good triumphing over evil through responsible use of technology. By contrast, *Evangelion*'s Shinji "cannot know what makes the Angels his enemies and what makes Seele and the Nerv his allies", and struggles to find meaning in his role as heroic saviour (Tanaka 119). Like his mentor Miyazaki, Anno transitions to works in which grand narratives are dissolved and personal crises of ethics and identity take centre stage.

Some of Tanaka's interpretations bear further scrutiny. For instance, I would argue that Shinji does exhibit signs of growth and emotional development beyond his inner world. In the first arc, Shinji is forced to overcome his instinct towards isolation as he begins to empathise with others—especially fellow pilots Rei and Asuka—and establish social bonds alongside a reluctant sense of duty. As the series progresses, he begins to question his father's authority, eventually mustering the courage to challenge him openly on ethical dilemmas.

The narrative is not one of total stagnation, but rather of regression: Shinji does make some

progress towards overcoming his past traumas, only to be unable to cope with the

retraumatisation he experiences as a pilot at NERV. He confronts the return of the repressed

but fails to master it despite his physical empowerment, which results in psychological

regression, reflected by his symbolic return to the womb.

I would also contest the notion that moral questions go unexplored: Shinij's perpetrator

trauma stems from precisely such questions, as he finds himself repelled by his father's

cutthroat military tactics. Likewise, older characters like Shinji's guardian Misato are forced

to question whether their use of fourteen-year-old pilots is justified in order to save humanity,

echoing Imperial Japan's enlistment of teenaged *kamikaze* pilots in the desperate final days of

the Pacific War. Tanaka writes that *Evangelion* "does not reflect a national frame at all" and

that "Japan as a nation is seldom depicted in the story", with secretive international

organisations forming the primary loci of power (116). As I intend to argue, however, the

Japanese setting is fundamental to Anno's thematic exploration: much like the

preceding *Gunbuster* and *Nadia*, and subsequent works like *His & Her Circumstances*, *Love

& Pop*, and *Shin Godzilla*, *Evangelion* is constructed as a meditation on Japan's past, present,

and future. For instance, while the secret society SEELE is implied to be run primarily by

Westerners, much of the series' background conflict stems from the machinations of Gendo

and his Japanese NERV branch as he moves to outwit SEELE for his own ends: thus, as in

Gunbuster, Anno subtly alludes to international conflicts in which Japan comes to supersede

the West. *Evangelion* certainly has applicability beyond the Japanese context, given Anno's

fondness for archetypal storytelling, but removing the Tokyo-3 setting would diminish the

specific commentary on Japan's wartime past and postwar redevelopment.

The Decline of Scientific Optimism

Evangelion draws heavily on memory of Japan's postwar reconstruction, in which the

ruins of Tokyo were turned into a thriving metropolis. In the wake of Second Impact, the

Earth-shaking apocalypse caused by contact with the Angels, Japan constructs the city of

Tokyo-3 near the headquarters of NERV, the organisation tasked with defeating the new

apocalyptic threat. While many parts of the world are implied to remain in extreme poverty,

Tokyo-3's residents enjoy access to modern consumer comforts a mere fifteen years post-

disaster. Anno's detailed rendering of the setting reflects the optimism of Japan's Economic

Miracle, in which the trauma of defeat was partially overcome through scientific innovation

and booming mechanical industries. This ethos is highlighted during the second episode

when Misato Katsuragi, Shinji's new guardian and military commander, takes him to a hilltop

overlooking the Tokyo-3 area. The entire cityscape is empty, as the buildings are equipped to

recede into the underground Geofront during a crisis; with Shinji's recent defeat of an Angel,

skyscrapers begin to emerge, accompanied by a vivid sunset and uplifting brass music.

Anno's animation paints a compelling vision of a technologically-optimised future in which

the environment is engineered perfectly to meet human needs. Furthermore, this moment

conveys to Shinji a rationale behind his role as an Eva pilot, as Misato shows him the urban

haven safeguarded by his sacrifices.

Shinji and Misato watch as Tokyo-3's skyscrapers emerge from the ground at
sunset.

This sequence reflects the passion for technology shared by Anno and his otaku peers; indeed, much of *Evangelion*'s initial stems from the detailed rendering of machines and vehicles, including the Evangelion robots. As in prior otaku works, there is an evident desire to aestheticise military machines. However, Anno turns an increasingly critical eye upon scientific idealism as the series progresses. The technophilia of *Nadia*'s Jean Raltique manifests in Shinji's classmate Kensuke, an otaku-like military enthusiast who dreams wistfully of becoming an Eva pilot; immersed in fantasies of heroism and advanced machinery, he remains oblivious to the the pilots' traumatic experiences, which becomes a recurring point of comedy throughout the series. Shinji, like his predecessor Nadia, has no such enthusiasm: while piloting an Eva initially provides empowerment and fosters new relationships, he grows increasingly alienated due to the mounting trauma of battle later in the series, and his Evangelion robot (which contains his mother's soul) becomes a site of withdrawal as Shinji closes off to the outside world.

Furthermore, Anno highlights the corrupt nature of power institutions in *Evangelion*'s world, suggesting—in contrast to *Nadia*—that there is little guarantee against its abuse. It is revealed that the Katsuragi Expedition to Antarctica, framed publicly as a scientific investigation, was in fact a plot by Gendo and SEELE to deliberately trigger Second Impact by making contact with the first Angel, Adam. The apocalypse was caused by the very institutions who claim to be fighting against it, disrupting the apparent heroic narrative. It later transpires that the entire conflict with the Angels merely a step in SEELE's Human Instrumentality Project, and that the widespread suffering inflicted on Earth's population by Second Impact was all part of the plan. The conspiracy to provoke war with the Angels may be an allusion to the 1931 Manchurian Incident, in which Japanese soldiers staged a false flag attack on Japan's South Manchuria Railway as a pretext for full-scale invasion. This revelation reflects Japan's pacifist narrative, which blames the militarist government for

inflicting the war on its own people through misleading propaganda, but also hints at reconciliationism: while the series limits its focus to Japan, it hints several times at the poverty and civil unrest experienced across the globe due to Second Impact. As *Evangelion*'s mysteries unravel, Anno introduces allusions to Unit 731: just as Gargoyle gives Nadia a tour of Red Noah's laboratories, Shinji is taken through the secret depths of NERV's underground headquarters, where he learns that fellow pilot Rei Ayanami is but one of many clones genetically engineered as replaceable pilots. Also on display are piles of giant skulls from early attempts to create the Evangelion robots, which turn out to be clones of Adam. Advanced science no longer has the same appeal as in the early episodes.

Evangelion parallels *Nadia*'s motif of journeying into the past and confronting the remnants of past regimes, including evidence of corruption and brutality, but unlike *Nadia*, *Evangelion* allows Shinji no heroic break from the legacy of his father. It is here that Anno's perpetrator narrative begins to emerge, as Shinji finds himself unwillingly complicit in the actions of NERV and SEELE, experiencing an uncanny identification with his father. Two scenes in particular come to mind. In the first, Shinji finds himself facing his schoolmate, Touji, whose Eva unit has fallen under the control of an Angel. Shinji refuses Gendo's orders to attack, refusing to take a human life for the greater good; in response, Gendo assumes control over Shinji's Evangelion, which proceeds to destroy Touji's robot in an especially graphic display. Shinji is forced to watch as his own hands are forced by his father to commit brutal violence: an extreme moment of traumatic identification. Following the incident, Shinji attempts to leave NERV, but reluctantly returns to Tokyo-3 when it seems that he is the only person who can save it. This allows him to befriend Kaworu, the newest Eva pilot, who is eventually revealed to be the final Angel. During their final confrontation, Shinji is faced with an unbearable choice: either he must destroy his enemy, or all of humanity will perish. At Kaworu's urging, and free from Gendo's direct influence, Shinji opts to save humanity,

revealing that he shares his father's capacity to kill in the name of the greater good. This traumatic encounter is what finally triggers Shinji's mental collapse, as all grand narratives are destabilised. In this regard, *Evangelion* fits Hashimoto's description of Japanese perpetrator narratives as descents into madness, in which ordinary people discover their capacity for violence and suffer psychological crises as a result.

Evangelion espouses a deep mistrust of power institutions and their capacity to wield science for the greater good, while warning of the potentially isolating effects of technological enclosure. *Gunbuster*'s nostalgic rehabilitation of Japan's military past is firmly rescinded, but unlike *Nadia*, there is no compensatory grand narrative of economic progress through scientific innovation. As a result, Shinji descends into nihilism, incapable of sustaining a coherent identity or ideological outlook. His only resolution is that he must pursue communication with those around him, even if that leaves him without guarantees for the future.

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1. OVA (original video animation) refers to anime released directly to home video, usually targeted at a niche otaku market and often featuring content too explicit for television broadcast.

2. For a side-by-side comparison, see "Nadia's homage to Yamato" (*Anno Cinema*, 2018): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxJRD-ESQd8&ab_channel=AnnoCinema

Conclusion

There are clear limitations to Murakami's theoretical propositions. His conception of Superflat as the core tendency of Japanese aesthetics provides an innovative art historical perspective, but relies on a restricted genealogy: as Lamarre notes, post-Meiji Japanese art, including anime, reflects diverse influences extending well beyond that Edo's *ukiyo-e*. Likewise, I have called into question some of Murakami's sociological assertions, noting that memory of defeat and the atomic bomb was not entirely repressed from mainstream discourse, given the release of bomb films like *Children of Hiroshima*, *The Bells of Nagasaki*, and *I Live in Fear* immediately following the US Occupation. However, his ideas provide an excellent starting point for further inquiry; by adjusting Murakami's model with insights from theorists such as Hashimoto, LaCapra, and Elsaesser, valuable insights can be gleaned regarding the nature of Japanese war memory. Where the aforementioned live-action dramas provide a realistic documentary view of the bomb and its aftermath, emphasising the historical trauma and disempowerment faced by victims of war, subcultural films like *Godzilla* offer a fundamentally different angle through fantastical narratives of empowerment in which trauma is fought head-on. The innate lack of realism and displacement from history allows these films to explore more politically sensitive themes, including heroic narratives that resurrect Japan's wartime ideals of *bushido* and *Yamato-damashii*, and perpetrator narratives reflecting the inhumane acts committed by those in the Japanese Empire's service. In this light, Murakami's model receives partial vindication: otaku subculture does highlight politically charged topics of national memory and identity which are rarely addressed in mainstream Japanese art (though exceptions do exist). The point of departure lies in the exact nature of the taboo topics, which is why my thesis fixates on Japan's controversial perpetrator memory.

Anime like *Space Battleship Yamato* and even pacifist narratives like *Grave of the Fireflies* are often perceived as nationalist texts, as heroic narratives of noble soldiers braving hardships and willingly sacrificing themselves in battle, or as victim narratives that define Japanese war experience through the plight of civilians whose lives are destroyed by air raids and famine. My analysis reveals that while collective memory and national identity lie at the heart of many of anime's most iconic tales, these works rarely fall into simplistic nationalist or anti-nationalist messaging. Rather, they reflect a complex relation to the nation's past in which different aspects of history are dissociated and repressed to varying degrees. Heroic, victim, and perpetrator narratives appear in various combinations within single stories, displacing aspects of Japanese war memory onto different story elements. As close examination of Miyazaki and Anno reveals, apocalyptic narratives during the Economic Miracle years tend to present a clean dissociation between heroic-victim and perpetrator elements: the protagonists' factions represent grand narratives of the postwar reconstruction mixed with elements of *Yamato-damashii* and Shinto spirituality that harken back to an idealised Japan, while the villains' factions reflect the militarism and totalitarian rule of Imperial Japan. The heroic faction succeeds in overcoming the militarist threat and, empowered by advanced technology or supernatural abilities, prevents the repetition of apocalyptic trauma. Thus, viewers are able to identify with protagonists who exemplify optimistic ideals; the collective memory of defeat and atomic trauma is overcome, if only within fictional spaces. However, in the 1990s, Miyazaki and Anno begin to blur the dissociative lines between hero, victim, and perpetrator: there is no idealised Japan, and while heroes may be able to overthrow or moderate representations of the Japanese Empire, they are forced to reside in uncertain worlds without unifying grand narratives. These films reflect contemporary social concerns, connecting anxieties in the present with memories of the past to create a sense of continuity. In this regard, many of Murakami's basic propositions are

vindicated: anime's apocalyptic narratives do present fantasies that respond to national memory of defeat in the Pacific War, while at the same time indicating sociological trends that may initially be overlooked within mainstream discourse.

While Murakami's sociological analysis is prone to generalisations and oversights, it must be remembered that Murakami is an artist rather than a scholar. His aim is not to conduct a controlled statistical analysis, but to echo feelings and ideas gleaned from lived experience and subjective observation. Murakami's stated goal is to export a uniquely Japanese cultural perspective to the Western fine art world, and in this regard he appears to have succeeded not only in broadcasting Japanese aesthetics, but in introducing philosophical viewpoints and social issues advanced in Japan by the likes of Osawa, Azuma, Miyadai, Saitō, and Ōkada. In this regard, he deserves credit for helping to catalyse a cross-cultural conversation that has blossomed considerably since 2005. It is difficult to gauge how much influence Murakami has had on the explosive international popularity of Japanese subculture since the turn of the century, but as anime becomes increasingly normalised within global culture, it may be that Murakami's status within high art culture helps to bridge the gap between generations and foster older demographics' engagement with styles and genres that had previously escaped their notice. Murakami's career continues to thrive, and he has already returned to the topic of atomic trauma in 2017's *Under the Radiation Falls* exhibition, so it may be that his theories on Japanese war memory and mass culture will continue to evolve over the coming decade.

Likewise, Miyazaki has emerged from retirement for a fifth time, with production underway on a fantasy film titled *How Do You Live?*, while Anno's final *Rebuild of Evangelion* instalment is slated for a January 2021 premiere. The release of these works will likely ignite renewed discourse around the directors, and may provide further insight into the Japanese psyche as the 3/11 disaster reaches its 10th anniversary. As Tamura observes,

scepticism towards techno-utopian ideals has only grown since the Fukushima nuclear

meltdown, with many young Japanese maintaining an ambivalence towards majoritarian

democratic politics (2). At the same time, as Japan pledges to become carbon-neutral by

2050, the question of its reliance on nuclear energy is unlikely to have easy answers. In this

regard, Miyazaki and Anno serve as potent cultural barometers for their home country: the

repressed really did return, revealing that the directors' nihilistic worldviews may be more

widespread than previously thought.

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