

APOCALYPTICISM IN POSTWAR JAPANESE FICTION

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation discusses modern Japanese apocalyptic fiction in novels, manga narratives, and animated films. It begins with an overview of the apocalyptic tradition from ancient times to the modern day, and reveals the ways in which apocalyptic narratives have changed due to major socio-cultural transitions. It focuses on two themes of apocalyptic narratives: the relationship between self and Other; and the opposition of conflicting values such as life/death and natural/artificial. Through a close study of these themes in apocalyptic fictions in postwar Japan, it becomes clear that such narratives primarily target a male audience and function as a tool to stabilize the damaged identities of the nation and the modern individual after the defeat in World War II.

The study focuses on the period of transition after the end of World War II: Until the 1970s, Japanese apocalyptic narratives, targeting adult men, attempted to bring ideals into reality in order to reestablish the damaged national identity. The failures of social movements in the 1960s meant that it was no longer possible for Japanese to participate in real movements that aimed to counter the United States as threatening Other. This is reflected in the shift in apocalyptic narratives from the 1980s onward toward quests for ideals in fictional settings, targeted at younger males.

After 1995, the Japanese apocalypse becomes totally postmodernized and explicitly targeted at young boys. Apocalypse after 1995 features characters who lack serious

interpersonal relationships and those who inhabit an endless and changeless simulacrum world. It becomes difficult for the youth to establish their identities as mature members of society, for they are increasingly losing their connections with the wider community. In the contemporary Japanese apocalypse, there is no one left but a hypertrophic self-consciousness.

This raises the question of whether it is possible for contemporary Japan to become fully mature. Japanese postmodern apocalyptic narratives suggest two different responses: one is to affirm that Japan is an eternally impotent adolescent state that tries to criticize power by subversively manipulating its relationships with the powerful. The other is to wait for an infinitesimal change of maturity in mundane daily life.

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## Introduction

*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*<sup>1</sup>

— The Book of Revelation

In human histories, it has long been God/gods who are said to have created the universe and who will end it; both G/genesis and eschatology have belonged to the realm of religious literature. Narratives of the beginning and the end have been powerfully influential, since it was believed that these stories came directly from an omnipotent, transcendental being or from some other higher power. However, in the contemporary era, when many advanced nations have become highly secularized and cosmological explanations for the creation of the universe such as the Big Bang theory have become widespread, many people have come to accept science-based ideas of the beginning of the universe. As a result, non-scientific narratives of the origin of the universe are transformed into myths, and lose their impact on present reality.

On the other hand, even in the current age of increasing scientific literacy, popular images of the end of the world/universe are inspired not by scientific theories about the natural destruction or death of the planet Earth or our Solar System, but rather by various crises depicted in apocalyptic fiction such as literature and movies. That is to say, even as non-scientific stories of the *beginning* of human life and the universe are increasingly understood and/or dismissed as myth, imaginative—rather than scientific—stories of the *end* continue to predominate.

Apocalypse is thus widely understood in terms of imagination rather than science.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. 22:13 Revised Standard Version.

There is a rich diversity of apocalyptic visions in popular narratives from ancient folk stories to Hollywood disaster films: natural catastrophes; climate and ecological change causing famines and plagues; and political misrule, such as oppression and genocide, nuclear warfare, and chemical and biological warfare. Although many of these scenarios are realistic or even inspired by actual events, modern apocalyptic narratives are typically highly imaginative, and include such tropes as astronomical objects crashing into Earth; artificial intelligence run amok; and attacks by extraterrestrials. The beginning happened long ago, but the end of the world/universe is correlative to the idea of personal death. This is why apocalypse survives in *fiction* while genesis has already died; apocalypse is highly malleable; we can create infinite varieties of apocalypse and imaginations of the end, death, and what we are, reflecting various time periods and places, and fiction can reflect a sense of crisis more realistically and perhaps more compellingly than can science.

Apocalypticism has been one of the most powerful cultural themes in the West because of the long Judeo-Christian tradition. Even as Christianity *qua* religion has lost its dominance in the modern West, the apocalyptic imagination still thrives in political movements as well as in culture: literature, film, and art. Apocalypticism, however, is not a phenomenon exclusive to Judeo-Christian thinking. For instance, it is widely found in myths and folklores in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Islands,<sup>2</sup> there is a clear apocalyptic

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of apocalyptic movements in non-Judeo-Christian religious traditions include Zoroastrianism in ancient Persia; Mahdism in premodern Islam; Maitreya faith in East Asia; the “cargo” cults of the South Pacific and the Ghost Dance movement of North America. See Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (New York: Schocken, 1969). Eschatologies in non-Western tradition are also discussed in detail in Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971). Japanese eschatological folklore is studied in Miyata Noboru, *Shūmatsukan no minzokugaku* (The Folklore of Eschatology) (Tokyo: Chikuma

vision in Hindu mythology, and apocalyptic flood myths predating the story of Noah exist(ed) in many parts of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Apocalyptic themes in Japanese culture can be observed not only in the Buddhist notion of cyclical life but also in premodern legends which describe natural disasters such as major earthquakes and the subsequent recreation of communities. Japanese new religious movements in the Bakumatsu and Meiji periods (from the 1860s to the 1900s) featured strong apocalyptic beliefs and advocated radical social reform in the modern era. The Japanese apocalyptic imagination, however, underwent drastic changes following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombings continue to be among the most prominent tropes in Japanese postwar culture, with science fiction *anime*<sup>4</sup> (animation) and *manga* (comic books) depicting future cities devastated by nuclear wars. Japanese postwar fiction in various genres deals with the total destruction of the self, the community, the nation, the Earth or the universe caused by the misuse of advanced technologies. The traumatic experience of defeat in the Second World War has shaped Japanese contemporary culture by destroying the traditional identity of Japan and the Japanese people.

This dissertation focuses on the roles of apocalypse in postwar Japanese literature and the ways in which apocalyptic ideology has changed throughout the period since the

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shoten, 1998), 27-84.

<sup>3</sup> *The Epic of Gilgamesh* contains a flood myth that is considered to be from *ca.* the 20<sup>th</sup> century BC. Also, the sacred Hindu Brahmanas written between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC include a myth detailing a devastating flood endured by the Manu, ancestors of humanity. Discussion of flood myths can be found in Kusano Takumi, *Seikimatsu: kamigami no shūmatsu monjo* (Fin de Siècle: Apocalyptic Literature by Gods) (Tokyo: Shin kigensha, 1997), 38-46.

<sup>4</sup> Anime can refer to animated content in any genre in films, on television, on the Internet, and in video games.

end of World War II.<sup>5</sup> The goal of my research is to reveal how apocalyptic fiction reflects and copes with major socio-political changes in postwar Japan, especially devastating changes that created serious discontinuity in the national identity from 1945. These changes created crises that are explicitly deadly, including the death of traditional identity and the death of the present understanding of the world. The structure of apocalyptic fiction reveals what is at stake in Japanese society—cultural continuity, tradition, politics, ideology, reality, communities, and interpersonal relationships—and suggests ways to cope with these crises and visions for the future, both positive and negative.

By looking at the postwar period we can observe how Japanese apocalyptic discourse has changed in its role as a tool according to the zeitgeists of various decades. Closely studying apocalyptic fictions in postwar Japan reveals that apocalyptic narratives in this period, which mainly target a male audience, function as a tool to stabilize the damaged identities of the nation and the modern individual after the country's humiliating and devastating defeat in the Second World War. Apocalyptic stories before the 1980s, primarily targeting adult males, sought recovery from the identity crisis brought on by this catastrophic defeat. After Japan's recovery from the immediate devastation of the war, apocalyptic narratives turned to dealing with realistic issues such creating a new national identity and coping with Japan's relationship with the United States as a threatening Other. As real-world political efforts failed, however, it became less easy to

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that in the Japanese context the "postwar period" has not yet ended. Outside Japan, many understand Japan's postwar period to have ended with the Occupation in 1952, or with the start of the period of high economic growth in 1955, or even with the opening of the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964, which for many represented Japan's return to the world community. For most Japanese, however, *senjo*, which literally means "after the war," but specifically refers to the period following the end of WWII—has not ended and has no foreseeable end.

offer realistic solutions to trauma and lack of maturity. Apocalyptic narratives in the 1980s therefore shifted from suggesting realistic solutions to presenting highly fictional ones targeting young male consumers who had abandoned the hope of bringing their ideals into reality and began to seek them instead in fiction.

Japanese apocalypse underwent a further change in the mid 1990s. The twin traumas of defeat and immaturity came to be understood/accepted as unresolved/irresolvable. It is difficult to build consensus and create meaningful solutions in a postmodernized society lacking grand narratives. In many contemporary apocalyptic stories targeting younger boys the apocalyptic crisis now serves as an almost incidental trope in narratives whose main purpose is to enhance the real focus of the story: the love relationship between the incompetent, almost infantile male protagonist and his heroic girlfriend/mother figure. This is a stark reflection of the difficulties younger Japanese males face in establishing their identities as mature and connected members of society.

In what follows I look at the transitions in apocalyptic fiction in three important time periods after World War II, and question whether it is still possible for contemporary Japanese apocalyptic fiction to cope with issues of trauma, identity, and maturity. I take four steps to achieve this goal: first, I contextualize apocalyptic narratives by surveying their trajectories in the West and in Japan; second, I trace the way in which modern Japanese apocalyptic imaginations changed in the important period between the end of the war and the 1970s; third, I highlight the radical change in apocalyptic themes in Japan in the 1980s; and fourth, I examine the future of postmodern apocalypticism since 1995.

Apocalypticism is widely considered an important avenue of research, not only in religious studies, theology, history, philosophy and literature, but also in sociology,

economy, political studies and anthropology, since it has significantly influenced many social, cultural and economic changes. In this dissertation, I approach premodern visions of the apocalypse in the West through histories of religion and theories of religious studies in order to clarify how social changes have influenced apocalyptic movements. I employ postmodern theories as well as Japanese subcultural theories to discuss the relationship between modern and postmodern apocalyptic narratives and their relationship to postwar Japanese society.

I also examine subculturally-produced fiction texts, such as anime and manga. These subculture works are important for two reasons. First, their plots and visual effects reveal new dramatic apocalyptic imaginations that are different from traditional, un-illustrated literature, featuring imagery that highlights the overwhelming catharsis of apocalyptic catastrophe. And second, much influential Japanese fiction in the last twenty years comes from these subcultural fields rather than from traditional “pure literature” (*junbungaku*).<sup>6</sup> For instance, psychiatrist and critic Saitō Tamaki points out that while there are many best-selling novels in contemporary Japanese literature that ably depict contemporary issues up to the year 1990, since then there has been no work of traditional literature that can transcend the anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (discussed in Chapter Five) in terms of critical attention, influence on other producers, and economic impact.<sup>7</sup> Since the early 1990s, anime targeted at youth have become the narrative products that have the most impact and influence on domestic and international audiences,

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<sup>6</sup> *Junbungaku* is usually understood to refer to modern literary works with artistic rather than commercial value, and is often regarded as the opposite of *taishū bungaku*, popular literature.

<sup>7</sup> Saitō Tamaki, *Bungaku no dansō* (Dislocation in Literature) (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2008), 10-17.

not novels by renowned authors of pure literature.<sup>8</sup>

The texts addressed in this study were created by and mostly for men and boys. This reflects the fact that the bulk of apocalyptic fiction in modern Japan has been produced by men for the consumption of a masculine audience. The gendered aspect of apocalypse in modernity and postmodernity is important, and many pertinent questions have arisen throughout the course of this study, among them: Are there apocalyptic narratives by/for women/girls? Are they similar to or different from the ones discussed here? What accounts for the differences, if any? These questions are outside the scope of this dissertation and indeed of any single study. My next project will attempt to address the meanings of apocalyptic narratives for women and girls, and the role of women and girls in apocalyptic narratives for men and boys.

In Chapter One, I examine the histories and trajectories of apocalyptic thought. I begin with the origin of the term “apocalypse,” how its changing meaning was influenced by social change in the medieval West. In the analysis, I focus on the versatile and everlasting nature of apocalyptic belief based on a linear understanding of time. I also look at another influential model of apocalypse, that which is based on a cyclical understanding of time. While linear apocalypse, derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition, is premised on historicity and the notion of a single, final end, cyclical apocalypse presumes ahistoricity and eternity, a repeating circle of countless deaths and rebirths. In comparing these two models of apocalypse, I take up Mircea Eliade’s question of the limits of modern historical understanding of time and the emergence of

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<sup>8</sup> The economic impact of the recent best selling trilogy by Murakami Haruki, *1Q84*, is reported at over ¥10 billion (about US\$118 million at an exchange rate of ¥84.92 to \$1). The *Evangelion* series and its related derivatives, on the other hand, are reported to have had sales of over ¥150 billion (about \$1.76 billion) between 1995 and 2008. It is notable that *Evangelion* has neither sequels nor prequels.

postmodern apocalypse.

In Chapter Two, I examine modern Japanese apocalyptic fiction and cultural theories related to modern and postmodern apocalyptic trends in Japan. First, I explore Japanese science fiction (SF) of the period from the start of the Meiji era to the start of World War II (1868-1939). It is usually considered that Japanese science fiction was not widely accepted until the 1970s. With Expo '70 came an increased interest in science, and popular science fiction writer Komatsu Sakyō's bestseller *Nippon chinbotsu* (Japan Sinks, 1973) created a wider audience for such works at that time. However, during the prewar period there were already a number of science fiction translators as well as writers such as Oshikawa Shunrō, who is considered a pioneer in the field, publishing science fiction works in the various popular magazines. I focus on a number of prewar science fiction pieces with apocalyptic themes, especially stories dealing with astronomical crises, which symbolized anxiety over rapid modernization and the stress of internationalization.

Then, I move to the postwar Japanese apocalypse according to three zeitgeists: "the idealistic age," from 1945 to 1970; "the fictional age," from 1970 to 1995; and "the animal age" or "the age of impossibility," from 1995 to the present. These distinctions in Japanese cultural trends are advocated by sociologist Ōsawa Masachi and critic/philosopher Azuma Hiroki; Ōsawa claims that the idealistic age was a period in which people tried to make ideals come true in reality, whereas the fictional age was the period when people sought ideals in fictional settings instead of in reality. The current animal age (Azuma) or age of impossibility (Ōsawa) is one in which people lose their ideals due to weakening interpersonal relationships and communalities. I examine how these three periods signify and influence apocalyptic thought in Japan.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five concentrate on specific texts. In Chapter Three, I investigate the way that Japanese apocalyptic fiction reflects the catastrophic experience of World War II and what kind of vision of the world after the crisis has passed it proposes. I explore two works by representative postwar writers: Ōe Kenzaburō's *Man'en gannen no futtobōru* (The Silent Cry, 1967), and Abe Kōbō's *Daiyon kanpyōki* (Inter Ice Age 4, 1959), and examine how these works deal with the identity crisis caused by Japan's defeat in 1945, the existence of a dominant Other, and Japan's relationship to its traditional past, the present, and the future. I also compare and contrast the opposing endings of these two works' visions for the future.

In Chapter Four, I concentrate on clarifying the shift from modern to postmodern apocalypse by comparing apocalyptic fictional works, including anime and manga, with their precursors or descendants in the 1980s. I compare Murakami Haruki's long novel *Sekai no owari to hādo boirudo wandārando* (Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, 1985) with its precursor, the story "Machi to sono futashikana kabe" (The Town and its Uncertain Wall, 1980), which was published in the magazine *Bungakukai*. I also attempt to discover the shift in apocalyptic ideology by examining the differences between animated films and the original manga that inspired them. I look at two representative works in the subculture of 1980s Japan: Miyazaki Hayao's anime *Kaze no tani no Naushika* (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, 1984) compared with his original manga version, which was serialized from 1982 to 1994, and Ōtomo Katsuhiro's film *AKIRA* (1988) compared with his original manga story, which was serialized from 1982 to 1990.

In Chapter Five, I focus on another shift in postmodern apocalypse which

occurred after 1995, the year when Japan experienced two major apocalyptic events: the Great Hanshin (Kobe) Earthquake, which occurred on January 17, and the so-called “Subway Sarin Incident,” the terrorist attack on the Tokyo subway system perpetrated by members of New Religious organization Aum Shinrikyō on March 20. These two events deeply shook Japan, which was already suffering from the collapse of the bubble economy, led people to find horrific Others near or within themselves, and reduced trust in communities and societies as places that produce and support wider social relationships among people. I explore the way in which this weakening of social relationships after 1995 influences the complete postmodernization of apocalyptic fiction, looking at the most important SF anime, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and the genre of subcultural works called “*seikaikei*” that are strongly influenced by it. Then I seek the possibility of maturity in 2000s Japanese postmodern apocalypse, comparing *seikaikei* works and Oshii Mamoru’s animated film *Sukai Kurora* (The Sky Crawlers), and Azuma Hiroki’s SF novel *Kuwontamu famirīzu* (*The Quantum Families*).

In the Conclusion, I present an overview of Japanese apocalypse, especially what apocalypticism post-1945 reveals about postwar Japan and the major cultural changes it underwent after the atomic bombings and defeat in World War II. I also describe the relationship between apocalyptic fiction and the difficulties of maturity, and the way apocalyptic fiction deals with the theme of overcoming the “postwar” period.

## Chapter One

### The Trajectory of Apocalyptic Discourse

“Apocalypse,” “the end of the world,” “millennialism,” “millenarianism,” and “fin de siècle” are all terminologies of ending: of life, epochs, the world, and the universe.<sup>1</sup> Among these end-related terms, “apocalypse” in contemporary usage connotes the most complex ideas and violent, decadent, large-scale endings, while the others suggest more specific, limited meanings, often lack destructive elements, and frequently focus on hope for the ultimate renewal of the world; with “apocalypse” what matters is when and how it comes and what triggers the end.

The original meaning of “apocalypse”—*apokálypsis* in Greek, literally “lifting of the veil”—has to do with revealing, uncovering, and disclosing. *Apokálypsis* originally referred to the disclosure to certain chosen people of something new or unseen/unseeable by others. In early Jewish and Christian tradition, apocalypse came to mean the revelation of secrets by God to worthy laypeople and apostles. Rather than something related to the end of time or the destruction of the world, it denoted the privilege of certain believers in God to know specific secrets.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *millennium* in Latin and *chilias* in Greek signify a period of one thousand years. According to the Judeo-Christian tradition, millenarianism (also millenarism) is the belief by a religious, social, or political movement in a coming major transformation of society, after which all things will be changed in a particular way. Millennialism is a specific form of millenarism based on a one thousand year cycle, especially significant for Judeo-Christian tradition. Apocalypse is considered to be a form of millennialism which accompanies the major destruction of the community, the world or the universe. See Yonina Talmon, “Millenarism,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, Macmillan-Free Press, 1968), 349-350. G.W. Trompf, “Millenarism: History, Sociology, and Cross-Cultural Analysis,” *The Journal of Religious History* 24, 1 (February 2000), 108.

<sup>2</sup> Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Pimlico, 1993), 4-20.

## Premodern Apocalypse

From the second century A.D. onward, the meaning of the term “apocalypse” gradually changed from the revelation of things hidden to the crisis of the destructive end of an age or of the world as we know it. In the New Testament’s Book of Revelation, also known as The Apocalypse of John, “apocalypse” is used to mean the “unveiling” of Jesus Christ as Messiah. In the second century, however, the word “apocalypse” came to be used to describe a specific literary genre with characteristics similar to those found in The Apocalypse of John: resurrection of the dead, the final war between good and evil, judgment day, eternal life, and perdition.<sup>3</sup> These final events are considered to happen only once; they never repeat, for Jesus died for our sins only once.<sup>4</sup> Images of crisis and finality in apocalyptic literature were connected with the idea of the end, but at first this did not merely mean the end of the world, but rather the end of an age. For some, “the end of the age” implied that the elect would escape the confinement of the given reality. However, others understood it as the literal destruction of the Earth and/or all living things, ending the present age of human existence. In this context, apocalypse came to mean a spatial as well as a temporal end.

Thus the term “apocalypse” lost its original meaning. Apocalyptic narratives came to represent the large-scale crisis of the end of the world leading to the perfection of eternal life. At the same time, apocalypse became the central ideology for surviving the oppression brought by the Antichrist. As the Roman Empire became more unstable between the second century and the fifth century, apocalyptic discourse became increasingly popular among those who longed for salvation from injustice and oppression.

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<sup>3</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 4, 18-26.

<sup>4</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 143.

However, when Christianity was eventually adopted as the religion of the Empire and established its authority in the fifth century, the Church began to show disapproval of apocalyptic literature. This is unsurprising: apocalyptic and millenarian ideals, representing longing for a new kingdom, are a threat to the maintenance of the status quo. Therefore, the Church approved St. Augustine's claim in *The City of God* that The Apocalypse of John should be understood as an allegory, and that the millenarian kingdom had already come into existence when Christianity was born.<sup>5</sup>

The earliest Christians longed for the actual moment of the end, yet these predictions were repeatedly disconfirmed. They hoped that *the present* was the time between "this moment" and the Second Coming, but gradually *the present* came to mean the time between "this moment" and each person's personal death. In other words, as Frank Kermode says, the end became not imminent but immanent;<sup>6</sup> already in St. Paul and St. John we can discern a tendency to understand the end as happening at every moment. This understanding of the immanent end puts the weight of the end-feeling onto the present moment, and we discover crisis not only in the larger world but also in our personal lives; human death came to bear more importance and religious signification through the teaching of apocalyptic crisis.

Even though the imminent end of the world and the establishment of the millenarian kingdom of God on Earth were repeatedly rejected by Christian dogma, the idea of apocalypse still survived in early Christian tradition.<sup>7</sup> The immanent aspect of apocalypse survived among those in the lowest strata, to erupt as an ideology of

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<sup>5</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of An Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Kusano, *Seikimatsu*, 71.

insurgence in times of invasions, natural disasters, famine and plague. When the Roman Empire collapsed in the fifth century, apocalyptic ideals not only in religious doctrine but also in occultism and heretical prophecies such as astrology and augury became increasingly influential. For example, Sibylline oracles which collected the apocalyptic words of prophetesses came to be common among ordinary people, becoming more influential than The Book of Revelation in the fourth century.<sup>8</sup>

That the end will come is certain, and to believe in the immanence of apocalypse made the solid goal of creating a holy kingdom in the future seem achievable; the appeal of apocalyptic belief was that it made sense of the confusion of the present. As we have seen, apocalyptic narratives in the period of the Roman Empire (27-476 AD) were shaped against enemies such as Emperor Nero and the pagans. Apocalyptic discourse at the end of the ancient period came to reflect the sense of crisis and anxiety of the times, and it could be encountered in various events from the end of an individual life to the end of the entire universe.

In the early medieval period, from the fifth century to as late as the eleventh century, apocalyptic discourse was muted, for the pope came to have powers equal to those of the emperor. The Church did not desire to destroy the world over which it had dominion, so it maintained an ambiguous stance towards the end-time: the specific date on which the world would end could not be predicted by human beings, it ruled, yet the end was always nigh and therefore people were to prepare for it by living virtuously. Apocalypse thus constituted a powerful menace to the commoners: the notion that it could come at any time was used to cow the masses into doing as they were told. The Church also used apocalyptic ideology to fight the “Muslim Antichrists” in the Crusades.

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<sup>8</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 22.

However, when medieval settlements experienced dramatic changes such as population explosions, the growth of cities and trade, and shortages of arable land in the twelfth century, the traditional social structure was shaken. Issues such as landless farmers; unemployment in the cities; soldiers without jobs; poor aristocrats; and clergy without positions created discord, and marginal people adopted expectations of an apocalypse as a revolutionary ideology of protest and formed insurgencies against their oppressors.<sup>9</sup>

Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* explores the apocalyptic movements that flourished in Europe between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. Covering the full range of revolutionary and anarchic sects and movements, Cohn demonstrates how prophecies of a final struggle between the hosts of Christ and the Antichrist melded with the desire of the poor to improve their own condition, resulting in a flourishing of apocalyptic fantasies. Cohn explains that in situations of anxiety and unrest, apocalyptic discourse comes to serve as a vehicle for social aspirations and animosities.<sup>10</sup> During the medieval age, commoners came to use apocalyptic discourse against various "Antichrists" such as Muslims, Jews, and even Churches. Visions of an apocalypse came to encompass the revolutionary movements led by the lowest strata which protested against the social hierarchy, uneven distribution of wealth, and their own social constraints. Apocalypticism was no longer a hidden doctrine of the chosen, or even of the uncertain end of an age or a particular space. It functioned now for the "un-chosen." It came to bear the concrete purpose of effecting change in real social conditions for the lowest-ranked.

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<sup>9</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 89.

<sup>10</sup> See historical examples of apocalyptic movements such as the movements by Franciscan, Brethren of the Free Spirit, Thomas Müntzer, and The Ranters in Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.

During the Renaissance period, it is commonly understood that Western society shifted to affirm humanity and to overcome superstition. Humanism questioned the absolute authority of Christianity and, as a result, apocalyptic discourse seemed to lose some of its power. However, the Renaissance was also an age of Inquisition, witchcraft, astrology, occultism and religious wars, a period in which social unease and apocalyptic belief were still dominant or became stronger.<sup>11</sup> Boia claims that we need to consider the period from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century as one continuum; there was little difference between the medieval period and the Renaissance in terms of the apocalyptic phenomenon. This period is a time of drastic and unsettling change, from the collapse of the feudal system to the establishment of the early modern world through the development of cities and commerce, the rise of the citizen, the formation of nation-states, the beginning of the colonial period, and major wars, as well as plagues and famines.<sup>12</sup> The reorganization and alienation of certain social classes, and the confusion and instability in social transition, made apocalypticism yet more colorful and appealing.

### **Modern Apocalypse**

With the Enlightenment and modernization came major breakthroughs in technology, science, industry, and ideologies. There was still apocalyptic discourse, and prophets and astronomers were still predicting that the end was nigh, but the fear of apocalypse was gone, replaced by new ideas of progress and the future. Boia and Nagayama insist that there had been no idea of “the future” or of “progress” in the contemporary sense before this time. Before the modern period, the future was seen as a

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<sup>11</sup> Lucian Boia, *Sekai no shūmatsu* (La fin du monde), trans. Moriya Nobuaki (Tokyo: Papyrus, 1992), 98.

<sup>12</sup> Boia, *Sekai no shūmatsu*, 100-101.

time when the world would return to the original and archetypal; the future described in the Bible is a return to Eden, and for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the ideal was to go back to nature. The premodern world did not assume that the totally unexperienced or unknown was of value.<sup>13</sup> Instead, people viewed the past of Greek and Roman tradition as more advanced than their own period, and hoped for a return to this ideal. Once people realized that modernization and its byproducts could bring a totally new and unique history, the new dimension of the future was born. To get there they invented the vehicle of “progress.” According to Boia, the contemporary meaning of the noun “progress” (the gradual betterment of humankind) developed in the late eighteenth century; prior to this, the term had meant simply to go forward or increase.<sup>14</sup>

It is surprising that apocalypticism survived in the nineteenth century with its emphasis on the future, progress, and evolution. The principal elements of apocalyptic discourse were combined with a new progressivism which sought the establishment of a better society organized rationally and scientifically. For example, social theory in Saint Simon, positivism in Auguste Comte, and Communism in Karl Marx clearly inherited traditional apocalyptic visions and discourse. At the same time, the apocalyptic tradition was also adopted in literature. Prior to this period, The Book of Revelation and other Biblical apocalyptic literature had been protected by the churches, and interpretation of astronomical omens such as comets was the work of scholars. Apocalyptic scriptures had been in effect off limits even though apocalyptic discourse penetrated the ideology of commoners who used it to revolutionary ends.<sup>15</sup> However, in the early nineteenth century, apocalyptic themes became secularized and writers began to describe the end of the

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<sup>13</sup> Nagayama Yasuo, *Natsukashii mirai* (A Good Old Future) (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 2001), 9-10.

<sup>14</sup> Boia, *Sekai no shūmatsu*, 130-131.

<sup>15</sup> Boia, *Sekai no shūmatsu*, 150-154.

world in their fiction. Whether people believed it or not, they could talk about, challenge, and play with the idea of the end of world at their will. The world of fiction has remained the most powerful and creative domain of apocalyptic discourse into modern times.<sup>16</sup>

Apocalyptic discourse underwent revolutionary changes with the development of the idea of the future and the secularization of the apocalyptic imagination. However, apocalyptic ideology came to be understood as a form of fictional narrative; indeed, it seemed to disappear into the world of fiction where it has flourished since the nineteenth century. It appeared to have lost much of its former influence in the fully modernized real world. In the twentieth century, however, positivism and progressivism came to be seriously challenged; people realized that “progress” brought only materialistic improvement, but not spiritual improvement, to their lives. With constant progress came pollution, ethnic and racial discrimination, colonialism, and world wars. In the twentieth century, real-world apocalypticism was revived by the fear that human beings would become powerful enough to bring about the end of humanity, nature, even God. The invention and actual use of nuclear weapons were decisive factors in the reinstatement of apocalyptic discourse.

Sociologist Ōsawa Masachi claims that apocalyptic thought can be regarded as one of the most influential trends in Western philosophy after World War I. For example, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) considered his time as the most degenerated due to the advent of technology. In addition to Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927), there were many influential books with apocalyptic themes published before World War II, including Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (1918-1923), Karl Barth’s *The Epistle to the Romans* (1919), Karl Kraus’s influential play *The Last Days of Mankind* (1915-1919),

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<sup>16</sup> Boia, *Sekai no shūmatsu*, 150. Nagayama, *Natsukashii mirai*, 10-13.

and Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Since World War II, this apocalyptic trend has spread. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (first published under this title in 1947) explains that the philosophy of the Enlightenment has paradoxically brought about the highly controlling society of our time, and expresses serious anxiety over the situation that Enlightenment, one of the most promising modern ideologies, has increasingly restricted the freedom of nations and individuals. In contemporary critical theory, one can recognize apocalyptic overtones in the works of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. The interest in apocalypse and ending seems to have reached its peak after the collapse of the Cold War; Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) drew considerable attention not only from academia but also from general readers.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the apocalyptic thought has been a basic philosophical trend in the West throughout the twentieth century.

In *The Sense of an Ending* Frank Kermode explains why the expectation of an apocalypse has never disappeared completely. Human beings, he argues, cognitively require the sense of an ending in order to make sense of the present life that constitutes the middle part of the whole:

Men ...rush 'into the midst,' in *medias res*, when they are born; they also die in *mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives ... Apocalypse depends on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future, achieved on behalf of us, who remain 'in the midst.'<sup>18</sup>

We need to have apocalyptic ideas since we always recognize and make sense of the present by validating the past and imagining the moment of individual death as our end.

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<sup>17</sup> Ōsawa Masachi, *Fukanōsei no jidai* (The Age of Impossibility) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2008), 219-220.

<sup>18</sup> Kermode, *The Sense of An Ending*, 7-8.

We unconsciously depend on fiction with the concordance of a beginning, middle, and end in order to decrease our anxieties about death as *our* end. Our imagination repeatedly constructs patterns of the end that correspond with the past-as-beginning and the present-as-middle. Therefore, the image of an end is never regarded as truly false, even though predicted dates of the end have always turned out to be so: apocalypse never dies unless our imagination dies.

In contemporary culture, the apocalyptic imagination repeatedly revives and thrives in the varied arenas of religion, social movements, ecology, literature, films and popular culture. As we have seen, apocalyptic discourse has been versatile and variant enough to adapt to manifold changes in history. It covers both temporal and spatial endings with imminence/immanence, and encompasses a wide variety of triggers such as natural and human-made disasters, famine, plagues, misrule, political changes, social unease, astronomical phenomena, ethnic conflicts, industrial and technological progress, pollution, and degradation of humanity. Apocalyptic themes have been useful for both commoners and elites and comprise both fantasy and realism.

### **Apocalypse in Non Judeo-Christian Tradition**

We have seen how the term apocalypse has come to encompass a wide range of meanings in the West, but it must be remembered that apocalyptic narratives predate Judeo-Christian thought and that many other religions and cultures have their own apocalyptic traditions. Indeed, the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition derives not from Judaism but from Zoroastrianism, whose apocalyptic narratives were transmitted through

Judaism to Christianity and Islam.<sup>19</sup> Apocalyptic myths and eschatological ideas are also found in various tribal cultures, ancient Greece, India, and Northern Europe. We tend to assume that the linear apocalypticism presented in the Bible has been the most influential source of secularized apocalypse in our time, but another influential form of apocalypse, cyclical apocalypse, exists outside the Judeo-Christian world. Much research on world eschatologies refers to the major distinction between linear historical apocalypses and cyclical traditional apocalypses.<sup>20</sup> One of the most influential studies on eschatology is Mircea Eliade's *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, in which he argues that pre-Judeo-Christian eschatology has a longer tradition and moreover that this eschatology follows a cyclical pattern instead of the linear pattern of Judeo-Christian apocalypse.

The cyclical idea of time in apocalyptic narratives is thought to have developed among ancient and tribal peoples who observed cyclic phenomena in nature such as the cosmic cycle of the planets and seasonal changes in plants and trees. They extrapolated the logic of these natural cycles of death and rebirth to humanity and the world, concluding that human beings and the Earth also repeatedly died and were reborn at specific intervals. They performed rituals to ensure that time would regenerate continuously and to return to their archetype of the sacred center, the source of life. Eliade calls this pattern "the myth of eternal return."<sup>21</sup> In this belief system, there is no beginning or end; time is eternal and living things are repeatedly reincarnated.

In ancient Greece, many believed that every event would be exactly repeated in the next cycle, and Plato's theory of forms was an influential cyclical discourse.

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<sup>19</sup> Trompf, "Millenarism: History, Sociology, and Cross-Cultural Analysis," 108.

<sup>20</sup> Kusano, *Seikimatsu*, 14-25. Kermode, *The Sense of An Ending*, 3-6.

<sup>21</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 1-34.

Hinduism teaches that all things including all forms of life, the universe, even time itself, end and are reincarnated at intervals of 864 billion years.<sup>22</sup> Such cyclical apocalyptic narratives envision no absolute end; many of these stories and myths envision apocalyptic destruction at the end of each cycle, yet assume that the world will be restored in the next rotation. Cyclical eschatology has its end, but implicit in this ending are both restoration and rebirth. The cyclical view of time is thus one way of expressing the notion of both eternity and transience.

Eliade discusses the ways that cyclical time and linear time affect one another, and how the two concepts of time treat historicity. The linear understanding of time, which originated in Judaism and was later completed by Christianity, assumes irreversibility: God created the universe, and time began; the world will end at some unpredictable future time with the Second Coming; and every event that occurs between these points is unique and unrepeatable.<sup>23</sup> This is the most common contemporary view of time and the one on which modern societies are built: history is in the past, we live in the present, and the future is unknown. We assume and depend upon the concordance of past, present, and future.

The cyclical understanding of time, on the other hand, functions to abolish history periodically by seeking transhistorical archetypes or by giving it a metahistorical meaning in the eschatological cycle. To find transhistorical archetypes is to transform a “historical personage into an exemplary hero and a historical event into a mythical category.”<sup>24</sup> To give events metahistorical meanings is to apply the astral and cyclical theory to a historical event so that the suffering provoked by the event assumes an

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<sup>22</sup> Kusano, *Seikimatsu*, 17-18.

<sup>23</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 141-147.

<sup>24</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 142.

eschatological meaning. Eliade points out that Romans in the first century frequently considered historical incidents and actual catastrophes as symptoms of the year of *ekpyrosis*. *Ekpyrosis* is the Stoic belief in the periodic destruction of the cosmos by a great conflagration every Great Year, and it brings the recreation of the cosmos and the start of the new cycle. Soon after Augustus as sovereign died, he was deified, since the Romans understood that his supernatural power was required to make the Roman Empire repeat the recreation of the cosmos. Romans transformed actual historical events and people into mythical components in order to cope with anxiety toward historicity. According to this abolishment of historicity, Eliade concludes that people tolerate the terror of history and find their identities, which accord with their archetypal system.<sup>25</sup>

We are apt to think, due to the spread of Christianity, that the cyclical understanding of time has faded. The linear model is taken for granted in our time, but Eliade shows that there is conflict between these two views even today: traditional cyclical time as archetypal and ahistorical, and the linear time as historical. Eliade stresses that the understanding of history via the application of the cyclical view of time to historical events continued to prevail in the world until very recently, and this view is still prevalent in some cultures, including the agricultural societies of contemporary Europe.<sup>26</sup> Eliade claims that modernization brings about the necessity of creating one's own identity via the abolishment of the cyclical understanding of time and the mythical archetype. To be modern means to place value on historicity and the uniqueness of events; in other words, modernization means accepting the totally new and unknown, which ancient people considered as sin or failure. Traditional peoples viewed the new,

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<sup>25</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 141-142.

<sup>26</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 141-143.

the unique, and the unexperienced as useless and even dangerous to the archetypal model, so they needed to abolish historicity periodically in order to maintain the archetypal model.<sup>27</sup>

From a modern perspective the cyclical view may seem to lack creativity, for it adheres to the archetype and rejects the new. To be modern is to accept newness and the uniqueness of events, and consequently to accept the dangers that inhere in them. Modernization allows each individual the free will to be creative and autonomous, to make a new history and an original identity. However, Eliade points out that to be creative and free in the modern period is, in fact, nearly impossible for most, since modern society is premised upon centralized political and power systems which function to unify members of the state. Modern individuals can only be free inasmuch as they comply with order, discipline, and the law of the status quo. On the other hand, it can be argued, ancient people could be creative and free to some extent by renewing their lives according to cyclical myths.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, Eliade proposes that it becomes very difficult for modern people to tolerate the burden of historicity as the modern world becomes increasingly repressive, and claims that the more flexible cyclical pattern of time will again prevail in our near future.

### **The Birth of Postmodern Apocalypse**

In accordance with his theoretical theme of “return,” Eliade seems to return to the original archetype with *The Myth of Eternal Return* in 1949. He sensed that modern ideologies would experience serious stagnation, but could not foresee the new cultural

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<sup>27</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 154-156.

<sup>28</sup> Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 156-157.

current of what we now call postmodernity. The postmodern standpoint, which relativizes the authenticity of any ideology, makes us realize that it is no longer possible to believe in the authenticity of the concordance of time. Although the cyclical and linear views of time understand historicity differently, they share notions of beginning, middle and end. While cyclical time repeats the pattern of this concordance, linear time presupposes one big concordance of past, present, and future. Despite the differences, both views rest on order, structure, universality, and clarity in the concordance.

When we can no longer believe in such concordance, we question what is the center, the beginning, the end, and who defines them and for what purpose. We have seen that it had long been thought that the laws of the divine, nature, and human rationality as the source of order were privileged in shaping ideas of time and an end. Since ancient times, people have tried to impose order on the chaos of the world and to understand the relationship between themselves and the universe. Yet August 6, 1945 precipitated a crucial change in apocalyptic discourse. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and later Nagasaki, was a shocking demonstration that human beings themselves now have the power to bring about the end of this world: the wildest apocalyptic visions of prewar science fiction had come true. When the impact of nuclear warfare was thoroughly realized and modern progressivism fell into stagnation in the 1970s, apocalypse became part of postmodern discourse. We have long assumed the concordance of beginning, middle, and end in our understanding of time and the world. Now it can be argued that there is no basis for such an order, and it becomes further possible to argue that time has multiple densities, and historicity does not operate singularly. The concordance of time has come to be challenged by the very multiplicity

that postmodern discourse advocates.

For example, Jean-François Lyotard's famous declaration of postmodernism as "incredulity towards meta-narratives" includes the argument that modern progressivism has ended. Besides, it is clear that what the Judeo-Christian tradition promises—the progress of history, the knowability of everything, and the possibility of absolute freedom—is no longer relevant in the contemporary world.<sup>29</sup> The social norms and ideals of human rationality, political ideologies of modern nation-states, and productivity have become invalid in the postmodern world. The modern apocalypse of progressivism has been sentenced to death, yet apocalypse as a form lives on; principle elements in the traditional apocalypse narrative are again incorporated into the postmodern apocalypse. The sense of the end of major ideologies reminds us of the apocalyptic mood of the classical period. Fredric Jameson sees recent millenary phenomena as postmodern, writing:

The last few years have been marked by an inverted millenarianism, in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the 'crisis' of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state, etc., etc.): taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism.<sup>30</sup>

Jameson considers the end of the meta-narratives as millenary and apocalyptic, and regards this as one of the characteristics of postmodernism. The sense of ending recurs everywhere; it replaces modern anxiety and stagnation by covering up all the universal,

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<sup>29</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, and Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiv.

<sup>30</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 62.

grand narratives. While the modern notion of the apocalypse implies progress and evolution, postmodern apocalypse celebrates the mood of the ending of modernity. From Jameson's comments, it becomes clear that progressivism as a modern secularized version of apocalypse is invalid and dying. However, apocalypse still survives and is used to designate the postmodern mood.

Jameson insists that the advent of advanced capitalism has destroyed modernism in which the three areas of culture, politics, and economy were semi-independent, and that this has promoted the commodification of all human activities: "culture" is "economy" in the postmodernized world. As a consequence of postmodernization, Jameson points to the effacing of historicity and the past, the disappearance of the individual subject in postmodernity, the increasing unavailability of a personal style of expression in art, and the emergence of the schizophrenic feeling that the past and the future are fused with the eternal present. Postmodernization transforms historical collective memories into the empty images of nostalgia, and pastiche as postmodern expressional modality changes historical tradition into superficial simulation.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Jameson concludes that postmodernization nullifies the concordance and diachronic notion of time in order to make sense of the present and to have a vision of the future, and emphasizes the synchronic understanding of time: it reveals that there is no beginning or end and that there is no sacred center to which to return.

Another preeminent postmodernist, Jean Baudrillard, goes even further, arguing that the apocalypse has already happened and "everything has already been wiped off the map. It is useless to dream: the clash has gently taken place everywhere."<sup>32</sup> While

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<sup>31</sup> Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," 66-79.

<sup>32</sup> Lee Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercise in Genealogical Criticism* (Minneapolis, University of

Jameson and Derrida assert that postmodernism itself has certain apocalyptic overtones,<sup>33</sup> Baudrillard argues that postmodernity is the time when the world has already experienced apocalypse. According to Baudrillard, there is no “unveiling” for there is nothing below the surface: there is only surface. There is nothing universal but commodification.<sup>34</sup> Hyperreality, the state in which it is impossible to distinguish the real from the fantastic, influences contemporary life. According to this argument, we are made happier and more fulfilled by the simulation and imitation of a transient simulacrum of reality than by any “real” reality.

This hyperrealistic state already exists: in the contemporary world, cyberspace fulfills the role. Fundamental parts of human reality now exist largely or even solely in this cyber world. Money is one example: the bricks-and-mortar bank has become an inconvenience to be avoided, a mere platform, while at every moment money is being shifted around the world electronically. Even virtual currency in imaginary universes like the massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *EverQuest* has become “real,” with imaginary objects in the game being sold for real money, and a virtual country in the game, Norrath, becoming so rich in the real world that it was calculated to have a gross national product per capita higher than China and India.<sup>35</sup>

In any economic activity, the substance of an individual is information existing in cyberspace. Reality is also formed in this cyberspace; most human activities—cultures of music and videos, social, political and economical transactions—now exist in cyberspace

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Minnesota Press, 1994), xxii.

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy,” trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., in *Oxford Literary Review* 6 (1984): 3-37.

<sup>34</sup> James Berger, *After the End: Representation of Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 8-9.

<sup>35</sup> Ania Lichtarowicz, “Virtual kingdom richer than Bulgaria,” *BBC News Online*, Friday, March 29, 2002. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/1899420.stm>.

as well as or even instead of in the real world. In MMORPGs real people represented by avatars in imaginary universes meet in virtual spaces inside online games and exchange virtual items for real-world money. There are even people who earn their living—their means of real-world survival—in this way. We are no longer able to insist on one “reality” when we talk about the concordance of time, for our world *is* no longer functioning as one reality.

Political economist and philosopher Francis Fukuyama also argues that we are living in the post-apocalypse in his essay “The End of the History?” and in his book *The End of History and the Last Man*:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.<sup>36</sup>

In this argument, the end of history does not mean that the end of ideological conflicts between communism and democracy causes a decrease in important historical events. Rather, Fukuyama claims that history must be viewed as an evolutionary process; of all the socio-political ideologies that have existed since the ancient period, liberal democracy has survived as the most suitable. Therefore, he argues that we have already entered a post-historical world without major endings, for no other political system will emerge; equality of rights, rules, and opportunities is guaranteed by the liberal democratic system and the world is increasingly becoming democratic since the end of the Cold War.<sup>37</sup>

As we have seen, postmodernism has certain apocalyptic features related to the end of grand narratives and the stagnation of modernity. Moreover, we increasingly feel

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<sup>36</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* (Summer 1989): 3-18.

<sup>37</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London/New York: Free Press, 2006).

that the apocalypse has already happened: our grand narratives have been lost, and we will not experience another major sense of ending in the future; the divine, nature, progress, ideologies, and human rationality cannot play a central role in contemporary life. In the premodern idea of cyclical time, the events of the end all belong to an archetypal model. The uniqueness of each event is subsumed within the concordance of time that loops back from end to beginning. There is no ultimate experience of ending: premodern apocalypse rests on eternity. In the modern notion of linear time, each event and each individual comes to possess uniqueness, for the modern concordance of time allows only one end. The end is in the future yet always near, but recognized as something as yet unexperienced. We continually progress towards the end, yet it is never here or now, but lies ever ahead. However, it becomes clear that the cyclical and linear understandings of time are no longer valid in the twenty-first century, for the postmodern world renounces the sacred center of the cosmos and idea of progress as the final goal of linear history.

James Berger terms this understanding of our time “post-apocalypse.” In *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, he explains that modernity is preoccupied by “a sense of crisis, viewing as imminent, perhaps even longing for, some conclusive catastrophe.”<sup>38</sup> We still have this sense of crisis, but it coexists with the sense that the major catastrophe has already occurred and that the crisis is over. The ceaseless activity in our time, and the procession of similar disasters, is a complex form of stasis. Berger claims that “the visions of the end that Frank Kermode analyzed in terms of a sense of an ending have increasingly given way to visions of after the end, and the apocalyptic sensibilities both of religion and of modernism have shifted toward a sense of post-

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<sup>38</sup> Berger, *After the End*, xiii.

apocalypse.”<sup>39</sup>

Apocalypse makes the promised end come true by revealing something important at some point in our future. But in the postmodern standpoint, the focus is shifted to something to come *after* the end, for the apocalyptic end has actually occurred and there *will* be no end in the future. Eliade propounds the question of whether one can survive the burden of historicity according to the modern linear understanding of time. The modern apocalypse always requires us to cope with the crisis of facing one final end. The postmodern apocalypse makes this question invalid; the historicity of an event is no longer singular, and there will be no major end or goal to reach. If a historic event were given an absolutely unique value and meaning, it would be impossible to survive the burdens of historicity. Yet suppose that the event has relative value and is approached with multiple expedients, and this may bring multiple interpretations and re-evaluation of the event. Further, postmodern time can be thought of as interactive. Accordingly, a historic event comes to have multiple dimensions and can be juxtaposed with the present or with the future in post-apocalyptic fiction. The postmodern imagination can help us to face the apocalypse in a totally different way—positive or negative—from premodern and modern understandings of time and historicity.<sup>40</sup>

In the preceding, I have looked at the ways in which three types of apocalyptic time have been formed. In the ancient world, the cyclical view of time was dominant, and apocalypse was the end of a cycle and could be repeated as many times as the cycle itself. Apocalypse in this view of time is the prelude to total renewal and the perfect rebirth of the world and the universe. With the ascendance of Christian tradition, with its

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<sup>39</sup> Berger, *After the End*, xiii.

<sup>40</sup> Berger, *After the End*, xx.

foundation of Jewish tradition influenced by Zoroastrian apocalypse, the seed of the linear view of time started to grow. As the Western world has modernized, progress and the linear view of time have become widely accepted. The end of time is now understood as the completion of the modernized society in which grand narratives unify nation and populace. As previously seen, the concordance of beginning, middle, and end has been maintained both in cyclical and in linear time.

However, since the late twentieth century, grand narratives have lost their authenticity, and concordance in the cyclical and the linear view of time is no longer reliable. We now experience the multiplicity of reality through the emergence of cyberspace enabled by highly advanced digital technologies. When the divine unitary center of the cycle is distrusted, and when the unitary understanding of history as the past, reality as the present, and goals as the future is totally disjointed by postmodern trends, apocalypse is considered to have occurred already, never to happen again. Postmodern apocalypse becomes the post-apocalypse, which seeks to express the aftermath of the unprecedented destruction of World War II and unexpected changes due to the revolution of information technologies in the social/ecological/cultural/economic system. It is a strategy for coping with living in an endless and timeless world. Apocalypse thus has undergone considerable diachronic changes, yet still survives and even thrives in contemporary popular cultures.

Here I would like to expand the ordinary definition of apocalypse that has long been used in religious contexts: I want to distinguish apocalypse from peaceful millenarism. Some millenaristic movements attempt to reconcile with their enemies without a catastrophic clash, while apocalypse is widely understood as the process by

which final salvation is brought by transcendence after a catastrophic crisis. However, as we have seen, various subspecies of apocalypse have emerged as it has lost its religious meaning and been transformed by sociopolitical changes. I would therefore define apocalypse as a story of facing a destructive end, usually an end that is never experienced by either the protagonists of the narratives or by their writers/readers; the story includes a catastrophic moment of ending caused by unknown Others, or by unexperienced changes. Apocalypse is formed when we feel a sense of crisis towards things or events we have never experienced: an individual death, the end of an epoch, the disintegration of an empire, the collapse of an ideology, the physical termination of the universe, or the end of the way we conceive the world. Apocalypse describes the catastrophic confrontation with such unknown others, and indicates new visions, positive or negative, after the crisis.

### **Functions of Apocalypse**

How is the role and influence of apocalypse critically understood and evaluated? In Western academia, there have been many studies of Judeo-Christian apocalypse and millenarian movements. Many of these try to take a neutral position toward apocalypticism, or give a positive evaluation of apocalyptic literature as canonical texts of subversion which support revolutionary ideologies in the West. Catherine Keller argues that liberation theologians such as Allan Boesak and Pablo Richard regard Saint John as a precursor of their decolonizing project. The famous contemporary theologian Jürgen Moltmann gives Christian eschatology renewed, affirmative meanings by stating that apocalypse is not centered on ending but rather on hope. He argues that Christian eschatology is all about hope as forward-looking, and therefore it leads to

“revolutionizing and transforming the present.”<sup>41</sup>

Others take a clear anti-apocalypse position, regarding it as a discourse: an ideological tool that the powerful use to control the powerless. It is not widely known that British novelist D.H. Lawrence wrote on *The Apocalypse of John* in the 1920s and emphasized the fact that the book is filled with hatred, enmity, and desire for hegemony over the oppressor. Since Christianity took hold in the West, Lawrence insists, apocalypse has long functioned to justify people’s desire for power and control.<sup>42</sup> Among recent studies, feminist postmodern philosopher Lee Quinby claims in her *Anti-Apocalypse* that apocalyptic discourse thwarts freedom and democracy. She reviews the relationship between power, truth, ethics and apocalypse using Foucault’s genealogy, and asserts that apocalyptic doctrine is the urge to unify, to homogenize and to dualize. It disavows questioning of existing truth, discredits skepticism, and discourages challengers of the status quo.<sup>43</sup>

Yet this anti-apocalypse stance always faces the danger of falling into the very binary system which it criticizes. When anti-apocalypticism strongly deplores a fundamentalist understanding of apocalypse as something threatening to our freedom, it is not totally free from the value-laden binary system; it may end up counter-demonizing the Other aggressively. Keller points out that anti-apocalypse is a double bind for it “must continuously confess its indebtedness to its opposite, and at the same time . . . disavow any righteous inevitability of The End.”<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, when we look outside

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<sup>41</sup> Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 16-17.

<sup>42</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (London, New York: Penguin Books, 1996), Introduction.

<sup>43</sup> Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse*, Introduction. See also Lee Quinby, *Millennial Seduction: A Skeptic Confronts Apocalyptic Culture* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 10.

Biblical tradition and influence, for example, to indigenous myths, Hindu and Buddhist tradition, and Greek mythology, it becomes clear that apocalyptic narratives in non-Judeo-Christian culture do not always rely on a single center of power and a value-laden dichotomy between good and evil, although these myths possess characteristics of the end of the epoch, the world, and the universe. Both pro- and anti-apocalypse standpoints in Judeo-Christianity fall short of explaining how apocalyptic phenomena function in other parts of the world, such as Japan. As we have seen above, apocalypse is versatile, and its context, proportion, rhetoric and influence vary greatly.

It is very difficult to evaluate worldwide apocalyptic traditions in terms of “good” or “bad” effects; the influence of the apocalyptic imagination is very versatile. Therefore, I prefer to pay attention to the functions of the apocalyptic phenomenon rather than its moralistic value. The focus is to look at what has been revealed through apocalypse at various times, especially during major transitional periods; apocalypse in the original Greek signifies lifting up the veil to reveal/disclose/uncover the otherwise hidden truth. I am interested here in how apocalyptic narratives have worked as a tool: what kind of tool, for what kind of audience, and in what circumstances.

In particular, I focus on two functional characteristics in apocalyptic narratives: apocalypse encompasses opposing values, and apocalypse as a system always reveals what comes after the end. First, apocalypse encompasses opposing values such as birth and death, beginning and end, creation and destruction, cycle and line, beauty and ugliness, joy and sadness, eternity and temporality, dominance and subjugation, and decadence and morality. This does not mean that all apocalyptic narratives construct a binary system and either always takes one side or function dualistically. Rather,

apocalyptic stories and ideology narrate the relationship between two opposing values, and by examining this opposition, it becomes clear what is at stake. While some apocalyptic narratives are based on a clear binary but place more value on one side or the other, other apocalyptic stories function to display ambiguities, simultaneously incorporating opposing values.

In The Book of Revelation, for example, Satan brings decadence, injustice and oppression to the righteous. However, after all seven seals are opened, Armageddon comes and amoral empires and Antichrists are destroyed. After Christ's perfect thousand-year reign, Satan revives temporarily and triggers the final war. With the final judgment, the Kingdom of Heavenly Jerusalem is eternally celebrated.<sup>45</sup> The Book of Revelation seems to function according to opposing values such as virtue versus vice, temporality versus eternity, and decadence versus morality. The story is based on binary oppositions, but with one side of the binary clearly valued over the other. In fact, however, the apocalyptic ideology in this book is used much more ambiguously. As Keller points out, The Book of Revelation is always favored by the disadvantaged; it has supported religious minorities and exploited people in their fight against the dominant. Yet at the same time, it has authority as part of the canon, the "omega" of the Bible. Despite its highly abstract content, its rhetoric has been adopted by the elite eager to protect their supremacy.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it is well known that The Book of Revelation was used to justify religious wars such as the Crusades. The function of apocalypse in this book is both for power and the powerless, having revolutionary ideas as well as conservative ones. The Book of Revelation thus contains a binary system in its story but its function is more

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<sup>45</sup> Kazama Kenji, "Apocalypse Now," *Eureka: Poetry and Criticism* 31, 2 (February 1999): 126-135.

<sup>46</sup> Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 10.

ambivalent.

On the other hand, a similar opposition of values and ambivalence can be observed in non-Judeo-Christian traditions. Buddhism as representative of the cyclical view of time has a dynamic ambiguity in its apocalypse. Buddhism does not define the time of the beginning or the end of the world, yet its cycle includes both nothingness and creation. This cycle of the creation and destruction of the whole universe repeats itself: Buddha appears and brings the righteous rule of harmony, virtue, enlightenment; after Buddha dies, it becomes gradually more difficult to achieve enlightenment. Buddha's teachings are maintained as scriptures, yet the number of followers decreases so that enlightenment becomes impossible. This period is called *mappō* (in Japanese) and its epoch represents shallow understanding of scripts, disharmony with nature, decadence, and conflicts among followers.<sup>47</sup> The time of *mappō* does not directly mean the final end time as in the Christian apocalypse, for the cycle continues, but its narrative vibrates between the ambivalence of perfection and deterioration in one Buddhist cycle of life.

While traditional apocalypses tend to deal more with the opposition of values and to emphasize the oppositional relationship between two conflicting ideas, apocalypse in the postmodern world places more importance on the boundaries of two opposing values. In particular, these boundaries of opposing values are well illustrated in science fiction. For example, the modern technological apocalypse always presents the usefulness of technology and then contrasts it with the crisis that comes when we misuse it or when we lose control of our creations. The postmodern tech-apocalypse, on the other hand, focuses on the way in which the artificial begins to meld with the natural, as well as how

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<sup>47</sup> Michele Marra, "The Development of Mappō Thought in Japan (I)," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (1988 15/1): 25-54.

nature becomes unable to survive without help and interference in the form of the artificial. Yet at the same time, the artificial always carries the potential of becoming uncanny and harmful to human beings. This illustrates the complex reality of the contemporary world in which the artificial and the natural have become indistinguishable. The threat of ecological apocalypse, which has been widely predicted since the late twentieth century, features similar boundaries and fusions between two poles of purification and contamination, protection and free competition, destruction and rebirth. The boundaries between the poles in the ecological apocalypse, such as the artificial protection of nature and non-interference with the ecological system, are sometimes very complex and cannot be easily defined. Often there is a time when boundary issues in these two opposing values cannot be immediately distinguished. Postmodern apocalypse thus has a tendency to explore the ambiguous boundaries of opposing values, and to reveal the possibility of hybridization of opposing values.

When the composition of opposing values is considered from a different angle, it can be argued that the function of this composition in apocalyptic narratives is profoundly related to confrontation with the Other in a time of crisis. Apocalypse, in other words, is a narrative about what one opposing value says about another, and the way in which people respond and react to the Other in a time of significant sociocultural changes. Apocalypse is the dynamics between the self and the unknown in a time of crisis; this unknown is often a threatening Other, including the limit of our imagination. Accordingly, apocalypse is often used to address unstable identities as a response to a crisis brought about by an unknown Other, and it often attempts to restabilize them by offering affirmations and visions of a better future.

The most representative opposing value pair in apocalypse is life and death. Death is understood as absolutely separate from life and experienced as totally Other when we are alive; we cannot experience death until we die, yet death is ever close by, for every living being *must* die. When one must face death, apocalyptic narratives can describe the relationship between life and death clearly; one story may emphasize the contrast between the two or declare the impossibility of reconciliation between them, while another may emphasize the ambivalence of life with death, or the connection and continuity between life and death. The trajectories of the opposing values in apocalyptic narratives can show what Otherness means. At the same time, the apocalyptic situation brings understanding of the self and helps to stabilize fluid identities by contrasting them with the Other.

The second functional characteristic in apocalyptic narratives is that apocalypse as a system always reveals what comes after the end of the event, the world, or the universe. We have seen that postmodern apocalypse mostly deals with the post-apocalyptic situation, yet in any apocalyptic narrative catharsis always follows destruction or complete annihilation. The characteristics of epilogues have varied as apocalypse has changed in the course of time. For example, in The Book of Revelation, righteous people chosen by the final judgment will live in the new holy Jerusalem that is descended from Heaven, finding the total victory of the sacred and the righteous, and feeling sublime after catharsis. This perfect world is considered as the completion of utopia.<sup>48</sup> In Hindu mythology, everything in our universe is happening in Vishnu's dream; Brahma, the creator of the universe, is born from a lotus growing in Vishnu's navel. When the universe is destroyed, Vishnu absorbs Brahma; one cycle ends at this moment. In the

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<sup>48</sup> Kazama, "Apocalypse Now," 126-135.

next step, Vishnu goes back to sleep and the creation of the universe begins anew. The apocalyptic end in Hindu myth shows eternity, omnipotence, infinity, unconsciousness and immensity and leads us to think of ourselves as a part of this grandiose cycle and one immense life.<sup>49</sup>

Epilogues in traditional apocalyptic myths mostly describe the happy or promised “ending” of the stories, yet modern apocalyptic narratives are often tragic and hopeless. H. G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895) describes the complete destruction of humanity and the Earth, and no hope is left at the end of the story. The main character, a time traveler, speaks of his experience journeying to the year 802,701 A.D. and subsequently to thirty million years from his own time. In the story, humans continue to evolve and reach their peak of perfection. But after this peak, human beings experience a differentiation and begin to degrade, becoming increasingly primitive. The Earth experiences the same thing: it stops rotating, and ultimately becomes a dead planet.<sup>50</sup>

Wells wrote a number of highly influential and innovative SF works, often explicitly criticizing capitalism and evolutionism. However, his works were abandoned by his contemporaries in the 1920s. After the First World War, progressivism came to be seen as uncertain and suspect among intellectuals. It is true that Wells’ works take a negative position towards progressivism, yet they were based on the premise of *scientific* progress. In that sense, Wells still believed that human beings are creatures of progress. His visions of what would come after catastrophes are often hopeless, for he was unable to reconcile the gap between reality and the ideal of progress.

After World War II, post-apocalyptic science fiction started to boom, for people

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<sup>49</sup> Kusano, *Seikimatsu*, 58-69.

<sup>50</sup> H.G. Wells, *Taimu mashin (The Time Machine)*, trans. by Ishikawa Toshi (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 2002).

had experienced apocalypse in the Holocaust and the atomic bombings. The main theme of apocalyptic fiction shifted from destruction to survival and revival in the aftermath. In Britain, a genre of post-apocalyptic science fiction called “cozy catastrophe” emerged after World War II. Works in this genre describe the emergence of new civilizations following destruction. Usually the main characters are able to safely observe the disaster which happens in a limited area. Most works in the genre describe the challenges of the survivor, the horror of dystopian high-tech societies with tight surveillance, or strife in destroyed civilizations. Regardless of their settings, the narratives seek ways to cope with the experience of existing between life and death, to speak the unspeakable, and to unveil what is hidden in such crises.

Some postmodern post-apocalyptic fiction, on the other hand, deals with special situations such as the *lack* of major change; highly postmodern apocalypse often assumes that there are no more major changes to come. While characters in cozy catastrophes merely observe the destruction, characters in Japanese apocalyptic narratives often experience it directly; the impact of the shock will remain forever, like the impact of the atomic bombs. The conflicts caused by the opposition of ideologies are gone forever, and all that remains is the barren realization that we have to live in a world without major endings, as influential Japanese sociologist Miyadai Shinji argues in his “Live in the endless daily life,” and as writer Tsurumi Wataru claims in his famous *Kanzen jisatsu manuaru* (Complete Suicide Manual).<sup>51</sup> We have to live in this endless time when it is

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<sup>51</sup> Miyadai argues that the leader and followers of Aum perpetrated the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway because they could not endure endless life without the sense of an ending. See Miyadai Shinji, *Owarinaki nichijō wo ikiro: Aum kanzen kokufuku manyuaru* (Live in the Endless Everyday: the Perfect Manual for Conquering Aum) (Tokyo: Chikuma shoten, 1998). Also Tsurumi’s book begins with the declaration that there will be no big ending in our life. See Tsurumi Wataru, *Kanzen jisatsu manyuaru* (Complete Suicide Manual) (Tokyo: Ōta shuppan,

not obvious what is right or wrong. When apocalyptic narratives are influenced by the postmodern changeless/endless worldview, they need to deal with something opposite to progress, change, growth, and maturity. We need to realize that conventional hope after apocalyptic crisis no longer exists in postmodern narrative, and apocalypse itself comes to mean something very different.

As we have seen, apocalypse has a versatile nature and changes according to epoch and place; apocalypse is still alive even when the concordance of beginning, middle and end is distrusted in the postmodern world. Apocalypse is no longer a mere end-time story. Rather, I argue that the structure of apocalypse implies the changes of certain relationships in the time of crisis and change; it concerns the relationship between the self and a new and unknown Other; apocalypse describes the crisis of facing a totally unknown opponent or environment, destructive conflict between self and Other, and implies a new relationship between the two. Through experiencing these changes, apocalypse can offer to solidify one's unstable identity in times of crisis, and to create new relationships with others. Regardless of the form, the date, and the cultural background, the relationship between two opposing values and what comes after apocalypse are two important keystones which are always present in any apocalyptic narrative. Through these two elements of apocalyptic narratives, the way the fiction defines otherness and copes with it becomes clear. In Chapter Two, I examine patterns and changes in Japanese apocalyptic narratives. I also look at the way in which the composition of opposing values and the visions after the crisis function in Japanese apocalyptic stories.

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1993) for further details.

## Chapter Two

### Apocalypse in Japan

This chapter mainly deals with theory and criticism of apocalyptic thought and narrative in modern Japan. I divide the modern era into four periods according to important events and transitions in society: from 1868 to 1945 (the beginning of the Meiji period to the end of World War II); from 1945 to 1970 (Japan's defeat in World War II to its recovery from defeat); from 1970 to 1995 (the high economic growth period to the collapse of the bubble economy and social stability); and from 1995 (the beginning of the long decline) to the present. In this chapter I discuss apocalyptic trends and narratives of the Meiji and pre-World War II eras, and I concentrate on apocalyptic thought and criticism in the postwar period; I analyze specific examples of apocalyptic fiction in the periods after 1945 in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

Before moving to discussion of the modern period, it is necessary to look at apocalyptic thought and movements in premodern Japan. Generally speaking, it is safe to say that apocalyptic thought was not as prevalent in premodern Japanese culture as it was in the Judeo-Christian tradition. While apocalyptic myths are common in cultures all over the world, there is no specific apocalyptic myth associated with ancient Japan. The oldest collection of Japanese myths, *The Kojiki* (collected in 712 AD), includes myths concerning the creation of the world and of Japan. *The Kojiki* contains explanations of the births of various Japanese deities, their relationships and conflicts, and the divine ancestry of the emperors, but it does not include stories about catastrophes or the end of the world, and it is difficult to ascertain whether its stories reflect a cyclical or a linear

view of time.<sup>1</sup> This is because present reality is more important than the past or the future in Japanese myth. Ancient Japanese myths tended to affirm the world, nature, and human beings as they were.<sup>2</sup> Even after the importation of Buddhism in the fifth century, with its cyclical approach and (in some forms) supernatural beings, apocalyptic thought was not the central ideology in premodern Japanese thought.

Although apocalyptic thought was not common in premodern Japan, there were three historical periods—the late Heian period (eleventh and twelfth centuries), the mid-Kamakura period (late twelfth and thirteenth centuries), and the mid- to late Edo period (mid-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries)—during which apocalyptic ideologies were widespread. In the late Heian period, the apocalyptic Buddhist worldview known as *mappō* prevailed; it taught that perfection would/could be attained in the Pure Land, but not in this world.<sup>3</sup> In the Kamakura period, new Buddhist reformers expanded and introduced *mappō* thought—which had been exclusively taught in the upper class—to the regional warriors and farmers, and in an innovative manner applied the theory to this-worldly issues like social problems in order to solve them in reality. In the Edo period, apocalyptic discourse spread into the lower strata of townspeople and farmers, and

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<sup>1</sup> Kurano Kenji ed., *Kojiki* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1963), 13-209. See also Kawai Hayao, *Shinwa to nihonjin no kokoro* (Myth and Japanese Mind) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2003), 21-104.

<sup>2</sup> Tamura Yoshirō, *Nihon bukkyōshi nyūmon* (Introduction to the History of Japanese Buddhism) (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1969), 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Mappō* (the Last Dharma Age) is part of the Buddhist theory of the Three Ages, which also includes *shōbō* (the True Dharma Age) and *zōbō* (the Imitation Dharma Age). *Shōbō* is the period of five hundred years after Buddha's death during which followers can attain enlightenment through Dharma. *Zōbō* is the period of five hundred to one thousand years after *shōbō*; though followers cannot attain enlightenment in this period, the teachings of Dharma continue to exist. *Mappō* is the period ten thousand years after *zōbō*, when people are unable to attain enlightenment through Dharma, and society becomes morally corrupt. The Dharma itself remains true, but in the age of *mappō* even priests cannot understand and exercise it correctly. See Marra, "The Development of Mappō Thought in Japan (I)," 25-54.

movements such as the new religion called *Fujikō*;<sup>4</sup> riots of *yonaoshi ikki*;<sup>5</sup> and fiction by *jōruri* playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1725) in the domestic genre (*sewa mono*) which deals with double suicides, reflected the Edo apocalyptic trend.<sup>6</sup>

The apocalyptic trend in the Heian period was exclusive to the upper class (the aristocrats), but it gradually widened its scope until it encompassed not only the middle- but also the lowest classes in the Edo period, much like the Western apocalyptic trend. As apocalyptic ideology spread, its functions changed; while Heian *mappō* thought depended on the binary distinction between the perfect ideal of the afterlife and the imperfect, hopeless, defiled this-life (which is to say reality), Kamakura Buddhism and Edo apocalyptic movements attempted to achieve their ideals in the present reality, or to act against the existing power through apocalyptic catastrophe. Japanese apocalyptic thought began to seek the connection between oppositional values and between self and unknown Other, offering more concrete ideas of what would come after the end. However, unlike Western apocalyptic thought, these premodern Japanese apocalyptic movements were not powerful enough to become a revolutionary ideology which could reform society. This may be because the traditional Japanese worldview values the

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<sup>4</sup> *Fujikō*, derived from the esoteric mountain Buddhism, developed into a popular religious organization for townspeople in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Edo. It taught that a better age would come when the poor and defiled age would end, and that the transition would occur when the balance of yin and yang was right. It also warned that when people are attached to worldly desires, lust, greed and idleness, apocalyptic events such as natural disasters will occur and the world will face its end. See Tamura, *Nihon bukkyōshi nyūmon*, 178-180.

<sup>5</sup> *Yonaoshi ikki* refers to riots aimed at ending social inequality, which often included violent destructive attacks on wealthy merchants and farmers. Details are discussed in Sasaki Junnosuke, *Yonaoshi* (The Reform of Society) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> The theme of double suicide in Chikamatsu's plays functions as a protest by the powerless against the mainstream values of the warrior class which valued hierarchy and loyalty. See detailed arguments in Steven Heine, "Tragedy and Salvation in the Floating World: Chikamatsu's Double Suicide Drama as Millenarian Discourse," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, 2 (May 1994); and Shinoda Masahiro, *Shinjū ten no amijima* (The Love Suicides at Amijima) (Tokyo: Kamensha, 1970).

present as it is, or it may be because people simply expected the natural renewals of stagnant social conditions that the cyclical view of time presupposes. In either case, despite being taken up by various social movements apocalyptic thought did not have a powerful sociocultural impact in premodern Japan.

### **Apocalypse in Modern Japan: from Meiji to the end of World War II**

Stories and folklore on apocalyptic phenomena like natural disasters have existed in Japan since the Heian period, and they mostly concern actual instances of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, fires, tsunamis, plagues, and the restoration of the community after such events. In the premodern period, apocalyptic narratives in Japan resembled myths of Heaven and Hell or simple records of natural disasters rather than narratives of world-wide devastation.<sup>7</sup> Apocalyptic stories in the Edo period were based on the opposition between the powerful and the powerless based on realistic circumstances, not fiction. The idea of the future is necessary to create the imaginary space for apocalyptic fantasy; therefore it was not until the early Meiji period that apocalyptic narratives came to be fully-fledged fictional imaginations, as modernization brought the ideas of progress and the future to a newly modern Japan.

Apocalyptic imagination in the modern period widened the scope of the end from that of the community to the end of the world or even the universe. This expansion of imagination was also related to the fact that Japan had re-joined the international community after nearly two hundred years of self-imposed isolation. While for many Edo people the area within the borders of Japan had represented “the world,” in the Meiji period even commoners were keenly aware of the existence of lands and peoples beyond

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<sup>7</sup> Miyata, *Shūmatsukan no minzokugaku*, 35-50.

their country. The opposing Other to the poor farmer or the masterless samurai in the apocalyptic movements of the Edo period was always a domestic power, such as the rich merchant or powerful lord. In the Meiji period, in contrast, the opposing Other became explicitly nondomestic: Western power, the modern nation-state, and the modern autonomous subject.

As a popular slogan during the Meiji period, *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit and Western technology), implies, it was a daunting task for Meiji intellectuals to maintain Japanese traditions while importing Western thought and technologies; their challenge was to reconcile Japaneseness and modernity (Westernization) in order to keep at least part of their traditional identity. Just as *jūbungaku* novels were strongly influenced by the theme of modernization and the new Japanese subjectivity, apocalyptic fiction in the Meiji period also came to encompass a wide variety of themes influenced by the influx of foreign, particularly Western culture. New findings in astronomy, geology and physics, as well as Christian, particularly Protestant, notions of apocalypse became sources of the new apocalyptic imagination in the Meiji and Taishō periods (1868-1926).

During the late Edo and early Meiji eras, astronomical phenomena such as comets and newly discovered planets were often considered potential causes of world-wide destruction, for it was understood that there was some chance that such celestial bodies could bring ecological changes on Earth. Comets had long been regarded as omens, but the idea that they could bring world-wide apocalyptic catastrophe developed in the late nineteenth century along with the importation and growth in popularity of science fiction. The new science fiction works in this period, inspired as they were by modern science, were all based on a linear understanding of time. Literary critic Nagayama Yasuo has

identified a common pattern of the ending in science fiction novels that describe the peculiar avoidance of the absolute end of the world in prewar modern Japan; in the following I analyze three novels introduced by Nagayama in his book.

Nakagawa Kajō's *Sekai metsubō* (The End of the World), written in 1898, was inspired by the real-life warning by an Austrian astronomer that a massive comet would crash into the Earth in November of 1899. Kajō's novel begins with a scene in which a professor at Tokyo Science University warns of the impending collision of a comet with our planet, and panic ensues. Another professor argues against this speculation, yet the comet indeed appears and the prediction comes true. A group of scientists escape into space on a special ship, and as they do they witness the moment that the comet hits and realize that the world faces its end.<sup>8</sup>

Translations of science fiction works were already common in this early modern period; a novel titled *The End of the World*, written in 1903 by the influential American-Canadian astronomer Simon Newcomb, was translated into Japanese and published as *Ankokusei* (the Dark Planet) in 1905. The novel was inspired by the latest astronomical science, and had a considerable impact on Japanese intellectuals. The novel is set ten thousand years in the future, when the cultures of humankind are flourishing with advanced science and technologies. One day, a scientist discovers a mysterious dark planet approaching our solar system at incredible speed. He calculates that this dark planet will crash into our Sun and that this crash will cause the Sun to expand one thousand times, heating up the Earth and causing the extinction of all living things. The scientist, aiming to be a sort of second Noah, builds an underground shelter stocked with

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<sup>8</sup> Nagayama Yasuo, "Nijusseiki no owarikata (How to End the Twentieth Century)," *Eureka: Poetry and Criticism* 31, 2 (February 1999): 168-179.

food and seeds. Following the crash and the subsequent destruction, the few people who had taken refuge in the shelter return to the surface to build a new society. However, they discover that the dark planet has turned the Sun into a nebula.<sup>9</sup>

Another influential science fiction novel, *Konoyo wa ika nishite owaruka* (How Will This World End?), was translated in 1923 from the novel *La fin du monde*, written in 1893 by French astronomer Camille Flammarion. Flammarion's 1891 short story "The Last Days of the Earth" had previously been translated into Japanese by novelist Tokutomi Roka, so Flammarion was already known in Japan in late Meiji and his work had considerable influence on intellectuals in the Taishō period.<sup>10</sup> The first part of the book describes the crashing of a huge comet into the Earth in the twenty-fifth century, which kills many people. Most of the developed countries are not affected by the comet. The second part of the book illustrates the far future, ten million years after this event, when human civilization has peaked and begins to decline, for the Earth is reaching the end of its life. The planet gradually cools and the Moon begins to change its orbit. The Sun shrinks and the solar system itself begins to die. Humans lose their procreative instinct and in the end a single woman and a single man are the only people left. They meet on the final day and try to reestablish human civilization.<sup>11</sup>

Besides these three examples, many science fiction stories on astronomical themes were published in Japanese popular magazines during the prewar period. Prewar high-culture literary circles, made up solely of male authors, dealt mainly with *shishōsetsu*, autobiographical narratives describing realistic details of the author's

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<sup>9</sup> Nagayama, "Nijusseiki no owarikata," 171-173.

<sup>10</sup> Camille Flammarion, "Sekai no matsujitsu" (The Last Days of the Earth), trans. Tokutomi Roka, *Kokumin no tomo* (The Nation's Friend) 119 (May 1891): 32-34.

<sup>11</sup> Nagayama, "Nijusseiki no owarikata," 173-175.

personal life and thoughts, targeting male intellectual readers. On the other hand, science fiction in popular literature was full of chimerical imaginations, targeting a wider adult and older teenage male readership. Although popular science fiction was concerned only with imaginative themes and was thought to lack serious reflection on the rapidly modernizing society, the themes in SF narratives of the period keenly reflect the social and cultural changes that Japan faced at the time. As Nagayama points out, it is interesting to note that most of these narratives, including the three examples above, stop short of depicting ultimate destruction and annihilation. In his study of apocalyptic novels from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, Nagayama concludes that most avoid a final termination, for example by the device of making apocalyptic events take place in a main character's dream. This applies not only to works originally written in Japanese; in translated works, even when the original ends with world annihilation, the translated version safely relegates the destruction to a dream.<sup>12</sup>

This may be because the idea of time in Japan had long been cyclical while in the West it had long been linear. Traditional Japanese narratives prefer to describe both the end and the subsequent birth of the new cycle rather than simply declaring an absolute end. A yet more fundamental reason lies in the structure of opposition in these apocalyptic stories. We have seen that there are opposing ideas and values in apocalyptic narratives and that the opposing poles had been very concrete. For example, the *mappō* apocalypse contrasted the heavenly Pure Land and Hell, and apocalypse in the Edo lower strata had been framed as opposition to the ruling classes.

On the other hand, science fiction in the prewar period introduced the idea of outer space as a totally new unknown as never before. These narratives presented space

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<sup>12</sup> Nagayama, "Nijusseiki no owarikata," 179.

as ambivalent in nature, a new concept and full of possibilities for new discoveries but at the same time uncontrollable and potentially threatening. Unknown enemies, in the form of comets, extraterrestrial aliens, planets, and other astronomical phenomena, implied the threat presented by foreign powers to a newly modern Japan. Apocalypse in early modern Japanese narratives thus encompassed the foreign and alien. Like galactic phenomena, the foreign Other, especially in the form of Westernization, was new and attractive but also mysterious, powerful, and capable of bringing devastating change to traditional Japan. Yet like a comet on a collision course with Earth, for Japanese people in the Meiji period the Westernization of Japan seemed ineluctable. I suggest, therefore, that apocalyptic narratives of the prewar period, targeting men who were facing an identity crisis brought about by inevitable and inescapable modernization, functioned as a tool to escape total obliteration in the form of modernization and Westernization, a way to escape the reality of a rapidly modernizing society.

Since modernization was a must for the creation of the new Japan, the structure of opposition becomes unclear; the modern West stood in opposition to prewar Japan, yet Japan longed to both preserve the historical continuity of its identity and to become a fully modern power. Therefore, apocalyptic narratives in the prewar period lose the power of conviction. While Edo apocalyptic ideologies among the lower classes implicitly and explicitly resisted the status quo, early modern apocalyptic narratives suffer from the difficulty of establishing the subjectivity of the modern individual and a modern nation. Farmers and merchants in the Edo period had solid identities, albeit ones that were imposed and fixed. Commoners in the Meiji period, on the other hand, faced the challenge of establishing a new, autonomous, modern identity. At the same time, they

had to contend with the contradiction inherent in the identity policy established by the Meiji government, which urged individuals in Japan to establish their modern subjectivity but also prevented them from doing so, for the Meiji Constitution explicitly designated all Japanese as the children of the father-Emperor.<sup>13</sup> Just as the ideas of a modern self and a modern nation remained ambiguous, there was no clear relationship between self and Other described in prewar apocalyptic science fiction.

Since the relationship between self and Other was not well described, there was no vision for the future after the apocalyptic crisis; the more clearly the tension and opposition between self and Other is composed, the more concretely the vision of the world after the crisis is presented. After the major destruction in these stories, characters are often allowed to survive and rebuild a community. But in most cases, there is no description of the new world. Alternatively, after the complete extermination of all living things and even the universe, it is revealed that the apocalypse actually happened in a dream, and ordinary daily life continues when the character wakes up. It can be argued that early modern apocalyptic narratives heighten the description of complete destruction and annihilation, since observing the conventional order being destroyed and being involved in unexpected changes overlaps with what people actually experienced in a rapidly modernizing society. However, it is clear that apocalyptic science fiction could not fully accept modernization and Westernization; it avoided the description of realistic destruction, instead returning to conventional reality. This shows that it was difficult, in the major upheaval of the transition to a modern nation-state, to have a stable vision for the future and to establish a new identity in modern society.

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<sup>13</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, "The Problems of Modern Subject," and "The Nation and the Nationalism," in *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, ed. Joshua Mostow (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 24-41.

## **Apocalypse in the Postwar Period**

World War II fundamentally changed apocalyptic discourse. Before modern weapons were introduced, winning wars depended much more on the number of soldiers each side could deploy, and on the soldiers' abilities and, to some degree, luck; armies consisted largely of mercenaries, and civilians were usually kept at a certain distance from the battleground. With modernization came new technologies of war including highly effective weapons capable of large-scale destruction; new developments in land-based and maritime transport and armaments; and increased ability to engage in aerial combat; all of these were fully deployed for the first time in the Second World War. These new technologies represented a revolution in warfare. They brought an exponential increase in damage to the natural and the human-built world, a rise in the number of civilian and military casualties, and vastly accelerated consumption of ammunition and fuels. The sheer scale of World War II also meant increases in costs, and defeat for the loser meant a correspondingly large obligation in compensation. To an extent never before seen in human history, not just soldiers or mercenaries, but also every adult and child citizen was thus forced to participate in the total war to support the nation and to pay for the costs of war/compensation, and this brought the war and apocalyptic crisis closer than ever before.

The Holocaust had a considerable impact on apocalyptic imaginations. The ideological illusion of the Nazis led to hitherto unprecedented genocide: more than ten million people were slaughtered. The victims included Jewish, Polish, Roma, Sinti, and Slavic civilians, gay men, Soviet prisoners of war, religious minorities, people with

disabilities, and of course those who dared to oppose the Nazi regime. Many were imprisoned in concentration camps and/or subjected to cruel medical experiments. They were killed not by conventional attacks with weapons but by vile means, the majority by so-called public euthanasia in gas chambers. The Holocaust is a particularly disturbing example of one man's imagination inducing wholesale apocalyptic catastrophe.

The Second World War also influenced the apocalyptic imagination in Japan. Battles in the early part of the war took place outside Japan, but direct attacks on Japanese territories increased as the war wore on. In the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, the largest amphibious assault of the Pacific War, approximately 110,000 Japanese soldiers, 100,000 Japanese civilians, and 12,500 American soldiers died. The widely reported incidents of mass suicide after the Battle of Okinawa show how civilians experienced the crisis of defeat.<sup>14</sup> The war began to encroach on the lives of civilians on the mainland of Japan, and the protracted bombing of Tokyo reduced most of center of the city to ruins. The so-called Great Tokyo Air Raid of March 9 and 10, 1945, the most destructive in history, destroyed one third of central Tokyo resulting in the deaths of some 100,000 people in the ensuing conflagration, more than the immediate deaths caused by the atomic bombing of Nagasaki.<sup>15</sup>

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had a unique influence on

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<sup>14</sup> It is still a subject of debate whether the mass suicides in Okinawa were voluntary or forced by the Japanese army, and in any case it would be very difficult to prove who gave the order. This controversy led to a long court trial over Ōe Kenzaburō's *Okinawa nōto* (Okinawa Notes, 1970) and Ienaga Saburō's *Taiheiyō sensō* (The Pacific War, 1968). It is, however, clear that the suicides were catastrophic and destructive acts that indicated that people could not cope with the uncertain future of defeat.

<sup>15</sup> The number of immediate deaths due to the Nagasaki bomb is estimated as 74,000 people, mostly civilians, mostly women, children, and the elderly. The number of immediate deaths due to the Hiroshima bomb, on the other hand, varies according to the source. The city of Hiroshima officially estimated that 140,000 people died between August 6, 1945 and the end of the year.

apocalypticism. The invention of nuclear weapons meant that it was now within humanity's means to destroy itself. Whereas before the entity with the power to bring about apocalypse had long been understood as (super)natural, it was now human. The only nation to have experienced a nuclear attack, Japan continues to suffer from its impact; the atomic bombs made real the kind of apocalyptic vision and power that had never before been seen. Blinding light and radiant heat from fireballs burning at nearly four thousand degrees centigrade turned two historic cities into corpse-filled ruins; near the point of explosion, known as ground zero, everything that could burn burst into flame, sand vitrified, and humans were either vaporized or instantly turned into carbon. Never before had such an apocalyptic sight or such destructive power been experienced.

Atomic bomb survivors, known as *hibakusha*, have a unique view of apocalypse: they have experienced it first-hand. Not only did they witness the extraordinary destructive power of the unexpected bombings, but they continue to survive their aftermath: their own deteriorating health and the slow deaths of hundreds of thousands of other survivors who gradually succumbed to radiation-related diseases. These are the first people to have experienced bodily the ultimate power that can destroy not only humanity but also the Earth.

John Whittier Treat emphasizes the specialness of the atomic bomb experience and atomic literature in *Writing Ground Zero*, in which he compares *hibakusha* with victims of other bombing raids:

The terror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki lies not in the number of their dead. The fire bombings of Japan and Europe killed hundreds of thousands, too. What must be accounted for in our definition of contemporary civilization is that the people of two cities were, and some still are, forced to live in a compromised state of both life and death at the same time; that that fate is a consequence of having

barely survived a deliberate and methodical human plan to eliminate them; and that we today potentially face the same destiny.<sup>16</sup>

What makes *hibakusha* different from survivors of other horrors is that their experience of apocalypse never ends. While millions died during World War II due to conventional bombing, torture, and genocide, those who survived these atrocities were released from the immanence of death and the fear of torture when the war was over. For *hibakusha*, however, the experience of the atomic bomb never ends; it continues to affect their lives and their health, as well as their descendants, their local communities, their cities and even the country as a whole. They continue to feel the immanence of death forever.

The atomic bombings fundamentally changed apocalyptic discourse in Japan. Referring to Treat's discussion of *hibakusha* writing and Frank Kermode's statement that we cannot endure the continuation of time without ending, the everlasting impact of the atomic bombing is explained as follows:

For atomic survivors, the act of writing can have two purposes: attempting to make non-*hibakusha* understand the horror of having to bear a particular personal timeline that has no conceivable meaningful end; and trying, by keeping the issue of the atomic bombs alive, to keep open the possibility of eventual public "meaning" of some kind. To impose an "end" on the atomic experience, to surrender to the historical narratives written with reference to that "end," would render the *hibakusha* experience meaningless, contrary to Kermode's statement.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear that, for the *hibakusha*, the ultimate apocalyptic experience of the atomic bombings paradoxically forever deprives them of a sense of ending. They must suffer physically and mentally from its aftereffects for the rest of their lives, yet they also bear

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<sup>16</sup> John Whittier Treat, *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation: Vision, Embodiment, Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 16.

the burden of making others understand the endless torture brought by this catastrophe, even if this task is nearly impossible. Hence, the attempts of non-*hibakusha* to make the *hibakusha*'s experience rational and historical by attempting to impose an ending on it are both undesirable and unhelpful for the survivors. Japanese atomic apocalypse came to paradoxically signify endlessness; although apocalyptic narratives are generally stories of *ending*, the atomic bomb experience brought suffering *without end*.

As Sharalyn Orbaugh points out, the period of Occupation between 1945 and 1952 was a time of major upheaval, and people wrote, read and told personal stories of their immediate, everyday physical experiences of the war and its epistemic dislocation. This is because it was impossible for writers to overcome the war and the consequences of the defeat and because consensus about the meanings of the war had not been established. The events were simply too extraordinary for the Japanese to digest, and they thought that the ongoing experience of the war and the defeat should not be regarded as something already ended. However, when the Japanese economy and social structure had recuperated in the late 1950s, "a coherent and discrete set of interpretative narratives about what and how the war signified" was established; writers in various political positions generally share this common paradigm of the understanding of the war in the 1960s.<sup>18</sup>

Fiction in the 1960s, especially narratives with apocalyptic themes, often tends to discuss the historical meaning of the war and its relation to the identity of Japan as a nation, for the defeat functions as a major discontinuity in the history and identity of Japan and its people. Apocalyptic discourse in this period functioned as a tool to comprehend the overall meaning of the defeat as a crisis and to solidify unstable national

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<sup>18</sup> Orbaugh, *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation*, 18.

and individual identity. Common interpretative narratives about warfare, which describe issues such as Imperialism, invasions of other parts of Asia, the atomic bombings, the aftermath of the defeat and the Occupation, were integrated into the apocalyptic crisis in order to recreate the ideological order after such catastrophes. Accordingly, the unknown Other in modern Japanese apocalypse in the 1960s is overtly foreign, especially American, and ambiguous values such as tradition/modernization, dominance/subjugation, victory/defeat, communism/capitalism, and victim/victimizer are opposingly displayed in the narratives. During this period, internationally renowned authors such as Ibuse Masuji, Mishima Yukio, Abe Kōbō, and Ōe Kenzaburō wrote stories with apocalyptic themes of the war and its aftermath that include the relation between the past, the present, and the future in the new larger paradigm.<sup>19</sup> From the end of the war to the end of the 1970s, apocalyptic narratives worked as a tool to restate what happened in the war and the aftermath of the atomic bombings, and to redefine the meanings of the defeat; they attempted to rehabilitate the damaged identities of the nation and its people, especially men. Apocalyptic stories sought a way out of the traumatic memories and discontinuity of the defeat.

### **Apocalypse in the Idealistic Age and in the Fictional Age**

While postmodernism has gradually spread among Western countries since the 1960s, it also began to influence Japanese culture from 1970, the year of the Osaka Expo. According to critic and philosopher Azuma Hiroki, the terms postmodern and

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<sup>19</sup> *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain, 1966) by Ibuse Masuji, *Utsukushii hoshi* (Beautiful Planet, 1962) by Mishima Yukio, *Daiyon kanpyōki* (Inter Ice Age 4, 1959) by Abe Kōbō, *Man'en gannen no futtobōru* (The Silent Cry, 1967) and *Kōzui wa waga tamashii ni oyobi* (The Floodwaters Have Come Unto My Soul, 1973) by Ōe Kenzaburō are examples of fiction with apocalyptic themes from this time period.

postmodernity are often used to designate cultural trends since the 1960s or 1970s.<sup>20</sup>

Forty or fifty years ago, the conditions which define culture changed drastically in highly advanced capitalist societies in Europe, North America, and Japan, and many cultural genres were transformed. The rise of rock music, film special effects, pop-art, hallucinogenic drugs like LSD, the personal computer, the decline of politics and literature, and the death of the avant-garde symbolize the decisive discontinuity of our contemporary cultural situation.<sup>21</sup>

While Western countries experienced a gradual transition from modern to postmodern from the end of the First World War in 1914 to the end of the Cold War in 1989, Azuma claims that, in extreme contrast, Japan experienced an explosive shift from modern to postmodern in the 1970s. During the periods of restoration and rapid economic growth after the end of World War Two, Japan needed to consolidate ideological social structures such as educational institutions and corporate systems. It needed to revive its national goals and a grand narrative in order to overcome the crisis of the defeat. Efficient economic growth in the early postwar period was in fact supported by the remains of the wartime political and legal systems, which were still essentially modern. Azuma considers that this consolidation unraveled in the 1970s so that Japan could legitimately move into its postmodern period. Consequently, the postmodern trend quickly spread through all cultural genres in Japan.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Azuma makes a clear distinction between the terms “postmodernity” and “postmodernism” in Japan. The former generally refers to cultural changes since the 1960s or 1970s, while the latter has both a more ideological mien and a more limited scope, referring to things like the critical trend led by Asada Akira and Karatani Kōjin, or the literary movement of Shimada Masahiko and Takahashi Gen’ichirō. See Azuma Hiroki, *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel, and Kōno Shion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009), 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 7-8.

<sup>22</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 107-108.

Sociologist Ōsawa Masachi also finds cultural discontinuity between the period from the end of the war to 1969, and the period from 1970 to 1995. He terms the zeitgeist from 1945 to 1969 “the idealistic age” (*risō no jidai*) and the zeitgeist from 1970 to 1995 “the fictional age” (*kyokō no jidai*). While the idealistic age indicates a period in which meta-narratives such as political ideologies are still valid and functioning in reality, the fictional age is a period in which such meta-narratives are regarded as invalid in the real world, and ideals are quested for in fiction. Ōsawa examines the success of Tokyo Disneyland and the development of Shibuya in the 1980s, arguing that these are fictional, hyperrealistic spaces that thoroughly exclude reality. In postwar Japan, order is shaped through the relationship between reality and the ideal during the idealistic age; political movements and student movements in the 1960s suggest that people tried to realize their political and ideological ideals in real society. However, in the fictional age, order comes to be shaped through the relationship between reality and fiction.<sup>23</sup>

Ōsawa locates the turning point around 1970, the period of student activism such as the *Anpo* and *Zenkyōtō* movements.<sup>24</sup> The *Anpo* strife (1959-1960 and 1970) and the student movements of the mid 1960s were postwar political movements challenging the lack of ideology in the status quo. These movements represented the idealistic age trying to realize its ideals in the real politics of Japan. However, in 1970, the second *Anpo*

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<sup>23</sup> Ōsawa Masachi, *Kyokō no jidai no hate* (The End of the Fictional Age) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1996), 38-51.

<sup>24</sup> *Zenkyōtō* is an abbreviation of *zengaku kyōtō kaigi*, meaning “the conference of all academic dispute.” *Zenkyōtō* movements occurred between 1965 and 1970; in the earlier period they were successful, but they later degenerated into violent clashes between students and police with no clear goals. *Anpo* is an abbreviation of *nichibei anzen hoshō jōyaku*: Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan. The *Anpo* strife or movement refers to the anti-*Anpo*, anti-war movements that occurred twice: in 1959/60 and again in 1970. Like the *Zenkyōtō* movements, they were successful at first, but later were marked by violence without concrete goals. They remain the biggest political movements in Japanese history.

movement by leftists and students came to deny both ideologies. Some even lynched their own comrades; these murders, known as *sōkatsu*,<sup>25</sup> were justified as necessary to make members more active revolutionaries. The *Anpo* movement in the late 1960s lost its ideological justification and fell into violence. Art critic Sawaragi Noi also considers the year 1970 a crucial turning point for Japan, pointing out the following important incidents; while Expo '70, the first Asian World's Fair, was underway, the Japanese Communist League-Red Army Faction hijacked a domestic aircraft to create a stronghold in North Korea, and Mishima Yukio staged his ritual suicide by disembowelment. In the next few years, a series of terrorist bombings hit Tokyo, and U.S. President Nixon's suspension of the gold standard and introduction of the fluctuating currency exchange system provoked the "dollar shock." Meanwhile, the international oil crisis (the "oil shock") caused spiraling inflation. Sawaragi claims that the year 1970 represents the turning point in Japanese cultural/sociological trends after World War II.<sup>26</sup>

Ōsawa's theory has in common with Azuma's and Sawaragi's arguments that 1970 was the year in which there was a major cultural change in Japan from modern to postmodern. It can be said that the idealistic age reflects the late modern spirit, while the fictional age reflects the start of the postmodern. Ōsawa compares these two ages and concludes that the 1972 Asama Sansō incident<sup>27</sup> represents the ultimate limit and collapse

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<sup>25</sup> *Sōkatsu* means to summarize, but the United Red Army came to use this word to encourage their members to self-criticize and to become revolutionary through violent acts. *Sōkatsu* became one of the justifications for the violence and murders engaged in by the organization.

<sup>26</sup> Sawaragi Noi, "On the Battlefield of 'SUPERFLAT': Subculture and Art in Postwar Japan," trans. Linda Hoaglund, in *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, ed. Murakami Takashi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 187-205.

<sup>27</sup> The Asama Sansō Incident was a hostage crisis and police siege in a mountain lodge near Karuizawa, Nagano that lasted from February 19 to February 28, 1972. The rescue operation on the final day of the standoff was the first marathon live broadcast in Japan, lasting ten hours and forty minutes. The incident began when five members of the United Red Army, following a

of the idealistic age, whereas the Aum sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995 (the incident will be discussed in detail below and in Chapter Five) functions as the ultimate end and collapse of the fictional age.<sup>28</sup>

The Asama Sansō Incident and Aum sarin gas attack, the former caused by radical political activism and the latter by a new religious organization, do not on the surface seem connected. Yet Azuma and Ōsawa, as well as Japanese subculture critic and manga artist Ōtsuka Eiji, who studies female members of the United Red Army (*Rengō sekigun*), agree that they differ mainly in the perpetrators' belief in contrasting narratives: one the well-known meta-narrative of communism, and the other fictional doctrines drawn mostly from subcultural contexts.<sup>29</sup> Among these subcultural phenomena in postwar Japan, Ōsawa points out that the fictional imagination of apocalypticism became widespread from 1970. Not only New Religious organizations but also cultural genres such as anime, manga, and popular literature dealt with apocalyptic themes, and this apocalyptic imagination was therefore not limited to religious believers but was also shared among the wider public. For example, Gojima Ben's *The Prophecies of Nostradamus* was published in 1973 and became highly influential. Also, popular

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bloody political purge that left fourteen members of the group plus one bystander dead, broke into a holiday lodge below Mount Asama, taking the wife of the lodge-keeper hostage. On February 28, police stormed the lodge; two police officers were killed in the assault, but the hostage was rescued and the five perpetrators were taken into custody. The incident contributed to a decline in the popularity of leftist movements in Japan. For further information, see Sassa Atsuyuki, *Rengō sekigun asama sansō jiken* (The United Red Army: The Asama Sansō Incident) (Tokyo: Bungei shunjūsha, 1999) for commentary by the police side and Sakaguchi Hiroshi, *Asama sansō 1972*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 1993) for commentary by a member of the United Red Army.

<sup>28</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 40.

<sup>29</sup> It is well known that Aum Shinrikyō's leader Matsumoto Chizuo was influenced by both fiction (including animations such as *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*) and esoteric Buddhism as well as the prophecies of Nostradamus. See Ōsawa Masachi, *Kyoko no jidai no hate*, 48-49, and Ōtsuka Eiji, *Kanojotachi no rengō sekigun: sabukaruchā to sengo minshu shugi* (Women in The United Red Army: Subculture and the Postwar Democracy) (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 2001) for further details of the relationship between The United Red Army and Aum.

animations such as *Space Battleship Yamato* (1977),<sup>30</sup> *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), and *AKIRA* (1988) are all set in places that have experienced worldwide nuclear war and describe the process of the real final war in their narratives; in other words, these apocalyptic fictional works are based on post-apocalyptic settings: worlds that have already been destroyed.

Ōsawa explains that the reason apocalyptic imaginations became powerful and widespread in the 1970s and 1980s is because many people in this period longed for the complete destruction of the existing order rather than for reform and adjustment.<sup>31</sup> In addition to Ōsawa's explanation, it can be considered that these fictional works implicitly repeat the experience of World War II and its aftermath in order to accept it as a real historical event. Or it could be argued that these apocalyptic works attempt to show the limit of modern idea of time through apocalyptic destruction.<sup>32</sup>

Let us turn now to how apocalyptic discourse functions as a tool. While modern apocalyptic works in the 1960s and the 1970s targeting adult men sought recovery from trauma, the recreation of the ideological order, and the reconstruction of identity in a realistic setting, apocalyptic stories in the 1980s abandoned the aim of making such ideals real and chose to address them instead in fictional settings. The failures of political movements such as the *Anpo* and *Zenkyōtō* movements underscored America's continuing influence on Japanese politics even after the Occupation. Young males, who grew up after the failures of these political movements, consciously or unconsciously

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<sup>30</sup> *Space Battleship Yamato* is usually considered a classical animation since it was released more than thirty years ago. However, it has recently experienced a resurgence in popularity; five animated films have been released from 1977 to 2009, and a live action film will be released in Japan on December 1, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 75-76.

<sup>32</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 73-88.

absorbed the difficulty of dealing with the power of the United States and the trauma of the defeat. Instead of fiction that proposed realistic solutions to trauma and unstable identity, young Japanese males turned to stories that described the imagined community of post-nuclear war survivors or that depicted new visions of the post-crisis future in fictional settings. In these fictions these youths found meaning in their stagnated lives and a bright, promising, albeit fictional, future.

Grand narratives were lost in the 1970s, but this does not mean that society suddenly became fully postmodern. When it became clear that modern ideals could no longer be realized *in this reality*, people tried to compensate for this loss by creating *fiction* that would offer a similar worldview; ideologies were reconstructed in fiction. Apocalyptic narratives were used to take over such grand narratives, for their structure usually incorporates both the destruction and the recreation of the world. In the 1970s, apocalyptic fiction was used to re-establish lost grand narratives. For example, we can see the re-created order and grand narratives of war in *Space Battleship Yamato*; even though the story is science fiction, the plot is essentially a retelling of the imperial order and sublime goals of World War II: the series thus reflected the realistic visions people had held twenty years previously.

However, people in the 1980s gradually realized the deconstruction of various ideologies that supported the postwar society, and sensed that a new age had come. Apocalyptic fiction, then, functioned to reflect the end of modern ideologies and the birth of postmodernity. As the trend of the fictional age became widespread in the early 1980s, the emphasis of apocalyptic narratives gradually shifted from recreation of the realistic order and morality to the quest for ideals in explicitly fictional settings. This shift can be

clearly observed in apocalyptic works with prequels or sequels written during the 1980s and early 1990s, and will be addressed in detail in Chapter Four.

### **Japanese Apocalypse since 1995**

The fictional age that seeks its ideals in fiction meets its limit in 1995; many critics of Japanese literature, sociology, and popular culture consider that 1995 marks an important shift in Japanese cultural trends. In that year there were two important apocalyptic events that widely influenced society and culture. The first was the Great Hanshin Earthquake (the Kobe Earthquake as it is more commonly known outside Japan), which occurred on January 17 in the southern part of Hyōgo Prefecture. Over six thousand people died and nearly 44,000 were injured. Old houses made of wood collapsed, and infrastructure such as highways, railways, electrical systems, gas and water supplies, and the telephone network were widely and severely damaged. More than 300,000 people were left homeless. This was Japan's worst natural disaster since the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, causing some ten trillion yen in damage, equivalent to 2.5% of Japan's GDP at the time.<sup>33</sup>

This was also the year in which Japan began to seriously suffer from the bursting of the 1986 to 1990 asset price bubble in which real estate and stock prices had been greatly inflated. The economic collapse had stopped the stable economic growth of the 1970s and early 1980s, and Japan now faced its most serious decline since World War II. Against this social and economic background, the Kobe Earthquake shook the image of the stable and safe society of postwar Japan. The apocalyptic devastation of the

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<sup>33</sup> For more detailed statistics, see [http://sinsai.fdma.go.jp/search/abstract.php?TOSHO\\_ID=N0000025&DATA\\_ID=0001&LEGAL\\_ON=1](http://sinsai.fdma.go.jp/search/abstract.php?TOSHO_ID=N0000025&DATA_ID=0001&LEGAL_ON=1).

earthquake caused discontinuity between the past and the present. The lives of those who experienced it were decisively changed by this traumatic event, just as were the lives of those who survived the atomic bombings and those who heard the Emperor's voice for the first time on the radio in August 1945.

In his diary, psychiatrist An Katsumasa terms this condition *riaru-byō* or “reality syndrome,” and explains the change in his own thinking in this way:

As I experienced the earthquake and continued to live in the disaster area . . . I realized that my sense of value and my way of feeling has gradually changed. Let me temporarily term it “reality syndrome” . . . The overwhelming experience of the earthquake and visions of devastated landscapes deprived me of words. Even though various emotions arose, I could not put them into words—I felt like such emotions would become lies if I verbalized them. I realized that reality [*riaru na mono*] is merciless and deprives us of words. In my case, as I am deeply caught by real events, I begin to refuse empty words and theories. I cannot stop thinking, “such empty things will be destroyed once another earthquake comes.”<sup>34</sup>

An's remarks indicate that the earthquake manifested the power of reality. Ideals in the fictional age appear meaningless in the face of the overwhelming power of the real. He saw the interpretation of the event as equal to fiction when compared to the reality of the earthquake. The reality of the Kobe Earthquake revealed the fragility of ideals in the fictional age. As Ōsawa claims, this earthquake brought the end of the fictional age zeitgeist that had obtained since the early 1970s. This fictional age had functioned well, despite its fictive nature. However, for those faced with the reality of the earthquake, ideals in fictional settings became simply too fictive to accept. Consequently, the communities and societies that had offered fictive ideals and critical theories lost their significance and power for people who experienced the earthquake. The Kobe Earthquake became a trigger to weaken the idealistic visions and the significance of

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<sup>34</sup> Qtd. in Saitō, *Bungaku no dansō*, 203. My translation.

communal space that offered such visions.

The Kobe Earthquake also brought a different understanding of Otherness. The earthquake was a brutal reminder that human life may end abruptly. It is always possible for natural disasters to bring sudden apocalypse, but it is easy to forget this since death is mostly hidden from our daily life in postmodern society. Ōsawa claims that the contingency of sudden death is very similar to an uncanny Other who may suddenly disrupt our lives. For example, Ōsawa refers to the comment by one survivor who felt that “everything looked like a weapon” after he experienced the earthquake. In other words, a state of emergency can produce the aggressive will of an uncanny Other.<sup>35</sup>

This Other cannot be specified as a certain existing thing or person, for this Otherness is what the contingency of death itself projects externally. In 1990s Japan it was understood that one’s identity was located within the anticipated course of one’s life; the majority of Japanese people lived in an age in which they rarely, if ever, confronted sudden, deadly dangers like wars, plagues, and famine. The possibility of the sudden death of large numbers of people had been forgotten in the reality of 1990s Japan, yet it revived as a totally uncanny Other found within the self. Thus, the immanent quality of the apocalyptic earthquake crisis led to the rediscovery of the contingency of sudden death realized within the self. We have seen that in apocalyptic fiction before 1995 the Other was variously imagined as an enemy, a monstrous foreign power, a mysterious extraterrestrial phenomenon, modernization and even the status quo. Apocalyptic stories tried to describe the relationship between the unknown Other and the self, and how to react to the unknown in times of crisis. But the Other was also discovered within the self through the apocalypse of the Kobe Earthquake.

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<sup>35</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 12.

The second important apocalyptic event in 1995 was the sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway (known in Japan as the Subway Sarin Incident), an act of domestic terrorism perpetrated by members of Aum Shinrikyō on March 20. Aum Shinrikyō, now rebranded Aleph, is a New Religious organization that incorporates leader Matsumoto Chizuo's idiosyncratic interpretations of yoga with facets of Buddhism and Christianity, and even the writings of Nostradamus. The police initially said that the attack was an attempt by the cult to hasten the apocalypse, while during the subsequent trial of those responsible the prosecution said that it was intended to bring down the government and install Matsumoto as the emperor of Japan. The attack was directed against trains passing through the Kasumigaseki and Nagatachō districts, home to the Japanese government. In five coordinated attacks during the morning rush hour, members of Aum released sarin gas on several lines of the Tokyo Metro. At least a dozen people died on that day and in the ensuing days, while over five thousand were treated at hospitals, including some fifty with severe to critical injuries and nearly a thousand who suffered temporary vision problems. Several of those affected, including passengers on other trains, subway and health care workers and bystanders, were sickened by helping others who had been directly exposed. This was and remains the most serious attack to occur on Japanese soil since World War II.<sup>36</sup>

The Kobe Earthquake and the sarin gas attack were both apocalyptic, catastrophic events because they destroyed the myth of security and safety in modern Japan; Japanese in the 1990s believed that their modernized society with its advanced city planning, well-maintained infrastructure, and efficient social systems, including the police and Self

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<sup>36</sup> D. W. Brackett, *Holy Terror: Armageddon in Tokyo* (New York: Weatherhill, 1996), 1-8. Matsumoto Chizuo is also known as Asahara Shōkō.

Defense Forces, could secure their lives against any threat, including natural disasters and social unrest. These two incidents revealed the fragility of this actually very fictive view, and threw into sharp relief the reality that something or someone uncanny and unknown can bring total destruction even in the most peaceful and highly modernized society. These two incidents, however, functioned in almost opposite ways to the trend of the fictional age: the cruelty of reality in the Kobe Earthquake destroyed the fictive, hyper-realistic trend of the time, while, like the Holocaust, the Aum incident was the crystallization of the ultimate fictional vision of its leader.<sup>37</sup> However, they share the important feature of triggering the disintegration of the fictional age. The attack by Aum Shinrikyō also raises two important issues that are similar to those in the Kobe Earthquake: the problem of reliance on society and the relationship between self and the unknown Other.

Aum Shinrikyō is considered the most paradigmatic example of religious movements in the fictional age since 1970. In the idealistic age, that is, from 1945 to 1970, Japan made its best effort to make its ideals of recovery, stability, progress, and prosperity come true in reality. During that time New Religious organizations saw a resurgence in popularity; these groups had a clear goal of relieving their followers of “*hin-byō-sō*” (poverty, sickness, and conflict) and to bring them close to ideals of this-worldly happiness. The organizations promoted communal support and harmony between their followers, making salvation in the idealistic age a this-worldly benefit in

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<sup>37</sup> It is significant that Murakami Haruki combines reportage of the Aum incident with non-fictional interviews in his *Andāgraundo* (Underground) and *Yakusoku sareta basho de* (At the Promised Land) (Tokyo: Bungei shunjūsha, 1998), whereas he juxtaposes the Kobe Earthquake with fiction in *Kami no kodomotachi wa mina odoru* (After the Quake) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2000).

reality.<sup>38</sup>

However, New Religions established after 1970 are very different in terms of their doctrines, systems of organization, and motives, so that they are categorized as “new” New Religions (*shin-shinshūkyō*).<sup>39</sup> Religious studies scholar Shimazono Susumu identifies six characteristics of new New Religions. The first is a change in motives for joining the organizations; reasons for joining New Religions used to include liberation from poverty, sickness, and conflicts in reality, but now the reasons have become more abstract, such as escape from “vanity in life.” The second characteristic is that they emphasize the spiritual world and a quest for departure from reality. The third is that they promote mysterious and transcendent experiences brought about by techniques of controlling body and mind. The fourth is increased emphasis on individual responsibility rather than on communal relationships between followers. The fifth is that their teachings include apocalyptic ideologies and messianism. The last is that the followers belong to the younger generation.<sup>40</sup>

As Ōsawa explains, Aum Shinrikyō not only had all the characteristics of new New Religions, but had them to an extreme degree. For example, Aum promoted a radical type of apocalyptic thought and quested for it thorough detachment from reality. It is notable that the followers of Aum in 1995 were mostly educated, privileged people in their twenties and thirties. Aum Shinrikyō thus can be considered as the archetype of

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<sup>38</sup> Representative new religions from 1945 to 1970 are Sōka Gakkai, Risshō Kōseikai, and the Perfect Liberty. See Shimazono Susumu, “Aspects of the Rebirth of Religion,” in *Religion in Japanese Culture*, ed. Tamaru Noriyoshi and David Reid (Tokyo, New York and London: Kodansha International, 1996), 170-174.

<sup>39</sup> Examples of new New Religions other than Aum Shinrikyō are Agon no Shū, the Unification Church, and Kōfuku no Kagaku. See Shimazono Susumu, “Aspect of the Rebirth of Religion,” 174-177.

<sup>40</sup> Shimazono Susumu, “Shin shin shūkyō no tokuchō” (The Characteristics of New New Religions), in *Shin shin shūkyō to shūkyō būmu* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1997), 23-50.

new New Religions in the fictional age. However, it was Aum Shinrikyō itself that bought the end or collapse of the fictional age by making their fictive ideals of apocalypse come true through terrorism.<sup>41</sup>

In the 1980s, Aum Shinrikyō had a weak but definite vision of what the world would look like after the apocalypse; Matsumoto often referred to the ideal Tibetan Buddhist state called Śambhala. He believed that there would be a final war between pagans and his followers followed by an apocalyptic catastrophe, after which Śambhala would be established by the chosen survivors. However, as he gained more and more followers, this ideal of Śambhala disappeared from his teachings.<sup>42</sup> The ultimate shift was the failure of Matsumoto's bid to get elected to the House of Representatives in 1990. Matsumoto had established a political party and ran twenty-five candidates for election, including himself. The result was a humiliating defeat with Matsumoto earning only about a thousand votes.<sup>43</sup> This incident resulted in Aum abandoning its ideal of making Śambhala come true in reality, and made the group more and more hostile to society. They increasingly stressed detachment from reality and renunciation of the world, creating a pseudo-cabinet within the organization, and criticizing the Japanese political system. Accordingly, their vision of apocalypse lost all hope for renewal as they began instead longing for the destruction of society.<sup>44</sup> Between 1990 and 1995, Aum's ideal gradually came to be the destruction of the existing reality that rejected their fictional doctrines. The fictional age that quested for ideals in fiction thus came to its limit

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<sup>41</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 35-36.

<sup>42</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 77-79.

<sup>43</sup> Matsumoto was not a joke candidate; he was very serious about this election, and had been totally confident of winning the election by gaining sixty thousand votes. See Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 196-198.

<sup>44</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 198.

through terrorism; before 1970, the ideal of the New Religious organizations had been to transform the existing society, but in 1995 Aum's ideal was to nullify it.<sup>45</sup>

The Aum sarin incident is similar to the Kobe Earthquake in terms of the discovery of uncanny Otherness within oneself. In 1997, Murakami Haruki published *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*, a non-fiction collection of interviews with survivors of the attack on the Tokyo subway. In his afterword titled "Blind Nightmare: Where are we Japanese going?" Murakami mentions that he had a very strong hatred and an uncanny feeling about Aum believers from the first moment he met them during the election campaign in 1990. He particularly wanted to avoid looking at Aum followers dancing strangely in their elephant hats and white costumes, and he noticed that most people around him seemed to feel the same way. However, Murakami realized that he usually did not have such an overwhelming hatred toward New Religious organizations; he usually regarded them as totally unrelated to his life. After the sarin gas attack, Murakami recalled this hatred, and concluded that ordinary people including himself have something "Aum-ish" within them, something that must be consciously excluded, for we tend to have unconscious and intense hatred toward projections of negative images of ourselves.<sup>46</sup> In other words, Aum followers explicitly represent something uncanny that exists within ourselves.

Ōsawa explains this uncanniness within oneself in detail. It was well known that Aum Shinrikyō believed in a number of fanciful conspiracy theories—they declared, for instance, that the whole world including Japan was controlled by Jewish capitalism and

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<sup>45</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 35.

<sup>46</sup> Murakami Haruki, "Blind Nightmare: Where are we Japanese going?" in *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel (London: Vintage, 2002), 197-199.

Freemasons, and that the Japanese authorities and security police, America and the CIA were minions of the Jews. Aum members believed they were under attack by these conspiring forces. Believing in conspiracy theories is often a sign that people cannot accept the reasons for unacceptable disorder in society, which they project onto some external Other who longs for the disorder that we least desire. At the same time, Aum members began to believe that many of their own followers were police spies, and began to surveil each other to ferret out these impostors.<sup>47</sup> Ordinary people had difficulty understanding these paranoid beliefs, and the mass media scoffed at Aum's too-fictional worldview.

However, Ōsawa argues, the beliefs of ordinary people—that is, non-Aum members—can be seen as similar to the outlandish beliefs of Aum Shinrikyō. Understandably, following the sarin attack people sought to discover and explain the motives behind the cult's attempt to destroy the Japanese social order. The mass media published and broadcast many highly dubious claims that Aum had secretly planted its members in the police and Self Defense Forces and even in the media itself, leading to widespread fears that this small group representing less than 0.01% of the Japanese population had infiltrated the very core of Japanese society.<sup>48</sup> In these alarmist news stories it becomes clear that Aum Shinrikyō was not the only thing to be feared: every Japanese was potentially suspect, and the true horror is that the uncanny Other is never far away: it never can be, because it is *within* us.

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<sup>47</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 21-28.

<sup>48</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 29.

## The Birth of *Sekaikei* Fiction

As apocalypse in the 1980s gradually shifted to a quest for ideals in the fictional settings of fictional narratives, the communal space that nourishes and offers such grand narratives weakened. Benedict Anderson calls this concept of a communal space in which ideologies are supported and social norms are defined “imagined communities,” that is, virtual communal spaces in which individuals can meet others and which exceed the limitations of existing village communities; Anderson explains that cultural imaginations create such communal space. Grand narratives such as ideologies and cultural/political movements have been shared by various types of imagined communities.<sup>49</sup> Until the 1970s, people communicated in a modern communal space supported by modern ideologies that forced each member to share the reality created by grand narratives or worldviews. However, once the premise of grand narratives was no longer trusted in the 1980s, it became increasingly difficult to communicate by relying on consensus in these imagined communities. The two apocalyptic incidents of 1995 decisively made Japanese society as an imagined community insecure and unreliable.

Critic and playwright Betsuyaku Minoru refers to this communal space as the middle ground, and claims that its role in fiction has changed. Whereas the distance that one can touch/feel is the foreground, the distance that refers to something very far away, such as the world/universe or transcendence, is the background. It can be argued that the role of the middle ground, which mediates between the foreground and the background, weakened in the late 1980s, and people started to connect issues in the foreground with

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<sup>49</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Sōzō no kyōdōtai* (Imagined Communities), trans. Shiraishi Saya and Shiraishi Takashi (Tokyo: NTT shuppan, 1997), 18-28.

issues in the background, bypassing the middle field.<sup>50</sup>

Azuma explains this phenomenon of loss of communal space where one can meet others outside of limited communities as the weakening of the Symbolic in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms. He comments that Japanese youth tend to focus on their families and love relationships and on apocalyptic catastrophe in the world or universe, but rarely on society or the wider community outside their close relationships. According to Lacan, a close relationship belongs to the world of the Imaginary, and a far-off and abstract issue such as the end of the world belongs to the world of the Real. The world which mediates the Imaginary and the Real is the Symbolic, and it is usually represented as larger communities, societies and nation-states. Azuma claims that the imaginations of the younger generation combine “the Imaginary” directly with “the Real.”<sup>51</sup> In fact, the weakening of the Symbolic or the middle ground brings the birth of a new apocalyptic imagination called “*sekaikei*” in Japan after 1995.

*Sekaikei*, roughly meaning “the motif of the crisis of the world,” is a neologism referring to subcultural works of animation, manga, games and light novels<sup>52</sup> on the combined theme of apocalyptic crisis and school romance.<sup>53</sup> Works in the *sekaikei* genre

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<sup>50</sup> Betsuyaku Minoru, “Chūkei no sōshitsu” (The Loss of the Middle Ground), in *Uma ni notta tange sazen* (Tokyo: Libroport, 1986), 10-13.

<sup>51</sup> Azuma Hiroki, “Yūbinteki fuantachi” (Postal Anxieties), in *Yūbinteki fuantachi#* (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 2002), 61-64.

<sup>52</sup> *Raito noberu* (light novel) is a genre of novels born in contemporary Japanese subculture. They are entertainment novels primarily targeting teenagers and young adults, usually published as *bunkobon*, and often illustrated by popular manga artists. In recent years, light novel stories have been popular choices for adaptation into manga, anime, and live-action films. In 2007, it was estimated that the market for light novels was about ¥20 billion (\$166.7 million at ¥120 to the dollar) with about 30 million copies published annually.

<sup>53</sup> *Sekai* in the word *sekaikei* is usually written in katakana. Translator Jonathan E. Abel and Kōno Shion explain the term *sekaikei* as “the kind of plot in anime and video games in which the small group of characters act as if their thoughts and actions can affect the fate of the entire world.” See Azuma, *Otaku*, 124. The definition of the term *sekaikei* is still under debate, but generally speaking there is a broader and a narrower definition. The broader definition considers

increased after the boom of the animation *Neon Genesis Evangelion*,<sup>54</sup> and *seikaikei* continued to be one of the main motifs in Japanese subculture in the 2000s. Many see in these *seikaikei* works the unmistakable influence of *Evangelion*, so the *seikaikei* phenomenon is also referred to as the Post-Evangelion Syndrome. In Chapter Five, I undertake a detailed analysis of several *seikaikei* stories including *Evangelion*.

In a narrow sense, *seikaikei* works deal with situations in which the foreground (love between the always male protagonist and the heroine) is directly connected to the background (apocalyptic crisis and the end of the world) without the mediation of the middle ground, such as communities and societies. The apocalyptic crises depicted are usually wars with the potential to end the world or even the universe, and the actions and crises of the protagonist and the heroine are synchronized with this fate. Society, nations, states, or international institutions are largely absent or even non-existent.<sup>55</sup> Not only the middle ground, but also ambiguity and Otherness are largely absent from *seikaikei* fiction; heroines in the narratives often play the role of mother to the protagonists; and the love of the empowered heroines for the adolescent male protagonists is often depicted as unconditional. There is no real “Otherness” in *seikaikei* fiction; secondary characters are mirrors or shadows of the protagonist, whom they never seriously confront. Also, the

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*seikaikei* to consist of Japanese fictional works from the late 1990s and 2000s that describe the self-consciousness of youth (especially young men), and that make use of “otaku-type” genre codes such as robots, battling beauties, detectives, and school romances. The narrower definition refers to subcultural works of animation, manga, games and light novels in late 1990s and 2000s Japan that feature the combined theme of apocalyptic crisis and school romance, with situations in which the “foreground” (love between the always male protagonist and the heroine) is directly connected to the “background” (apocalyptic crisis and the end of the world) without the mediation of the “middle ground,” such as communities and societies. I use the narrower definition of *seikaikei* in this project.

<sup>54</sup> TV series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, directed by Anno Hideaki and produced by GAINAX (Tokyo: TV Asahi, October 4, 1995-March 27, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> Kasai Kiyoshi, Introduction in *Shakai wa sonzai shinai: seikaikei bunkaron* (There is No Society: the Theory of *Seikaikei* Culture), ed. by Genkai shōsetsu kenkyūjo (Tokyo: Nan’undō, 2009), 5-6.

reasons for the apocalyptic crisis are rarely explained at all in *sekaikei* stories, and there are almost no detailed explanations of wars. Characters in the narratives do not know what is righteous or evil, for moral norms cannot be structured without the presence of or reference to the Symbolic.

We have seen that apocalyptic narratives have constantly functioned as a tool of solidifying unstable identity through the catastrophic crisis after World War II, but their target audience has changed according to the zeitgeists: as previously discussed, works of apocalyptic fiction mainly targeted adult males in the 1960s, and male youth in the 1980s. After 1995, they came to target even younger boys and their identity crises. While apocalyptic narratives from the 1960s to the 1980s realistically or fictionally sought a way out of the traumatic memories of war, defeat and loss of identity, in the 1990s they began to suppress actual historical trauma. Apocalyptic narratives after 1995 could not cope with these issues directly, since a common language and ideology via which to discuss defeat and trauma had been gradually dissolved by postmodernization. The latent trauma of the failure and unstable identity of Japanese youth are described as something never resolved. Instead of coping with historical trauma, apocalyptic narratives after 1995 deal instead with the disappearance of the middle ground, and the endlessness of immaturity. Many *sekaikei* works depict the protagonist gaining affirmation through a maternal figure rather than from social relationships, suggesting that society/communities and interpersonal relationships that are usually nourished in the middle ground can no longer give social affirmation to young boys. It is not only real societies that have disappeared: imaginative communities no longer have meaning for youth; they long like infants for total affirmation of the incompetent self by the mother. Thus they never

encounter the truly Other, and consequently remain in a state of suspended adolescence, unable to form independent identities.

Azuma Hiroki explains that the birth of *sekaikei* apocalypse without middle ground, ambiguity, Otherness, or hope is due to the rise of a new zeitgeist after the fictional age. As discussed previously, Ōsawa Masachi terms the period from 1945 to 1969 in Japan the idealistic age and the period from 1970 to 1995 the fictional age. The fictional age having met its limit with the Great Hanshin Earthquake and the Subway Sarin Incident in 1995, Azuma argues, Japan entered a new period he terms the animal age.<sup>56</sup>

The idea of animalization is taken from Alexandre Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.<sup>57</sup> Kojève explains that the difference between the human and the animal lies in the difference between desire and need: humans have desires as well as needs while animals have only needs. The word "need" here means a simple thirst that can be fulfilled via its relationship with a certain object or action: when an animal is hungry, this need is satisfied by eating. Needs function in the circuit between lack and satisfaction. Humans are also driven by such needs, but humans have another type of craving called desire. Desire, however, does not disappear when the object of desire is obtained and the lack is fulfilled. Kojève takes the example of the male's sexual desire for the female. The male desire for the female is not fulfilled even after he has a partner: rather, it increases. This is because sexual desire has "a complex structure, wherein the desire of the other is itself desired."<sup>58</sup> A man who obtains a woman wants others to react with jealousy just as he jealously wants to obtain that which the other desires. Thus

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<sup>56</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 86.

<sup>57</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

<sup>58</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 86.

desire is never satisfied.

Azuma emphasizes Kojève's point that humans are different from animals because they have inter-subjective desire, and this distinction is a grand premise of modern philosophy and thought from Hegel to Lacan. Animalization, therefore, means the condition in which humans lose their inter-subjective relationships and live in the circuit of lack-satisfaction. Kojève originally labeled post-war American consumer society animalistic, but this is also applicable to contemporary Japan, where society has been standardized and media-ized with a meticulously well-kept distribution management system. Consumer need in Japan can be immediately and mechanically satisfied without the intervention of the Other. Objects of desire that previously could only be had with social communication, such as food and sexual release, can now be obtained both readily and with little or no communication, via the fast food and sex industries. Azuma concludes that in this way Japanese society has truly been going down the path of animalization since 1995.<sup>59</sup> Japanese subculture tried to fabricate grand narratives in the 1970s and early 1980s, but after 1995 it abandoned them. The zeitgeist in Japan moves from the partial postmodern in the 1980s to the total postmodern after 1995: the animalization of people living in the animal age.

Some may argue that the consumption style of a certain generation of male *otaku*<sup>60</sup> fans of manga, computer games, and light novels is not applicable to the whole

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<sup>59</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 87.

<sup>60</sup> *Otaku* is generally understood to refer to people with obsessive interests, particularly in popular culture products such as anime, manga, or video games. In recent years, however the word "*otaku*" has been used in broader contexts, leading critics to try to refine its meaning. Critic Okada Toshio defines *otaku* culture as the active of enjoyment of a popular culture work with artistic, sophisticated views and detailed study. Psychiatrist and critic Saitō Tamaki considers the essence of the *otaku* culture to be sexuality—specifically a sexuality that can find real appeal in 2-dimensional animated characters. Azuma Hiroki claims that *otaku* culture is profoundly related

Japanese cultural field, but Azuma disputes this, for subcultural works and their consumption revolves around issues of Japan's inability to come to terms with war defeat, of the American cultural invasion of Japan, and of the distorted social conditions brought about by modernization and postmodernization. The *otaku* subculture is in fact more related to political and ideological issues than it first appears; it is the place where the unresolved, distorted problems of postwar Japan are explicitly expressed as they are. Azuma insists that this cultural phenomenon is not limited to Japan only, for Japanese subcultural products have become popular and spread worldwide. The trend of animalization in which one comes to process emotional activities nonsocially, in solitude, can be applied to the worldwide entertainment industry such as Hollywood films and techno music. Azuma argues that the rise of Japanese subculture needs to be considered in relation to the worldwide trend of postmodernization.<sup>61</sup>

While Azuma terms the zeitgeist after 1995 the animal age based on the postmodern consumption and production of Japanese subcultural fiction, Ōsawa Masachi takes a different angle to understand the contemporary period. In his 2008 book *Fukanōsei no jidai* (The Age of Impossibility), he names the contemporary zeitgeist "the age of impossibility." In this book, Ōsawa refers to the two totally opposite directions of the social and cultural trend in Japan after 1995: one is towards the return to the real, and the other is towards super-fictionalization. The first direction reflects people's desire to experience reality, and it appears that some are eager to escape *into* reality rather than to escape *from* it. This reality, Ōsawa argues, is often the ultimate realistic situation, such as apocalyptic natural disasters, terrorism, and war.

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to Japanese subcultural trends since 1960s. Here in my study, I will rely primarily on Azuma's understandings of *otaku* culture in Japan.

<sup>61</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 10.

This direction can be seen in recent domestic phenomena such as the increase in self-harming and in the enthusiasm among youth for volunteering in disaster areas or visiting war zones.<sup>62</sup> The vogue for body modification, the popularity of reality television shows, and violent nationalist movements are international examples of this direction. Ōsawa claims that the rise of fundamentalism is also an ideological expression of this direction. Escaping into reality helps people to re-cognize their identities and to bring realistic realizations of life through violence and danger.<sup>63</sup>

The other direction Ōsawa identifies is the desire for super-fictionalization of reality, the inclination of the fictional age escalated and concentrated into the indulgence of a super-fictionalized reality without violence or danger. Here Ōsawa borrows Slavoj Žižek's idea of decaffeinated coffee, which he sees as the best example of this direction. There are infinite varieties of this inclination in products ranging from sugar-free soft drinks, alcohol-free beer, and non-fat milk to virtual sex in computer games and online worlds and wars conducted from afar or even without easily identifiable targets, such as the Iraq War and the War on Terrorism. These examples are the manifestation of the cultural direction that tries to eliminate the danger and risks that give realistic meaning to reality; this desire makes reality even more thoroughly fictionalized than that in the fictional age. Ōsawa insists that these two opposing directions in the cultural trend since 1995 sever the fictional age. He terms the latest zeitgeist the age of impossibility because these two contradicting vectors are responses to something impossible to directly identify or recognize.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “Risuto Katto, shō-chū-kō sei ni kyūzō (The Increase of Wrist-Slashing among Elementary, Junior high, and High School Students),” *Mainichi shinbun*, 15 August, 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Ōsawa, *Fukanōsei no jidai*, 4-5.

<sup>64</sup> Ōsawa, *Fukanōsei no jidai*, 81-83.

Ōsawa suggests that this “something impossible” can be Otherness in contemporary Japanese culture. As I will discuss in more detail shortly, influential subcultural fictional narratives such as *Evangelion* and works in the *seikaikei* genre depict characters who *crave* profound relationships, especially communication or cohesion with others, yet they want these relationships without risk or danger because they fear conflict and the possibility of hurting or being hurt by others in inter-subjective relationships; they want to be connected with others without “Otherness.”<sup>65</sup>

For Ōsawa, the important characteristic of the contemporary zeitgeist is the something impossible that exists at the center of two totally opposite vectors in recent cultural trends, while for Azuma it is the animalization of a society lacking inter-subjective relationships. However, both agree that since 1995 Japan has moved from partially to totally postmodern, and that Japan now creates cultural trends without meaningful confrontation between opposing values and unknown Others, although people continue to desire them. The mega hit *Evangelion* series and the emergence of *seikaikei* apocalypse indicate a world where the Symbolic no longer functions properly; these fictional works lack the middle ground that mediates the background/the Real and the foreground/the Imaginary. Without meaningful inter-subjective relationships and confrontations there can be no substantial communities and societies sustained. Japanese contemporary apocalypse has thus paradoxically established itself as apocalypse without Otherness, ambiguity, and maturity; it seems headed for endless post-apocalypse.

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<sup>65</sup> Ōsawa, *Fukanōsei no jidai*, 192.

## Similarities and Differences

We have followed the trajectory of apocalyptic thought and fiction in Japan from the ancient period to the present and examined the state of modern apocalyptic narratives. There are three main ways that Japanese apocalypse up to the modern period resembles Western apocalypse. First, apocalypse in both the premodern West and premodern Japan was originally found in religious teachings or scriptures that were available to the upper classes, but the emphasis shifted from other-worldly issues to this-worldly issues as it gradually spread to the lower classes, where it often functioned as a revolutionary ideology. In both Japan and the West apocalyptic ideology was thus first in the hands of the privileged, but gradually trickled down to the lower strata and came to be supported by poor farmers and merchants.

Second, themes of the relationship between opposing ideas such as life/death, heaven/Hell, creation/destruction, dominance/subjugation, and morality/decadence gradually changed as time went by. In both the Edo period and in medieval Europe, apocalyptic movements came to deal with more realistic, political aspects of the present situation and they were formed to act against ruling ideologies. Apocalyptic thought brought the conscious representation of opposition to power. The culture of the powerless was based on the profound understanding of the Other as powerful, and the powerful could not ignore the apocalyptic ideology of the powerless. The relationship between the two was interactive, while opposing values in apocalyptic myths in Heian Japan and in the Book of Revelation had been totally unrelated and reconcilable, teaching that the Pure Land/Heaven existed in an *other* world which could not be reached from this world.

Finally, apocalypse in the modern West and in modern Japan now encompasses the idea of progressivism and apocalyptic narratives have become full-fledged science fiction. We tend to think that human beings have always tried to foresee the future and to create visions for it, but as we saw in Chapter One, the idea of a future brought by progress is relatively new. In premodern Japan as well as in the premodern West there was little belief in improvement, novelty or progress; the premodern ideal was to go back to a previous golden age such as the Asuka period in Japan or the Roman Empire in Europe, and to profess a desire to return to this pure period was to be powerfully virtuous, particularly in the context of premodern Japan. Therefore, it is only since the modern period that apocalyptic narratives have come to incorporate visions of the post-apocalypse, for the concept of new ideals and new hopes are products of progressivism. Also, it is the modern period in which science fiction with apocalyptic themes was established as a genre both in the West and Japan.

Japanese apocalypse is also different from Western apocalypse, however. There are four main differences: first, throughout the country's history, Japanese apocalyptic phenomena have been unable to bring decisive social change or to suggest long-term hope or new visions that can overcome difficulties in reality, whereas apocalyptic movements in Europe often brought major social reforms and revolutions. This may be because the traditional Japanese worldview is based on affinity with nature and the present, or because the cyclical view of time derived from Japanese Buddhism presupposes the regular natural renewal of stagnated social conditions. Apocalyptic movements and ideologies were relatively powerful in the Edo period, yet a number of scholars agree that they did not bring change in social structures: Edo apocalypse often

ended up causing strife within rather than between classes.

Second, Japan experienced the significant discontinuity of total defeat in World War II, and especially the atomic bombings and their aftermath, as ultimately apocalyptic events. As discussed in Chapter One, while postwar apocalyptic science fiction in the West often describes atomic catastrophes from a perspective of a far-off safe distance, they are very real events for Japanese apocalypse; science fiction in the prewar period avoided total annihilation by relegating apocalyptic catastrophes to dreams, but it is impossible for postwar Japan to avoid depicting the moment of total destruction. Just as the atoms in the A-bombs were forced to split to cause the explosions, Japan was forced to split itself from the past; prewar ideologies and ideals were totally negated by a powerful foreign other. This discontinuity was not widely discussed or digested by the public until the 1960s, as restoration of the economy and social structure were the primary issues for Japan after the Occupation. Japanese modern apocalypse in the 1960s and 1970s thus explored the identity of Japan as a nation and attempted to recreate other ideologies or grand narratives to support the nation as a whole.

Third, the postmodern trend spread quickly in Japan after the 1970s and apocalypse became postmodern and especially post-apocalyptic after 1995, whereas the West postmodernized gradually starting in 1918. The restoration of Japan was supported by the remnants of wartime political and legal systems in the 1950s, and this consolidation unraveled in 1970; Japan could then legitimately move into its postmodern period. Apocalypse in the 1960s still attempted to make a bridge between ideologies of the past and present. Apocalypse in the 1980s, on the other hand, sought ideals not in reality but in fiction, for it had become difficult to recreate lost ideologies in reality.

Many apocalyptic fictional stories in the 1980s and early 1990s are set in post-apocalyptic worlds in which the major catastrophe has already passed, and deal with the difficulties of reconciling the present with the past and tradition.

Fourth, since 1995, the year in which Japan experienced both the Kobe Earthquake and the Aum subway attack, Japanese apocalypse has moved to total postmodern post-apocalypse; it paradoxically describes a world without Others, without ambiguities or endings. Apocalypse in the 1980s relied on post-apocalyptic settings, but the stories were still seeking some sense of finality, questing for reconciliation between the past, the present, and the future. However, apocalyptic stories after 1995 increasingly depict the post-apocalypse of an endless, timeless world without confrontation. Also, contemporary postmodern post-apocalyptic fiction is targeted at a young male audience in Japan, while apocalyptic novels and films in the West often target a more general audience. The establishment of the *sekaikei* genre is also unique since its narratives totally lack society, governments, and larger communities (that is, the Symbolic), while contemporary Hollywood apocalyptic and disaster films do not.

In the following chapters, I look at the ways in which the specific cultural changes we have seen in this chapter affect apocalyptic fictional works in the 1960s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

## Chapter Three

### Apocalyptic Fiction from 1945 to the 1970s

From the early days of Japan's modern period, apocalyptic narratives warned of problems caused by progressivism and modernization: ecological change, economic gaps between advanced and undeveloped nations, exploitation of the lower classes, conflicts between different religious beliefs and ethnicities. Such distrust toward progress, new scientific findings and technological developments deepened at the end of World War I. With World War II came the shocking realization that humanity had created weapons that could literally wipe out human life. After the atomic bombings, modern apocalyptic discourse in Japan underwent a crucial change: for the first time humanity displaced the astronomical unknown as the force that could destroy the world.

Moreover, Japan's defeat in the Second World War and its subsequent occupation had a tremendous impact, as the country was occupied between 1945 and 1952 by the very nation that created the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At the same time, Japan had to deal with the reality that it had been a victimizer as well as a victim, and the country's former colonial territories in Asia began to publicly protest Japan's war crimes. This discontinuity of Japanese cultural identity penetrated the world of literature, and the realistic experience of the apocalyptic catastrophe by atomic bomb also influenced apocalyptic fiction.

Apocalyptic science fiction in popular literature of the prewar period implicitly described the overwhelming wave of modernization through the metaphor of threats from outer space. As I have shown, this apocalyptic science fiction always avoided depicting

ultimate devastation. Although it was realized that modernization/Westernization was unavoidable following the Meiji Restoration, to establish a modern Japanese identity, both for individuals and for the nation, was not an easy task. That most novelists avoided describing the aftermath of the apocalypse indicates that it was difficult even for science fiction writers to imagine the future and to establish a new identity for modernizing Japan in a time of heretofore unimaginable transition.

In the Taishō and early Shōwa periods (1912-1945) Japan reimagined itself as Imperial Japan by becoming rapidly modernized and warlike. However, the country's defeat in World War II collapsed this identity. In short order, Japan experienced its first loss in an international war, the catastrophe of the atomic bombings, the shame of occupation, and the loss of its colonial territories. Postwar Japanese identity came to be defined by humiliation, embarrassment, misery, subjugation, and loss of pride and confidence. Even after the occupation ended, the tensions of the Cold War had a strong impact on Japanese politics: Japan was forced to follow the United States in order to survive in the new and complicated international arena. The atomic bombings and their continuing aftermath now made it impossible for Japanese apocalyptic narratives to avoid describing realistically the catastrophe of apocalyptic situations. Avoiding reality by the conceit of relegating the apocalyptic to a dream was no longer possible, for an apocalyptic reality had now actually been experienced. Japan was forced to face both its past and the uncertain future.

After the occupation, *junbungaku* authors began to deal with national apocalyptic themes targeting a male audience according to the common paradigm of the war that formed in the 1960s. Postwar apocalyptic narratives therefore revolve around the identity

and continuity of Japan, and deal with the ambivalence between the traditional and the modern, and the past, the present and the future. Two representative authors of postwar Japanese pure literature, Ōe Kenzaburō and Abe Kōbō, each wrote a number of novels with apocalyptic themes. In the following section, I discuss Ōe's *The Silent Cry* and Abe's *Inter Ice Age 4*.

### Ōe Kenzaburō's *The Silent Cry*

Born in 1935, Ōe Kenzaburō, winner of the 1994 Nobel Prize for literature, is one of the most influential authors in postwar Japan. He is known for exploring themes of war experience, postwar democracy and Imperialism, as well as the theme of marginalized people including his own developmentally disabled son, Hikari. Ōe often explores apocalyptic catastrophes and total destruction in his novels and also in documentary essays such as *Hiroshima Notes* (1965) and *Okinawa Notes* (1970).

*Man'en gannen no futtobōru* (Football in the First Year of Man'en, 1967; Eng. trans. *The Silent Cry*)<sup>1</sup> is representative of Ōe's work on apocalyptic themes before 1970. *The Silent Cry*, however, is not a clear example of apocalypse as usually defined: it does not contain world-ending destruction, whereas (as Susan Napier points out) his 1973 novel *Kōzui wa waga tamashii ni oyobi* (The Floodwaters Have Come Unto My Soul) has a strong apocalyptic tone, a vision of salvation, and an ending with "both an apocalyptic flood and a nuclear holocaust."<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to examine *The Silent Cry* here for two reasons; first, the events depicted in this novel are allegories for the larger issue of the national identity crisis after World War II; the story in this novel, especially

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<sup>1</sup> Ōe Kenzaburō, *Man'en gannen no futtobōru* (Football in the First Year of Man'en) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 195.

the confrontation between the brothers and the relationship between the past and the present revolves around the issue of re-establishing identities after the apocalyptic crisis of the war. In particular, the revolt against the Korean proprietor known as “the Emperor of the Supermarket” by a cornered Japanese youth derives from a rich apocalyptic tradition, despite being set in an isolated rural village. Accordingly, I consider this personal, individual destruction and the communal crisis of the villagers symbolically apocalyptic, paralleling the personal crises of the individual and private history in the 1960s and the crises of the nation and national history after the war.

Second, this novel, published in 1967, is temporally closer to Abe’s *Inter Ice Age 4*, which was published in 1959. As discussed above, the common paradigm for discussion of World War II was formed around 1960 when the Japanese social system and economy had largely recovered from the damage of the defeat. Many writers in this period undertook the task of examining the larger meanings of the war within this new modern national framework. *The Silent Cry* describes events that take place in the early 1960s, so both this novel and *Inter Ice Age 4* belong to the idealistic age when people tried to make ideals and ideologies come true in reality, making it much highly suitable for this discussion.

*The Silent Cry* won the prestigious Tanizaki Prize in the same year it was published, and was among the works named when Ōe was awarded the Nobel Prize. This apocalyptic story intentionally (re)arranges and parallels the ambivalence between tradition and modernization in Japan as it describes the relationship between two brothers in the early 1960s. The complicated relationship between Japan and the United States is a backdrop to the characters’ lives which are filled with tensions caused by a number of

complex oppositions such as modern/traditional, urban/rural, conservative/radical, power/weakness and destruction/creation through the history of the family. The narrator Mitsusaburō, or Mitsu, and his wife Natsumi, have been through a series of crises; unable to take care of their physically and mentally handicapped baby, they have left him in an institution. Natsumi has become an alcoholic due to the shock of their baby's condition. Mitsu's best friend has committed suicide. In the midst of these crises, Mitsu's younger brother Takashi (Taka), who failed in the *Anpo* movement, returns to Japan from the United States, where he had joined a drama troupe formed by reformed *Anpo* activists and toured around the U.S. with a play called "Our Shame." He suggests that they all try to start their lives afresh, so the three travel to the brothers' home village, set in a hollow in a forest on Shikoku.

As Michiko Wilson points out, the brothers have totally different, almost opposite personalities and form a "thesis-antithesis" relationship: Taka is active and even violent, whereas Mitsu is passive and often contemplative. Also there is ambivalence within Taka's personality, which has both violent and penitential sides.<sup>3</sup> Due to their differences, they have different memories and opinions about the mysterious deaths of three of their family members: their great-grandfather's younger brother (their great-great uncle), who had led a peasant revolt in 1860; their brother S, who was killed in a raid on the Korean settlement near the village; and their younger sister, who committed suicide. The truths of these mysteries are revealed little by little as the story progresses.

In addition to the individual quests of two brothers *The Silent Cry* also explores the quest for collectivity. Wilson points out that there is a strong connection between

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<sup>3</sup> Michiko N. Wilson, *The Marginal World of Ōe Kenzaburō: A Study in Themes and Techniques* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), 50.

1860 and 1960 in terms of the relationship between Japan and the United States. In 1860, the first year of *Man'en*,<sup>4</sup> the Edo bakufu was forced to open up to the West as a consequence of the arrival of Commodore Perry and his black ships and the commercial treaty between two countries that had been signed two years earlier. In 1960 the Japanese government signed the renewal of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between the United States and Japan, commonly known as *Anpo*. Both these events caused unresolved feelings among Japanese people of humiliation, compromise, and resignation against the United States as a powerful foreign Other. *The Silent Cry* implicitly recalls these events in its exploration of the trajectory of the identity of the nation-state of Japan and its relationship with the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Mitsu and Taka's family has a *kura-yashiki*, a traditional storehouse, and one reason Taka wants to return to the village is to sell its contents to "the Emperor of the Supermarket," a Korean man who was originally taken to the village as a slave but who has now gained a position of economic dominance. When Mitsu discovers that Taka has also agreed to sell all the family's land he is furious, but his wife Natsumi sides with his brother. Taka begins to organize the youths of the village into a group, at first for football practice but soon, after he finds out that many of the youth are dispirited due to the recession and unemployment, to lead an uprising against the "Emperor" and to loot the supermarket and distribute the goods among the people. Taka also begins a sexual relationship with Natsumi, which he confesses to Mitsu. The excitement of the uprising continues in the village but the sudden death of a girl in Taka's group causes discord. Taka, who claims that he had intended to rape her but ended up killing her because she

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<sup>4</sup> *Man'en* is the name of a reign year cycle in the pre-Meiji system of dates and *Man'en gannen* in the title of the novel means the first year of *Man'en*, that is, 1860.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, *The Marginal World of Ōe Kenzaburō*, 49.

resisted, expects the villagers to lynch him. Mitsu, however, does not believe the story and says that Taka is using the girl's accidental death as a way to engineer his own execution to expiate his sin. During the argument, Taka reveals the secret of their sister's death, but Mitsu claims that Taka's confession is merely an attempt to elicit forgiveness. Taka then shoots himself, writing as a final statement, "I told the truth." This apocalyptic climax leads to the revelation of all the family's secrets.

Critic Katō Norihiro argues that the year 1967, when Ōe wrote this novel, was a time when opposing ideas and positions that had been intermingled ambivalently in modern Japan became gradually independent and split from their opposites. In this period, Kojima Nobuo wrote *Hōyō kazoku* (Embracing Family, 1965), and Etō Jun completed *Seijuku to sōshitsu* (Maturation and Loss, 1966). *Hōyō kazoku* describes the destruction of the family caused by an affair between an American soldier and the protagonist's wife.<sup>6</sup> *Seijuku to sōshitsu* is a critical work which deals with the important question of how to live in a modern Japanese society where the nation-state as father figure is absent and nature as mother figure is dead.<sup>7</sup> Both writers deal with contemporary Japan two decades after the war when Japanese society had been *reformed* by Americanization.<sup>8</sup> Their works represent resignation and anxiety especially in the period of the mid 1960s when it became impossible to resist such rapid change.

Ōe, however, discovers connections in these oppositions between the traditional and the modern, and bridges the two poles in *The Silent Cry*. The first part of the story contrasts the differences in the personalities of (passive) Mitsu and (active) Taka, the

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<sup>6</sup> Kojima Nobuo, *Hōyō kazoku* (An Embracing Family) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Etō Jun, *Seijuku to sōshitsu: "haha" no hōkai* (Maturation and Loss: Collapse of Motherhood) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Katō Norihiro, "Man'en gannen kara no koe" (The Voice from the First Year of Man'en), in *Man'en gannen no futtobōru* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1988), 465-468.

lifestyles of (modern) Tokyo and the (traditional) village, the economic gap between (rich, explicitly foreign) Korean capital and the (poor, disadvantaged) indigenous people, and the differing attitudes of the (conservative) old and (reformist) young villagers. In particular, the story contrasts the two brothers' totally different understandings of their family members' deaths. Mitsu sees his great-great uncle as a traitor, since he alone survived and escaped to Kōchi prefecture following a failed revolt in the Edo period, while his followers were executed. Taka, on the other hand, considers the man a hero for resisting conservatives like their great-grandfather, who wielded considerable political and economic might in the village. Taka also sees their older brother S as a brave leader of raids on the Korean settlement near the village, while Mitsu remembers him as the weakest, most cowardly young man in the village, who agreed to be killed in payment for the death of a Korean during the first such raid. While Mitsu sees his retarded sister's suicide as mysterious, Taka, who was close to her, seems to know the secrets behind the incident.

Ōe attempts to connect these opposing ideas and images through an apocalyptic insurrection that parallels the rebellion that the brothers' great-great uncle had led one hundred years previously. Taka stirs his football team to attack the Emperor of the Supermarket in retaliation for their misery, unemployment and the depression. This revolt not only links to their great-grandfather's rebellion but also to their brother S's anti-Korean raid. The rebellions at the end of the Edo period, the raids and violence after the war, and the *Anpo* strife in 1960 are symbolically united in this narrative.

Taka explains that the motive for the revolt lies in his ambivalent self image; he tells Natsumi that he wants to restore his split self by reliving the experiences of his

heroes, his great-great uncle and S. On one hand, he would like to affirm his own violent nature; he has intentionally continued to do violence by joining not only the *Anpo* strike but also the ultra-right-wing gang. At the same time, he wants to be punished; he joined the drama troupe for reformed *Anpo* activists and repented for his violence. He uses this revolt to both justify and unify his split identity. However, he eventually chooses to punish himself by falsely confessing to murder, for which he hopes that the villagers will either lynch him or sentence him to death. Mitsu, for the first time, confronts the self-destructive Taka. Mitsu thinks that Taka is unconsciously seeking a way out and that his confession of an incestuous relationship with their sister is a lie designed to trick Mitsu into accepting his sinful brother so that Taka can restore himself. Further, Mitsu warns that Taka should not have childish illusions about his heroes: they were actually very cowardly people.

Takashi's split self symbolizes the status of postwar Japan which did not know how to reconcile its actions in World War II and its aftermath. Japan had insisted that it wanted a Pan-Asian community to act against the colonial West, but then subjugated Korea and part of China, enslaving many of its fellow Asians in the process. Imperial Japan committed serious war crimes, yet tried to conceal them and to ignore the consequences, just as Takashi told his sister that they could continue their sexual relationship if they did not make it public. Once the war was over, Japan began to suffer for these war crimes, and faced the decision to confess or deny its actions; some Japanese thought that they needed more self-criticism, while others wanted to justify the war and Japanese tradition. Taka's contradictory attitude derives from this incongruity with which Japanese people were still wrestling in the 1960s. Taka's attempt to unite his split self by

reliving the experiences of his ancestors and confessing to Mitsu fails and the story comes to its apocalyptic climax: Taka commits suicide, shooting himself in the face to intentionally damage his eyes.

It seems that the attempt to seek connections between the end of Edo, the ending of World War II, and the year of the *Anpo* strife has completely failed. However, Taka's self-blinding and his last words, "I told the truth," reveal other mysteries. In the last part of the novel various secrets are revealed—significant because, as we recall, the original meaning of "apocalypse" is "revelation." For instance, when the demolition of the *kura-yashiki* begins, a secret basement is discovered in which the great-great uncle had spent the rest of his life hiding after his failed rebellion. This shows that he never abandoned his political stance, and he punished himself for his failure by confining himself in this basement: he was not a traitor after all. Furthermore, it becomes clear that the great-great uncle actually led a successful rebellion in the early Meiji period, ten years after the first one. The villagers wanted their political head to resign from his post, for they opposed him regarding the abolition of the *han* system and the establishment of the prefecture system.<sup>9</sup> Their great-great uncle used all of the wisdom gained from his ten years' self-criticism to lead a successful rebellion. After the success, he returned to his basement where he remained until his death, thereby maintaining his identity as a consistent resister. Mitsu realizes that Taka, who has endured his own hell as their great-great uncle did, has the courage to tell the truth of his sin. Taka can overcome his fear of death and conquer his hell through the punishment of killing himself, as their great-great uncle punished

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<sup>9</sup> The Abolition of the Han System and Establishment of the Prefecture System was an act of the new Meiji government in 1871 to replace the traditional feudal domain (*han*) system and to introduce a centralized government authority (prefectures). This was the most significant reform of the Meiji Restoration in that all *daimyo* (feudal lords) were now required to return their authority to the emperor.

himself with self-imposed isolation. In this apocalyptic catastrophe, we find that Ōe suggests not only the reunification of Taka's split self but also the synchronization of Taka and his family's spirits, including those of the great-great uncle and his brother S.

The post-apocalyptic vision here, then, is restoration. The details of the death of S are also revealed by the Korean supermarket owner; he witnessed S in the violent conflict beaten to death by both the Koreans *and* the Japanese,<sup>10</sup> but his death restored the peaceful relationship between the two groups. Furthermore, Taka's rebellion, which seemed to have failed completely, becomes a catalyst to change the political dynamics in the village: one of the former members of the football team will be elected as a member of the town council. Taka's attempt to create a connection among the younger generations helps these youth to act against the older conservative villagers. Taka becomes a legend in the community; he is made one of the village's ghost spirits, and will be honored by the villagers in a ceremony every summer. The story ends with the reconciliation of Mitsu and Natsumi; they decide to live together again, along with their handicapped baby and Takashi's child, whom Natsumi is carrying. Mitsu decides not to return to his old job, instead taking up an offer to work as a translator with a wildlife expedition to Africa.

As we have seen, in *The Silent Cry*, Ōe presents various ambivalences in modernity centering on the split identity of the individual and the nation after Meiji; the story shows how the catastrophic violence of one individual against a group, as well as the violence of one nation against other countries, creates profound anguish that can

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<sup>10</sup> S's death is highly ambiguous, and is best described as a Christ-like sacrifice which ultimately ended the conflict between the two groups. According to the story, the Japanese and the Koreans were all fighting when S entered the fray unprotected and without fighting. He was thus beaten to death in the general mêlée without being specifically targeted by either side.

damage the consistent identity of the self or the nation. Taka's reaction to the *Anpo* movements and the United States, and the villagers' anger against the Korean proprietor, indicate the unresolved feelings of the Japanese caused by World War II and its consequences. A split self caused by a sense of shame, sin, and suffering increases the tensions between self and other. Ōe uses apocalyptic uprisings and rebellions to connect the past to the present; catastrophic revelations of truths overcome separation and the opposition of conflicting values. Mitsu and Natsumi's child is the catalyst for their destruction, but a new baby plays the role of reconnecting the two. The aftermath of the catastrophe restores the consistency and united identities of the individual, the community, and the nation. Ōe makes his ideal of postwar democratic ideology come true in his novel: the revelation of wartime violence against other nations, self-criticism for Imperialism, new symbiotic relationships, the potential of political movements to benefit the collective rather than the privileged. Ōe successfully bridges the past and the present, and revives the destroyed post-apocalyptic world into a hopeful, restored world with new democratic vision.

#### **Abe Kōbō's *Inter Ice Age 4***

While Ōe's works often deal with domestic history and Japanese identity, the themes of Abe Kōbō's work are very cosmopolitan. Abe (1924-1993) gained international recognition following the success of *Suna no Onna* (Woman in the Dunes, 1962), in which he deals with themes of alienation and loss of identity and captures the negative impact of Japan's rapidly urbanizing, growth-centered corporate society on the individual. Abe's earlier novel *Daiyon Kanpyōki* (Inter Ice Age 4, 1959, which I examine

below), and his later *Hakobune Sakuramaru* (The Ark Sakura, 1984) are particularly apocalyptic.

Abe's surreal and often nightmarish explorations of the individual in contemporary society earned him comparisons to Kafka,<sup>11</sup> and his influence extended well beyond Japan, particularly with the success of the film version of *Woman in the Dunes* at the 1964 Cannes Film Festival.<sup>12</sup> *Inter Ice Age 4*, written in 1959, is considered one of Abe's most radical works of science fiction. It was the first major SF story that Abe published, and it gained considerable attention. Susan Napier argues that *Inter Ice Age 4* is a landmark novel for a man previously known as a writer of pure literature, as the two genres were considered quite separate at the time.<sup>13</sup>

The story begins with an advanced information system named Moscow I, created by the USSR, which can foresee the future. Protagonist Dr. Katsumi of the Institute for Computer Technique (ICT) in Tokyo is appointed to develop a similar machine for Japan, and his team successfully develops a computer named ICT-1. Subsequently, the USSR announces that it has forecast that the whole world will soon become communist. Due to this forecast, tension between the USSR and the United States heightens, and the government of Japan decides to stop its ICT-1 experiment. Dr. Katsumi and his assistant Tanomogi decide to use the machine for crime investigation instead, but they themselves become suspects in a murder. At the same time, Katsumi begins to receive threatening phone calls from a mysterious man. In addition to these troubles, someone who sounds

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<sup>11</sup> William Currie, *Sogai no kōzu: Abe Kōbō, Beckett, Kafuka no shōsetsu* (The Composition of Isolation: the Stories of Abe Kōbō, Samuel Beckett, and Franz Kafka) trans. Anzai Tetsuo (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1975), 7-38.

<sup>12</sup> Abe wrote the screenplay for the movie version of *Suna no onna* (Woman in the Dunes, 1964), which was directed by Teshigahara Hiroshi.

<sup>13</sup> Susan J. Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 199.

like Katsumi telephones Katsumi's wife and instructs her to have an abortion, and her fetus is subsequently stolen from the hospital.

Meanwhile, it is revealed that the machine has forecast an impending apocalyptic climate change in which the polar ice caps will begin to melt, threatening to submerge the continents and destroy their inhabitants. To cope with this, a secret group of scientists whose leader is Katsumi's assistant Tanomogi have begun work on a daring plan to save terrestrial life through the use of controlled biological mutation on animal and even human fetuses. Their ultimate goal is the creation of an undersea nation that will survive the predicted destruction of Japan by a tidal wave. Tanomogi reveals that Katsumi's baby is alive and will be genetically modified with gills—he will become one of a new species of underwater humans called aquans. Katsumi tries to disrupt the plan, aiming to kill his fish-child, but the group has already foreseen this attempt using ICT-1. Katsumi is told that he is going to be killed, and the story ends as Katsumi hears the assassin arrive at his door.

*Inter Ice Age 4* reflects the political circumstances of the late 1950s. The Berlin crisis erupted in 1958. The tension between the United States and the USSR deepened even though the death of Stalin in 1953 had softened the opposition for several years. On the nuclear weapons front, both the United States and the USSR pursued nuclear rearmament and developed long-range weapons with which they could each strike the territory of the other.<sup>14</sup> In August 1957, the Soviet Union successfully launched the world's first intercontinental ballistic missile and in October they launched Sputnik, the first Earth satellite. The launch of Sputnik precipitated what became known as the Space

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<sup>14</sup> Yomiuri shinbun nijusseiki shuzaihan ed., *Nijusseiki Reisen* (The Cold War in the Twentieth Century) (Tokyo: Chūō kōron shinsha, 2001), 77-85.

Race, which culminated in the Apollo Moon landings, which astronaut Frank Borman later described as “a battle in the Cold War.”<sup>15</sup>

The fact that in this time period Abe briefly joined the Japanese Communist Party seems to have influenced the inclusion of descriptions of communism and the USSR in his work, but his novel features no real ideological details. Rather, Abe is very careful about describing the effects of the Cold War and its influence on Japan. The race to develop the forecasting machine in *Inter Ice Age 4* reflects the real-world race to develop nuclear weapons and space technologies. The political use of the forecasting computer in the novel becomes problematic in Japan’s relationship with the United States, so that Katsumi needs to suggest a non-political use for the machine. The unstable situation in which Japan always has to consider its position in relation to the United States leads to the consequent problem that the protagonist may lose his job and be forced to abandon the machine he created. Katsumi mistakenly thinks that the ICT-1 will save him by allowing him to foresee the futures of individuals.

While Ōe’s *The Silent Cry* presents the tension of opposition between conservative and progressive, tradition and modernity, and then tries to unite them, *Inter Ice Age 4* describes the nightmarish mysteries that corner the protagonist and reveal the irreconcilable gap between opposing values. The truths behind these mysteries are revealed when the protagonist is told that he is to be killed. All the mysteries of the murder case, the phone call, and the kidnapping of the fetus come from the future predictions of Katsumi himself. The person who confuses Katsumi is Katsumi himself, who knows everything that he will do: the enemy is the self who knows his future.

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Klesius, “To Boldly Go,” *Air and Space* (December 18, 2008). <http://www.airspacemag.com/space-exploration/To-Boldly-Go.html>.

Katsumi's present self and his future prediction of himself are separate and irreconcilable, for his prediction data eventually fails to save his life just as, implicitly, the Japan of 1959 was irreconcilable with the Japan of the future.

The latter half of *Inter Ice Age 4* reveals further cruel separations between the commonplace of daily life and a totally different, almost chimerical future plan, and depicts the decisive discontinuity between present and future. The members of the submarine colony team at first plan to make Katsumi join them; they decide to forecast what Katsumi will do when he learns about their plan. One of the members tells Katsumi:

To, put it simply, sir, you couldn't stand the future that was predicted. In other words, you're able to envisage the future only as a continuation of day-in, day-out life. With that limitation, though you placed such great expectations on the forecasting machine, you were unable to accept a rapidly evolving future, one which may well destroy, deny the present—a severed future.<sup>16</sup>

The members of the team consult with Katsumi's predicted value—that is, the future Katsumi himself, who I will call Future Katsumi—on whether there is a way to avoid killing Katsumi. Future Katsumi decides to give Katsumi a chance to accept the future. It is revealed that the team contrived to make him a suspect in the murder case to prevent him from relying on the police. Future Katsumi also lets Katsumi know the facts about the kidnapping of the fetus, and allows him to experience a tour of the underwater aquan breeding facility. In these ways, the team create a situation in which Katsumi cannot rely on other people, and also prepare him for the cruel fact that underwater hybrid-humans, including his own son, are already being developed. Katsumi, however, decides to kill

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<sup>16</sup> Abe Kōbō, *Inter Ice Age 4*, trans by E. Dale Saunders (New York: Tuttle, 1970), 170.

his son, who has been “crippled” by the plan, and attempts to reveal the secret to the public. Katsumi is sentenced by his own predicted data in the forecast machine, “you’re a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary who bears no resemblance to the designer of the forecasting machine. A really amazingly reactionary man.”<sup>17</sup>

After Katsumi learns that he is to be killed, the members of the underwater colony team show him the modified humans, including his son. These aquan children are different from land people in a number of ways: they communicate by clacking their teeth like Morse code; their tear glands are atrophied so that they do not/cannot cry. Moreover, the member scientist explains, they do not have many of the emotional expressions of land humans since the emotions depend largely on sensations in the skin and mucus membranes. Bodily sensations such as “zotto suru” (freezing), “zarazara” (rough), “nebatsuku” (sticky), and “muzumuzu suru” (tickling) can describe our feelings and atmosphere.<sup>18</sup> Aquans do not have such bodily sensations, so they also lack typical emotional expression.

The members of the underwater colony team and the aquan children represent a total Other to the protagonist Katsumi. The members do not question the reliability of the forecasting machine. They buy human fetuses to create human-animal hybrids and murder the fetus-brokers to keep their work secret, and soon they will kill Katsumi too. For Katsumi, they are insane criminals. He finds the aquan children horrifying. They do not appear to have emotions or to act like humans; they look more like animals, though they are highly intelligent. All Katsumi can think of is to oppose this monstrous plan.

In *The Silent Cry*, the oppositions between self and Other, between conservative

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<sup>17</sup> Abe, *Inter Ice Age 4*, 153.

<sup>18</sup> Abe Kōbō, *Daiyon kanpyōki* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1970), 243. My translations.

and progressive, and between modernization and tradition, are presented in the first half and they are confronted in the apocalyptic rebellion in the climax. In *Inter Ice Age 4* as well, the latter half of the story reveals that there are oppositions between Katsumi in the present and Future Katsumi, between the land people and the aquans. However, there is no crucial clash between the Katsumi who clings to the present and his future self, between Katsumi and the members of the colony plan which is devoted to the future, or between humans and aquans. Katsumi has the will to rebel against the plan but is powerless: he has been cornered and is to be killed. The humans will have to rely on the aquans; soon they will have no other option. Their relationships are not equal: there is profound severance between the two positions.

When the time of his death comes near, Katsumi is suddenly informed of the impending apocalyptic climate change. Scientists consider the reasons for the increasing activities of underwater volcanoes in the Pacific Ocean and the rise of the sea level as the end of the fourth Inter Ice Age, which lasted fifty million years. In the near future, the sea level will be over three thousand feet higher than it is now. Specialists and governments decide to conceal this catastrophic future from the public so as not to cause panic. Since there are always constant shifts in Japanese governments, a kind of countermeasure committee for the underwater colony, centered around the financiers, is created. In spite of knowing this forecast, Katsumi cannot accept the future of underwater life even though he himself knows the accuracy of the forecasting machine he created; he cannot stop clinging to the existing state of things despite knowing the future.

Facing his own death, Katsumi realizes he can no longer believe in himself; he has lost his sense of honor, justice, respect and virtue. At the very last moment, he hears

the machine predicting that land humans will lose their homes to the rise of the ocean and the government will retreat underwater. At first the humans will manage to maintain some power but eventually all political power goes to the aquans. Original humans will be kept in zoos and their cultures exhibited in the museums of the underwater Japanese government.

*Inter Ice Age 4* repeatedly insists that there will be serious discontinuity between the present and the future. The story illustrates a future that destabilizes present reality and values currently assumed to be unchangeable. Abe claims that our common sense is not absolutely reliable and that it is likely to die away when major changes occur. Critic Isoda Kōichi explains the frailty of our common sense as described in this story thusly: when apocalyptic climate change comes, there is no other way but to create humans who can survive in the water. Life is reconsidered from the process of generation, and there will be no other way but to become non-human. Our common sense tells that we cannot stand such a horrible change, yet it is only the aquans who can survive in the water, establishing their own worldviews and values inevitably different from our own.<sup>19</sup>

Abe's intention in writing this novel was to consider the future as something which judges the present rather than the present deciding whether the future is affirmative or negative. The purpose of depicting the future is explained in a postscript:

The future gives a verdict of guilty to this usual continuity of daily life. I consider the problem an especially important theme in these critical times. Thus I decided to try to grasp the image of a future that intrudes on the present, a future that sits in judgment. Our usual sense of continuity must give way the instant it faces the future . . . We must be clearly aware that there is real evil in the every commonplace order of things we call everyday living.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Isoda Kōichi, Commentary in *Daiyon kanpyōki* written by Abe Kōbō, 276-278.

<sup>20</sup> Abe, *Inter Ice Age 4*, 226-227.

Abe understands that the future is uncanny and totally unreachable from our common sense and daily values. While Ōe tries to connect the past and the present and suggests a vision of the future via reconciliation and new life, Abe emphasizes that there will be decisive severance between the present and the future, and the new life of Katsumi's fish-son marks the crucial separation between the two.

The outcomes of the apocalyptic catastrophes in these novels are totally opposite. Ōe tries to reestablish the continuity and identity of a modern self and a modern nation-state of Japan, which was once destroyed by defeat. The catastrophic opposition of Mitsu versus Taka, rural versus urban, tradition versus modernization, victim versus victimizer, conservative versus progressive—all are reconciled in the end. Ōe seeks the collective salvation of commoners via postwar democratic ideology which criticizes and acts against the powerful; Taka's football team produces a youth who will join the town council, and the young people of the village become politically active after the riot. Mitsu and Natsumi are reunited with their child and the new life created by Taka and Natsumi.

Abe, on the other hand, believes that the possibility of Japanese traditional identity and its continuity were thoroughly destroyed by the country's defeat in the Second World War, and assumes that the future of Japanese society will be—indeed, can only be—decisively different from its past; the replacement of the ruling world above with the submarine world reflects the experience of defeat. The submarine world to which his own son will belong is a completely different, uncanny place for the protagonist Katsumi, reflecting the reality that babies born after the war are almost a new

species: completely new beings without the experience of the past, Imperial Japan or the misery of the war.

As well, the situation of the cornered and isolated Katsumi is in sharp contrast to Ōe's protagonist Mitsu; Katsumi is abandoned by both his colleagues and his future self, he is despised by his wife, and tries to kill his own son. There is no reunion or reconciliation following the catastrophe; there is no way for Katsumi to communicate with his aquan son. Thus, Abe successfully expresses the crisis of the isolated individual in a highly modernized society. The novel warns each individual against being buried in daily life during the reconstruction period when many people indeed tended to turn away from the fact of defeat and concentrated on the present reality of rehabilitation of the Japanese economy. *Inter Ice Age 4* suggests the significant possibility that though the apocalyptic catastrophe of the defeat may ultimately be accepted in the future, some may yet avoid facing the miserable past and the decisively changed future vision, as the protagonist Katsumi does in the story.

There are those who assert that *Inter Ice Age 4* finally achieves a particular political ideology. Thomas Schnellbächer, for example, claims that ocean-based figures in postwar Japanese science fiction works are in some way associated with Japanese national identity, specifically with pre-1945 Japanese imperialism and the idea of Japan as a Pacific sea power.<sup>21</sup> While some science fiction depicts the restoration of this power, *Inter Ice Age 4* is the antithesis to both territorial and national concerns, which are implicitly critiqued in the submersion of all major land masses in the story.

Schnellbächer concludes that the novel is “reminiscent of works from a transnational

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Schnellbächer, “Has the Empire Sunk Yet? The Pacific in Japanese Science Fiction,” *Science Fiction Studies* 29, 3 (November, 2002): 382-396.

socialist canon depicting a post-national and post-human (though not post-organic) world,” for the future submarine world is depicted as borderless albeit not nationless.<sup>22</sup>

Although Abe is frequently considered an avant-garde novelist, many of his works include postmodern elements; his novels often describe the crisis of an individual who suffers a profound sense of alienation caused by relativized worldviews. *Inter Ice Age 4* has definite postmodern overtones in that the relativization of traditional values and commonsense prove that the characters’ values, rules, and thoughts are not absolute. However, I would argue that this novel is not a fully postmodern work but is instead highly *modern* despite its postmodern leanings. The novel is set in a world where grand narratives such as political ideologies are still effective. Abe could have written a science fiction novel about a future submarine world without describing the Cold War; instead, he used the tension between the USSR and the United States and the forecast of the future dominance of communism as a turning point of his plot.

I argue that the story is modern because, crucially, the protagonist Katsumi never accepts the future, which appears almost fictional to him—he has many opportunities before his death, yet he never concedes anything that contradicts his worldview, and ultimately (the story suggests), he dies. If he accepted the future, he could save his life, yet he sticks to his commonsense notions of how human beings should be, and cannot imagine a world outside his values. If the story were a truly postmodern work, it would be possible for the protagonist to accept the cruel future of the underwater world; postmodernity is premised on the condition that it is always possible that one’s common sense and values of life are relativized.

These two apocalyptic postwar works take opposite approaches to the identity of

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<sup>22</sup> Schnellbacher, “Has the Empire Sunk Yet?” 389.

Japan: Ōe hopes that it will be reunited with tradition, while Abe sees it as irretrievably changed after the defeat. However, they have one common standpoint: that the novel should function to help ideals and visions come true in reality. Ōe's work functioned to promote a particular ideology of postwar democracy in the 1960s. And although Abe's work is a highly imaginary story based on science fiction, it criticizes the reality of late 1950s Japan that blindly rushed into reconstruction after war without fully considering the meaning of defeat. Abe himself states that one of the purposes of this novel is "to make the reader confront the cruelty of the future, produce within him anguish and strain and bring about a dialogue with himself."<sup>23</sup> In other words, Abe hopes his readers will take a critical view toward their daily lives.

Both works seek a deepening of the understanding of the past, and a critical approach to the present and to present visions, positive or negative, of future reality; these two apocalyptic stories use the modern linear understanding of time in order to comprehend the present reality and to construct a vision of the future. They aim to influence the reality of postwar Japan by presenting their philosophical stances. Mainly targeting adult males, modern apocalyptic narratives like these function as a tool for resolving the identity crises of the nation and the individual. Both Abe and Ōe declare that the most important readers of these two novels are contemporary Japanese, and both writers try to mediate between their reality and their visions.<sup>24</sup> However, these ideological visions through apocalypse began to disappear when apocalyptic narratives in the 1980s gradually come to depict their visions not in reality but in fiction. In the next

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<sup>23</sup> Abe, *Inter Ice Age 4*, 228.

<sup>24</sup> Ōe says that he writes for Japanese audience, especially for people of his own generation. See Kazuo Ishiguro and Ōe Kenzaburō, "The Novelist in Today's World: A Conversation," *Boundary 2*, 18, 3 (Autumn, 1991), 116.

chapter, I will look at how ideals in apocalyptic stories moved from reality to fiction in the 1980s.

## Chapter Four

### Apocalyptic fiction in 1980s Japan

As discussed in Chapter Two, it is frequently stated that the year 1970 marks a turning point in Japanese cultural trends. Ōsawa terms the period from 1970 to 1995 the fictional age, when Japanese culture gradually shifted from struggling for change through political movements to seeking ideals in fictional settings. This shift is particularly evident in major apocalyptic fiction narratives from the 1980s and 1990s, especially those with prequels or sequels. An influential literary example from the 1980s is Murakami Haruki's *Sekai no owari to hādo boirudo wandārando* (Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World; 1985) and its precursor *Machi to sono futashikana kabe* (A Town and its Uncertain Wall; 1980). In the subcultural genre, the apocalyptic animation film *Kaze no tani no Naushika* (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind; 1984) by Miyazaki Hayao (b. 1941) was serialized as a manga until 1994, and the manga narrative differs from that of the animation. Another internationally renowned apocalyptic animation, *AKIRA* (1988) by Ōtomo Katsuhiro (b. 1954), was also serialized as a manga until 1990, and the manga version of this story also has a different message from the film version.

All three of these works have apocalyptic themes and similar settings. However, there is discontinuity between the prequels and sequels or manga and animated versions of each. Examining the differences between different versions of a given narrative highlights the shift from modern to postmodern, and what modern apocalypse and postmodern apocalypse convey. By closely comparing the ambiguities in apocalyptic narratives and their visions of what the world will be like after the crises have passed, we

can also see how the relationship with the other transformed in 1980s and 1990s.

### **Murakami Haruki's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World***

Murakami Haruki (b. 1949) is an extremely popular and critically acclaimed writer of fiction and non-fiction. His fourth long novel, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (hereafter *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*), was written in 1985, and won the Tanizaki award that year.<sup>1</sup> It is considered one of the most popular of Murakami's early novels. The success of this novel brought the author popular attention, and in 1987 his *Norwegian Wood* sold millions of copies in Japan and turned him into a national celebrity. Although *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* was not a best seller it has been widely referenced since it deals with the core issues of the postmodernized world.

The novel consists of parallel narratives: the odd-numbered chapters are set in a place called Hard-Boiled Wonderland, in near-future Tokyo, while the even-numbered chapters are set in the End of the World, an isolated town surrounded by a forest and a wall. The narrator of the odd-numbered chapters is a Calcutec, a human data processor who has been trained to do shuffling, data conversion that uses his subconscious as an encryption key. The Calcutecs work for the quasi-governmental institution called the System, while the criminal Semiotecs, generally fallen Calcutecs, work for the Factory. These organizations compete for information; the Calcutecs protect data while the Semiotecs steal it.

The odd-numbered chapters begin with their narrator's visit to a mysterious scientist who is exploring "sound reduction" in a laboratory hidden within an

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<sup>1</sup> Murakami Haruki, *Sekai no owari to hādo boirudo wandārando* (Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1985).

anachronistic version of Tokyo's sewer system. The scientist asks the protagonist to calculate some data with a shuffling system that the Calcutecs have for some time been forbidden to use, but the scientist has official permission from the top of the System. The protagonist has no reason to refuse this special request, but this precipitates an attack on the scientist's office by the Semiotics after the calculation is done, and both the data and the scientist disappear. Two days after the calculation, the protagonist is able to meet the scientist, who has escaped and is hiding in a secret underground hollow. Here, the scientist reveals a shocking truth: he invented the shuffling system when he used to work for the System years ago. When he installed the shuffling system in the protagonist's brain, he also secretly reorganized his subconscious and implanted it as an artificial world. Moreover, the scientist confesses that he activated this circuitry with the recent shuffling execution: he was curious to collect data on this subconscious world, for the protagonist is the only Calcutec survivor with this shuffling ability. However, the data in the protagonist's subconscious world is stolen by the Semiotics, and the protagonist is informed that there is nothing he can do to save his life; the scientist tells him that his subconscious world will soon take over his conscious reality. The protagonist learns that he is destined to live permanently in his own subconscious.

Meanwhile, the narrator of the even-numbered chapters is in the process of being accepted into the fairytale-like town called the End of the World. Because residents of the town are not allowed to have a shadow, the narrator's shadow has been "cut off." The gatekeeper of the Town tells the narrator that his shadow must remain in the shadow grounds where it is not expected to survive the winter. Shadows represent mind or memory in this town, and the residents do not have minds. The narrator is assigned

quarters and a job as dream reader, whose task is to remove all traces of mind from the town. He goes to the library every evening where, assisted by the Librarian, he learns to read dreams from the skulls of unicorns. These beasts passively accept their role of carrying people's memories out of the town; they are sent out at night to their enclosure where many die of cold during the winter. The narrator's shadow senses that there is something wrong with this town, and suggests that they leave before the shadow dies. The narrator at first agrees; he saves his shadow from the shadow grounds and they decide to leave.

As the story progresses, it becomes clear that the two different worlds are interrelated: the subconscious world of the protagonist in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* is the End of the World. The story comes to its climax when the narrator in the End of the World learns that there is a fatal weak point in the town where every unresolved emotion is forced onto the weakest animal, which then dies. The peace and perfection of the town is artificial, for it cannot exist without sacrificing the lives of the unicorns. At first, the narrator decides to regain his shadow and tries to leave the town, but he later declares that he has decided to stay in the woods with Librarian. In the end, his shadow leaves without him.

The precursor to *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, the mid-length novel *Machi to sono futashikana kabe* (The Town and its Uncertain Wall) was published in the magazine *Bungakukai* in 1980. Murakami calls this story a complete failure, and the novel has not been included in any of his collected works.<sup>2</sup> *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* does not have a particularly strong apocalyptic theme compared with *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*,

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<sup>2</sup> Bungakukai special edition, *Murakami Haruki bukku* (Murakami Haruki Book) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjūsha, April 1991), 42.

but it offers a useful comparison to its successor.

The plot of the story is as follows: when the protagonist, known only as *boku* (I), is eighteen years old, he hears the story of a town surrounded by a high wall from another character, a girl known as *kimi* (you). She says that the “self” he sees is her shadow, while her real self lives in the town. Soon her shadow dies, and the protagonist enters the Town by cutting off his own shadow—as in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, one needs to cut off one’s shadow to be accepted by the town. He meets the “real” girl in the town library and is assigned to be a dream prophet. Their relationship gradually develops, but he discovers that he cannot feel any emotion for a girl who does not have a shadow. Later, the protagonist succeeds in releasing the old dreams in the library, and feels profound sorrow. Eventually, he decides to regain his shadow and leave the town.<sup>3</sup>

*Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* is clearly based on *The Town and its Uncertain Wall*. The two novels share the same setting of the isolated walled town as well as its beasts, its residents, and its environment. While the protagonist in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* is a “dream reader” who reads old dreams in the skulls of the unicorns, in *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* he is a “prophet” who reads old dreams from egg-shaped objects. His dream-reading role is the same, as is the role of the Librarian. Even though *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* has a more complex setting, the idea of the Town is very nearly identical. Also, the main storylines of *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* and the End of the World portion of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* are very similar. In both stories, the protagonist suffers a sense of loss when he meets the shadowless girl and once he decides to regain his shadow and leave the Town.

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<sup>3</sup> Murakami Haruki, “Machi to sono futashikana kabe” (The Town and its Uncertain Wall), *Bungakukai* (Tokyo: Bungei shunjūsha, September 1980): 46-99.

Despite these similarities, the stories have strikingly different endings. In *The Town and its Uncertain Wall*, the protagonist realizes there is something unnatural about the town, and chooses to return to reality with his shadow. Even though he loves the Librarian, he chooses to live apart from the shadowless girl and to leave the perfectly peaceful world in which there is neither desire nor emotion. In the early part of the story, the protagonist is told by the gatekeeper that a shadow is a weak, dark heart filled with hatred, worries, frailty, vanity, self-pity, anger and sorrow. People in the town, including the girl, do not have shadows so they do not suffer from troubled emotions. The protagonist considers staying in the peaceful town with the girl forever, but he realizes that he cannot be himself without his shadow/heart even though it is often filled with dark emotions.

While the shadow is depicted here as mind or emotion, the old dreams the protagonist reads symbolize the histories and the collective memories of the larger community and the nation. The old dreams in the library represent lost memories or suppressed dark histories, whereas the heartless people in the Town live peacefully, protected by the wall. Just before the protagonist decides to leave the town, he awakens all the old dreams; they are supposed to be completely secured by the egg shaped objects and by the Wall, but they suddenly radiate light and begin to talk. He goes down a hole with the dreams and comes to the place where everything is lost and dead. Thousands of old dreams march like soldiers and guide him along. As the old dreams march on, time goes by and the protagonist finds his body gradually decaying. When the process ends, the dreams begin to lose their light and softly fall to the ground.

Some of these dark memories and histories of the old dreams are the failures and

suppressed emotions of the protagonist himself; he sees remnants of his past memories along the road as he marches. At the same time, these dreams are also of the bigger collectivity. Old dreams are collective memories, such as national memories of war and crisis. The image of the headless marching army symbolizes the suppressed memories of the deceased, while the wall symbolizes authority.<sup>4</sup> The power of the authorities absorbs all the dark negative memories from the people who experienced war and suppresses them into their subconscious as dreams, much as the postwar government avoided facing the defeat and its responsibilities directly so that it could set the goals of reconstruction of the nation and economic growth instead, in order to better control the people.

The protagonist therefore questions the wall about the meaning of the town; he challenges authority as an Other that does not allow people to keep their past memories or to have consistent identities. He prefers to live with his lost memories and dark emotions rather than suppressing them. The protagonist confronts the wall, declaring that the words that describe the past, memories, and histories are dying every second, for they will be given different meanings as the time passes. He wants to leave the town so that he can describe the past with these dying words; it is destined that every memory will be gradually re-edited and reconstructed, yet he still feels it is necessary to live with them rather than to suppress them. He is not sure whether leaving the town was the right thing to do, but he does not regret his decision. The continuity of his identity and community, and the wholeness of his memories and life are achieved when he leaves the town. Even though he is surrounded by decayed and re-edited memories, he can regard himself as a whole person with a heart filled with dark memories and negative emotions. Although

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<sup>4</sup> Murakami has long used the image of walls as a metaphor for authority, the powerful, and the system, and he has declared that he sides with “the egg that breaks against it.” See his Jerusalem Prize remarks on February 15, 2009 at <http://www.47news.jp/47topics/e/93880.php>.

the wall and its town remain, they no longer influence him. Consistent identity, belonging to the collectivity, and moralistic catharsis are achieved in the reality to which the protagonist returns at the end of the story. *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* is not an apocalyptic story but rather a story of integration and reconversion. This novel reflects the spirit of Ōsawa's idealistic age; the ideals of establishing one's own identity and facing the collective continuity of history are achieved in the end.

In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, on the other hand, it is clearly stated that the town is a world in the protagonist's subconscious that has been edited and added to his brain by the old scientist, and the town is called the End of the World, where all things the protagonist has lost exist. When the protagonist is able to meet the old scientist again in the underground maze, the scientist tells the protagonist that his consciousness in reality will be lost and then he will live eternally in his subconscious. The scientist says that there are two choices left for the protagonist: to commit suicide, or to live peacefully in his subconscious world. While in *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* the protagonist can choose whether or not he will leave the town of his own will, the protagonist in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* does not have a choice which will allow him both to save his life and keep his identity in reality. This difference illustrates the importance of the change from modern to postmodern society reflected in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. The insuperable power of authority infringes on the significantly weaker citizens in postmodern societies: exclusive elites manage advanced technologies and economies with which the rest have little or no contact. They function totally outside of the commoners' consciousness, yet have enormous impact upon it. When important areas of our lives are outside of our

control, we are in an acculturative situation; we have to learn new rules to live by.<sup>5</sup> The protagonist in Hard-Boiled Wonderland world does not know what has been added to his brain, he does not fully understand his shuffling work, and there is nothing he can do to save his life in reality. Even though he insists on living his own life, he is actually powerless to do so.

Moreover, the hidden truth about the social/moral structure in the novel is that there is actually only one person behind both the System and the Factory; the seeming opposition between the two is designed to generate the most profit through their competition. As Matthew Strecher points out, the near-future Hard-Boiled Wonderland world is a society that can control one's identity, supplant one's original identity, and "replace it with an artificial, externally constructed identity designed for optimum state control."<sup>6</sup> Strecher also stresses the fact that the End of the World, that is, the subconscious of the protagonist, is not a creation of the protagonist, but "an artificially constituted approximation of his inner self" made by the old scientist.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, in the latter part of story it becomes clear that there is almost no hope for the protagonist to protect his own identity.

While the protagonist in the "reality" of Hard-Boiled Wonderland is forced to go into his subconscious world, his other self in the End of the World vacillates between two choices: to go back to reality with his shadow, or to live in the town forever in return for the loss of his shadow. His shadow tells the protagonist that the town is incomplete and wrong; there is no war, hatred, or desire there, yet neither is there true joy, happiness, or

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<sup>5</sup> Ted Daniels, Introduction in *Millennialism: An International Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), xxv-xxvi.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Strecher, *Dance with Sheep* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 41.

<sup>7</sup> Strecher, *Dance with Sheep*, 42.

love. The shadow insists that we cannot feel true joy without despair, disillusionment, and sorrow. The cost of the perfection of the town is the death of the unicorns; they take people's hearts outside its walls and die because of the weight of the ego of the heart.

When he learns that the sacrifice of these weak lives is what makes the town perfect, the protagonist decides to escape with his shadow. However, when the protagonist begins to sing, the melody from long ago gives him a sudden realization that all things in the town are created by himself, even the Librarian. This realization enables him to access the lost heart of the Librarian which was scattered among the skulls of the unicorns in the library, and he promises to discover the shadow/mind she lost in the past. It is destined that people who are not able to lose their mind completely have to live in the forest outside the town. The protagonist announces to his shadow that he will remain inside the wall and live in the forest with the Librarian; he decides to stay because he feels responsible for what he has created: the town, its wall, the people, the beasts and the river. The story ends when the protagonist sees his shadow leave the town and ventures to protect some of his own identity and autonomy even in the marginalized place in this highly controlled world.

This ending perfectly reflects postmodern apocalyptic characteristics. First, the work clearly symbolizes the fictional age in which we cannot have the ideal in reality so we quest for it in fiction. The protagonist fails to preserve his own identity in reality; he has no choice but to move into his eternal fictive subconscious which has been implanted by the scientist. He decides to take responsibility for what he created and live in the forest in order to recollect the lost memories: it is no longer in reality that he seeks the ideal, but in fiction. Further, the range of responsibilities two stories describe is reduced

from a certain collectivity to the subconscious of one individual. Whereas *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* sticks to the quest for social and individual ideals in the real world, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* describes the subversive challenge of questing for the ideal on a fictional, individual level. This realization indicates that it became increasingly difficult to share the idea of grand narratives in real social settings after the 1980s, and ideals are more experimentally quested for in our imaginations.

Second, right and wrong are uncertain and ambiguous in this novel compared to its precursor. As we have seen, apocalyptic narratives deal with opposing values such as life/death, good/evil, hope/despair, heaven/hell, and finite/infinite. Premodern apocalypse tends to emphasize the binary opposition between the two poles, and modern apocalypse the dialectical use of such ambiguities leading to progress. In postmodern apocalypse, however, the distinction between the two poles of ambiguity becomes blurred. Strecher points out that *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* does not fulfill our moral fantasies such as reaffirmation of life over death, or of clarity and truth over mystery and doubt.<sup>8</sup>

Moral standards in the social system are ambiguous. The System and the Factory are controlled by one privileged person, destabilizing and problematizing the ground of morality. The protagonist's choice to live eternally marginalized in the forest rather than going back to reality with his shadow is shocking even though we know it is impossible for the protagonist to remain alive in the reality of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. Whereas there are clear distinctions between ambiguities in its precursor, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* blurs the distinction between the two poles. The novel describes how difficult it is to find clear solutions and make right decisions in postmodern society where morality has lost its firm ground and there is absolute but often invisible oppressive control of the status quo.

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<sup>8</sup> Strecher, *Dance with Sheep*, 45-46.

As Strecher points out, to peripheralize oneself in such a gray area is one of desperate way of resisting the indomitable power of postmodern state ideology.<sup>9</sup>

Third, the vision of the world after the apocalyptic crisis has passed in the novel indicates a different relationship between self and Other as collectivity. Usually, apocalyptic fiction describes the reestablishment of order or the possibility of rebirth and reconstruction after catastrophe—there is at least some hope. In *The Town and its Uncertain Wall*, the protagonist goes back to the real world and decides to recollect all the details of the town; there is continuity between what he is and what he used to be. His identity and memories of the collectivity remain at the end of the story. In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, in contrast, the protagonist discovers that his life in reality is about to end and no one can save him. Not only that, but his death will impact no one. He has no choice but to become a new self in his own subconscious by daring to choose to stay in the forest with the Librarian. The forest is a marginal place in which those who cannot lose their shadow completely must live, and they suffer from a heavier workload than the residents of the town. Despite the harsh environment of the forest, the protagonist is able to re-collect his lost memories of himself and the collectivity with his incomplete heart in his subconscious rather than to lose everything.

To remain in the town which was re-organized and implanted by another is to lose his original authentic identity, yet the protagonist chooses to be a new self who possess some uncertain memories of his past and the collectivity. However, his desperate resolution of facing his past does not have any effect on reality. This ending is often understood to be an allusion to the failure of social movements in Japan in the late 1960s and the early 1970s; to have an ideal and to make it happen in reality is longer possible,

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<sup>9</sup> Strecher, *Dance with Sheep*, 46.

and the relationship between the self and the bigger community is not depicted as something agreeable. To live in a society where one has only weak bonds is the postmodern post-apocalyptic future Murakami suggests.

As we have seen, five years after Murakami wrote *The Town and its Uncertain Wall*, he completed *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* with a totally new vision. With the intervening time came a more profound realization that Japanese culture had shifted from modern to postmodern. Murakami describes this postmodern society as a place where people have fewer bonds and authority has invincible power. Mainly targeting youth, Murakami's apocalypse dares to suggest the solution of peripheralizing oneself as a subversive means of keeping one's own identity and of acting against authority in a postmodern world.

### **Miyazaki Hayao's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind***

*Kaze no tani no Naushika* (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind) is an animated film written and directed by Miyazaki Hayao, the most representative Japanese postwar animator.<sup>10</sup> The film was distributed by Tōhō in 1984, winning numerous domestic and international awards, and has been translated into a number of foreign languages. The manga *Kaze no tani no Naushika* (hereafter *Nausicaä*) was written and drawn by Miyazaki Hayao and serialized in the manga and anime magazine *Animage* between 1982 and 1994. The anime is based on the first two volumes of the seven volume manga.<sup>11</sup> Among fans it is known that the film version and the manga version have different settings, plots, and themes, but the film version is much more widely known.

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<sup>10</sup> *Kaze no tani no Naushika* (Nausicaä in the Valley of the Wind) (1984), dir. Miyazaki Hayao (DVD, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Miyazaki Hayao, *Kaze no tani no Naushika*, 7 vols (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 1987-1994).

The film takes place one thousand years after the “Seven Days of Fire,” an apocalyptic war which destroyed human civilization and most of the Earth’s original ecosystem. Scattered human settlements survive, isolated from one another by the Sea of Decay, a jungle of giant plants and fungi swarming with massive insects such as the Ohmu. Everything in the Sea of Decay, including the air, is deadly. The protagonist, Nausicaä, is a charismatic young princess of the peaceful Valley of the Wind. She has an unusual gift for communicating with the giant insects, she is kind to humans as well as animals and plants, and she is a brave and skilled fighter. Inspired by her mentor Lord Yupa, a wandering warrior possessed of great wisdom, Nausicaä frequently explores the Sea of Decay to discover the origins of the toxic world.

One day, an airship from the powerful kingdom of Tolmekia crashes near the Valley of the Wind, and its cargo turns out to be a Giant Warrior embryo, one of the lethal weapons used in the ancient war. It is later revealed that the Warrior embryo was unearthed by the Pejite Kingdom, but it was stolen by the more powerful Tolmekia. While transporting the Warrior back to their realm, the Tolmekians were attacked by insects and landed in the Valley. The next day, the Tolmekians, under the leadership of princess Kushana, invade the Valley to kill Nausicaä’s father, the king of the Valley, and to secure the Warrior, explaining that the God Warrior will be used to burn the Sea of Decay.

Kushana attempts to return to Tolmekia with Nausicaä as a hostage, but her airships are attacked by a Pejitan gunship and forced to make an emergency landing in the Sea of Decay. Nausicaä ends up in the strange (non-toxic) world below the Sea of Decay. She realizes that the plants in the Sea of Decay purify the polluted topsoil, producing clean

water and sand which remain hidden in the underground world; she finds the truth that the toxic forest actually purifies the polluted environment.

Nausicaä escapes from the underground world and arrives at Pejite. Soon, she learns that Pejite is trying to lure the insects into the Valley of the Wind to recapture the Warrior. To save her people, she heads to the Valley, but along the way she encounters a herd of enraged Ohmu who are following an injured baby Ohmu; the Pejite have intentionally injured it to lure the herd to the Valley. Meanwhile, the Tolmekians revive the Giant Warrior and attempt to burn the herd of Ohmu, yet the Warrior collapses because it is premature. Nausicaä releases the baby Ohmu and stops the herd, but is mortally wounded in the process. The Ohmu use their golden tentacles to revive her. Nausicaä's dress is stained blue by the blood of the baby Ohmu—she turns out to be the mythological “man” in blue for whom Yupa has long been searching.<sup>12</sup>

The setting of *Nausicaä* is a futuristic post-apocalyptic world that has experienced the total devastation of war. Human civilization has declined to the level of the medieval period. Frightened by the enlargement of the Sea of Decay, people have begun to reuse the remains of the past civilization. In the beginning of the story, the crucial conflict between human civilization and nature is presented; too-advanced technologies have severely damaged both the ecosystem and humanity. One thousand years later, people are still trying to take control of nature by fighting against it. Nausicaä discovers that the Sea of Decay and its insects are not hostile to humans; rather they function to purify the Earth which has been polluted by humans, and she seeks symbiosis with the seemingly toxic. She tries to stop the war and to save the Sea of Decay and its insects. The ending

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<sup>12</sup> For a thorough and insightful analysis of Nausicaä as an example of apocalyptic narrative, see Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 202-204.

of the film indicates the reconciliation between humans and nature, and hints at hope for reconstruction. The moral fantasies in this film are to discover the mysteries of The Sea of Decay, to stop the war, and to establish a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature; in *Nausicaä* these three goals are all satisfied in the end.

There are two elements that make this film extraordinary: one is that the protagonist is a charismatic teenage girl who can fight as well as men and communicate with insects: a legendary hero. At the story's climax, Nausicaä sacrifices herself to stop the angry herd of Ohmu. Her courage, love, and faithfulness move the Ohmu and they revive her. Nausicaä is thus also a classical messiah figure. The other is that the story is based on Miyazaki's profound insight into the complexities of the ecological system. Despite these two innovative points, the apocalyptic setting in the film is very traditional: the oppositional clash between humans and nature as totally other is brought to the dialectical process via the sacrifice of a girl, and peaceful symbiosis is promised after the apocalyptic catastrophe. The structure of the film *Nausicaä* is very similar to Ōe's *The Silent Cry*, since both works deal with contradictions and confrontations between binary ideas, make them clash in the apocalyptic catastrophe, then reunite them after the crisis. The film *Nausicaä* thus satisfies many elements of modern apocalyptic fiction.

On the other hand, it took twelve years to complete the manga version, which has major differences from the film. The difference in the stories is apparently disturbing for some fans of the film.<sup>13</sup> The story in the manga is of course not only much longer but also much more complex, describing war between two powerful nations, struggles for power within a nation, the lives of marginal people such as the insect trainers and the

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<sup>13</sup> Ōtsuka Eiji and Sasakibara Gō, *Kyōyō to shite no manga, anime* (Comic Books and Animations as Culture) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 153-157.

forest dwellers, and the quest for the truth about environmental corruption. Miyazaki himself says that the film version of *Nausicaä* is based on his understanding of the world in the early 1980s, stating that “the real world is not this thin and simple.”<sup>14</sup>

The manga narrative has more complex subplots and settings; while the film does not describe the relationship between the various countries, the manga illustrates the politics and power relationships between the nations. Nausicaä in the manga is the leader of her peripheral state, and her people become vassals to the Tolmekian king and are obliged to send forces to help when he decides to invade the neighboring Dorok Empire. The Tolmekians have a strong conventional military, but the Doroks have developed a genetically modified mould from the Sea of Decay with which to overwhelm the invaders. But when the Doroks introduce this mould into battle, it multiplies and mutates resulting in a phenomenon called “*daikaishō*” which spreads across the land and draws the insects into the battle. As a result, the Sea of Decay spreads across most of the Dorok nation, killing vast numbers of civilians and rendering most of the land uninhabitable. The Ohmu and other forest insects respond to this development but, as Nausicaä finds out, they do not battle but in fact sacrifice themselves to pacify the rampant mold.

Also, the manga narrative has a central theme of revealing the complex mysteries of the toxic environment and its ecological system. The seemingly hostile environment of the forest and its insects are not a danger to human beings. Rather, Nausicaä senses that this toxic environment was created by humans, for the *daikaishō* suggests that nature can be manipulated and used as a weapon. Nausicaä travels deeper into Dorok territory to seek those who are responsible for manipulating the fungus, recruiting the Giant

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<sup>14</sup> Kiridōshi Risaku, *Miyazaki Hayao no sekai* (The World of Miyazaki Hayao) (Tokyo: Chikuma shoten, 2001), 305.

Warrior found in Pejite. Despite the loss of some of her companions, she is eventually able to reach Shuwa, the Holy City of the Doroks, and enters the Crypt, a giant construction from before the Seven Days of Fire. There Nausicaä learns the truth: the last scientists of the former civilization had foreseen the end of their age and created the mold and the Sea of Decay to clean the land. They altered human genes to cope with the pollution, stored their own recreated “moral” human beings inside the Crypt, and waited for the day when they could reemerge. Learning this secret, Nausicaä confronts the Master of the Crypt, who is regarded as a god by the keepers of the Crypt. Then Nausicaä is confronted with the ultimate choice: she must decide whether or not to destroy the eggs of the new improved humans.

There are crucial differences between the manga and the film. The first is that opposition and reconciliation between nature and human civilization are not depicted in the manga story: the notion that a purified, better future will come when human beings choose to cooperate with nature is absent from the manga narrative. At the end of the manga story it is revealed that all of the natural threats such as the *daikaishō*, insects, fungi, and the Sea of Decay were intentionally created by privileged people in the previous civilization. Moreover, human beings themselves were genetically modified to survive in the toxic environment. Due to this modification, the present humans, including Nausicaä, will be unable to survive if the environment is purified completely. In the Crypt, the intelligence and technology of the previous world, including the eggs of newly modified “better” human beings, have been stored until the day the purification of Earth is complete. Thus, in the manga version, the conflict is not between nature and humans as in the film, but between idealistic progress set in motion by those in power in the past

and the incomplete present reality of Nausicaä and her contemporaries. This conflict, however, remains unresolved; in fact it leads to the complete denial of the ideals of progress that were set by the past authority and makes a decisive break with such modern ideals.

This secret in the manga *Nausicaä* is very close to that in Abe's *Inter Ice Age 4*: the powerful elite have covertly created new, "improved" human beings in response to apocalyptic crisis. Accordingly, there is little possibility that the old species can survive in the coming new world that is supposed to be a purified, more moralistic place. Both stories suggest that the older generation to which the protagonists belong is destined to decline. However, the striking difference is in their positions: Katsumi learns that there are new genetically modified humans; his own son is an aquan, but he himself is not. On the other hand, Nausicaä and the people in her generation have already been secretly modified, and she and all her contemporaries will be unable to survive in the perfectly purified world. While Katsumi remains an authentic, original human being to the end, Nausicaä realizes that she cannot insist upon the authenticity of the human species. The plot of *Nausicaä* depicts the post-apocalyptic realization that the apocalyptic crisis of human modification has already been brought about by the privileged few. There is no way to escape this modification, just as the protagonist of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* cannot escape his manufactured subconscious. The difference between the settings in these two narratives is also related to the attitude toward the discontinuity of time. Katsumi never accepts the discontinuity of the present and the future, leading to his death. However, Nausicaä accepts the discontinuity of the past modification; she accepts that it has happened and thinks only of the future.

The second difference is that ambiguous values are emphasized in the manga narrative. While the film does not deal much with ambiguities and portrays a black-and-white kind of morality, the manga story stresses that most things have ambiguous values; there are no totally wrong/bad beings, nor there are perfectly right/good beings. For example, the Giant Warrior in the film can be regarded as a metaphor for the atomic bomb. However, when the Tolmekians attempt to use it, it is too premature to be born; its rotten, immature body crashes into the ground. The Giant Warrior is depicted as a destructive and uncanny being which will harm people.

However, in the manga version, the Giant Warrior is portrayed as a more humane and complicated being; Nausicaä can communicate with him, and in order to destroy the Crypt, she decides to take on the role of his mother, even naming him Ōma, meaning “innocence” in the ancient language of her tribe. As soon as she gives him this name, his intelligence grows, and he informs her that he is not only a warrior but also an arbitrator; the Giant Warrior is a dangerous being, yet at the same time, he can help by mediating conflicts of values. Nausicaä feels guilty that she wishes for him to die despite being his “mother.” Ōma dedicates his life to destroying the Crypt, for Nausicaä as his guardian clarifies his mission as arbitrator. The manga version places the emphasis on humans’ responsibility for dealing with technology and ambiguous power. Ōma is depicted as innocent despite his enormous power; his body radiates a poisonous radioactive light which is harmful to Nausicaä and the environment. This recalls and suggests the ambivalent nature of nuclear power, which can be used to kill as well as to heal. It falls upon humans to use this double-edged power morally.

Another example is in the confrontation between Nausicaä and the Master of the

Crypt. Near the end of the manga story, the Master of the Crypt suggests that they should purify humans and replace them with wiser and calmer ones. Without his help, he warns, the human race will be extinguished by the environmental pollution. Nausicaä protests that human beings are destined to come out from the darkness and go back to it.

According to her, life is both purity and contamination. She insists that agony, tragedy and stupidity are part of being human and they will continue to be so even in the purified world. Human beings always need to experience darkness and light, tragedy and comedy, agony and bliss, virtue and vice, beauty and ugliness.

This is remarkably similar to what the shadow in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* tells the protagonist; it tries to persuade him to leave the town because, as it explains, life becomes meaningful when it has death as its end, and we cannot experience bliss without despair. The protagonist, however, remains within the town's wall even though he knows a life without ambiguity is wrong, unnatural and even unhealthy. Instead of returning to a reality full of ambiguities or remaining within the town itself and losing his emotions completely, he chooses to be responsible for the incomplete town his secretly and non-consensually implanted subconscious has created. The protagonist chooses to become marginalized by living in the forest outside the town and collecting past memories and ambiguous emotions forever.

The protagonist in the End of the World portion of the *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* narrative has two major choices: (i) reality: returning to the reality of Hard-boiled Wonderland, or (ii) fiction: living eternally in the fictional walled town. Within option (ii), he has two further choices: (a) to live in the eternally peaceful mindless town, or (b) to live in the marginalized forest area with incomplete memories. Nausicaä, in contrast,

has two simple choices, but whereas the choice of the protagonist in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* is personal and will affect his own life, Nausicaä's choice will affect all of humanity and indeed all living things and the Earth itself: she can save the Crypt, and choose a perfect purified world, or destroy it, and maintain an ambiguous, impure one. She believes that life is full of ambiguities and there will be always negative values in the future. Rather than achieving the perfect purification and reformation of humanity, Nausicaä chooses to let nature/the Earth decide whether the human race will survive, demonstrating that the lives of humans are connected to and dependant upon the whole ecosystem. She decides to destroy the eggs of the modified humans, albeit with some guilt. Nausicaä chooses to be responsible for the imperfect people in the incomplete present world full of ambiguities rather than fulfilling the past modern ideology of constant progress.

These differences from the film make a clear break from modern apocalypse; Nausicaä's choice to destroy the Crypt and to maintain the world with its existing imperfect humans indicates a discontinuity from the past and its ideals of constant progress. Nausicaä does not dismiss these ideals as meaningless, yet she finds more value in a life that includes death, agony and brutality, for these seemingly negative characteristics give meaning to life. She finds it unnatural to focus on one pole of ambivalence and to fundamentalize it. In the film version, the theme of purification is portrayed as positive, but in the manga narrative, it is described as harmful as well. In destroying the eggs of purified descendents, Nausicaä breaks with the past.

In addition, the manga story successfully disturbs the moral standard of modern fantasies characterized by non-contradiction, simplicity, constructiveness, and order. The

moral fantasy in this story is to discover the mysteries of nature and to stop war. It turns out, however, that behind it all there is one power: the Crypt containing the knowledge of the past. What the Master of the Crypt as the symbol of centralized power offers is an end to war, sickness, pollution, even death, and a chance to save humanity. Nausicaä rejects this offer, and chooses instead to live *with* death, for she believes that it is not human beings but the Earth itself that must decide whether humanity will survive or perish. Miyazaki implicitly denies that we can continue to rely on progressive ideals centered around or privileging human beings over nature and other beings, and shows us the reality that life is full of uncertainty and ambiguity, and that the natural environment as Other still has the power to influence human lives.

Ōtsuka Eiji and Sasakibara Gō comment on the shifts in Miyazaki's apocalyptic narratives. Before the manga version of *Nausicaä*, the endings of Miyazaki's works were purely entertaining and Disneyesque: the righteous win, evil dies, mysteries are neatly resolved—viewers' emotions are released by such catharsis. But the manga version of *Nausicaä* depicts contradictions as they are and refuses to resolve them.<sup>15</sup> The ending of the manga does not satisfy common moral fantasies of harmony and unity but does successfully convey the fact that the idealistic age completely ended in the early 1990s.

While it can be regarded that the ending of the manga version of *Nausicaä* presents the limit of the idealistic age, it does not describe a clear shift to the fictional age. We have seen that in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* the protagonist chooses to enter the fictional world. In *Nausicaä*, in contrast, there is no such solution suggested. The only goal *Nausicaä* sets on the very last page of the manga is *ikineba*: “we have to live.” The manga focuses on the conflict between ideal and reality and emphasizes the limit of the

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<sup>15</sup> Ōtsuka and Sasakibara, *Kyōyō to shite no manga, anime*, 156-157.

idealistic age, so it ends without concrete hope for the future.

The vision of the future after the crisis has passed in the manga version is not clearly indicated either. While the film ends with the peaceful symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature, the manga narrative only states that a certain chronicle says that Nausicaä went back to the Valley of the Wind after living with the Doroks and that another legend tells that she eventually went to the forest people. Then it adds that it is heard that Kushana governed Tolmekia by deputy and it eventually became a nation without a king. While this short comment on their future suggests that there was peace and that Tolmekia changed from an imperial system to a republican one, there is no firm evidence provided.

This ending shows that there was not a clearer postmodern/post-apocalyptic worldview in Miyazaki's work than in Murakami's. This may be because many of Miyazaki's works emphasize moral confrontations more than their consequences. At the end of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, the protagonist chooses the ideal in fiction. He knows that there are more complex ambiguities of life with death, virtue with vice, profound joy with sorrow in reality outside of the wall, but he chooses to marginalize himself in the forest—within the wall but outside the town—since he wishes to protect some parts of his identity. This demonstrates that we can never completely avoid the power of authority; we have to comply with the power of the status quo in order to live. To keep one's identity and to be free from tight control and invisible oppression, Murakami suggests marginalizing oneself and gaining partial freedom rather than remaining in a seemingly perfect town and being under the total control of the powerful. The protagonist wants to be responsible for the town he has created, and that is the place where he can keep some

of his original identity. Murakami does not deny the ambiguities in the real world, but he premises an acculturative situation where it is difficult for people to secure their identity and to live according to their own free wills. His work supposes that people have already moved on to the post-apocalyptic world where important areas of our lives are totally outside of our control.

On the other hand, Miyazaki presents the limitation of the idealistic age, and shows that solutions based on modern progressivism cannot function in our reality. Through the changes from the film *Nausicaä* to the manga, we see that the ideal of questing for only one side of binary values such as virtue, purification, and harmony is too simple. Miyazaki stops at the point of suggesting that we need to realize that the world has more complex, diverse values and dynamics, while Murakami emphasizes that such a complex world is invisibly controlled by the privileged few and there is almost no way to escape that control. It is difficult to judge whether Miyazaki still believes in the small possibility that we may come to have a common ideal which can come true in reality. Yet, he presents neither an ideal in fiction as Murakami does, nor a totally post-apocalyptic world without major endings. While Murakami's solution is to marginalize oneself, even in a fictional setting, to maintain distance from the controlling society, Miyazaki's solution to living in the world after the catastrophic crisis has passed is represented by the phrase "we have to live." He knows the grand narrative has died, but does not suggest how to live without it. However, in spite of the lack of clarity of the future vision of the world, the difference between the film and the manga versions of *Nausicaä* indicate a split from the continuity of the past and the idealistic age, and show what was at stake in 1980s Japan.

## Ōtomo Katsuhiro's *AKIRA*

Written by Ōtomo Katsuhiro and initially serialized in the pages of *Young Magazine* between 1982 and 1990, *AKIRA* was published in a six volume collection upon its completion.<sup>16</sup> An eponymous anime adaptation with a shortened plot was distributed by Tōhō in 1988.<sup>17</sup> While most of the character designs and basic settings were taken from the first two volumes of the manga epic, the restructured plot of the film differs considerably from the print version, eliminating much of the last half of the manga. The manga takes place in a larger timeframe than the film, involving a wider array of characters and subplots. Both versions have been widely accepted by foreign as well as domestic audiences, and a live-action remake of *AKIRA* has long been in the planning stages in Hollywood.<sup>18</sup>

The series won a great deal of recognition in the industry, including the 1984 Kōdansha Manga Award for best general manga. It was also nominated for the Harvey Award for Best Graphic Album of Previously Published Work in 2002. In her book *The Fantastic in Japanese Literature*, Susan Napier describes the film version as “a combination of visceral and aesthetic thrills” and a “no-holds-barred enjoyment of fluidity and chaos.”<sup>19</sup> The work is credited as having introduced both manga and anime to Western audiences. *AKIRA* cemented Ōtomo's reputation and the success of the animated feature allowed him to concentrate on film rather than the manga form in which

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<sup>16</sup> Ōtomo Katsuhiro, *AKIRA*, 6 vols (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1984-1993).

<sup>17</sup> *AKIRA* (1988), dir. Ōtomo Katsuhiro (DVD, Bandai Visual, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Actor Leonardo DiCaprio announced the production of a live-action version of *AKIRA* in 2008, and the film was scheduled to be released 2009. However, the project was abandoned due to the resignation of the director.

<sup>19</sup> Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature*, 219.

his career began.

The film version of *AKIRA* was released in 1988 when the first four volumes of the manga were complete, but its plot and setting are taken mostly from the first two volumes. The film begins in the year 1988, when Tokyo is destroyed by an apparent nuclear explosion that leads to the start of World War III. Thirty-one years later in Neo-Tokyo, a megalopolis built on an artificial island in Tokyo Bay, the teenage protagonist Kaneda leads his motorcycle gang, including his best friend Tetsuo, in a gang war against another biker group. As Kaneda and Tetsuo battle with their enemies on a highway, Tetsuo almost runs into a mutant child and is injured when his bike explodes. Soon after the crash, armed soldiers appear and take both Tetsuo and the child away. Kaneda and his gang are also taken in for questioning by the police, where Kaneda unsuccessfully flirts with a young girl named Kei, but they are later released.

Meanwhile, Tetsuo, under watch by the Colonel and Doctor Ōnishi in the army hospital, is discovered to have mental frequencies similar to those of Akira, a boy with unique abilities. It is revealed that Akira was the cause of the explosion that started World War III in 1988. Aware that another gifted child, Kiyoko, has foreseen visions of Neo-Tokyo's destruction in the same horrific manner, the Colonel orders the doctor to kill Tetsuo. Sensing danger, Tetsuo escapes from the hospital, but he begins to suffer painful hallucinations of Akira.

That night, Tetsuo is attacked by the three mutant children, Takashi, Kiyoko and Masaru, who are trying to kill him before he grows accustomed to his new powers. However, this only increases his powers, and he uses them to damage the hospital. In the mutant children's room, Tetsuo learns that Akira, the young boy whom Tetsuo has been

seeing in his hallucinations, is in cryogenic storage below the new Stadium being built for the upcoming 2020 Olympics. The Colonel, Kei, and Kaneda learn that Tetsuo is flying to the Stadium to meet Akira.

At the Stadium, Tetsuo unearths the Akira chamber and finds it empty except for Akira's organs stored in glass jars. The Colonel tries to shoot Tetsuo using an orbiting laser weapon called SOL, but manages only to sever his right arm. Tetsuo takes off into orbit and destroys the satellite, then forges himself a new arm from inorganic material. The Colonel pleads with Tetsuo to return to the lab, but Tetsuo attacks him. When the Colonel fires back, with Kaneda joining the fray, Tetsuo is unable to keep control any longer, and his body begins to transform into a gigantic baby-like mass. The mutant children realize the only way to stop Tetsuo is to call forth Akira. Akira's manifestation, however, causes another explosion; studying the wavelengths of the explosion, Doctor Ōnishi concludes that it is the beginning of a new universe.

Taken into the mass of Tetsuo's field, Kaneda experiences Tetsuo's and the mutant children's past memories, including Tetsuo's twisted friendship with Kaneda and how the children obtained their powers. The mutant children remove Kaneda and tell him that Akira will be taking Tetsuo away. The explosion engulfs nearly the whole of Neo-Tokyo, and as it ends a small flake falls on Kaneda's palm and radiates light, then disappears. Kaneda joins Kei and his friend, and they drive away from the ruined stadium and the dead city. The credits begin with a Big Bang and Tetsuo saying three last words, "I am Tetsuo."

The film *AKIRA* has many postmodern features. The story is set in the post-apocalyptic Neo-Tokyo of a dystopian near future. The main characters are teenage gang

members abandoned by their parents or mutant children who have been separated from their families because of experiments. As Susan Napier points out, there is almost no kinship described in the story, there is no responsible adult figure except the Colonel, and past memories are seldom referred to until the end of the narrative.<sup>20</sup> The former capital Tokyo, which was devastated in World War III in 1988, has been left as it was for thirty-one years, but the remains will be swept away soon since ground zero will be the site of the new Olympic stadium.

There is a new and different relationship between the past and the present in the setting of the film *AKIRA*. While the works of Murakami and Miyazaki deal with the continuity from past to present, *AKIRA* begins with a setting in the present that has a certain distance from the past. Progress in the past brings conflict in the present in the film *Nausicaä*, and life with past memories is at stake in *The Town and its Uncertain Wall*. The past in these works is something related to the present situation. Yet in *AKIRA*, the past is equivocally situated; ground zero will be reconstructed for the Olympics, and Akira, who represents power developed in the past, is frozen and secreted under the stadium next to the (re)construction site. The past surely exists, but it has been covered up and rendered invisible and thus unknowable. In *AKIRA*, there is a deeply ambiguous relationship between the present and the legacy of the past; the present, both literally and figuratively, intentionally conceals and buries the past.

The power of Akira himself is the creation of past technology, which triggered the Third World War. He has been cryogenically frozen for thirty-one years, and is revived by the mutant children in order to take Tetsuo away to a different universe. In other words, Akira, who once destroyed Tokyo, now saves it. Akira symbolizes the past and

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<sup>20</sup> Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature*, 217.

has tremendous power to influence the present, but he is not portrayed as hostile to the present or the future. In fact, Akira is depicted as a small boy, not seemingly monstrous at all despite his tremendous power. In addition, Akira is mostly silent in the film (he speaks a few words in the manga narrative); this too suggests suppression of the past. But although Akira's name is also the title of the story, he is not depicted as a target against which to fight: the main target in the film is Tetsuo, who wishes to release the power of Akira and the traumatic past. Akira does not appear in the film until the very end, but people fear him because of his past.

Susan Napier compares Akira with the monster in the 1956 film *Godzilla*. Godzilla is a mutation created by nuclear fallout, and is a symbol of fear and horror because of his monstrous appearance and uncontrollable power. Eventually he is killed by Japanese scientists and the evil past of a nuclear experiment is corrected by the righteous present: the film has a clear moral composition. In *AKIRA*, Napier argues, the past is something frozen, and it is difficult to judge by his appearance whether or not Akira is truly dangerous.<sup>21</sup> It is true that he has tremendous power, but the reasons why such power was developed in the past, and why Akira precipitated WWII, are never clearly explained. The role of Akira in the narrative indicates the twisted relationship of the past with the present of the 1980s.

This also relates to other ambiguities in the story. As we have seen, apocalyptic narratives contain ambiguities such as death and life, evil and good, despair and hope, the distinction between the poles becomes blurred in the postmodern apocalypse. In *AKIRA* there are many examples of coexisting ambiguities. For example, the mutant children are

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<sup>21</sup> Susan J. Napier, "Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from Godzilla to Akira," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 19, 2 (Summer, 1993): 327-351.

unique in that their skin resembles that of the elderly while their other features remain childlike. Tetsuo's new arm, forged from inorganic material, represents the birth of a cyborg, a hybrid between the natural and the artificial. The disappearance of Akira, Tetsuo, and the other mutant children is not their actual death; rather they are reborn into the new world. The boundaries of ambiguities are disturbingly blurred and challenged in the narrative.

Another postmodern feature, the highly advanced controlling power of the authority over each individual, is manifested in the film *AKIRA*. Tetsuo and the mutant children do not wish to develop psychic power themselves; as in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* and the manga version of *Nausicaä*, it is the authority that is responsible for modifying the main characters. Tetsuo and the mutant children do not have the ultimate right to decide or control their own lives for they cannot live without medical intervention, especially drugs. The power of the status quo can change the lives and identities of the individual living in a controlling society. Yet the reason for government interest in the development of the supernatural powers of talented children is not explained much in the film. *AKIRA*, *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, and the manga *Nausicaä* do not fully illuminate the hidden power behind the troubles in their narratives.

At the end of the film is presented the vision of what will be after the apocalyptic catastrophe: Akira takes Tetsuo, Kiyoko, Masaru, and Takashi out of the real world and creates a universe in another dimension. Just before the final credit roll begins we are shown the Big Bang, the ancient universe, the planets, all the memories of life, and the words "I am Tetsuo." The film *AKIRA* suggests the creation of a whole new possibility. This indicates that the film has totally departed from the idealistic age and externalizes

the fictional age; ideals of freedom, empowerment and immortality are suggested in the new fictional universe rather than in the realistic setting of the existing world where Kaneda and Kei remain. This does not mean that fiction has no impact on reality. Fictional ideals in *AKIRA* leave both the characters in the film and viewers of the film the positive expectation that the past is gone and new imaginations will come: this new world is not created by the independent, mature, and powerful, but by children. The brief exchange between Kiyoko and Masaru at the end of the film (“It will come to us someday.” “So has it already begun”) brings a certain expectation to the viewer that something new, a new age and a new understanding of the world, will come to them.

The film *AKIRA* celebrates the birth of the postmodern age of fiction, presenting a new relationship with the past, reality, and the future. On the other hand, the manga version was serialized over a period of almost ten years, so it could expand various themes that became important during the 1980s: cyberpunk, juvenile delinquency, drug culture, psychic awareness, social unrest, the rise of new religions, the reactions of the United States and USSR towards Japan. Compared with the *Nausicaä* series, the storyline of the film and the manga narratives of *AKIRA* are not as different. The film *AKIRA* is already a very postmodern story, while the film *Nausicaä* is a conventional modern story. However, the manga *AKIRA* reflects in more detail the political situation of the 1990s, developing subplots of the establishment of the Great Tokyo Empire of Akira, the rise of new religious organizations, the feasibility of World War IV, opposition and cooperation between the United States and the USSR. Among the differences between the film and manga, the most interesting is the apocalyptic catastrophe at the end. In the film version, the catastrophe happens because the revived Akira takes Tetsuo to a

different universe with the other mutant children. When Kaneda is asked whether Tetsuo is dead, he answers ambiguously. On the other hand, in the manga version, Tetsuo's power is used to neutralize Akira's energy and exterminate him. The mutant children use Kei as a catalyst, gathering all their psychic power in her, and finalize Tetsuo's power to make it equal to Akira's. Miyako says that Akira's power has the power of "plus," and Tetsuo's finalized power the power of "minus." The plan is to maximize Tetsuo's power and then collide with Akira so that Akira's power can contract.

This is very different from what happens in the film. The creation of a new universe through catastrophe in the film is one way of expressing the zeitgeist of the fictional age. The resolution in the manga, however, takes another feature of the ideal in fiction by suggesting movements of absorption and contraction. Akira symbolizes the monstrous remains of the past, especially the asset of modernity, which has been promoted as "positive." Modern ideals include territorial expansion, the diffusion of ideologies, and the amplification of production. Modernity is thus characterized as a movement of expansion with centrifugal force. Akira has radiated tremendous energy from himself and he cannot control his power, which has destroyed his identity. This implies that the proliferation of modernity is out of control. This process also can be an allegory for modern prewar and wartime Japan's increasing aggression, colonial expansion, and war crimes.

To resolve this uncontrollable state, the mutant children decide to use Tetsuo to stop the power of diffusion. They grow Tetsuo's power to equal Akira's, and ask Akira to absorb Tetsuo's power so that these two monstrous powers can be offset. Tetsuo's power reflects the international situation of Japan in the late 1980s. Japan became the second

most economically powerful nation in the world after suffering both defeat and the loss of national identity. It has been very difficult for Japan to develop and maintain its self-confidence as an independent modern nation-state which can influence the world. But Japan realized in the 1980s that it had gained power and influence since its absolute defeat in World War II. This sudden empowerment is reflected in Tetsuo. The orphan Tetsuo lacks self-confidence, and even his best friend Kaneda treats him as a younger brother. This suddenly changes when he develops enormous psychic power and overcomes his miserable past. The vanity and pride of overcoming the past/modern, however, eventually leads him to lose his grounded identity; his body begins to transform into a gigantic baby-like mass taking Kaneda into his field. Akira's absorption of Tetsuo, therefore, may suggest that there is a possibility that Japan in the late 1980s truly confronted and accepted the suppressed memory of modern Japan. In the film, Akira and the mutant children take Tetsuo to a new universe, but Akira's incorporation of Tetsuo is not described. On the other hand, in the manga plot, Akira's absorption of Tetsuo indicates Japan's confrontation with defeat and its acceptance of the non-restorable discontinuity of tradition.

It is often said that contemporary Japanese culture is still influenced by the experience of World War II, the atomic bombings, and defeat. The post-traumatic experience of defeat implies that Japan has completely lost its traditional identity, and continues to influence various cultural forms in postwar Japan. For example, art critic Sawaragi Noi insists that postwar Japanese contemporary art had stayed in a "bad field," a limited condition which was defined by defeat until the 1980s. This "bad field" has no history, and is filled with countless foolish repetitions. Sawaragi argues that artists began

to face this limited condition in the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> Azuma Hiroki also claims that Japan did not begin to deal with the contradictions caused by the defeat and subsequent economic growth until the 1980s, and postponed their solutions until after the 1990s.<sup>23</sup>

I would argue that Akira's absorption of Tetsuo in the manga version's ending suggests the possibility that Japanese society may have a chance to confront the meanings of the apocalyptic catastrophe and defeat objectively for the first time since the war; until the late 1980s, Japan could not fully absorb or digest the past. In the previous chapter, we saw that Oe's *The Silent Cry* attempts to pursue the reconciliation of the traditional past, the present, and the future; the story stresses the continuity of identities of nation and individual by bridging the end of Edo period, the time of the defeat, and the present. Ōe's intention is achieving the continuity of the tradition and the present. In Abe's *Inter Ice Age 4*, the narrative points out that there is a possibility that the future will be totally different from the present, yet the protagonist never accepts this discontinuity; he clings to his common sense that has derived from the past and should be maintained in the future. On the other hand, the manga version of *AKIRA* first emphasizes the destruction of identity and the discontinuity of tradition by presenting Akira as an emotionless, speechless child whose identity was destroyed when he could not control his power; Ōtomo recognizes that the past and the defeat have been severed from our present already. Then the plot makes Akira absorb Tetsuo and contract; it does not repeat the same expansion with centrifugal force as Akira. Instead, it digests the past. I would argue that the ending of the manga version of *AKIRA*, therefore, implies there is a possibility that Japan in the late 1980s can objectively accept and digest the modern sufferings of the

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<sup>22</sup> Sawaragi Noi, *Nihon, gendai, bijutsu* (Japan, Contemporary, Art) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1997), 12-26.

<sup>23</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 15.

defeat as major discontinuity.

When Kaneda is taken into the expanding field of Tetsuo, he views the memories of Tetsuo and the mutant children and learns the possibility of the new evolution of human beings. After Akira absorbs Tetsuo, Kaneda returns to reality to join Kei. While in *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* the protagonist returns to his ordinary reality and reconciles with past memories, Kaneda and Kei do not choose to go back their old reality; every building is reduced to piles of rubble, but Kaneda, Kei and his friends declare the continuance of the Great Tokyo Empire of Akira. They attempt to expel all the invaders, claiming that Akira is still alive within them. The manga ending reflects Japan's wish to become truly independent in international relations; it wants to be treated as a fully grown up, independent nation which rejects unnecessary interference from other powerful states.

Of course, Kaneda's vision of the future seems very difficult to make real. Ideals in the manga version of *AKIRA* still remain in the realm of fiction since, as Ōsawa insists, creation of an imaginary state (meaning independence from reality) is the core of cyberpunk ideology.<sup>24</sup> The Great Tokyo Empire is an isolated community independent from the norms set by others, so it will not be accepted as a nation-state which must comply with minimum international norms. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine that the ideal of establishing the independent state of the Great Tokyo Empire will come true realistically even in fiction. The manga *AKIRA* represents the spirit of the fictional age, yet it shows that something new may start—even if it is fictional in nature—when one truly confronts the past, understands the discontinuity between the past and the present, and has a vision for the future. The new universe of Tetsuo is created outside of reality in the film version, but in the manga Kaneda declares that Akira, Tetsuo, and the mutant

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<sup>24</sup> Ōsawa, *Kyokō no jidai no hate*, 49-50.

children continue to live within himself and his friends. While the film celebrates the very fictional ideal of the possibility of a new universe, the manga explores the fictional ideal of gaining independence and (re)creating a new national identity in a more concrete way.

In the last scenes of the manga, as Kaneda and his gang ride through the city, the buildings reconstruct themselves, and the ghosts of Tetsuo and Yamagata riding their bikes appear on either side of Kaneda and Kei. As Susan Napier mentions, the story leaves us to decide whether this is a dream or a new tomorrow.<sup>25</sup> The audience decides whether the fictional ideal proposed in the manga narrative of becoming independent and mature even in a fictional community can have impact on our reality or not.

As we have seen, the film and the manga present different ideals: the film successfully expresses the discontinuity between the past and the present, and suggests the birth of a totally new world. On the other hand, the manga does not have the same time limitations as the film, so it expands such discontinuities further and takes the opportunity to present a challenge to the fictional ideal of overcoming the discontinuity of the past and the present. Among the works we have seen so far, the manga version of *AKIRA* was written in 1990s while the others were created in the 1980s, showing that Sawaragi's argument that artists came to face the trauma of war directly in the 1990s is equally applicable in the world of fictional narratives.

As we have seen, these three popular works of 1980s literature, film and manga manifest a shift from modern to postmodern apocalypse, demonstrating changes in the ways ambiguities are depicted and what visions of the world after the apocalypse are presented in that period. *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* and the film *Nausicaä* attempt

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<sup>25</sup> Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature*, 217.

to reconstruct a meta-narrative and consistent identity in realistic settings through apocalyptic crisis, but the manga version of *Nausicaä* points out the impossibility of making these ideals come true in reality. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and the film version of *AKIRA* recognize the discontinuity of the past and identity and present the new possibility of having ideals in a new fictional world. The manga version of *AKIRA*, accepting the discontinuity of time and identity, tries to establish a new identity and vision that is fictional yet concrete through apocalyptic catastrophe. The difference between modern and postmodern apocalypse is manifested in the understanding of time. While the modern apocalypse of Ōe and Abe is based on the linear understanding of time, some postmodern apocalypse begins to introduce different schemes. *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* and *Nausicaä* still operate according to the linear understanding of time, while *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* and *AKIRA* explore multiple linear timelines, presenting time both in reality and in newly created worlds.

The shift from modern to postmodern apocalypse can also be observed in the changing functions of apocalypse as a tool. These works target younger males more than do modern apocalyptic stories, although the works of Murakami and Miyazaki attract a considerable female audience. These apocalyptic works help the younger generation who have already observed failure of political movements in the 1960s and 1970s to face issues of trauma and defeat. It seemed that Japan had recovered from the damage of the war by the 1980s, yet the country still remained under the influence of the United States and the unstable conditions of the Cold War. Practical political movements that attempted to regain some political independence from the United States and the self-criticism of Imperialism in the war period could not improve the position of Japan in the

ongoing tension in international relationships, or stabilize the fluid identity of Japan and young Japanese males who no longer had the opportunity to join major political movements. Consequently, apocalyptic fiction in the 1980s began to offer new visions to cope with the trauma of the defeat in fictional space: being responsible for one's own inner world; abandoning efforts to make modern ideals of progress come true; and questing for ideals even in a new virtual-realistic world can be ways of acting against power and of reevaluating the new identity of Japan and its youth in the 1980s.

### **The Weakening of “the Middle Field”**

As ideals and visions move from reality to fiction another important change follows. Through these works we have discussed, a new direction in the relationship between self and other is indicated. These apocalyptic fictional works quest for an ultimately direct communication between self and Other. *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* is the least direct in this regard for it does not incorporate supernatural elements in its plot. However, the ending, in which the protagonist lives eternally inside himself, shows that there is no space of Otherness in his last stop. His world is made of his subconscious, and the others in his town are part of himself. He learns to read the lost memories and emotions of the Librarian little by little through the skulls of unicorns. He eventually decides to live with her in the forest, recovering her lost memories and retelling them to her, and it is indicated that their relationship will be much closer in the forest it was in the town. However, the Librarian, who appears to be an important Other to the protagonist, is in fact part of his memory.

*Nausicaä* exhibits a more obvious tendency for direct communication with others.

The heroine Nausicaä is a human being who can communicate with the Ohmu and other insects. In the manga version, she has telepathic ability, reading the minds of other humans and animals. The Ohmu, the monks of the Dorok, and the forest people can read her mind and help her out of danger, and telepathic communications between Nausicaä, her friends, and the insects save her life on a number of occasions. The story depicts a world where every living thing can communicate and live harmoniously as the ultimate ideal, rather than the world of new purified, improved human beings who are programmed to be moralistic. To achieve this goal, direct communication helps to mediate between humans and other living things.

*AKIRA* can be considered the clearest example of the desire for direct communication. In the ending of the manga version, Kaneda sees the memories of the mutant children by being absorbed into the mass of Akira/Tetsuo and learns how they were included in the experiments of developing their supernatural power. When Kaneda asks them whether their power brings only unhappiness at the cost of their ordinary life, Kiyoko replies that their power enables them to gain true friends with whom they can communicate without language. They can understand each other with their direct communication by reading minds. Miyako explains to Kaneda that this is the new choice for human evolution.

The desire for direct communication in 1980s apocalyptic fiction may be a reflection of the boom in interest in the supernatural in Japan in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the influence of the worldwide New Age movement that seeks the “one-ness” of the universe. It might also be argued that the desire for direct communication is a Buddhist ideal. However, when we consider that this type of communication was often

described not in the context of a religious or social movement but in apocalyptic fiction in the 1980s, the most plausible reason for this boom is related to changes in the community of postmodernized Japan; when visions are shifted from reality to fiction, the influence of societies and communities that offer us reality became gradually weakened. This tendency of the withering of middle ground/communities and societies can be detected in these three major works in the 1980s, but they at least depict society. As discussed in Chapter Two, however, the middle ground is less and less visible in apocalyptic fiction after 1995. Further, it is worth noting that the trend of the desire for direct communication is now becoming realized in the field of contemporary technology; there is ongoing research on things like non-verbal communication through human neurons and contact lenses with database functions, and some of these technologies will soon be in actual use.<sup>26</sup> These developments show that we are increasingly losing the influence of the Symbolic in the real world as well as in our imagination. When the Symbolic becomes absent, we leave the fictional age behind and enter the new zeitgeist after 1995, the zeitgeist Azuma terms the animal age and Ōsawa terms the age of impossibility, and encounter the new trend of *sekaikei* apocalypse. This trend will be explored in the next chapter.

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<sup>26</sup> “Next World: Future Super-Human,” *Chikyū Doramachikku* (The Dramatic Earth) (Tokyo: NHK, July 22, 2010).

## Chapter Five

### Apocalyptic fiction after 1995 – *seikaikei* works

Two apocalyptic events in 1995, the Kobe Earthquake and the sarin attack, revealed the fragility of the Japanese infrastructure and emergency system that had previously been thought inviolable, secure and coordinated, and that human lives can come to a sudden, violent end even in a highly modern society. These revelations led to the manifestation of the uncanny Other within the self and the limitation of the fictional age. We have seen that from the 1970s to the early 1980s, apocalyptic fiction portrayed the quest for ideals in reality in order to solidify grand narratives and to maintain the concordance of beginning, middle, and end; they strongly reflect the idealistic age, relying on a linear understanding of time. From the mid 1980s, however, apocalyptic fiction shifted to describing ideals being sought in fictional settings; it no longer strove for the recreation of ideals and grand narratives in reality, and instead set them in explicitly fictive space by introducing multiple linear timelines. In what ways, then, was apocalyptic fiction changed by the experience of these two incidents in 1995 and subsequent social issues? In seeking the answer, many Japanese cultural critics refer to one of the most influential animations in contemporary Japan.

#### **GAINAX's *Neon Genesis Evangelion***

Broadcast in 1995, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* originally consisted of twenty-six television episodes first aired on the TV Tokyo network from October 4, 1995 to March 27, 1996. The original story was produced by the animation studio GAINAX, and

directed by Anno Hideaki. It was later aired across Japan by the Anime Satellite Television Network. The series won the Animage Anime Grand Prix prize twice: in 1995 and 1996. Three animated films of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, directed by Anno Hideaki (b. 1960), were released in 1997 and 1998 through Tōei, and attracted a considerable audience despite for the most part retelling the TV version.<sup>1</sup> The animation was extremely successful, drawing a large audience, international as well as domestic, and has spawned countless derivative works including figure products, game software, derivative manga stories/novels, and even *pachinko* machines.<sup>2</sup> It also influenced subcultural creators and inspired a number of imitators.

Twelve years after the original animation was broadcast, a new animated film series consisting of four movies called *Rebuild of Evangelion* [sic] is currently in production. The first three movies will be an alternate retelling of the TV series, including new scenes, settings, backgrounds, and characters, and the fourth will have a completely new conclusion. The first of the new movies was released in Japan on September 1, 2007 as *Evangelion: 1.0 You Are (Not) Alone*. The second, *Evangelion: 2.0 You Can (Not) Advance* debuted in theaters on June 27, 2009. The gross revenues of *Evangelion 1.0* total some twenty million yen, despite its similarity to the original TV series.<sup>3</sup>

*Evangelion* is still considered one of the most powerful currents in Japanese

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<sup>1</sup> The first two films, *Shin seiki Evangerion gekijō-ban: Shito shinsei* (Evangelion: Death and Rebirth) and *Shin seiki Evangerion gekijō-ban: Air/magokoro wo, kimi ni* (The End of Evangelion) were directed by Anno Hideaki and distributed by Tōei in 1997. The third film, *Shin seiki Evangerion gekijō-ban: DEATH (TRUE) <sup>2</sup>Air/magokoro wo, kimi ni* (Revival of Evangelion) combines the first two films and was directed by Anno and distributed by Tōei in 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The TV series has so far been aired in twenty-five countries.

<sup>3</sup> Detailed information on the success of the new series can be found at <http://www.evangelion.co.jp/>

subculture. The television series established a number of recognizable features for the franchise: a stock set of distinctive characters; a focus on philosophical, psychological, and religious themes; and an idiosyncratic vocabulary of symbols and allusions drawing heavily on Christian and Kabbalistic symbolism, Buddhism, and Japanese subculture. Due to its techno-mechanical SF focus, the animation's primary target was teenage to young adult males, but its charming characters and various themes also attract female fans. In this chapter, I concentrate on examining the original TV series aired in 1995-1996 and the film *Shin Seiki Evangelion Gekijō-ban: Air/Magokoro wo, kimi ni* (The End of Evangelion, 1997) which contains alternate episodes or a "real world" account of the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth episodes of the TV series.

In the year 2000, according to the *Evangelion* story, came the Second Impact, a global cataclysm which almost completely destroyed Antarctica and led to the deaths of half the human population of Earth. It caused a devastating change in the Earth's axial tilt, leading to climate change, geopolitical unrest, the nuclear destruction of Tokyo-1,<sup>4</sup> and a crisis in the international economy. The cause was ostensibly a meteorite hitting Antarctica, but in fact the cause was contact with and experimentation on the first of what are collectively called the Angels: Adam. Angels are monstrous extraterrestrial antagonists who continue to regularly attack Tokyo-3, a militarized civilian city which is intended to become the new capital. The mysterious and sinister organization Seele and the paramilitary organization Nerv, which is headquartered in Tokyo-3, are conducting research on the Second Impact. Nerv's central mission is to locate the remaining Angels and to destroy them to save humanity.

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<sup>4</sup> Tokyo-1 is the original Tokyo, now in ruins. The new capital of Japan, located in Nagano Prefecture, is called Tokyo-2; the government relocated there after the destruction of Tokyo-1.

In 2015, as the first episode of the *Evangelion* TV series opens, Tokyo-3 is under attack by Angels. Conventional weapons prove ineffective, largely due to the Angels' projected force field, the AT Field.<sup>5</sup> Nerv takes command of the battle, and is able to defeat the Angels using biomechanical mechas called Evangelions (Evas). Not knowing why Ikari Gendō, his coldly distant father and commander of the Nerv, has summoned him, fourteen year-old Ikari Shinji arrives in Tokyo-3 just as the third Angel attacks the city. Gendō orders Shinji to fight, and Shinji reluctantly agrees to pilot Evangelion Unit 01. After the battle, Shinji moves in with Captain Katsuragi Misato, who takes the role of his older sister/mother. He and Ayanami Rei, a fourteen year-old girl, battle the successive advances of the Angels together and are later joined by Soryū Asuka Langley, pilot of Unit 02.

The first sixteen episodes in the television series deal mainly with the adventures of Shinji and the other pilots as they battle the Angels: in other words, they are conventional robot anime. After the sixteenth episode, however, *Evangelion* shifts to explore more psychological themes, mainly Shinji's inner conflict and identity crisis. The later episodes center on Shinji's unstable mental condition, while gradually revealing the ultimate plan of Nerv and Seele: the Human Instrumentality Project. The purpose of this project is to force the completion of human evolution; they plan to break down the AT fields that separate individual human beings in order to reduce all people to one entity: a supreme being, the next stage of humanity, ending all conflict, loneliness and pain brought about by individual existence.

In the last two episodes of the TV series, it is hinted that Gendō and Rei initiate

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<sup>5</sup> Near the end of the film version it is explained that every human being also has an AT field, which is the wall that separates the mind of one individual from another. These AT fields become important later in the story, as discussed on the next page.

the Human Instrumentality Project, but the actual events are not fully described. Instead, the stories continue to focus on Shinji's inner psychological world. The ending concerns Shinji's conflict over his identity and a brief interlude depicting an "alternate" *Evangelion* universe with the same characters but apparently in the school comedy genre. Finally, Shinji concludes that life could be worth living and that he does not need to pilot an Eva to justify his existence. He says farewell to his father and mother, and is congratulated by all the characters in the final scene. Importantly, however, this whole sequence of the affirmation of his identity has only happened within his mind; the story ends without revealing what actually happens.

*Neon Genesis Evangelion* is part of the genealogy of super robot/mecha animation that includes *Mazinger Z* (known outside Japan as *Tranzor Z*) in the 1970s and *Mobile Suit Gundam* in the 1980s. A super robot or mecha is a mechanized war vehicle, generally a large humanoid robot—in most cases they move by walking, frequently bipedally, and have arms with prehensile hands—which is driven by a pilot, most often a boy, who fights enemies. However, while ordinary mecha stories describe the growth and maturation of the young protagonist, *Evangelion* does not explicitly portray Shinji's growth. Rather, it emphasizes the dark, bleak aspects of the process of growth; it 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.<sup>6</sup>

*Evangelion* is also in the tradition of apocalyptic stories that have been popular since the 1970s. Conventional SF anime usually explains the reason for the apocalyptic crisis affecting the world, and provides a vision of the world after the crisis. The TV

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<sup>6</sup> Ōtsuka and Sasakibara, *Kyōyō to shite no manga, anime*, 80, 189.

series *Evangelion*, in contrast, dispenses with explanation even of such basic things as why the enemies are called Angels and why they attack humans. The latter episodes do describe Shinji's inner world, but crucially not what actually happens in the Human Instrumentality Project, and what will result from the apocalyptic catastrophe. In this sense, *Evangelion* is an unconventional work based on conventional themes and motifs of apocalypse.

We have seen that an apocalyptic system usually contains opposing values. Premodern apocalypse tends to emphasize the binary opposition between the two poles, while modern apocalypse sees the dialectical use of such conflicting values leading to progress. In postmodern apocalypse, however, the distinction between opposing values becomes blurred. The endings of premodern apocalyptic stories promise the reaffirmation of life over death, and the manifestation of clarity and truth over mystery and doubt. Modern apocalypse uses the binary system to bring progress and unification or to critically reconsider the present and the future. As we have seen in narratives from the 1980s like *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the manga version of *Nausicaä*, and *AKIRA*, however, such a binary system is inconsequential in postmodern apocalypse, where moral standards and social ethics are nebulous, equivocal, and problematic.

In *Evangelion*, this binarism is further deconstructed. For example, society is insignificant in the story, and moral standards and social ethics are increasingly unimportant. Questions of what is good/evil, what is pure/dirty, and the difference between life and death are not presented in the story, and community and society as the foundations of morality are very weak. Instead, Seele and Nerv are depicted as

representing society and larger communities. However, Seele is a privileged, secretive society and its reason for pursuing the Human Instrumentality Project is obscure. Nerv's reason for cooperating with Seele is similarly obscure. These organizations have the extraordinary power to control information, and ordinary people, even those, like Shinji, who work for Nerv, rarely know the reasons for the crises presented in the narrative. In addition, both organizations are international, and Japan as a nation is seldom depicted in the story.

Conversely, in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* it is at least clearly described what the System/the Factory does and for what purpose. The characteristics of the nations and the cause of the war are fully explained in *Nausicaä*, and the intentions of the Japanese government and the anti-government guerrillas are clear in *AKIRA*. On the other hand, *Evangelion* does not reflect a national frame at all, and the goals and intentions of international organizations remain mysterious. The audience is never afforded the means to judge what is good or bad, what leads people to live or die, and what facilitates or impedes progress. Moreover, these organizations and their plans totally disappear in the last two episodes of the TV series, along with all indication of what is happening outside Shinji's inner world.

As the relationship between self and society becomes less clear, the relationship between self and Other becomes increasingly important. Shinji reluctantly agrees to pilot an Eva but he does so in order to feel worthy of existing and to gain his father's recognition, not to save the world or the injured Rei. He continues to pilot the Eva since he has nowhere else to go, not because he desires to destroy the Angels—indeed, Shinji does not even know why they are attacking, or why his father is so deeply involved in

this crisis. He cannot find meaning in his life except in his special status as an Eva pilot. In *AKIRA*, Tetsuo's personality changes when he is empowered. Shinji, however, does not appear to change much even after he becomes an elite pilot charged with saving the entire world: difficulties in his relationship with his family and friends are more Shinji's concern.

For Shinji, Others in the story include his father, his colleagues Asuka and Rei, and the Angels. Kasai Kiyoshi argues that it is obvious that *Evangelion* does not aim to depict a modern narrative of maturation wherein a son becomes an adult by symbolically killing his father. The Freudian Oedipal model works as follows: the father controls access to the mother's body and frustrates the son's desire for her. The boy rebels against the father, but does not achieve union with the mother; instead he obtains a woman of his own and becomes fully independent and mature. In this case, in contrast, the father actually forces a complete physical and spiritual union between mother and son: Shinji's mother Yui, it emerges, was the creator of Eva-01, and her soul and body were merged into it. Thus Shinji and his mecha have an "artificial" mother-son relationship. The relationship may be "artificial," but in fact Shinji has a closer relationship with his mother than most: every time Shinji is ordered to synchronize with his suit, he enters into an increasingly complete and perfect union with his mother.

In Freud's analysis, it is very difficult for a boy to move to adulthood if he is not forced to acknowledge the power of the Symbolic, as represented by the power of his father to forbid access to the mother's body/mind/soul. Shinji cannot mature because his father does not play the proper Oedipal role. On a larger scale, the Human Instrumentality Project is attempting to bring the evolution of all humans from

incomplete individuals to one complete, all-absorbing being. Kasai claims that this is the imaginary hypertrophy of non-separation of a mother and an infant. He concludes that the society disappearing from *Evangelion* is modern society. In other words, the story fails to envision a modern society where a son becomes an adult by symbolically killing his father and becoming his social equal.<sup>7</sup>

We have seen that apocalyptic narratives are stories in which one faces a totally different other. In *Evangelion*, however, every Other Shinji faces turns out to be a part of himself: since Gendō never allows himself to be “killed” by his son, Shinji cannot become an adult; Gendō remains Shinji’s father, a part of Shinji. Shinji becomes close to Ayanami Rei, who initially appears to lack human emotions but gradually shows her feelings to him, and comes to love her, but it turns out that she is a clone of his mother, Yui. As an Eva pilot, Shinji battles the mysterious Angels, a truly monstrous Other. But at the very end of the series it is revealed that the Evas are not really “robots” at all: they are cloned Angels onto which mechanical components are fused as a means of restraint and control. Thus while the Angels are Shinji’s enemies, they are also part of him: Eva Unit 01, with which he has a physical, spiritual and indeed a blood connection, is a hybrid comprising his enemy and his mother/his second self.

Moreover, as the story develops, it is revealed that Shinji has in his DNA some of the original Angel, Adam, which hit earth when Shinji was still in the womb. This is the reason why the Eva pilots are all fourteen years old: they can pilot the Evangelions precisely because they share DNA with them. To complicate matters even further, while most Evas are cloned from the first Angel, Adam, Eva-01 is cloned from the second

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<sup>7</sup> Kasai Kiyoshi, “Sekaikei to reigai jōtai” (*Sekaikei and the Exceptional Condition*), in *Shakai wa sonzai shinai: sekaikei bunkaron*, 21-28.

Angel, Lilith.<sup>8</sup> Shinji can pilot the mecha because he shares both Adam's and his mother's DNA. In a very real sense, then, this genealogy completely eliminates Shinji's father. Shinji *is* Adam/the father, and Eva-01, with whom he has a perfect physical and spiritual union is Lilith, his wife/mother. The most horrific, uncanny, grotesque enemies are thus closely related to Shinji—even a part of himself. The relationship between self and Other in *Evangelion* has in common with the Kobe Earthquake and the Aum sarin attack the shocking discovery that the uncanny other can be so close that it may literally be within us.

In the film *AKIRA*, it is explained how Akira got his power: the government developed mutant children in order to cause a new human evolution. This allows us to understand how Akira as an other becomes what he is. But in *Evangelion*, it is revealed that the first Angel Adam caused the Second Impact and the subsequent devastation and atomic bombing of Tokyo-1, but it is never explained *why* the Angels come to Earth and for what purpose. The Angels as Other remain an uncanny, never resolved mystery.

The final episode of the TV series *Evangelion* ends with Shinji saying farewell to his parents and discovering his identity as more than an Eva pilot. While apocalyptic fiction usually provides a vision of what the future will be like after the crisis has passed, the TV series of *Evangelion* does not. It might be argued that the last episode proves that Shinji has matured in some sense—even just internally—but since this maturation only occurs in his inner world, it is impossible to know whether or not Shinji undergoes the ceremony of maturation like the others; it is also impossible to know whether Shinji will fulfill his responsibility in the Human Implement Plan. This is not the conventional style

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<sup>8</sup> In Jewish legend dating to the Middle Ages, before Eve, Adam had another wife named Lilith. In this myth, Adam and Lilith, not Adam and Eve, are the sources of all human life.

of apocalyptic ending offering the discovery of some clear truth, and many fans were very disappointed by it. According to an interview with *Evangelion* director Anno Hideaki, this was the originally planned conclusion. However, amidst a storm of protest it was decided to create a film series with the last two episodes rewritten. In this new version of the film *The End of Evangelion*, Shinji will be united with Lilith and the two will become one being without anxiety, suffering or refusal, precisely according to the Human Implement Plan.

As we have seen, the idea of new human evolution in the Human Implement Plan is not unique in apocalyptic fiction. In the manga version of *Nausicaä*, the Crypt stores the eggs of the calmer and wiser human beings, which will be used to put an end to barbaric humans and create new, improved ones. In the manga *AKIRA*, Kiyoko explains to Kaneda that the government gathered children with special supernatural powers and tried to explore the possibility of a new human evolution. These two plans aim for the evolution of each human individual and their communities and the world as the spaces to which they belong. The Human Implement Plan, however, is an attempt to destroy the boundaries of each individual and to remake them as a single entity. Communities, societies, nations, and the world—in other words, interpersonal relationships—will no longer be necessary.

In this film version, Shinji finally chooses the world where the Other exists, and is left lying on the shore with Asuka. The world is devastated by an apocalyptic catastrophe, and only these two seem to have survived. Even though he has chosen to live with the Other, Shinji tries to strangle Asuka out of fear of refusal. While he is strangling her, Asuka touches Shinji's cheek, and Shinji stops and begins to cry. The film ends with

Asuka's words, "I feel sick of you." Shinji fears rejection, but he dares to choose to live with the Other despite the potential to be hurt. This choice, however, leads to the cruel reality of refusal. There is no hope or restoration after the apocalyptic catastrophe either: there is a bleak post-apocalyptic situation of complete despair, endless failure, and disillusionment. In the endings of both the TV series and the films, there is no vision similar to the protagonist's desperate but futile challenge of reserving some of his own identity against the status quo in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*. There is no possibility of a new dimension to the universe as in the ending of the film *AKIRA*, nor the presentation of the limitation of binary oppositions as in the ending of the manga *Nausicaä*. This strongly suggests the harshness and cruelty of living with the Other in reality.

*Evangelion* presents a very different, difficult, innovative style of new apocalypse. Usually apocalypse deals with opposing values and ambivalence, and we find the distinction between conflicting values becoming increasingly blurred in the late 1980s. In *Evangelion*, it becomes difficult to judge what relationship the opposing values have, for communal spaces such as local communities, societies, and the state, where values are created, are not a significant part of the story. Shinji cannot find meaning in fighting to protect Tokyo-3 or in living a life that is so close to death. He cannot know what makes the Angels his enemies and what makes Seele and the Nerv his allies.

As for visions of the future after the crisis has passed, there are new challenges and directions suggested in the apocalyptic stories of the 1980s, but there is little positive vision in any of the *Evangelion* features, which only suggest the inevitable difficulties and hopelessness in dealing with the Other. The TV series ends within Shinji's consciousness, since he finds it difficult to relate to the Other, such as his parents and

friends, although they do not confront or challenge him; they are part of himself, in some cases literally. Shinji in fact has very few inter-subjective relationships.<sup>9</sup> *Evangelion*'s power and popularity stem from precisely this: its 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.

### **The Birth of *Sekaikei***

Despite its complicated and ultimately hopeless story line, *Evangelion* remains immensely popular and its narrative style became central to the *sekaikei* genre. As previously explained, *sekaikei* fiction consists of settings in which the foreground (love between the male protagonist and the heroine) is directly connected to the background (apocalyptic crisis and the end of the world) without the mediation of the middle ground, such as communities and societies. As Uno Tsunehiro would have it, these are narratives that envision the kind of world in which *Evangelion*'s Shinji is not refused by Asuka in the end.<sup>10</sup> That is, *sekaikei* narratives avoid cruel realistic rejection by the Other, and instead offer total affirmation, especially by the heroine who can play the twin roles of perfect girlfriend and mother.

Representative *sekaikei* works according to this definition include the animation *Hoshi no koe* (The Voices of a Distant Star; 2002) by Shinkai Makoto (b. 1973);<sup>11</sup> the

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<sup>9</sup> The only exception is Shinji's relationship with his captain, Katsuragi Misato, with whom he lives. As explained above, Katsuragi is a mother/big sister figure for Shinji, and dies before the Human Implement Plan is executed.

<sup>10</sup> Uno Tsunehiro, *Zero nendai no sōzōryoku* (The Imagination in 2000s) (Tokyo: Hayakawa shobō, 2008), 83.

<sup>11</sup> *Hoshi no koe – The Voices of a Distant Star* (2002), dir. Shinkai Makoto (DVD, Comics Wave,

manga *Saishū heiki kanojo* (Saikano: The Last Love Song on This Little Planet; 2000-2001) by Takahashi Shin (b. 1967);<sup>12</sup> and the light novel *Iriya no sora, UFO no natsu* (Iriya's Sky, Summer of the UFOs; 2001-2003) by Akiyama Mizuhito (b. 1971).<sup>13</sup> These works are profoundly related to the infantile psychological theme of omnipotence and the adolescent psychological theme of maturity.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, they are both targeted at and consumed mostly by a young male audience, while apocalyptic stories such as *Space Battleship Yamato*, *Nausicaä*, and the novels of Murakami also have a sizeable female audience. The audience of *Evangelion* spans several generations, both male and female, though male fans are predominate. The audience for most *seikaikei* works is the young so-called “*otaku*,”<sup>15</sup> though the live-action film version of *Saikano* targets a young female audience too.

*Sekaikei* works offer themes and settings tailored to their young male target audience. The main character in *seikaikei* works is typically a male student who meets a

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2006). *Voices of a Distant Star* was highly acclaimed because it was written, directed and produced entirely by one individual on his Macintosh computer (friends provided the voices and the soundtrack). This animation won important awards in 2002, such as The Award for Image Design in the Entertainment Category in the Digital Contents Grand Prix, and The Highest Award of Public Offering Category at the 2002 Tokyo International Animation Fair 21.

<sup>12</sup> Takahashi Shin, *Saishū heiki kanojo* (Saikano: The Last Love Song on This Little Planet), 7 vols. (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2000-2001). Manga *Saishū heiki kanojo* was originally serialized in Shōgakukan's *Big Comic Spirits* magazine. Later, the manga story turned into the TV animation in 2002, original video animation in 2005, and the live-action film in 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Akiyama Mizuhito, *Iriya no sora, UFO no natsu* (Iriya's Sky, Summer of the UFOs), 4 vols. (Tokyo, Media Works: 2001-2003). The series was once nominated for the Seiun Award, a Japanese science fiction award for the best SF, though it was originally published as light novels targeted at teenagers. Later, it turned into original video animation in 2005, two video games for the Nintendo DS in 2007, and a manga series in the teen boys' magazine *Dengeki Maō* in 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Kasai, “*Sekaikei to reigai jōtai*,” 21.

<sup>15</sup> According to Azuma's argument, male *otaku* culture can be divided into four generations: the first generation was born around 1960 (those who watched *Space Battleship Yamato*); the second generation was born around 1970 (those who watched *Mobile Suite Gundam*); the third generation was born around 1980 (those who watched *Neon Genesis Evangelion*); and the fourth generation was born around 1990 (those who are accustomed to the Internet). In this section on *seikaikei* fiction, the main target audience is usually considered to be the fourth generation of male *otaku*.

girl, the heroine, who is an invincible warrior. In *Saikano*, for example, protagonist Shūji is in love with Chise, an ordinary high school girl who, it turns out, is the ultimate biological weapon, developed by the Japan Self-Defense Forces without her knowledge or consent in order to defend the world from imminent invasion. In *The Voices of Distant Stars*, Noboru is an ordinary junior high school student who is in love with his classmate, Mikako, a seemingly ordinary girl who, it is suddenly revealed, has been chosen as a mecha pilot for the United Nations Space Army which will fight a group of aliens who attacked humans. In *Iriya's Summer*, protagonist Asaba Naoyuki meets heroine Iriya Kana, a biological weapon made to fight space invaders. In all three stories, the heroines are extraordinarily empowered as biological weapons or mecha pilots. Also larger communities, society, and the national frame of Japan are largely undescribed (although there may be brief descriptions of the United Nations, for example), and the reasons for the war or impending crisis are not explained at all. *Evangalio* incorporates some middle distance such as society and community: it describes the UN forces, Seele, and Nerv as international organizations, as well as the ordinary junior high school attended by Shinji, Rei, and Asuka. However, the middle distance is largely absent from *sekaikei* works; even though the main characters are students, other students and teachers do not play important roles in the stories.

The heroines in these stories fight apocalyptic crises while the male protagonists are in love with these empowered girls but play little role in the fight. Rather, these boys recognize that they are just observers of the suffering heroines, and loathe themselves for their own incompetence. In *Evangalio*, Shinji is a (somewhat reluctant) fighter, but *sekaikei* protagonists do not even get this far. Indeed, many of the main male characters

in *sekaikei* fiction declare that they would rather *not* save the world to protect their heroines, but the appeal of their love makes the heroines decide to protect the world for the *boys'* sake (although they do not always succeed—at the end of *Saikano*, for example, the heroine chooses to become a spaceship-like object to save her boyfriend Shūji from the dying Earth). To be loved by the competent heroine, the passive protagonist indirectly gains the power to control the world. This is a form of the “super-fictionalized reality without violence and danger” discussed by Ōsawa Masachi following Slavoj Žižek; the protagonists want to be involved in an important fight without actually fighting, to encounter the Other without risk or stress, and to obtain power without facing danger.<sup>16</sup>

In *Evangelion*, Shinji's Others, such as his parents, his friends, or the Angels, are still described even though they turn out not to be totally Other for him in the end. These Others at least create tension and confrontation within Shinji. A father, albeit an incomplete/unnecessary one, plays an important role in the series. On the other hand, in *sekaikei* works, there is no true Other who creates such tension. It is also notable that there are no fathers or father figures in *sekaikei* stories, and that the figures of enemies are not described at all, even when they attack the Earth. Visible enemies and symbolic Others have long represented a threat in apocalyptic narratives; especially after the war, the atomic bombings and the United States often play the threatening role. In *sekaikei* stories, though, there are neither illustrations nor descriptions of enemies: we never know what they are, what they look like, and why they attack, just that they bring an end-of-the-world crisis.

Instead, there are heroines who truly love the protagonists, and who are empowered to fight for the world and brave and selfless enough to give their lives to save

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<sup>16</sup> Ōsawa, *Fukanōsei no jidai*, 81-83.

the protagonists. These heroines act almost as mothers, with unconditional love for the protagonists, and in fact a remarkable number of *seikaikei* stories end with the theme of returning to the womb, with boy characters showing no signs of growth or maturation—in *Saikano*, as mentioned, the heroine transforms into a spaceship-like object and encloses her boyfriend within herself to protect him. There are no death battles or serious conflicts with the Other depicted in these stories. This strongly suggests that the boy characters in *seikaikei* are seeking a kind of mother-infant relationship, and indeed some commenters are harshly critical of *seikaikei* works for this very reason.<sup>17</sup> *Seikaikei* apocalypse establishes itself without inter-subjective relationships and visions for the future. Baudrillard says there is no “unveiling” in the postmodernized world since there is nothing under the surface. This is particularly true of the *seikaikei* genre; in these stories, there is nothing but the hypertrophic self-consciousness of the protagonist.

Why has *seikaikei* fiction become so popular among young males in the early 2000s? One explanation is that the attraction of *seikaikei* works is related to the phenomenon of acute social withdrawal known as *hikikomori* that began to be recognized as a serious social problem in Japan in the late 1990s. *Hikikomori* (literally pulling away, used to describe both the phenomenon and its sufferers) refers to the phenomenon of individuals choosing to completely withdraw from social life, often seeking extreme isolation and confinement. The dominant nexus of *hikikomori* centers on the transformation from carefree youth to the responsibilities and expectations of adult life. When Saitō Tamaki conducted a major study on the phenomenon in 1998 he estimated the number of *hikikomori* at around one million,<sup>18</sup> but by 2005 the number had grown to

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<sup>17</sup> Uno, *Zero nendai no sōzōryoku*, 83.

<sup>18</sup> Saitō Tamaki, *Shakaiteki hikikomori* (Social Withdrawal) (Tokyo: PHP, 1998), 3-8.

1.6 million, sixty to eighty percent of them male. The most recent study of *hikikomori*, the first nation-wide study by the government, estimates the number of *hikikomori* at around 700,000, with an additional 1.55 million so-called semi-*hikikomori*.<sup>19</sup>

Another social problem, the worsening employment situation for youth since the bursting of the asset price bubble, is also related to the *sekaikei* worldview. Between the late 1990s and 2005, downsizing and unemployment increased and the number of people seeking jobs exceeded the demand for employees. This situation led to an increase in the number of young freeters and NEETs. Freeter is a Japanese term for people between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four who lack full-time employment or are unemployed, excluding homemakers and students; they may also be described as “permanent part-timers.” These young people do not start a career after high school or university but instead usually live with their parents as so-called “parasite singles,” and work at low-skilled and low-paid jobs. The low income they earn makes it difficult for freeters to start their own families, and their lack of qualifications makes it difficult for them to get full-time jobs later in their lives. It is estimated that the number of freeters in 2005 was around two million. It is true that some young people willingly chose more flexible work-styles, including part-time and freelance options. But this was mainly because the government at that time period could not offer concrete policies to alleviate the unemployment and underemployment of youth.<sup>20</sup>

NEET was originally a United Kingdom government acronym for people currently “Not in Education, Employment or Training.” In Japan, the classification

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<sup>19</sup> “Seven hundred thousand *hikikomori*,” *Yomiuri shinbun*, 24 July, 2010. Statistics on the number of *hikikomori* varies depending on the source, but it is widely believed to be increasing.  
<sup>20</sup> Charles Hugh Smith, “Japan’s Economic Stagnation is Creating a Nation of lost Youths,” *Daily Finance* (June 8, 2010). <http://www.dailyfinance.com/story/careers/japans-economic-stagnation-is-creating-a-nation-of-lost-youths/19580780/>.

comprises people aged between fifteen and thirty-four who are unemployed, unmarried, not enrolled in school or engaged in housework, and not seeking work or the technical training needed for work. It is estimated that there were about 847,000 NEETs in 2006. The increase in NEETs means that there are large numbers of non-*hikikomori* who are not willing to work or prepare for independence.<sup>21</sup>

The *hikikomori* phenomenon and the increase of freeters and NEETs show that it is difficult for Japanese youth, especially males, to accept their social role as adults; they cannot attain proper social status as mature members of society. Japanese commentators have offered analyses of the *hikikomori* phenomenon suggesting distinct causal relationships between the modern Japanese social conditions of anomie, *amae* and atrophying paternal influence in the nuclear family and child pedagogy.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes referred to as a social problem in Japanese discourse, *hikikomori* has a number of possible contributing factors. Young males may feel overwhelmed by contemporary postmodern Japanese society, or be unable to fulfill their expected social roles as they have not yet formulated the sense of personal *honne* and *tatemae*—“true self” and “public façade” —necessary to cope with the paradoxes of adulthood. These analyses can be applied to the increase in freeters and NEETs; these youth are supported by their parents, and do not have a firm intention to become independent and mature. These complicated factors led Japanese youth in the mid-1990s to withdraw from social relationships and from establishing mature identities as members of society.

According to Lacan, children mature as they learn that they are not omnipotent: in

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<sup>21</sup> Genda Yūji, “Jobless Youths and the NEET Problem in Japan,” *Social Science Japan Journal* 10, 1 (2007): 23-40.

<sup>22</sup> *Amae* is the word referring to the Japanese psychological construct of passive object love in Freudian terms, typically of the kind between mother and infant. See Doi Takeo, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, trans. by John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2001).

other words, one becomes gradually mature as one accepts one's lack of power and experiences resignation and loss.<sup>23</sup> *Sekaikei* works circumvent this process of becoming, and seem instead to affirm withdrawal and refusal of maturity. In this regard, it is natural that *sekaikei* began to appear in conjunction with the *hikikomori* phenomenon and the rise of freeters and NEETs in late 1990s Japan. *Sekaikei* works satisfy the desire of omnipotence by allowing their protagonists to indirectly control the world through their empowered girlfriends and negate the experiences of resignation, refusal and loss.

Considering the social issues of *hikikomori* and the increase in freeters/NEETs from the late 1990s, and the advent of the new zeitgeists such as “the animal age” or “the age of impossibility,” it is unsurprising that apocalypse in postmodern Japan comes to include no meaningful social interaction or Otherness. Accordingly, most stories with apocalyptic themes do not describe the world after the crises have passed, for they do not deal with change through growth. There can be no growth and maturity without committing to engagement with the Other and without connecting with a bigger community. *Sekaikei* works perversely insist on remaining in a state of adolescence and present pure love stories enhanced by end-of-world crises. The motif of the apocalyptic crisis no longer has a substantial impact; it has become a mere trope, a device that offers no visions related to the meaning of life. Apocalyptic stories in the 1980s still struggled with themes such as the past memories of Japan's past, the subjectivity of self in society or of the nation state in international relationships, the total Other such as the United States, and the future of morality. On the other hand, *sekaikei* apocalyptic stories repeatedly express themes such as absolute affirmation from the heroine as mother figure, the difficulties of relating to others, and withdrawal from social relationships.

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<sup>23</sup> Saitō, *Shakaiteki hikikomori*, 206-207.

As we saw in Chapter One, humanity has long been concerned with endings. Some traditions, like Hindu mythology, have understood time as cyclical, repeating a given cycle of beginnings and ends endlessly. Others, like the Judeo-Christian tradition, have understood time as linear, with one beginning and one final ending. Now, however, both patterns are challenged by postmodernity: for the first time in human memory, people are actually living in the post-apocalypse, they have already experienced the end, and will never experience another one.

Fiction in the 1960s is not post-apocalyptic, since many apocalyptic works have some sense of ending and offer visions of the future after the catastrophe has passed, such as we have seen in Ōe and Abe's works. *The Silent Cry* presents the positive vision of reconciliation after apocalyptic crisis, whereas *Inter Ice Age 4* offers the ruthless vision of a totally new future. Fiction in the early 1980s such as the film version of *Nausicaä* and *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* are not really post-apocalyptic; they have a sense of finality and seek restored visions. However, works in the late 1980s such as *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* and *AKIRA* are post-apocalyptic since they are based on the realizations that the world has already experienced an apocalyptic crisis and that transcendence or grand narratives are gone forever. *Evanglion* in the 1990s and *seikaikei* works in the 2000s are fully post-apocalyptic works; they describe a completely hopeless, visionless reality that does not change at all after the apocalyptic catastrophe has occurred. As society and culture become fully postmodernized, apocalyptic stories become post-apocalyptic.

We have also seen a transition in the understanding of time in apocalyptic fictions; the modern apocalypse is based on one linear timeline whereas postmodern apocalypse in the late 1980s and early 1990s begins to incorporate multiple linear timelines by

introducing fictional space. Totally postmodern fiction after 1995, on the other hand, does not seem to adhere to a single linear timeline; *Evangelion* has two: the timeline of reality and the independent timeline of Shinji's subconscious. Among *seikaikei* works, *The Voice of Distant Stars* incorporates multiple linear timelines, whereas other works have simple single linear timelines. Even though reality in the *seikaikei* fiction is based on a linear timeline/timelines, the stories end by returning to the beginning: the protagonists do not grow or change even after the crisis. Their timelines are not explicitly repetitive, but it can be said that their messages are closer to the cyclical worldview proposed by Eliade. However, the center of the cycle lacks anything sacred or archetypal; it has only the hypertrophic self-consciousness of adolescence.

Youth become mature when they have the ability to adapt to grand narratives, regardless of whether they admit or deny those narratives. When there are no grand narratives or transcendence to share in contemporary society, it is difficult for younger generations to learn the common cultural language with which to communicate with others who are distant or different from themselves. They tend to be satisfied with living in small communities where they can share interests, and their relationships are fluid since they can easily withdraw from these communities whenever they lose interest. Consequently, they do not take full responsibility for the choices they make in their own lives or in their relationships with others. This is what *seikaikei* works describe: characters who are either concerned with the close relationship of love or fighting a world crisis but who do not have grand narratives to which they adapt or react. All the important decisions are made by the heroine mother figures.

In the previous chapters, we have seen that apocalypse has provided a frame for

narrating stories of the end, describing the relationships between opposing values and the confrontation with the Other. However, contemporary Japanese apocalypse narratives paradoxically become stories *without* the sense of an ending, conflict between opposing values, or confrontation with the Other. Consequently, *seikaikei* fiction seems to be one of the best examples of representing long-term, or almost never-ending adolescence in Japanese youth. This raises the question: does postmodern post-apocalyptic fiction function only to affirm and celebrate its changeless, endless, and immature state? Is it possible for Japanese contemporary apocalyptic fiction to offer a sense of ending and certainty in an age without a sense of ending? Or is it truly an icon of Japanese cultural neoteny?<sup>24</sup> Are there any possibilities left for 2000s apocalyptic fiction to reach the Other or to give a vision of maturity? This also leads to another question: whether Japan will continue to understand “postwar” to mean the entire period between the end of World War II and the present, a habit which appears to be unique to Japan. As Carol Gluck points out, the Japanese “postwar” period seems to have no particular ending, despite the government having several times declared the period over.<sup>25</sup> Have the Japanese overcome the defeat and their own war crimes? What kind of indication for maturity is suggested in the fiction of the 2000s, nearly sixty years after the war?

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<sup>24</sup> Neoteny refers to the retention of juvenile or larval features in adults. A detailed discussion of the relationship between neoteny and humanity can be found in Ashley Montague, *Growing Young* (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 1989). The term is often used to refer to Japanese contemporary art and subculture products. Anime such as *Astro Boy*, *Doraemon*, and *Chibi maruko chan* and works by internationally renowned artists Nara Yoshitomo and Murakami Takashi are examples of Japanese cultural neoteny. See further details in Uchida Mayumi and Kojima Yayoi ed., *Neoteny Japan: Takahashi Collection* (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> As discussed in the Introduction, *senjo* literally means “after the war,” and refers to the period between World War II and the present. Carol Gluck discusses Japanese postwar longevity in “The End of Post War: Japan at the Turn of the Millennium,” *Public Culture* 10, 1(1997): 1-23.

## Possibility of Maturity in Post-apocalyptic Fiction in the 2000s

I would argue there is a possibility of maturity in postmodern post-apocalyptic fiction in the 2000s, except in the *seikaikei* genre. There have been a number of influential Japanese post-apocalyptic works in the 2000s. For instance, the 2008 anime *Sukai kurora* (hereafter *The Sky Crawlers*) directed by Oshii Mamoru (b. 1951), based on Mori Hiroshi's novel series of the same name, depicts a challenge for realistic hope.<sup>26</sup> In a number of interviews, Oshii stresses that the film targets young people who cannot find positive meaning in life. He says that he wants to send a message to them by showing them "true hope."<sup>27</sup>

*The Sky Crawlers* is set in a post-apocalyptic world where, although the world is at peace, in order to ease the tensions of a populace accustomed to war and aggression, private corporations contract fighter pilots to stage combat operations against each other for show. The pilots are called *kirudore* or kildren, and they live eternally in adolescence until shot down in battle. They are clones, reproducible beings without a decisive end/death, but the kildren themselves do not know this, and it is not explicitly indicated that this warfare is a show; it appears that it does not matter for the kildren whether or not it is real.

Protagonist Kannami Yūichi is one of the kildren, a battle plane pilot. In the novel version, he introduces himself thus: "I am the pilot of a battle plane. My daily job is to fly the plane and kill people. Today I use my hand to . . . eat a hamburger as well as

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<sup>26</sup> Mori Hiroshi's novel *The Sky Crawlers* series has six volumes including a collection of short novels. The first volume, *The Sky Crawlers*, was published in 2001, and the last volume, *Sukai ekuripusu* (Sky Eclipse), in 2008. The film *The Sky Crawlers* is based on the story in the first volume.

<sup>27</sup> Oshii Mamoru, interview in *Yomiuri shinbun*, 28 April, 2008.

to erase the lives of two people.”<sup>28</sup> The catastrophic crisis of war is a daily occurrence in this novel; Kannami experiences various dangers and faces death every time he flies his plane, but these crises never end. This is the ultimate post-apocalyptic novel.

Near the end of the story, Kannami learns that he has been cloned from the former pilot of his plane, Kurita Jinrō, who was in love with Kusanagi Suito, also a pilot. Kusanagi shot Kurita to death on his request; she agreed to do so since she loved him and could not bear to continue to lose him repeatedly. Kusanagi and Kurita believed that his death would be permanent if he was shot, but Kurita has been reproduced as Kannami; the warfare company needs to maintain his excellent combat skills. Kusanagi longs to be killed by Kannami since she feels the profound despair of eternal life without permanent death.

While Mori Hiroshi’s novel version ends when Kannami shoots Kusanagi, it emphasizes the reality of endless despair. Oshii’s film version, however, has a different ending. Kannami asks Kusanagi to live until she can change things, and dies battling the invincible ace pilot called “The Teacher” on the enemy side, the sole adult male pilot in this show-warfare. The film ends with the scene in which a new pilot, a clone of Kannami, is appointed under the command of Kusanagi. In this film, death no longer functions as an absolute end; the visionless life of the children, eternal adolescence without maturation, repeats as a sort of cruel time loop. In fact, existing cloning technology in our own world makes it at least theoretically possible that human beings could be cloned, meaning that someone much like ourselves could live on after our death. The idea of cloning helps to enhance the feeling of eternal repetition in contemporary

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<sup>28</sup> Mori Hiroshi, *Sukai kurora* (The Sky Crawlers) (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 2004), 245-246. My translation.

culture.

Neither the novel nor the narrative of the film present hope explicitly, even though Oshii says that he wanted to do so, and a number of critics agree that the film is far from encouraging for youth. Kannami challenges an invincible enemy, the ace pilot called “The Teacher,” the sole adult pilot in the show warfare who has never lost in combat, a clear symbol of patriarchal power and the authoritative adult society. Also, “The Teacher” can be read as a symbol of the United States; the film does not give the locations of the battles or the nationalities of the private military companies, but the names of the airplanes in the company to which Kannami and Kusanagi belong are all in classical Japanese, while the names of the airplanes on Teacher’s side are all English, and their airplanes resemble those used by the United States in World War I.

The film’s ending—in which Kannami loses a battle and a new pilot, a clone of Kannami, is appointed under the guidance of Kusanagi—reveals that death cannot offer a sense of ending. Even though Kannami asks Kusanagi to continue to live until she can change things, and Kusanagi agrees, the entire narrative seems to represent a profound stagnation. There is almost no difference between life and death, for death in this film can no longer end eternal life. In addition, the story shows that youth always lose against the world of the mature adults, and symbolically indicates that Japan cannot escape the influence of the United States; there is no space left for Japan as a nation and for Japanese youth to avoid their inferiority, immaturity, and imperfection. It seems cruel and discouraging to suggest to young people that they should find hope in the subtle difference between life and death.

However, another possible interpretation is that the film positively affirms this

very difference. We live in a world where life and death are remarkably close; indeed, for those who cannot find meaning or value in life there may be no real difference between life and death. Accordingly, as Ōsawa mentions, some youth venture to visit war areas to get a sense of life through proximity with death. The film *The Sky Crawlers* indicates that visiting dangerous war zones or attempting suicide offers no escape from endless reality; true hope is an incredibly subtle change hidden in our banal daily life.

It may appear cruel to suggest that there is almost no difference between life and death and that one has to find hope within such a small difference. However, Oshii claims that “true” hope is to find very ordinary visions, subtle values and small changes in our seemingly endless life; true hope is not in the dreamy, dramatic future visions that are often depicted in juvenile fiction, but is rather within quiet, delicate, small indications of change in our life without the sense of an ending. The meaning of life as defined by this film is to keep looking for such indications until something changes or we die. *The Sky Crawlers* declares that youth cannot win against adults and that Japan cannot escape from the influence of the United States; there is no decisive salvation or sense of an ending in our postmodern post-apocalyptic life. Yet the story also shows that there may be a path to maturity beyond stagnation by accumulating such small changes; at the very end of the film, Kusanagi stops her hand over a pack of cigarettes in front of Kannami’s clone, though she has smoked frequently before. This is a small sign of rejection of dependence and seeking for what a subtle change can bring. The film thus ends with a very small but certain change that shows Kusanagi seeking independence and maturity.

Another postmodern post-apocalyptic fiction in the 2000s that can indicate the way to maturity is *Kuwontamu famirīzu* (hereafter *The Quantum Families*) written by

Azuma Hiroki in 2009 (b. 1971).<sup>29</sup> *The Quantum Families* is the first novel by Azuma, a philosopher and critic. The novel is science fiction based on the quantum theory that claims the possibility of a multiverse, for an electron and an atom can be a particle as well as a wave at the same time in the micro world. The protagonist, Ashifume Yukito age thirty five in the year 2007, is a novelist as well as a university lecturer; he studies Murakami Haruki and wrote a thesis on *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. He married Yurika in 1999 but they have no child, for Yurika has refused to have sex with him since 2005. One day, he gets an e-mail from his daughter dated 2035. This future daughter invites Yukito to visit her in Arizona; he goes to see her, but she is not there.

When he returns to Japan, he enters another reality where a different Yurika and his three year old daughter Fūko live. The story explains that as of the 2020s advanced “trans-worlds” technology makes it possible to communicate with other worlds. Yukito gradually learns that he has a daughter, Fūko, in this parallel world A. In his original world, he learns that he will rape Yurika and commit suicide a year later, and a son named Riki will be born after his death. In parallel world B, he finds out that he will be a terrorist and will commit suicide during a terror attack. In parallel world C, he will lose his memory and commit double suicide with a young woman. From four different worlds, Yukito and his family are gathered by Yurika, who belongs to parallel world C and the year 2036.

This parallel world C is headed for catastrophic extinction due to a disease called “Retrieval Identity Disorder.” This disorder is caused by the ability to travel between worlds: people go insane since they cannot distinguish their own original memory from

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<sup>29</sup> Azuma Hiroki, *Kuwontamu famirīzu* (The Quantum Families) (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 2009).

the memories of their other selves in the parallel worlds. The population of sufferers explodes in 2033, and people begin to avoid communication with the parallel worlds. Then, the advanced civilization degenerates to the premodern level.

Sixty-nine year-old Yurika (whom I will call “aged Yurika”) gathers all her family members in this apocalyptic world C in 2036 to make a confession. She tells them that she has been extremely jealous about the relationship between Yukito and a young woman called Nagisa. In the original world and in parallel worlds A and B, this young woman is a fan of Yukito’s work. In parallel world C, she takes care of the Yukito who has lost his memory, and the two eventually commit double suicide. However, all four worlds share in common a past incident in which high school student Yukito attempted to rape elementary school student Nagisa. Yurika hates and is also profoundly jealous of their relationship and hidden secret, and wants to confess that such profound desire and hatred can transcend the parallel worlds and destroy others.

After listening to Yurika’s confession, Yukito decides to live with aged Yurika, adult Riki, adult Fūko and toddler Fūko as a family in the dying parallel world C. Yukito destroys the possibility of sending Riki, Fūko and himself back to their respective worlds and of saving the dying world. At the end of the story, it is hinted that he dies in world C but at the same time, he enters his unconscious world with aged Yurika, adult Fūko, three year old Fūko and adult Riki. He decides to live his own life that is “fake, but only one life, full of mistakes but with no restart.”<sup>30</sup>

However, the book does not end with Yukito’s death; it has one more short chapter titled “Outside The Story.” This chapter describes the issue of Yukito’s sin; Yukito confesses to Yurika that he attempted to rape Nagisa nineteen years ago, and promises to

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<sup>30</sup> Azuma, *Kuwontamu famirīzu*, 359. My translation.

turn himself in to the police. Yurika decides to marry him if he atones for his sin against Nagisa, but she says that she will not accept him until he goes to the police. When three and a half years have passed since his confession, Yukito realizes that Yurika has never forgiven him; they have not had sex since the day of the confession. The side story ends with Yukito deciding to go to the police in order to continue to love his wife.

It is interesting that the theme of sin permeates this science fiction world with its physics, computer science, and network theories. The story is about a world that has the most advanced technologies, yet the core of the story is about a family relationship, fatherhood, and the idea of sin. At the end of the main narrative, Yukito declares that he will give his children a piece of advice as a father for the first time, even though “this Yukito” never had a child in his original reality. Yukito tells the children that they can sacrifice Yukito or Yurika if they cannot come out of the repeated spell of hatred that their family carries in every universe; he decides to take all the consequences of his past sin as a father. Also, in the extra chapter, Yukito finally decides to take responsibility for his past sin to regain his wife Yurika’s trust. The story repeatedly insists that we have many choices in a multiverse like the one depicted, but clearly this does not mean that we can escape from real responsibility or past sin: the emotions tied to these are never erasable. Even in facing an apocalyptic crisis, one cannot escape from interpersonal relationships and the profound emotions that arise within and around them.

This is an extended metaphor for Japan, its war responsibility, and its “postwar period”; the war left indelible mental and physical scars on people in Asia, and the defeat left Japanese people, who had dedicated their lives to the nation and a god who became merely a man, confused and despondent. Even though Japan was revived by its long

period of economic success and has established seemingly peaceful relationships with other Asian nations, the scars tear open whenever people begin or are forced to remember the past, as is evident from the protests of other Asian countries which erupt over visits by various Japanese officials to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. Uno Tsunehiro has declared that the *senjo* period is over since the grand narratives that defined communal Japan have been lost.<sup>31</sup> Yet, there remain people who suffer from the memories of violence, disillusionment, despair, sorrow and distrust of the war, and people continue to be directly or indirectly influenced by the shock of the defeat and Japan's hidden war crimes.

*The Quantum Families* demonstrates the reality that such distrust never truly disappears in relationships with others. Whenever right-wing Japanese intellectuals try to bowdlerize history textbooks to soften their discussions of Japan's war crimes—which they do with some regularity—angry protests arise in other Asian nations. International sporting events are often disrupted by anti-Japanese sentiment; in fact, Japanese and Korean youth often turn to virtual violence via Internet hacking and denial-of-service attacks. *The Quantum Families* shows that in order to come out of the loop of repeated violence and misdeeds there is no choice but to take full responsibility. To become a father in this novel means to become a person who takes responsibility for his deeds both past and future; Yukito chooses to be a father and to be mature at the high cost of his physical life in reality, even though his family are fake. He chooses to live with his fictional family for they are the only family that he has and he understands that he must be responsible for them.

There is another possible approach to understanding this novel as well: the meta-

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<sup>31</sup> Uno, *Zero nendai no sōzōryoku*, 280.

fictional standpoint of the protagonist. Yukito has seen three different parallel universes and his own future in his original world; in one world he lives a happy life with his wife and daughter, and in another he is a terrorist. In still another, he has lost all his memories, and he will commit suicide in the future of his original world. In the parallel universes he has numerous different lives and choices. Yukito initially decides to go back to his original world, accepting that Fūko and Riki will go back to their original worlds too. However, after Yurika's confession, he decides to live with aged Yurika, adult Fūko, toddler Fūko, and Riki in the dying world; he realizes he can never escape his relationships with them even in thousands of different versions of his life.

The choices Yukito faces recall those faced by the protagonist at the end of Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, who chooses to stay in the fictional subconscious world rather than going back to reality with his shadow; he ultimately chooses to leave the seemingly perfect town and go to the forest, but he still remains both in the fictional world and inside of the wall. In fact, there are frequent references to *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* in *The Quantum Families*, and the latter is clearly influenced by the former.<sup>32</sup> While *Hard-Boiled Wonderland* gives its protagonist two major choices of reality or fiction, *The Quantum Families* gives its protagonist three: reality, fiction, or a hybrid. Yukito can go back to his unhappy original world, or he can stay in the parallel world with Yurika and three year old Fūko where he is the most successful and happy. Instead, he chooses to live with his family members from all the different worlds in a bleak, visionless post-apocalyptic world. From one point of view this might be considered stupid or even crazy, but the important thing is that the answer

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<sup>32</sup> In the ending of *The Quantum Families*, there are two bold lines saying, "Hard-boiled Wonderland is not righteous/ we live in the End of the World."

to the larger questions the narrative deals with can be found neither in the “happy ending” of returning to reality nor the eternal game of self-confinement in fiction. The answer—indeed, the only real choice—is to accept responsibility; Yukito does not know whether he will be happy or unhappy with his multi-universal family. His choice is not realistic—at least, not for his family members, each of whom has his or her own different reality—but neither is it totally fantastical: Yukito could have chosen a happier and more promising world. However, he positively affirms the present situation in his choice to live with them. Azuma argues that the contemporary postmodern world is meta-fictional and game-like.<sup>33</sup> As I explain in my discussion of virtual online worlds in Chapter One, just as there is really no “outside” of this game-like world, there is really no “inside” either: we cannot fully confine ourselves within it, for this game is not absolute, but at the same time so much of human life is technologically mediated and indeed located within virtual spaces that the two are interconnected to the point that ultimately there is no meaningful difference between them. Therefore, as *The Quantum Families* suggests, we need to recognize the fact that our world is game-like and that there are numerous other choices and consequences available. However, despite knowing these facts, we still need to affirm the moment of choice-making as reality.

We long have met Others through apocalyptic crises; through opposing them, fighting them, or reconciling with them we learn to live with them. Also, as we have seen, various values clash and thereby create new visions and hope through the crisis. However, when there is no Other and no opposition of values, the result is an endless, futureless world. Japanese apocalyptic fiction in the 2000s illustrates the possibilities of

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<sup>33</sup> Azuma Hiroki, *Gēmuteki riarizumu no tanjō* (The Birth of the Game Reality) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2007), 287.

such a meta-fictional worldview; *The Sky Crawlers* and *The Quantum Families* make use of what I call the spiral concept of time—a hybrid of cyclical time and multiple linear time. In these stories, time repeats endlessly, but it also spirals subtly upward. While *seikaikei* apocalypse refuses growth and interpersonal relationships, other apocalyptic works in the 2000s challenge their circular approach and indicate directions for the development of maturity. To affirm one's choice and become responsible for it, I argue, will lead to the way of encountering the unknown, often fictional, but always meaningful Other.

## Conclusion

*I am still a child,  
and sometimes, my right hand kills people.  
In turn,  
someone's right hand will kill me.  
Until then,  
without being bored,  
I need to continue to live  
as a child.<sup>1</sup>*

—Mori Hiroshi, *The Sky Crawlers*

We have seen that there was an apocalyptic tradition in premodern Japan, but that it was less influential than the Western apocalyptic tradition. In Japan, the cyclical idea of time, which was introduced by Buddhism, dominated because transience became the central ideology in premodern Japan. Early Japanese apocalyptic thought often included binary oppositions such as heaven and hell, virtue and vice, eternal and temporal, and there was no confrontation between them. Otherness is described as something distant and unreachable, such as another world or the Pure Land. As time went by, apocalyptic thought gradually developed into a subversive ideology to counter opposing values and dominant others such as powerful authorities. In the Edo period there emerged several apocalyptic movements that sought social reform through destructive action, and people tried to act against the powerful by establishing their own values and aesthetics. Here, the Other was something reachable and contestable, though the relationship between self and Other was not always equal.

Modernization, the first major discontinuity in Japanese history, brought to Japanese apocalypse the linear concept of time and a more specific and concrete Other:

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<sup>1</sup> Mori Hiroshi, *Sukai kurora*, 124-125. My translation.

the West. Imported science fiction began to focus on the astronomical theme of the end-of-the-world crisis. “Modernization” in the Meiji period for most practical purposes meant “Westernization”: it was brought by a foreign force, and it was extremely rapid and abrupt compared, for example, to the gradual shift of political power from the Heian period (794-1185) to the Kamakura period (1186-1333). Meiji and Taishō science fiction often depicted an overwhelming crisis as the symbol of inescapable modernization. However, the majority of the endings of these works avoided final devastation by relegating the apocalypse to dreams, suggesting that it was very difficult for people in this period to reconcile modernization or Westernization with Japanese traditional identity. Visions of the world after the catastrophic crises, therefore, were also carefully avoided in narratives of the period.

The 1945 atomic bombings and their aftermath, however, made it impossible to continue relegating apocalyptic events to dreams. Japan had now become the first nation to experience a nuclear attack.<sup>2</sup> The facts that humans had the power to destroy the world and that this awful power had been deployed against Japan fundamentally changed the Japanese apocalypse; the impact of the bombings is endless, for they destroyed the identity and tradition of Japan as a nation. This is the first time that Japanese apocalypse paradoxically comes to connote an endlessness that never returns to the sacred center.

However, the modern apocalyptic fiction from the 1960s that we have looked at takes a simple linear timeline and still attempts to achieve concordance of the past as beginning, the present as middle, and the future as end through confrontation of opposing

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<sup>2</sup> It is often claimed that Japan is the only country to have experienced nuclear war; this is incorrect: World War II was the human species’ first (and to date, only) nuclear war; Japan remains the only country to have suffered a nuclear *attack*, while the United States is the only country to have *deployed* nuclear weapons during war, but many countries now possess nuclear weapons stockpiles.

values: it still struggles to incorporate the meaning of the defeat and the atomic aftermath within its historical continuum. By introducing the conflict of opposing values such as past/present, rural/urban, and Japan/U.S., Ōe Kenzaburō tries to unite the past, the present and the future of Japan and its identity in *The Silent Cry*. On the other hand, Abe Kōbō describes the fundamental discontinuity between present and future by contrasting the untenable present and the undesirable future. *Inter Ice Age 4* envisions the future as explicitly different from the present: it presumes some sort of progress, which may not be positive. It also does not place the future in a fictional setting: the flooding, the aquans, the retreat of governments below the waves are all placed on a continuum with the novel's present reality, a concordance of beginning, middle, and end.

Apocalyptic fiction in the 1980s, however, gradually drifted apart from this concordance of time and the confrontation of opposing values as Japanese society moved into the fictional age. In the fictional age, visions of the future do not belong to the real world, and opposing values become relativized. While Murakami Haruki's protagonist in *The Town and its Uncertain Wall* chooses to go back to reality and reconcile with the past in the end by regaining his shadow, in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* the protagonist chooses to stay in his subconscious world forever. This town and its story, however, have been artificially modified and implanted by a scientist, and are therefore fictional. The shadow of the protagonist as both Other and the past chooses to leave the town by itself; there is no reconciliation or union between the two. There is no realistic vision in the end.

In subcultural genres in the 1980s, apocalyptic fiction underwent a similar change. For example, Miyazaki Hayao's film version of *Nausicaä in the Valley of the Wind* is

firmly in the perfect apocalyptic archetype. On the other hand, the manga version dismisses past ideals of purification, progress and symbiosis, and instead affirms the contaminated and contradictory and abandons the will to control the future by leaving the future of humanity to nature or fate. The manga narrative shows that human ideals of progress and purification can no longer be sought in reality, although the story does not explicitly present the shift from the idealistic age to the fictional age. The film and the manga *AKIRA* by Ōtomo Katsuhiro are clearer examples of celebrating fictional ideals and the birth of the postmodern apocalypse; the confrontation between Akira and Tetsuo, both morally ambivalent identities, brings a new universe, multiple linear timelines, and new political subversiveness. The works do not indicate realistic visions for the real future after the catastrophe, yet they successfully present vivid visions for the new-born fictional world. Thus, Japanese apocalypse in the 1980s gradually moves away from the concordance of time and confrontation of opposing values, reflecting the postmodern trend that deconstructs the meanings of reality.

In 1995, Japan experienced two major apocalyptic incidents that revealed the limit of the fictional age as a zeitgeist and entered the new total postmodern zeitgeist. The animal age, or the age of impossibility, is one in which inter-subjective relationships and dialectic confrontations of values begin to disappear, even though we long for them. The most influential subcultural fiction of the 1990s, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, directly connects apocalyptic crisis to the inner world of its fourteen year-old protagonist, Shinji. We gradually come to realize that there is no real Other who confronts him, and that there is no obvious opposition between values, since the reasons for the enemy's attacks and the secrets of the organizations that battle them remain opaque. Further, the vision of the

future after the crisis has passed is abandoned in both *Evangelion* series. The film Shinji faces the total disapproval and rejection of the heroine. He is destined to remain in an eternal adolescence without interpersonal relationships.

*Sekaikei* fiction, the genre of love stories in which the fate of the apocalyptic world crisis and the romantic relationship are interconnected, emerged after *Evangelion* and targets a younger teenage male audience. While *Evangelion* has a hopeless but realistic ending in which the male protagonist is refused by the heroine, *sekaikei* fiction perversely seeks the complete affirmation of the male protagonist by the heroine, who plays the somewhat disturbing hybrid role of the perfect girlfriend/mother. There is no real Other in *sekaikei* narratives, only the love relationship between the male protagonist and the empowered heroine who fights the enemy. The loss of the Symbolic and the disappearance of society as the middle field is acuter than in *Evangelion*; *sekaikei* narratives feature almost no references to or depictions of society or community, and there is no international organization or nation that can explain the reason for the apocalyptic crisis which drives the narrative. *Sekaikei* apocalypse thus establishes itself without Otherness as post-apocalyptic narrative without endings or maturity.

*Sekaikei* fiction in the form of light novels, anime, manga, and video games is one of the most powerful genres in 2000s Japanese subculture. The *sekaikei* worldview represents endless adolescence without progress or maturity. Despite the growing popularity of *sekaikei* fiction there are still Japanese apocalyptic works that seek some sense of change in our postmodern and post-apocalyptic time. Oshii Mamoru's anime *The Sky Crawlers* depicts the ultimate endless world of eternally young children who can never truly die because they are clones, and Azuma Hiroki's *The Quantum Families*

presents the endless variations of life by allowing its characters to move between parallel worlds. Both works see the post-apocalyptic world as endless, immature, and visionless. However, by proposing the realistic “true” hope of waiting for subtle changes or of taking full responsibility in relationships, these post-apocalyptic stories suggest a way to find a small change that leads to maturity. These stories do not present time as cyclical. Rather they depend on what I have called the spiral movement of time; although the characters are living in the endless cyclical patterns of life, they wait for a small change that can lead to upward movement, forming the impetus for independence and maturity.

As discussed, Japanese apocalypse has changed in reflection of and in response to major social and cultural changes that created discontinuities of identity for the nation. Apocalyptic stories attempt to deal with the threatening symptoms of major changes in order to make sense of the present situation, to decrease anxiety, and to create clearer visions of the future; authors and readers try to find meaning in social unrest, difficulties and upheavals brought by various changes through writing and reading apocalyptic fiction. Apocalypse has revealed what is at stake in times of major socio-political change; the Other in apocalyptic narratives is something or someone unknown, or something or someone that brings decisive change to the present situation. The apocalyptic story clarifies such unknown things/beings and the dynamic between self and Other. For example, Otherness has long implied ideas of death and the afterworld in contrast to life and this world. Otherness in apocalyptic fiction gradually widens its scope from death to something that *leads* to death, such as catastrophic disaster, plague, famine, war, or climate change. In the modern period, as the threat of catastrophic natural disasters decreases, wars between nation-states as confrontations between

international Others increase. Consequently, the threatening Other symbolically comes to be the powerful: the United States and (its) destructive nuclear weapons. Modern visions of apocalypse dealt with the crucial crisis of cultural and social discontinuity brought about by contacts with these symbolic powerful Others.

Since the end of the Second World War, apocalyptic stories have attempted to rehabilitate Japanese national as well as individual (male) identities that were destabilized by the defeat, the Occupation, and the threatening Other of the United States. Analysis of postwar Japanese apocalyptic fiction reveals that apocalyptic discourse has changed its role as a tool according to the zeitgeists of various periods. Primarily targeting adult males, apocalyptic stories before the 1980s sought immediate recovery from the identity crisis of catastrophic defeat. After recovering from the devastation of the war, they attempted to deal with realistic issues such as a new vision of national identity and Japan's relationship with the US as threatening Other. By retelling the catastrophic aftermath of the World War II, apocalyptic stories sought a way out of the trauma of defeat; they attempted to reconcile the present with the traditional past and to rebuild a stable national identity and a modern individual (male) identity.

However, even when the Japanese economy was flourishing in the 1970s and 1980s and Japan appeared to have recovered from the defeat, the influence of the U.S. and the shadow of defeat still remained; even as Japan rapidly gained second place in the international economy, it remained unable to wield independent power in the international political arena. It became difficult for Japanese society in this time period to offer either a clear solution to this trauma or a bright vision of the future, and apocalypse in Japan moved from the realistic to the fictional arena, targeting male youth

in their teens or twenties. These young males, who grew up after the failure of the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s, longed for stories that imaginatively described survival of crises; they gave up the hope of making their ideals reality and began to seek them instead in fiction. To face the crisis of the end of the world gave meaning to their stagnated lives and the possibility of reconsidering the defeat and historical discontinuity, even though in stories with fictional settings and solutions.

When society becomes highly postmodernized after the mid 1990s, major social changes are less frequent, and we no longer feel the presence of death in our daily lives. When our connections with our larger communities become weaker due to the loss of grand narratives, we begin to see the horrifying Other in ourselves rather than in the outer world. What is at stake is the loss of the middle field—common social languages, communalities, local communities, direct human relationships, and the decline of the power of the Symbolic. In contemporary Japan it is becoming increasingly easy, and increasingly natural, for people to live in isolation from their local communities, and to shop, eat, and even satisfy their sexual desires without the intervention of the Other. Virtually anything can be purchased readily and with little or no communication online, while fast food outlets and the sex industry obviate the need for human communication or for anything deeper than a vendor-client relationship in the real world.

Along with this transition, the Japanese apocalypse has changed its scope and audience again. The target audience is now young boys, including junior high school students, who can find no connection with the “outer space” of society and community, and the apocalypse has come to deal only with the inner world, using the underlying theme of the world-ending crisis. Since the mid 1990s, it has increasingly become

difficult for young people to become fully independent, legitimate members of society; it is difficult for them to join society as mature, responsible adults. To join a community and survive even in fictional settings, therefore, is no longer a choice for these youth in establishing their identities. Many apocalyptic stories in contemporary Japan have come to deal with romantic love stories that affirm incompetent boys with the almost incidental enhancement of an end-of-the-world crisis. These apocalyptic stories no longer bother to seek solutions for the trauma of defeat, and no longer bother to seek maturity, instead withdrawing completely from meaningful social relationships.

Thus Japanese postwar apocalypse reveals how people, especially male youth, gradually have lost their connection with society and community and remain in eternal adolescence, totally lacking a way out of the suppressed traumatic memories of the defeat and the atomic bombings. Works by Ōe and Abe seek to rehabilitate the damaged identities of the nation and the individual, and apocalyptic fiction in the 1980s and 1990s, especially the manga version of *AKIRA*, tackle the serious discontinuity of the defeat and ongoing trauma by presenting protagonists with a fictional but concrete will to become independent and mature. However, the trauma and discontinuity are avoided in the contemporary Japanese apocalypse; the world has already been destroyed, but we never find out why or by whom.

There are two ways suggested for coping with these contemporary crises in Japanese apocalyptic narratives of the 2000s. One is to use the everlastingly incomplete, immature state as a means of inversion. Postwar Japanese culture has long been preoccupied with how to become fully mature after the defeat; Japan has struggled with Douglas MacArthur's characterization of the nation in 1951 as being like a twelve year-

old boy by the standards of modern civilization.<sup>3</sup> Keith Vincent points out that there have been two major discourses to explain the immaturity of Japan after the war: one sees the defeat and the occupational period in terms of castration, making Japanese culture impotent and childish, while the other suggests that Japan became a maternal society of absent working fathers and smothering stay-at-home mothers who impose their desires on their children.<sup>4</sup> To cope with this immaturity, critics such as Etō Jun in the 1960s and Katō Norihiro, Asaba Michiaki, and folklorist Ōtsuki Takahiro in the 1980s offer various ways to become fully mature.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, in the 1990s Miyadai Shinji argued that Japan can no longer be mature, since the traditional society that could offer normative values was completely lost in the 1980s and the new postmodernized society cannot offer the normative meanings of life and values.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary Japan must remain in a state of cultural neoteny forever.

However, Japanese contemporary art has appropriated and subverted this theme of cultural neoteny, creating new genres and artists who have won international attention.

Among these, artist Murakami Takashi is particularly aware of the immaturity in Japanese popular culture, claiming that it derives from the trauma of the atomic bombings and Japan's long dependence on the US after the defeat. However, instead of criticizing

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<sup>3</sup> Here, MacArthur compares Japan to the metaphorically forty-five year-old Euroamerican West. While this statement (delivered several weeks after his triumphant departure from Japan, on the occasion of his firing by President Truman) was not intended to be hostile, it is nonetheless revealing, wrapped up as it is in issues of racism/scientific racism, religion, colonialism, and paternity. Unpacking all its possibilities is far beyond the scope of this dissertation, but suffice it to point out that it underscores the father-son relationship between the (metaphorically) 45 year-old MacArthur/America and the 12 year-old son, Japan. MacArthur's absence, that is, his departure from the still occupied Japan, and his subsequent firing, made it forever impossible, in Freudian terms, for Japan to reach maturity by overcoming this father.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Vincent, "Nihonteki miseijuku no keifu" (The Genealogy of Japanese Immaturity), in *Nihonteki sōzōryoku no mirai: kuru japanorōjī no kanōsei* (The Future of Japanese Imagination: The Possibility of Cool Japanology), ed. by Azuma Hiroki (Tokyo: NHK shuppan, 2010), 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Uno, *Zero nendai no sōzōryoku*, 225-227.

<sup>6</sup> Miyadai, *Owarinaki nichijō wo ikiro*, 168-170.

this immaturity, Murakami joyfully uses it to counter Western cultural authority.<sup>7</sup> It might be argued that *seikaikei* works have some similarities to Murakami's art. Although many *seikaikei* fictions depict adolescents in a state of powerlessness and insecurity, avoiding serious contact with unknown Others and fearing failure in relationships, as Karatani Kōjin argues in *The Origin of Modern Japanese Literature*, the confession of being incomplete and immature can paradoxically be a strategy for maneuvering power.<sup>8</sup> I do not see the *seikaikei* genre having reached a stage where it can be considered a meaningful tool for inversion, however. For one thing, unlike Murakami Takashi and his consciously immature art, it does not seem that *seikaikei* writers have any intention to be subversive or internationally relevant, and I am not aware of any indication that *seikaikei* consumers read the narratives in those ways either. This is not to say that the *possibility* is not there: *seikaikei* fiction *could* be used to send the political message that Japan has its own definition, style, and speed of maturity and/or as a form of resistance against the idea of maturity defined by Western ideology. *Seikaikei* narratives' cyclical approach to time, and their total lack of growth, however, undermine this possibility.

On the other hand, another way of coping with these crises is to wait for a chance to be mature even though the chances of growth are extremely small, and to be responsible for one's relationships even though they are fictional in nature. *The Sky Crawler* and *The Quantum Families* also postulate that we have already entered the post-apocalyptic age without major conflicts and endings, and claim that it is difficult to seek growth when endlessness and multiplicity dominate the cultural trend; the eternally young children and the reproduction of the protagonist in *The Sky Crawlers* implies the

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<sup>7</sup> Vincent, "Nihonteki miseijuku no keifu," 28.

<sup>8</sup> Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans. by Brett de Bary (Durham, N. C.: Duke University), 77.

obsolescence of maturity. That the protagonist in *The Quantum Families* is a father only in parallel worlds shows that fatherhood is no longer naturally achieved. The ending, which some read as the protagonist being able to be a father to his fictional children only in his subconscious, symbolically implies the impossibility of achieving realistic maturity. Also, loss in combat with “The Teacher” in *The Sky Crawlers* and the failure in *Quantum Families* of a terror attack against the United States planned by Yukito in parallel world B allegorically show that it is almost impossible for contemporary Japanese to overcome the trauma of defeat.

However, these works still do not give up a realistic hope of coping with stagnation; these stories indicate the small possibility of becoming mature by waiting for subtle changes and by taking full responsibility in relationships, albeit fictional ones. The Japanese contemporary apocalypse indicates the stagnated feelings of endlessness and the difficulty of maturity due to the loss of the middle field and the Symbolic; it presents unending repetition without interpersonal relationships or confrontation. However, some of the works still function to challenge readers to meet the (possibly fictional) Other and to wait for the banal but realistic hope of the discovery of a maturity not imposed by the West but defined by contemporary Japanese. We now live in a world where there is virtually no difference between first and last, beginning and end. Moreover, technology has blurred the boundaries between real and fictional. The contemporary Japanese apocalypse can no longer provide a decisive end, yet its imagination is able to reveal the fact that there is a possibility that Japan will face its past trauma and its future identity with its own style, speed and definition of maturity.

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