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Radiant Dreams and Nuclear Nightmares: Japanese Resistance Narratives and American Intervention in Postwar Speculative Popular Culture

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Media Studies
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Recommended Citation

Preliminary Information

Abstract

This project explores three distinct sets of Japanese and American postwar popular culture texts to demonstrate that there is a continuum of Japanese cultural interest in pacifism through resistance narratives in speculative fiction. Through close readings of *Godzilla*, *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Akira*, and *Metal Gear Solid*, which I compare with similar American texts, my project positions its objects of study as points of cultural resistance to hegemonic pro-American cultural products. Each text produces commentary on Japanese-American relations with specific respect to nuclear policy and military expansionism. Significant Japanese cultural producers have grown increasingly critical of Japanese-American cooperation since the end of the Second World War. These producers have conveyed a series of dire warnings to Japanese and American power-holders alike. This project broadly defines the postwar relationship between America and its sociopolitical vassal Japan as dually cooperative and oppressive by examining key points of nuclear, political, cultural, and technological convergence.

Keywords

Summary for Lay Audience

After the American nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the relationship between Japan and the relatively newly arrived Western superpower was changed forever. My project studies how several key Japanese popular culture franchises have historically expressed tension and anxiety over the post WWII vassal-ruler relationship between Japan and America, specifically concerning the questions of nuclear weapons, militarism, and imperialism. By studying globally significant Japanese popular culture texts against their American counterparts, my project demonstrates a disparity in how the two nations' postwar cultures have depicted and critiqued nuclear trauma, war devastation, and militarism in popular forms of storytelling. This disparity ultimately demonstrates a continued form of cultural resistance in Japanese popular culture that continually questions the unbalanced relationship between Japan and America and argues for increased national sovereignty for Japan that is equally removed from American power and Imperial Japanese tradition.

Acknowledgements

To my parents Ed and Donna for their unending support throughout this entire process and my life at large. To Maddy, Pat, and Archie for never failing to make me smile. To Tim for his patience, understanding, and insight. To Susan, Aldona, Nick, Warren, and Luke for helping shape the project and its scholar. To my colleagues Jess, Afsana, Man, Billie, Ryan, Charlotte, and Alyssa for listening to me complain all the time. To my friends and family who have been constant reminders that I am supported and cared for.

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Introduction: Detonation

The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth.

—Julia Kristeva
Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection

I choose to begin my project with this quote from Kristeva as I feel it accurately represents the paradox of nuclear abjection and horror. Nuclear power is creation, it is the most basic expression of nature in the breaking down and remaking of its most vital component the atom, but it is also terror and death. "Revelation" here for this project serves a dual purpose, as the revelation that humanity's ability to create and destroy now rivals that of God, but also as the revelation that in breaking the atom humans have made possible the near instantaneous destruction of the entire world. When I was in 11th grade my chemistry teacher decided to open one class in March with a brief discussion of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster which had just occurred on March 11, 2011. At the time I understood very little about nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, and even less-so about how those two forces are two halves of the same split atom. My parents' generation was raised on Cold War nuclear panic, duck and cover drills, Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, but in a post-Cold War world I found myself at a loss for the critical tools to unpack what had once again been visited on the people of Japan, the horror, the resurgent trauma, like a monster returning from the deeps. The Fukushima disaster ignited my fledgling interest in nuclear weapons and nuclear trauma and this curiosity only grew as I developed as a popular culture scholar. How can we make sense of nuclear horror, and how does the advent of the nuclear age appear and reappear in popular culture? What

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does a specific nation's history with nuclear devastation do to its cultural output and shared national psyche? This project aims to study Japanese popular culture primarily, with American counterparts in parallel, to discern answers to these questions, and where no answers can be found, produce more questions and more useful lines of thought to continue to unravel this great nuclear mystery.

As work on this project continued, I came to realize that the texts I have chosen to study here are concerned with much bigger dilemmas, ironically, than solely a rejection of nuclear violence. Rather prophetically, my use of Takashi Murakami's work *Little Boy* has led me to understand this project as a broader sketch of the postwar relationship between Japan and their neocolonial protectors, the United States. Initially, this project was only concerned with the representation of nuclear imagery and themes in Japanese and American popular culture, particularly on how these respective depictions opposed each other. Now, after several years of research, writing, and thinking, I have realized that what I am doing here is using key Japanese popular culture texts to demonstrate a continuum of resistant narratives, often but not exclusively with nuclear trauma at their core. This project will examine four key points of Japanese cultural resistance to American military imperialism, which this project imagines as a Hydra. Nuclear weapons are but a single head, along with cultural imperialism, military expansionism, the conglomeration of the military and information technologies, and even the rearmament of Japan itself. The remainder of this introductory section will provide background historical context for both Japan and America's relationship with the advent of the nuclear age. I will then introduce Takashi Murakami's work in *Little Boy* as this project's

chief theoretical grounding and will outline what is to come in the following chapters as a

series of explorations into the Japanese cultural psyche as reflected by its popular culture.

Postwar Ad Infinitum

In surveying John Hersey's November 1946 work *Hiroshima* I have had a very difficult

time picking out a particular instance of trauma that best encapsulates the effect of

nuclear weapons in microcosm. At the end of the first chapter, he describes the effects of

the blast itself rather subtly as the weapon exerted itself over one Miss Sakai,

> The ceiling dropped suddenly and the wooden floor above
> collapsed in splinters and the people up there came down
> and the roof above them gave way; but principally and first
> of all, the bookcases right behind her swooped forward and
> the contents threw her down... in the first moment of the
> atomic age, a human was being crushed by books.[1]

Hersey's journalistic account of the bombing and the weeks that followed is painfully

thorough. Nuclear trauma doesn't start and end with the blast, it is a long-drawn-out

process of biological, mental, and societal degradation. Hersey's stories in culmination

propose a single narrative, that the world was irrevocably changed on August 6th, 1945.

In an instant the world as we understood it was killed, and a new one brightly burst forth,

and it made a lot of people incredibly sick. Ceaseless vomiting, skin mutations, hair loss,

these are all of the immediately recognizable symptoms that popular culture has taught us

to associate with the effects of nuclear weaponry on the survivors of the initial blast, who

are then subject to radiation sickness. The ensuing economic collapse coupled with the

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[1] John Hersey, *Hiroshima.* (New York, A. A. Knopf: New York, AAKnopf, 1966,) loc. 243.

seemingly perpetually understaffed and overworked healthcare system in Japan bears

certain unsettling similarities to our own current Covid-19 pandemic disaster. Beyond

that, the mental and psychic reverberations of the blast are still being felt, they will likely

always be felt. These reverberations should be felt lest we forget the terrible potential of

these weapons that were so callously cast upon a completely unprepared civilian

population in a war that was otherwise all but won.[2] Howard Zinn continues this thought,

> Hiroshima was not an unfortunate error in an otherwise
> glorious war. It revealed, in concentrated form,
> characteristics that the United States had in common with
> the other belligerents—whatever their political
> nomenclature. The first of these is that commission and
> easy justification of indiscriminate violence when it serves
> political aims.[3]

Zinn also explains the more insidious nature of the nuclear question and the idea of

rational logical debates surrounding the use of these irrational and illogical

superweapons,

> The debate itself over the bombing proved a point. Could
> any truly civilized nation *debate* gas chambers for Jews or
> slavery for blacks? Would it matter who won the debate?
> The concession that these were debatable was enough. And
> after Hiroshima, the use of atomic bombs was debatable,
> the extermination of villages and cities debatable, modern
> wars of annihilation debatable.[4]

The total damage of the use of nuclear weapons extends beyond the blast, beyond the

sickness, and the psyche as well, it extends into the realm of what we deem humanly

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[2] Howard Zinn, *Postwar America: 1945-1971.*, History of American Society (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973,) loc. 308.

[3] Zinn, *Postwar America,* loc, 497.

[4] Zinn, *Postwar America,* loc. 278.

possible to inflict on others. The weapon's existence has already altered our fundamental humanity. If it accomplishes nothing else, I would be satisfied if this project engenders both a curiosity and a healthy fear of and hatred for the nuclear-ordered world so that we may never again know this type of devastation.

Another generative text of this project is Gunther Anders' *Burning Conscience*, which is correspondence between Anders himself, a German essayist and journalist, and Claude Eatherly, the pilot who flew the *Straight Flush* over Hiroshima in reconnaissance support of the *Enola Gay* and its nuclear payload. Wracked by his own "burning conscience" over what he had helped deliver to the world, Eatherly turned to pacifism and staunch anti-nuclear politics in the years following the Second World War. In particular, he was inspired by Anders' own writing "Commandments in the Atomic Age," which specifies, "your first thought upon awakening be: 'Atom'. For you should not begin your day with the illusion that what surrounds you is a stable world."[5] This quotation again signifies several things but chiefly that since the advent of the nuclear era, nothing else should be of greater concern to anyone than the eventual unmaking of the world. He continues that "we as mankind are 'killable'...not only mankind spread over the provinces of our globe; but also mankind spread over the provinces of time."[6]

Eatherly himself engaged in correspondence with a group named "Girls of Hiroshima" who wrote to him about the "scars or traces of injury in our faces and limbs, and we do

[5] Claude Eatherly and Günther Anders, *Burning Conscience: The Case Of The Hiroshima Pilot Claude Eatherly* (Verdun Press, 2015,) 11.

[6] Ibid.

wish that that horrible thing called 'war' shall never happen again either for us or for anybody living in this world."[7] Additionally, the group makes clear that they harbour no ill will towards Eatherly for his part, "You were perhaps ordered to do what you did, or thought it would help people by ending the war. But you know that bombs do not end wars on this earth."[8] Until his last day Eatherly remained resolved to "lend influence towards peace, end nuclear buildup, to safeguard the rights of all people regardless of race, color or creed."[9] How then did Eatherly's anti-nuclear politics pervade American popular culture, if at all? Despite his personal efforts, can we as cultural historians and scholars understand American popular culture output as truly anti-nuclear in comparison with its Japanese counterparts? It is the express thesis of this project that we cannot see the expressions as anti-nuclear given American popular culture's implicit and explicit closeness to entrenched American power and empire. I argue that American mainstream culture, like the two bombs used on Japan, is deployed in a callous and cavalier manner: little is done to impress the grave and ethereal consequences upon the world.

Ironically in the aftermath of World War II, it was Japan, and not America, that was made to rein in its future destructive potential through "Article 9" of the Japanese Constitution of 1946. In its second chapter "Renunciation of War" the Japanese constitution clarifies,

> Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on
> justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war

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[7] Eatherly and Anders, *Burning Conscience,* 25.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Eatherly and Anders, *Burning Conscience,* 31.

as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of
force as means of settling international disputes.
In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph,
land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will
never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state
will not be recognized.[10]

Despite its proposed sincerity, this article was actually drafted by the General

Headquarters of the Allied Occupation Forces under American General Douglas

MacArthur as a means of preventing Japan from waging war again in the future. This

article greatly affected and continues to affect the Japanese national psyche as it created a

state of dependence, vassal-hood even, between Japan and the United States, its occupier

who was now free to completely rebuild the nation as its perfect free-market capitalist pet

project.[11] Article 9, a reverberation of the nuclear blasts, is cited by Japanese Pop artist

and cultural critic Takashi Murakami in his exhaustive survey of Japanese popular culture

Little Boy.

Murakami outlines precisely how he believes the Japanese national psyche was altered,

or more accurately fixed in place, by the nuclear detonation in Hiroshima. *Little Boys*'

foreword, written by Frank L. Ellsworth for the New York City-based Japan Society

through which *Little Boy* work was published, outlines Murakami's thesis precisely, "Mr.

Murakami proposes a radical interpretation of historical forces that continue to shape

contemporary Japanese art and its distinct graphic languages, locating the birth of these

new cultural forms in the trauma and generational aftershock of World War II and its

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[10] "Article 9," *The Constitution of Japan,* (Constitute Project, 1946).

[11] Takashi Murakami, ed., *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, Bilingual edition (New York: Yale University Press, 2005,) 8.

atomic devastation."[12] Particularly, my project is most concerned with Murakami's

theory of "Pika-don" which translates from Japanese to English as "light blast" referring

to the flash and boom of nuclear weapons. Murakami supposes himself that,

> The two atomic bombs have left a permanent scar on
> Japanese history: they have touched the national nerve
> beyond the effects of the catastrophic physical destruction.
> "Pika-don" symbolizes the visual, aural, and other sensory
> imprints made on the Japanese psyche, which has been
> completely transformed in the wake of the collective
> subjection of the Japanese people to the horrendous
> experience of nuclear annihilation. Perhaps from this
> national trauma did *kawaii* and *otaku* cultures emerge in
> contemporary Japan.[13]

It is the goal of my project then to make use of Murakami's claim in light of Japanese

culture's American counterparts, and also to study how much of the essence of "Pika-

don" storytelling remains in Japanese and American transnational products.

Methods

The methodology of my project will vary slightly depending on the medium of the texts

that are being discussed. In short, I will employ semiotic close-reading analysis and myth

analysis, informed largely by Barthes, to discuss Japanese film and animation, but when

discussing video games, the medium's interactivity brings forth new challenges and

opportunities for analysis. My project's close reading method is borrowed from various

examples in Jonathan Culler's "The Closeness of Close Reading" in which he outlines

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[12] Frank L. Ellsworth, "Introducing Little Boy," *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, Bilingual edition (New York: Yale University Press, 2005,) vi.i

[13] Murakami 19. Here the term "kawaii" refers to the understood Japanese obsession with cuteness, and "otaku" denotes a culture of fandom around anime and manga products.

different approaches to "New Criticism", or close reading in the humanities. He

paraphrases Paul de Man on the topic of New Criticism:

> De Man's description helpfully conveys one thing that is
> crucial to the practice of close reading: a respect for the
> stubbornness of texts, which resist easy comprehension or
> description in terms of expected themes and motifs. The
> close reader needs to be willing to take seriously the
> difficulties of singular, unexpected turns of phrase,
> juxtapositions, and opacity.[14]

Here Culler explains that there isn't really a roadmap or set of steps a scholar can take to

apply a close-reading method to texts, especially concerning texts that are increasingly

participatory. However, my project will mitigate some complications by applying a more

historical approach at the outset of each chapter, providing a context for the texts

discussed and the media of which they are a part. Culler later goes on to paraphrase

Barbara Johnson who at least provides some reasonably specific markers, or areas of

interest for close-reading scholarship to pay attention to:

> In her essay "Teaching Deconstructively," she provides,
> with an unusually bold explicitness, a series of examples of
> different kinds of signifying conflicts or tensions that
> students should look for in passages they are studying:
> ambiguous words, undecidable syntax, incompatibilities
> between what a text says and what it does, incompatibilities
> between the literal and the figurative, incompatibilities
> between explicitly foregrounded assertions and illustrative
> examples, and so on. Such attention involves "a careful
> teasing out of the warring forces of signification that are at
> work within the text itself."[15]

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[14] Culler, Jonathan, "The Closeness of Close Reading," Modern Language Association, accessed March 23, 2021, https://www.ade.mla.org/bulletin/article/ade.149.20. 22.

[15] Ibid, 23.

Again, these types of contradictions or the "warring forces of signification" are the main subject of this project, an attempt to unearth the unspoken and horrible as it is reflected in this project's texts.

Concerning the project's final chapter, a more intricate and specific method will need to be applied, or at least borrowed from. I will adapt James Paul Gee's method established in *Unified Discourse Analysis: Language, reality, virtual worlds, and video games* to study *Metal Gear. Unified Discourse Analysis'* eleventh and twelfth chapters "Projective Identity" and "Avatars in big 'D' Discourses" discuss the player-character or "avatar" in digital games and how an avatar's own practices and actions can be read as a form of conversation. Throughout his work Gee refers to the process of gameplay as a discourse, or conversation, of its own. The work, and my own project by extension, will then interpret gameplay and interactions with a digital world as a language of its own, full of signs to be read with meaning to be derived therefrom.

In "Projective Identity" Gee states that, "good games create a 'projective identity.' They create a double-sided stance towards the world (virtual or real) in terms of which we humans see the world simultaneously as a project imposed on us and as a site onto which we can actively project our desires, values, and goals. A projective identity is a melded identity, a melding of self and avatar in a way that gives rise to a new sort of being."[16] Considering the intensely self-reflexive nature of *Metal Gear Solid*, its constant breaking of the fourth wall and its constant renegotiation between player agency and narrative

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[16] James Paul Gee, *Unified Discourse Analysis: Language, Reality, Virtual Worlds and Video Games*, 1st edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2014). 94.

drive, Gee's work on projective identity lends a useful toolkit for unpacking how the interactivity of *Metal Gear* constructs the nuclear-ordered world and places its players within it. In his tenth chapter "Metal Gear Solid," Gee specifically addresses some of these issues as they appear in *Metal Gear Solid 4: The Guns of The Patriots* with its protagonist "Solid Snake." My project then aims to perform a similar type of analysis pointed almost entirely at the game's successor *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, and its protagonist "Venom Snake."

Chapter Overview

My project's chapters are organized both by the chronological period from which their respective objects of study originate, and by the medium of the object of study. Aside from the first chapter providing a general introduction to the topic and its import, each of my project's three sections is structured similarly to include historical and medium-specific context followed by a semiotic close reading of its respective objects. The opening chapter of my project discusses Japanese popular culture as it appears relatively early in the Cold War. I focus on 1954's *Gojira* (*Godzilla*) and situate it within the broader context of the "kaiju" film, films about gigantic monsters who represent existential threats to humanity. Additionally, I will discuss the legacy and later pacification of the genre's pre-eminent monster Godzilla, as films following the series' first film shift drastically in tone. It will also prove useful to compare Godzilla—a uniquely Japanese film—to its American contemporary counterparts and the extended, ultimately transnational *Godzilla* franchise. How do these films present contrary narratives to humanity's ability to survive the existential dangers posed by nuclear

weapons? What tone is used to describe these horrors? How is power constructed and portrayed in these texts?

Advancing in time to near the final decade of the Cold War, my project's second chapter discusses the anime industry and medium generally, as well as its relation to changes in the Japanese economy and the modernization and globalization of its cultural industry. I then move into close readings of the original *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979) anime television series and Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 anime feature film *Akira*. The discussion of *Akira* is placed in its own bridging subsection as it serves as a philosophical link between adolescence and adulthood. Chapter two and its succeeding connecting section focuses on the themes of technology and mecha—giant mechanical suits that serve as both armor and weapon—and the prominence of the adolescent body as the key vessel of meaning in Japanese postwar popular culture. Additionally, I will consider questions of how the themes of adolescence and trauma vary in similar American/Japanese co-produced texts like *Transformers* (1984). What does it mean to remove the adolescent human body from the machine? What meaning can be derived from the increased blending of Japanese and American pop culture products and how does this affect their narrative and formal conventions? This analysis is continued from *Gundam* and *Transformers* to its apex in *Akira,* which completely erodes binaries of military and civilian, biological and technological, adolescent and adult.

Finally, my project closes with an extended discussion of the *Metal Gear Solid* video game franchise, and the convergence of Japanese and American popular culture in the internet age. *Metal Gear* represents a very fluid endpoint of convergence between

Japanese and American popular culture and storytelling. *Metal Gear* is equally indebted to conventions of both American and Japanese cinema, animation, and mythology. Because it's a deeply interactive medium, I pay special attention to the role of the player and the oft-challenged separation between player and avatar in digital games. The final chapter addresses the *Metal Gear* franchise as a whole to lend historical context to the growing convergence of Japanese and American culture but succinctly examines *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* as a culmination and occasional inversion of the series' themes and warnings. My project's third chapter is less of a fusion between *The Phantom Pain* and other more "American" forms, simply because *Metal Gear* represents a point of major convergence in itself between American and Japanese culture. Additionally, the game is positioned as a subversive anti-war text that comments on the 21st century remilitarization of Japan under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. It was always the intended goal of my project to understand the two nations' cultural outputs in light of the other, and *Metal Gear* provides an excellent place to conclude and speculate.

Chapter 1: *Gojira*

Godzilla's Roar

In the summer of 2014 I had just finished my first year of undergraduate studies. I'd asked one of my friends from residence to meet me at the aptly named Colossus theatre in Vaughn, Ontario for an IMAX screening of *Godzilla*. Although I had previously dabbled in kaiju cinema through Guillermo del Toro's *Pacific Rim,* this was my first brush with the big green lizard, and boy was it big. Godzilla's most recent American adaptation franchise sees the gorilla-whale looking more whale than gorilla for the first time ever; it was slow, lumbering, incomprehensibly wide, a true expert at taking up space. What else could we expect from America in the teen years of the new century? Director Gareth Edwards painfully teased out glimpses of the monster for the first half of the film until finally, during a scene at the Honolulu Airport, Godzilla's megaton form is revealed in full. A slow tilt moves from the monster's feet, amidst the flaming wreckage of aircraft, towards his fuming maw. Like a mushroom cloud boiling over and thrusting into the atmosphere, the beast draws in on itself and unleashes its trademark roar. Godzilla's roar is one of those sounds that I can hear clearly in my head but can never describe accurately. It is animal and alien, angry and mournful, like a whale song and the opening jet of a flamethrower screeching in unison. My eyes widened; I was practically vibrating. The audience erupted with applause, the theatregoers' cacophony reverberating Godzilla's own. I was in love.

This chapter is something I have been struggling to write for some time now. Amidst the global Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, my motivation has suffered but returning to this

material, which ironically feels comfortable despite its destructive obsession, has helped.

Perhaps it reads as macabre, but I have found a renewed vigour for my work given the

seemingly apocalyptic surroundings of our current world; quarantine, protesting,

economic collapse, all these themes are appropriately 'zilla-esque' and have urged me on

towards writing more. This chapter aims to study the Godzilla film canon in its various

forms and argue that Godzilla's anti-nuclear allegory is most potent in the Japanese films.

Moreover, the reason the Japanese films excel in their anti-nuclear rhetoric is because

they position both the U.S. and the monster as antagonists. At the time of writing this

introduction there are 36 Godzilla films either released or in production. To attempt a

close reading of each is beyond the scope of this project so I have instead opted to select

a few key points in the monster's career to highlight and read closely. Except for one

sequel, each of these films can be understood as "origin stories" for the monster. Those

films are: Ishirō Honda's 1954 *Gojira*, the first film in the canon, the American films

Godzilla (2014) and its sequel *Godzilla: King of Monsters* (2018) by Gareth Edwards and

Michael Dougherty respectively, and finally Hideaki Anno's *Shin Godzilla* from 2016.

The first and last films are both Japanese while the middle two are American. My

purposeful delineation will allow me to compare the two cultures' respective treatment

and representation of the monster, its nuclear terror, and to explore what these films say

about the postwar relationship of Japan and America.

Accompanying the close reading of these texts will also be several contextual and

historical explorations of postwar Japanese culture and politics, a broader examination of

Japan's relationship with the figure of the "kaiju" and monsters generally, and postwar

American attempts to run peace-time public relations for the destructive power of atomic energy. As a point of order, this chapter will refer to the monster in gender neutral terminology, even though many if not most of the films, with the exception of the 1998 American film *Godzilla*, refer to the monster in masculine terms. Godzilla is a gigantic monster, an avatar of destruction, and this author views it above trite comparisons to human gender norms. I will also explore the cross-cultural representational divide concerning the monster and its antics, and also to argue that Japan's approach to nuclear kaiju storytelling specifically depicts anti-nuclear politics, whereas the American approach is mired in propaganda, American essentialism, and ultimately the aim to make atom a pacified and distinctly consumable entity, a pet for U.S. power holders. Ultimately, this chapter will explore the idea that *all* films in the Godzilla canon are in some way about the relationship shared between postwar Japan and America, a relationship that the Japanese films clearly code as antagonistic and hegemonic.

Japan and the Kaiju

Before diving headlong into the atomic breach, I will make use of a few key texts that explain, in better terms than I am able to, the existence of the kaiju as a uniquely Japanese sci fi subgenre, and its relation to the horror genre broadly. For this, I will be relying most heavily on *The Kaiju Film* by Jason Barr. In this work, Barr outlines four distinctly Japanese traditions that lead to the birth of *Gojira* and subsequently the kaiju subgenre as a whole: yokai, bunraku, kabuki, and noh. While these inspirational elements are all visible in the 1954 film, I will demonstrate that many of the distinctly Japanese cultural and historical elements of the kaiju film are stripped away during the Godzilla

franchise's interim years mostly as a result of American meddling in and commercializing of Gojira. This chapter culminates in a discussion of Hideaki Anno's 2016 *Shin Gojira*, or *Godzilla Resurgence* in English, which dutifully restores the monster itself and the franchise to its roots in Japanese horror.

Barr also begins his work with a certain concession, one that this project will make several times, being that attempting to view Japanese and American films in respective isolated paradigms is fruitless. There is a much more dialectic relationship between the two, a relationship that this chapter aims to explore through a few key moments in the transnational proliferation of Godzilla. The kaiju genre was not necessarily *born* with Godzilla, in fact Barr claims that it was 1933's *King Kong*, an American film, that kickstarted the genre, early evidence of monstrous transnational convergence. Barr goes on to explain that while *King Kong* may have started the kaiju film he views *Gojira* as the "catalyst" for the genre. Since kaiju cinema's inception it has represented a conglomeration of American and Japanese myths and formal techniques. He also specifically names Murakami's "superflat" theory of Japanese popular culture as a key contributing source of the dual cute-horrific nature of Japanese fascination with monsters, but also through this introduction explains that "the seeds of kaiju were planted several centuries earlier."[17]

Beginning with the "yokai," a term Barr describes as representing "a massive catalogue of spirits and creatures," Barr uses the immediate example of the Japanese folklore

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[17] Jason Barr, *The Kaiju Film: A Critical Study of Cinema's Biggest Monsters* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Publishing, 2016,) 25,26.

character "tsuchigumo," a gigantic spider that would terrorize villages and store the bodies of its victims inside its belly. For Barr, this commonly found figure is a direct inspiration for the Godzilla franchise monster Kumonga that appears in three different Godzilla films throughout the 1960s. While similarities like these are common in the kaiju genre, Barr points out that there is not always a direct correlation, "Yokai are often akin to the Urban legends of the United States, intended to warn people away from bad decisions, bad habits, or other actions that could damage themselves, their families, or their culture... Kaiju however are relatively new phenomenon and often serve as parables for the modern ills in society."[18] The distinction between cautionary parable and vengeful monster is made clear here, Godzilla is not interested in human course correcting, it only seeks to punish and destroy in retaliation for events that have already occurred. Michelle Osterfeld Li explains that the yokai figure of the "oni", a word synonymous loosely with demon, is often used as a vehicle for sympathy, or as a means of connecting human emotion with Japanese myth and folklore. She uses medieval Japanese fiction to explain the numerous links that these monsters have to humanity and how oni figures evoke sympathy, remorse, or pity through their closeness to humanity.[19] In the more contemporary case of the kaiju, American attempts to soften or pacify the monsters are nearly forgotten in the Japanese tradition. Later, in the films of the 1960s and '70s,

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[18] Ibid, 27.

[19] Michelle Osterfeld Li, "Human of the Heart: The Pitiful Oni in Medieval Japan," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Brookfield, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?docID=4920515. 174, 175.

renewed efforts are made to make the monsters, chiefly Godzilla, and its long-time ally

Mothra, appear more sympathetic and relatable, even goofy.

Next for Barr comes "bunraku," a specifically Japanese form of puppetry pioneered in

17th century Japan. Japanese theatre historian Gotō Shizuo expands that puppetry theatre

has been a Japanese cultural mainstay since the 1650s but that Bunraku was preceded by

other forms, most notably "jōruri ayatsuri" puppetry.[20] The bunraku tradition included

visible onstage puppeteers who weren't obscured like puppeteers in other continental

traditions. Barr writes, "watching older kaiju film carries with it the reasonable

expectation that the viewer would be seeing not only kaiju but the performer in the suit as

well."[21] Barr goes on to explain that bunraku is "deeply embedded" in Japanese culture,

and that the performance of bunraku in Japanese kaiju films often stood at odds with their

western counterparts. He makes note of developments in stop-motion film making made

during the silent-era "most importantly in *The Lost World* (1925) and *King Kong* (1933)."

Although Godzilla was being acted in the 1950s, when stop-motion techniques were both

reliable and commercially successful, Toho remained on course with its Japanese roots

and remained committed to puppet performance.[22] He credits this "reliance on or

embrace" of bunraku puppetry with the perception that kaiju special effects lagged far

behind their western counterparts. Even as western monster films began to embrace CGI,

perhaps most notably in the case of Spielberg's 1993 *Jurassic Park,* Kaiju films, and

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[20]Gotō Shizuo, "Bunraku Puppet Theatre,", *A History of Japanese Theatre,* ed. Jonah Salz, trans. Alan Cummings. (Cambridge: University Press, 2016) 161.

[21] Barr, *Kaiju Film*, 28.

[22] Ibid, 29.

specifically Godzilla films, remained reliant on puppetry until *Godzilla 2000* when at last computer graphics and puppetry were combined.[23] Unsurprisingly, later American Godzilla franchise entries are heavily CGI laden, all but abandoning the theatrical Japanese principles of bunraku puppetry. The two American films discussed later in this chapter rely exclusively on CGI to depict their monsters, and do not make so much as a nod to the original kaiju acting style or costume construction. Barr explains that the eventual embrace of CGI techniques in Japanese filmmaking is "the beginning of the end for traditional kaiju film, as a majority of low-budget studios have opted instead for quick cash grabs."[24] This is not to suggest that CGI filmmaking is not without its own specific set of artistic conventions and strengths, but instead that the growth of CGI in Japanese film represents, again, an erosion of the traditionally "Japanese" quality of the text in the postwar era mostly inspired by the influence of American markets and politics.

Lastly for Barr comes "kabuki", which he describes mostly as the informing narrative tradition of the kaiju film, alongside the visual cues from bunraku. It should also be made clear that these historical techniques and conventions are not mutually exclusive: bunraku puppetry was a common element of kabuki and noh-style theatre performances. The forms work to complement each other as they do in the kaiju films they would later inspire: "Kabuki plays are well known for being slow-moving at the start, building to a large climax, followed by a rapid denouement. Perhaps more so than bunraku, kabuki

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[23] Ibid, 31.

[24] Ibid, 32.

plays often follow this structure rigidly."[25] In effect, Barr has described in macro terms the plot structure of *Gojira,* a film that despite its atomic allegory burns quite slowly in its beginnings. As Barr points out, *Gojira* does not actually feature the full Godzilla monster until the 45-minute mark, and the monster only appears in approximately eight minutes of the film's 96-minute run time.[26] Where kabuki supplies a rigid narrative structure to be followed by *Gojira*, noh theatre's influence is much more subtle, and at times seemingly erased from kaiju films as the genre matures beyond its 1954 *Gojira* catalyst. noh theatre predates kabuki and was also situated as a more elite form of entertainment, telling stories intended for noble audiences, whereas kabuki emerged roughly 200 years later as a form of low culture. This distinction is often paralleled in the film industry, or even situates the film industry as the "kabuki" alternative to something like opera. Understandably then, the noh tradition does not leave as heavy a mark on the kaiju genre, which is at its core a popular form of art and entertainment. Barr points out that "the borrowing of noh structure has slowly ebbed, as directors and writers have consistently attempted to put new takes and spins on the genre and the creation," also citing the impact of action-based Western storytelling techniques whereas noh is more deliberate and quiet.[27] Through this lens, Barr understands noh's relationship to the kaiju film as genetic, as a latent and foundational element that has mutated out of recognizability over time.[28] Finally, with its origins squarely tucked away, it is time to

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[25] Ibid 32.

[26] Ibid, 33.

[27] Ibid, 35.

[28] Ibid.

move into the first film in the Godzilla franchise, the granddaddy of proper kaiju filmmaking, and the should-be cause of endless nuclear terror, *Gojira*!

Godzilla Emerges

Ishirō Honda's 1954 *Gojira* is perhaps the most significant piece of Japanese postwar nuclear culture. The film follows the titular monster's path of destruction through Japan, as the monster makes its way inland from archipelagos and towards Tokyo. In parallel, *Gojira* also follows the efforts of a team of scientists as they try to both better understand the monster, and search for a way to stop its wanton devastation. When confronted with the monster's previously unimaginable power a team of scientists lead by Dr. Serizawa (Akihiko Hirata) must resort to using experimental superweapons, chiefly the "Oxygen Destroyer" to destroy the monster at the cost of Serizawa's life. Serizawa is unwilling to let evidence of his potentially world-ending weapon resurface and so he destroys all of his notes and manually detonates the device, sacrificing himself and killing Godzilla. Unlike the creature features of 1950s America like *Them!* and *The Blob*, *Gojira* is permeated with sadness and sombre tones. The film begins aboard a Japanese salvage vessel as an unexpected encounter with the monster results in the deaths of the majority of the crew, and perhaps more tellingly, the complete arresting of arts and culture as signified by the abandoned mandolin and toppled board game left behind by Godzilla's atomic flash.[29] Godzilla scholar Bryce Bivens explains, "This Eikomaru is usually paralleled with the 1954 Lucky Dragon incident, during which the fishing vessel Lucky

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[29] Bryce Bivens, "Godzilla: Culture through the Camera's Lens" (Thesis, University Honors College, Middle Tennessee State University, 2019), 6. https://jewlscholar.mtsu.edu/handle/mtsu/6014.

Dragon decided to fish in and around the Marshall Islands and was caught in the Castle

Bravo nuclear tests."[30] These are the first casualties we actually see in *Gojira,* culture and

leisure, not the physical human death toll. Throughout this section of the chapter, I will

analyse various scenes in *Gojira* for how they mirror anti-nuclear rhetoric as well as

investigating how the monster's attacks reflect Japanese national psychic damage, not

just physical destruction.

Following the aforementioned boat attack that opens the film, the monster makes land at

Odo Island. The pastoral village's survivors, now homeless refugees, flee to Tokyo to

demand disaster relief; in response, the Japanese government sends a paleontologist, Dr.

Yamane (Takashi Shimura), with a team to inspect the damage. While not yet absolute,

Godzilla's destruction of the small Odo fishing community is a precursor of larger

destitution to follow. Equipped with a Geiger counter, the team takes readings within

Godzilla's massive footprint revealing it to be abundant with radioactive energy,

reminiscent of the nuclear fallout that followed the real-world atomic blasts at Nagasaki

and Hiroshima. This scene also carries with it the film's tension between tradition and

modernity, and how Godzilla's presence blurs the lines between ancient and modern

Japan or destroys that line completely. Odo is a traditional village with a unique folklore

and a rudimentary way of life. One can only spot a few sparse hydro poles during this

scene, modern Japan is hardly anywhere to be seen on this island.[31] Godzilla's

insurrection brings modernity to the island in the form of the research team, who are then

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[30] Ibid, 7.

[31] Bivens, "Godzilla" 8.

left to ask, why here and why now? A warning bell later sounds causing the research team and Odo villagers to climb a nearby hill to catch a glimpse of the monster which Yamane claims to be a creature from the Jurassic era; their orderly procession to the top of the hill, shot from above, is reminiscent of a colony of ants making for the entrance to their hill. I do not mean to draw any sort of cultural criticism against Japanese people by making this comparison, only to elaborate the way by which the film constructs—or rather demolishes—the individuality of its subjects. All are as infinitesimal as ants before the monster. Godzilla's head crests the hill and it lets out an iconic roar as the villagers and researchers flee while trying to capture snapshots on their cameras. Here individuality and agency are removed from the fleeing multitude, as low angle shots of running feet are edited together with frantic clamouring. The monster and the devastation it represents destroy order.

The monster's design itself is of import here as well, as a recurring point of discussion throughout this chapter. The costume and special effects techniques were pioneered by Eiji Tsuburaya, who worked alongside Honda.[32] Obviously the scenarios and motivations Godzilla enacts will change from film to film, but so too does its physical appearance, which can also be read for meaning. In his first inception, the monster is stated to stand over 150 feet tall, possessing massive claws, spines, and feet. Popular culture commentator Kristian Williams points out that the monster's hide does not appear to have scales like one might expect from a massive lizard, and instead explains that the

[32] Kristian Williams, *Godzilla - The Soul of Japan,* 2016, YouTube.

monster's skin is meant to resemble the radiation burn scars suffered by victims of the

atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and later collateral damage suffered by

Japanese Pacific Islanders during the U.S.'s postwar atomic testing, particularly around

Bikini Atoll.[33] Bivens points out that Godzilla's devastation parallels specific instances of

American violence carried out against the Japanese civilian population, chiefly the

nuclear bombing but also submarine surprise attacks, the firebombing of Tokyo.[34] Its

eyes are rather large given the rest of his proportions which also give the monster a

somewhat cartoonish look, but this is likely more of a functional requirement of the

suit/puppet than a conscious design choice. Typically, figures are given larger eyes when

they are meant to appear cute, relatable, or even human. Eyes also help establish a sense

of scale; their size proportional to the rest of the head tends to shrink the larger the whole

creature actually is. Later installments in the franchise make a sort of course correction

regarding the size of the monster's eyes, but they are still packed with diverse meaning,

determined by the film's overall goals for the monster.

In the following scene, Yamane reports the findings of his research exhibition to the

government. He explicitly cites that American Pacific H-bomb testing has disturbed the

ancient leviathan's sanctuary, forcing the creature to surface and seek revenge. Here the

tension between past and present resurfaces, however it is not simply a distinction

between modern and traditional Japan, but between the natural world that was, and the

technological world that humans have created. Carried ashore and left behind in the

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Bivens, "Godzilla," 9.

monster's footprint, Yamane finds an arthropod thought to be extinct for the last two

million years. Godzilla has quite literally dredged the pre-human world back from the

depths of the ocean's deepest chasms in direct conflict with the oppressive underwater H-

bomb testing. Godzilla itself is stated to carry and emit the same radiation as the bomb, a

walking breathing weapon of mass destruction. *Gojira*'s anti-nuclear and anti-American

sentiment is undeniable during this section of the film. As we continue along Godzilla's

path of destruction, we see that this sentiment only grows over time. Again, the conflict

between tradition and modernity emerges as the Odo Island refugees sitting in on

Yamane's briefing insist that his findings be made public, while the government

representatives advise caution because "our fragile diplomatic relations [with the U.S.]

will be further strained." For the Japanese officials, maintaining the economic and

political standing order takes precedence over the safety of Japan's citizens as the newly

liberalized nation seeks to find some balance between its traditional practices and

entering the postwar economy, a balance through Godzilla will leave a trail of destruction

one radioactive footprint at a time.

Later, in what is probably the film's most action-packed segment, Godzilla makes his

assault on Tokyo. Machine gunners in sandbagged positions and lines of stationary guns

fire relentlessly upon the monster as it is caught up in a net of hydro wires and towers.

Godzilla destroys these structures with its claws and tail while being buffeted by

incoming shells and bullets. Seemingly annoyed with the slowness of its advance, the

monster then unleashes its iconic atomic breath, melting the remaining towers to a liquid

nearly instantly. The monster's nuclear allegory is at its least subtle in these moments, as

his radioactive breath melts through steel as though it were butter, similar to the intense heat created by a nuclear blast. As in previous monster encounter scenes, the fleeing people are shot from above, obscuring their individuality and humanity; they are more akin to insects than humans here, running erratically from the monster's path of destruction. Without any real cause of distinction Godzilla continues to unleash its atomic breath on the city, melting homes, businesses, automobiles, and people without any pause for thought. This sequence offers the audience a glimpse of what no one was really able to record during the actual nuclear attacks demonstrating how speculative film and animation can be used to convey what is impossible to *actually* record.

In a moment of sober respite before the film's climax, a televised montage is accompanied by a choir of high school children singing a song of peace composed for the film by Akira Ifukube:

> Oh peace, oh light,
> Hasten back to us,
> May we live without destruction.
> May we look to tomorrow with hope.
> May peace and light return to us.
> Our hearts are filled with prayer,
> This we pray,
> Hear our song,
> And have pity on us.
> May we live without destruction.
> May we look to tomorrow with hope.

Accompanying the mournful chorus are images of Japan's total devastation: completely demolished city blocks reduced to rubble, rows of bloodied and bandaged patients nursing cuts and burns, overworked hospital staff, children unable to find their parents, groups of survivors huddled around a radio listening to this broadcast. Upon viewing the destruction, Serizawa is finally convinced that he must deploy his own, potentially

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deadlier, "Oxygen destroyer" weapon to restore peace and put an end to Godzilla's threat.

After his sacrifice is made and the monster defeated, we are left with Yamane's

worrisome and foreboding remarks, "I can't believe that Godzilla was the last of its

species. If nuclear testing continues... then someday, somewhere in the world another

Godzilla may appear."[35] This moment in the film is when its allegory is at its closest to

the surface, it isn't allegorical anymore. Yamane has explicitly stated that nuclear testing

and nuclear weapons breed destruction, their causal relationship with the monster makes

them one and the same. Godzilla is the nuke, and the nuke is Godzilla.

In its inception, Godzilla is most certainly a gleaming artifact of Japanese anti-nuclear

culture that dares to name the United States as its true villain. A monstrous power made

manifest by humanity's ceaseless meddling in the natural world, Godzilla stands quite

literally as a warning to those who would pursue nuclear energy and nuclear weapons

even after their terrible consequences are well known. The monster is only that, a

warning, an uncontrollable and unthinking force, set loose by American militarism. What

can we then attribute to the monster's pacification over the following decades? How can

we, as scholars of the wartime atom, make sense of Godzilla's transformation from force

of unmitigated destruction, to a campy human ally fighting off increasingly whacky

kaiju? In the interests of examining global power consolidation and hegemony, we must

explore what changes lead Godzilla from its 1954 state to its 2014 American rebirth,

tracking through the decades of kaiju filmmaking and American "peaceful" nuclear

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[35] Peter H. Brothers, "Japan's Nuclear Nightmare: How the Bomb Became a Beast Called 'Godzilla,'" *Cinéaste* 36, no. 3 (2011): 4.

policy. The latter is most often attributed to Dwight D. Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace"

program, which also marked the birth of the myth of the "peaceful atom." In this cultural

shift, both the monster, and the atom that it represents are rendered cutesy and

consumable. Additionally, by exploring the erasure of anti-American sentiment in the

Americanized and sanitized *Godzilla: King of the Monsters!* (1956) rerelease, additional

insight into the original film's criticism of U.S. imperialism, and the efforts of U.S.

hegemony will be gleaned.

Mutation and the Atom Pacified

In 1956 Godzilla finally made landfall on American shores, in American cinemas. Joe

Blevins, writing for the popular entertainment outlet *The AV Club* lambasts both the film

and its audiences ignoring the initial subtext of the film and for treating the film like a

popcorn romp over a sombre reflection of the horrors of nuclear technology. Blevins

explains,

> The American version of the movie did away with the
> subtext, however, with 20 minutes deleted. The U.S.
> version also added a half hour of scenes featuring Raymond
> Burr so that the events could be shown from an American's
> point of view. Any references to nuclear testing were
> excised, and the original Japanese dialogue was either
> untranslated or dubbed over. It was Godzilla, King Of The
> Monsters!, not Gojira, that cast the die for the franchise in
> decades to come. The original version of the film was not
> widely seen in America for 50 years. By then, Godzilla's
> campy reputation was firmly in place.[36]

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[36] Joe Blevins. "How American Audiences Ruined the Power of the Original Godzilla," News, accessed
June 27, 2020, https://news.avclub.com/how-american-audiences-ruined-the-power-of-the-original-
1798255035.

Essentially, American censorship had cut off this monster's head before its horror had

time to manifest in American audiences. The film is scrubbed of all criticism of

American foreign policy, of the traumatic danger of nuclear energy, and the monster's

name was anglicized in a way that drew an obvious connection to deification. William

Tsutsui describes the American-friendly recuts as "major surgery" which made the film

politically stagnant. Tsutsui also argues that these edits were meant to serve the lesser or

at least differently suited attention span of American audiences.[37] He quotes American

film producer and distributor Henry Saperstein who worked on repackaging several

Godzilla films for American release,

> Every Japanese monster film starts with a conference.
> Either the press or government officials or scientists, and
> they lay the foundation for the story and the characters and
> the threat and a plan of what they're going to do about it.
> This goes on for five minutes, by which time every
> American viewer tunes it out, particularly on television.[38]

Tsutsui goes on to explain the way by which the remainder of Godzilla films repackaged

for American release were given a similar treatment, always being cleaned of negative

references towards American atomic testing and American foreign policy.. He surmises

the drive of this decision as twofold, "to protect delicate American sensibilities and

ensure a bankable G rating."[39] In his chapter "The Godzilla Franchise" Tsutsui begins by

succinctly declaring,

> The Godzilla that most Americans know and love is not the
> sinister, homicidal, black-and-white, fresh-from-Bikini-

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[37] William M. Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters* (St. Martin's Press, 2017), 122.

[38] Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind,* 122, 123.

[39] Ibid, 123.

atoll-and-bent-on-revenge monster of the 1954 *Gojira*. Instead, the image rooted in America's pop culture subconscious is that of Godzilla the goofy champion, the saurian defender of the world, the judo-kicking, karate-chopping, bug-eyed, technicolor creature from the films of the 1960s and 1970s.[40]

Here, Tsutsui makes clear the distinction between the original incarnation of Godzilla and its later heavily pacified, consumable counterpart that rose to prominence alongside the stream of American distributor recuts. Towards that latter point, Tsutsui points out later that in the 1967 *Son of Godzilla*, the destructive titan is given a son "Minilla" as a cynical appeal to the children's market. It is a wonder that the monster wasn't redesigned to feature cargo shorts, thick socks, Teva sandals, and a Flandersian push-broom moustache. Here Daddzilla offers lizzy-back rides and lessons in the baby's first radioactive breath blast.[41] Concerning its adversaries, Tsutsui explains that Godzilla films of this era feature much more kaiju wrestling than they do city stomping, Godzilla begins to assume the role of humanity's defender rather than an arbiter of destruction and vengeful justice. Such films have him scraping elbows with the likes of pterodactyl-like Rodan, ankylosaurus rip-off Anguirus, and even later teaming up with the humanoid robot Jet Jaguar to defeat the insectoid Megalon.[42] These are but a few members of the menagerie of goofy kaiju matchups that the interim Godzilla films offer their viewers, and it almost goes without saying that through these years the original monsters' potency as a strong nuclear and anti-American allegory is all but sapped. I need look no further than one of my own

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[40] Ibid, 43.

[41] Ibid, 56, 57.

[42] Ibid, 58.

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shelves to see evidence: two "chibi" proportioned Godzilla toys, sold promotionally for the 2014 American film.

Tsutsui is very clear in his description of these changes as a primarily market-driven exercise, but the remainder of this section will argue that alongside these very astute claims, something less obvious was also occurring. Edits made to the films were markedly political, pro-nuclear and pro-military, all following a trajectory from the 1956 re-release to the American films of the 2010s that will be discussed next in this chapter. Additionally, the prior examining of the Showa era (1954-1975) films along with the succeeding Heisei (1984-1995) and Millennium (1999-2004) as a continuum of ever-softening critique of American imperialism and the ever-weakening of Godzilla's nuclear allegory proves useful as well.[43] Alas, there are a total of 36 films in the Godzilla canon, which could rightly be its own thesis, to dissect each one is well beyond the scope of this project. However, in viewing trends in Godzilla's representation alongside the rise of pro-Nuclear American propaganda and a continued exertion of hegemonic power, it becomes quite clear that Godzilla's shift towards marketability reflects these exercises of U.S. power and propaganda. By examining Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" program, a utopian vision that Paul S. Boyer refers to as "Bright Dreams," and more specifics of the American-Japanese postwar nuclear relationship, these connections will be made apparent.[44] Additionally, for better or worse, the Cold War connection between atomic

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[43] Ibid,, 35-38.

[44] Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985,) 122.

power and rising American Christian Evangelism will be explored; these latter atom

fanatics did not specifically try to pacify the image of atom but instead to remake the very

existence of atom and the American military as proof of God's divine will and justice.

In their exhaustive volume *Atoms for Peace and War: 1951-1963, Eisenhower and the*

Atomic Energy Commission Richard G. Hewlett and Jack M. Holl outline a precise

history of Eisenhower's administration's attempts to pacify the atom in policy and public

opinion both domestically and abroad.[45] In their eighth chapter "Atoms for Peace:

Building American Policy" the two scholars pay specific attention to an Eisenhower

speech of the same name. Delivered before the United Nations General Assembly on

December 8th, 1953, Eisenhower calls upon the world's leaders to join the U.S. in

strengthening the Atomic Energy Agency. In doing so he explains,

> The United States knows that if the fearful trend of atomic
> military build-up can be reversed, this greatest of
> destructive forces can be developed into a great boon, for
> the benefit of all mankind. The United States knows that
> peaceful power from atomic energy is no dream of the
> future. The capability, already proved, is here today. Who
> can doubt that, if the entire body of the world's scientists
> and engineers had adequate amounts of fissionable material
> with which to test and develop their ideas, this capability
> would rapidly be transformed into universal, efficient and
> economic usage?[46]

Here, Eisenhower attempts to make a specific delineation between two forms of atomic

energy, the wartime atom and the peacetime atom. This is the exact type of rhetoric that

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[45] Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Atoms for Peace Speech, December 8, 1953" Text (IAEA, July 16, 2014),
https://www.iaea.org/about/history/atoms-for-peace-speech.

[46] Ibid.

festers within the post-1956 Godzilla film canon, a distinction that this project will argue is largely irrelevant. Hewlett and Holl go on to describe the unilateral political appeal of this type of thinking, at least within American politics, "Senators from McCarthy of Wisconsin and Hickenlooper of Iowa to Mike Mansfield of Montana described the speech as 'a good suggestion,' 'great,' and 'daring.' Democrats and Republicans alike saw the speech as a master stroke of propaganda, but they were divided on the feasibility of establishing an international atomic energy agency."[47] It is not particularly surprising that the bipartisan arbiters of U.S. empire and hegemony would applaud the establishment of a supranational atomic regulatory body with America at its head. The authors do not specifically comment on Japan's reaction to the announcement, instead focussing more of this chapter on the difficulty of approaching the Soviet Union with this plan. The succeeding entry "Pursuit of the Peaceful Atom" makes note of a specific incident in which Nobel prize winning geneticist Herman J. Muller's paper on the genetic effects of radiation on the human body was included in a 1954 Geneva survey of the medical applications of atom. They write,

> The incident did not have reverberations beyond scientific circles until a month later, when a Washington Post reporter called the Commission staff about the incident. A Commission press statement released the next day explained that Muller's invitation had been rejected because the full text of his paper 'was belatedly found to contain material referring to the nonpeaceful uses of atomic energy, namely, the bombing of the Japanese city of Hiroshima.'[48]

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[47] Jack Holl and Richard Hewlett, *Atoms for Peace and War, 1953-1961: Eisenhower and the Atomic Energy Commission* (ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2011,) 210.

[48] Holl and Hewlet, *Atoms for Peace*, 268.

In no uncertain terms, the U.S. government had attempted to censor evidence that would greatly weaken their claims about the existence of a peaceful atom.

In his chapter "Bright Dreams and Disturbing Realities" American historian Paul S. Boyer grapples with the appearance of the opposite. He argues that public promotion of the "peaceful atom" ideals in popular press did not shy away from referencing the nuclear attacks on Japan. To the contrary, he points out that even liberal publications like *New York Times* and *Atlantic* attempted to reframe the atomic devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in positive terms. He quotes an *Atlantic* writer who stated, "through medical advances alone atomic energy has already saved more lives than were snuffed out at Hiroshima and Nagasaki."[49] Boyer goes on to explain "it was further implied that the Japanese bombings were, in some way, an essential step in unlocking atom's peacetime promise," a deeply Orwellian notion if ever there was one. Following along, Boyer not only addressed U.S. hegemonic attempts to remake atom as a scientific and political good, but also a religious one. In "Atomic Weapons and Judeo-Christian Ethics" he details at length the multitudes of responses to atom from faith leaders in the U.S. He rather glibly references a short September 1945 poem by Edgar Guest:

> The power to blow all things to dust
> as kept for people God could trust,
> And granted unto them alone,
> That evil might be overthrown.[50]

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[49] Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light,* 122,

[50] Ibid, 211.

The "evil" Guest refers to here turned out to largely be the civilian population of two Japanese cities.[51] In its rather uncritical report on the bombings, *Christian Century* published "In the regime of war—that is, in the regime ruled by military necessity—the bombing of cities, whether by an atomic bomb or by B-29s, is on the same plane as the killing of an enemy soldier with a rifle... War has no moral character. When a nation commits its destiny to the arbitrament of sheer might, it abandons all moral constraints."[52] If you're already going to blow the thing up, might as well go full nuclear. Boyer notes that a trend then emerged among Christian authorities in the U.S., being that while they would willingly condemn a total war strategy—the equivalence of enemy combatants and non-combatants—they made no specific condemnation of the use of atomic weapons themselves.[53] Boyer argues that this ambivalence essentially "would provide the ethical foundation of the nation's nuclear policies for the next generation." He refers to this type of milquetoast response as a "blank cheque" for militarists.[54]

In her work *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares,* scholar Angela Marie Lahr explicitly makes the connection between the advent of nuclear weapons and the growing Christian evangelist movement in the United States. She argues "the nuclear age brought these two strands of apocalypticism (apocalyptic Christians and anti-nuclear pacifists) together. At the same time, the Cold War created a hyper-tense world situation that made

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[51] Howard Zinn's *Postwar America: 1945-1971* makes an excellent argument that cites the bombings as further exertion of American muscle and more of a sign to the Soviet's and Chinese than an actual tactical or necessary decision for defeating the already crumbled Japanese Empire.

[52]"Atrocities and War," *Christian Century,* September 26, 1945, p. 1087.

[53] Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light, 228.*

[54] Ibid.

nuclear warfare a real possibility."[55] She goes on to explain how the appearance of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy "inserted new components into the scientific/religious relationship" which ultimately served to legitimize the once "fringe" evangelists as arbiters of some new apocalyptic nuclear truth.[56] Marie Lahr relies on the work of Wilbur Smith, author of *The Atomic Bomb and the Word of God* to further this point; "Evangelicals like Smith seemed to believe that understanding the basic science of nuclear energy not only communicated the awesome power of these new weapons to other believers but also helped them gain some credibility among nonbelievers about the prophetic destiny of the atomic age."[57] Put simply, the existence of atomic power doubled as the proof of the existence of the almighty. To borrow from Alan Moore's Cold War comic epic *Watchmen,* "The superman exists, and he's American." The Zack Snyder film adaptation of the comic changes this line to be more explicit: "God exists, and he's American."[58][59] As this project moves on to discuss 2014's *Godzilla* and its sequel 2018 *Godzilla: King of the Monsters,* this link between Godzilla worship and Christianity will be made more explicit, particularly in the latter film, because the revelatory depiction of the monster is tied most closely to a markedly pro-U.S. understanding of nuclear politics and religion. The previously pulled Moore quote is very easily altered to "Godzilla exists, and *he's* American."

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[55] Angela Lahr, "Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: Evangelical and Secular Identity in the Early Cold War" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2005), 51.

[56] Ibid, 58.

[57] Ibid, 59.

[58] Alan Moore, "Watchmaker," *Watchmen*, (DC Comics, 1986,) 13.

[59] Zack Snyder, *Watchmen*, (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2009.)

The American Monster

I began this chapter with my own personal recollection of seeing my first full Godzilla film, *Godzilla* (2014) shortly after the end of the first year of my undergrad. As I stated before, this viewing of director Gareth Edwards' film was a bit of an awakening for me but the more time I have to reflect on the film, the more distrustful I grow of its representation of the eponymous monster, and the more insidious I see the work it does, especially when relating it to the previously discussed ideas of "peaceful atom" and the seamless consumption of Godzilla as a protector of humanity. I believe this is the fundamental wrong way to portray the monster, and as seen in the 2014 film, this depiction is quite deliberate as both Godzilla and its "Massive Unidentified Terrestrial Organism" (MUTO for short) rivals are explicitly nuclear. The difference here is that while Godzilla represents preservation and balance, the peaceful atom, the bug-like MUTOs are atom-hungry, they burn through radiation as atomic gluttons. The MUTO monsters pose a serious threat to American military hegemony, like the emergence of a newly nuclearized 'belligerent' state and must be dealt with for *order* to resume. Thus, the film's primary conflict conceit again constructs the myth of the "peaceful" atom by playing it against the "warlike" or let us say "hungry" atom. Also particularly telling of this film's propagandistic position as not only pro-nuclear but also fiercely pro-American military.[60] Our human hero Ford (Aaron Johnson) is a Navy EOD (explosive ordnance disposal, military bomb squad) veteran and later leads a parachute strike on the MUTOs

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[60] Erin Suzuki, "Beasts from the Deep," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 20, no. 1 (2017): 15, https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2017.0002.

alongside Godzilla in a sequence that can only be described as kaiju-military porn. Although I have been glib in my initial discussion of this film, it is still important to seriously understand this film within the larger narrative of U.S.-Japanese cultural dialectics, and also understand how this film is a symptom of a decades-long attempt to rehabilitate atom's public relations image. Godzilla is a particularly useful vehicle for pursuing these ends, as the monster doesn't speak, doesn't scratch its nuclear manifesto into the earth, it is just simply a force that exerts itself freely on others. The monster then can be understood as a sort of *tabula rasa* for politically interested filmmakers, whether they adopt the origin film's approach and politics, or the much more neoliberal pro-empire stance of the 2014 American entry and its sequel *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019).

Godzilla (2014) wastes no time in attempting to rewrite the series' canon; the opening credit montage is cut together from a mixture of imitation and archival footage showing various Pacific Ocean nuclear blasts, much like the 1946 tests on Bikini Atoll. However, this sequence seems to imply that these "tests" were a U.S. military effort to destroy Godzilla, given that the monster's likeness was painted on the body of the testing bomb in a style like the Ghostbusters' logo. Where previously Godzilla was depicted as a monster woken or disturbed by nuclear testing, the monster is now remade into a target. Additionally, while this film is still indebted to the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it also bears the scars of the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011.[61] The film's

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[61] Hamilton, Robert F. "Godzilla After the Meltdown-the Evolution and Mutation of Japan's Greatest Monster-," *Meiji University Academic Repository* 7.1 (2015): 50, https://m-repo.lib.meiji.ac.jp/dspace/handle/10291/17398.

second sequence introduces Doctors Joe and Sandra Brody (Bryan Cranston and Juliette Binoche), the human protagonist's parents. The couple are working a regular day at one of Japan's nuclear power plants (not Fukushima itself, but an obvious proxy) when an unexpected earthquake (later discovered to be caused by one the MUTO monsters) triggers a meltdown. Sandra sacrifices herself to contain what she can of the damage while Joe is forced to look on in terror as he loses his wife and the mother of his child. This scene is painfully reminiscent of the stories told about the nuclear plant workers who sacrificed their safety to contain the Fukushima meltdown. A young Ford watches through the window of his schoolhouse as the plant's cooling towers collapse and children are hastened onto buses to get away from the blast.

A time skip 15 years into the future reveals Joe Brody's continued obsession with the event as he is unable to come to terms with the devastation wrought and the loss of his wife. Ford arrives in Japan to pick his father up from a police precinct after he was arrested for yet-again venturing into the now abandoned and overgrown quarantine zone that was affected by the plant's collapse. Ford, now a U.S. Navy veteran, reluctantly agrees to accompany his father one more time into the restricted area. The disaster zone in *Godzilla* is bereft of radiation as Dr. Ford discovers and understands the lack as evidence of a cover-up.[62] The two sift through the moldy mossy remains of their former house, recovering photographs and artifacts of their past, a past that was taken from them by a nuclear "accident." Here then it is determined that it is the greed and dishonesty of

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[62] Ibid, 50.

large formless power structures, and not atom itself, that lead to their loss. The Brodys quarantine zone findings create room for a positive interpretation of atom, as the film continues to argue.

The scene that traces Godzilla's landfall on Hawaii to confront the MUTO monster is another example of this kind of myth making. Godzilla and MUTO are both monsters, yet one is explicitly "evil" while the other is coded as "good," albeit chaotically so.[63] Godzilla's destruction of human life and property in this sequence is only depicted as haphazard. Gone are the very intentional atomic-breath blasts of the 1954 precursor, instead it is of a singular MUTO-hunting focus. The monster goes as far out of his way as to duck beneath the aircraft carrier vessel blockading the harbour, rather than tear through it; it seems that 2014's American Godzilla really respects the troops. In her article "Beasts from the Deep" scholar Erin Suzuki refers to this treatment as the film's "overly sentimental portrayal of this massive and unpredictable super predator."[64] The humans on the ground are still rightly terrified of the gigantic lizard but are also shown to regard him with reverence and awe, until shooting starts and they scream and scatter. Godzilla truly receives a godly welcome on the island as he marches dutifully toward the MUTO. This sequence culminates in a massive airport runway explosion that leads to the dramatic low angle shot of Godzilla and his roar with which I began this chapter. The destruction that the monster causes in the form of a massive ocean surge is also abstracted from its own involvement; watching, we know that Godzilla's arrival has caused this wave that

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[63] Suzuki, *"Beasts,"* 22.

[64] Ibid, 23

undoubtedly killed dozens if not hundreds of people, but the film treats its fleeing

subjects with an air of ambivalence. We see them running scared and diving for cover,

we see them duck out of frame before their deaths can be caught on screen, so the

audience is never asked to ever align itself against Godzilla. We don't even see the

monster's form in the wave as it ravages the coastline and its hotels, we only later see

Godzilla sauntering through the city already completely emerged from the water. In

editing, the film absolves its titular monster of guilt, the humans drowned by its

emergence are merely collateral towards a greater good. When the MUTO kills, we see

bodies falling from monorail cars and people being stepped on, but Godzilla is never

directly shown causing human death. Through this distinction in framing, the divergence

between the peaceful and warlike atoms is made very clear. Like the peaceful atom,

Godzilla must be absolved and pacified, he must be made cool and consumable, an

artifact of awe and reverence, not destruction and sorrow. For Godzilla scholar Robert F.

Hamilton explains what he believes is the core difference between Honda and Edwards'

films:

> Despite the implicit warnings against nuclear testing and
> condemnation of the actions of the American government,
> this resolution seems to imply a lingering faith in the
> Japanese government and their ability to use weapons for
> good. Edwards' Godzilla, on the other hand, finds
> resolution in allowing nature to take its course. Instead of
> dropping a weapon into the harbour to kill the monsters, the
> beasts are permitted to fight it out until natural order is
> restored.[65]

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[65] Hamilton, "Meltdown" 51.

My reading of the film takes issue with Hamilton's assertion here. There is nothing

natural about the confluence of imperialist military might, evangelism and the split atom,

referring to the MUTOs vs. Godzilla. Every element of this film is specifically designed

to pacify and familiarize its audience with America's newfound heavyweight champion.

The characters may say "Let them fight" as Serizawa (Ken Watanabe) does in a pivotal

moment in the film, but its action and outcomes tell a different story, one of military

cooperation, deification, and the illusion of "natural order" being restored.

Unsurprisingly, this "natural order" seems to strongly resemble global U.S. military,

cultural, and economic hegemony.

The monster's design itself also follows suit here. This is a distinctly "Americanized" re-

imagining of the leviathan. It now stands almost always entirely upright; it is bulky and

thick and constantly in a "ready to fight" posture. Its eyes, perhaps the most telling part of

its design, are emotive and expressive, not just in terms of rage and anger but also

sorrow, understanding, and at times even compassion. Both in this film and its sequel

Godzilla: King of the Monsters, great attempts are made by the filmmakers to render

Godzilla more relatable and heroic, both in its posture, its appearance, its efforts, and by

the relationships the films allow the monster to build with its main characters. Godzilla

literally gets an "eye to eye" moment with Ford Brody, and later a sort of sombre "final

goodbye" moment with Dr. Serizawa (Ken Watanabe), the monster's long-time foremost

human spokesperson. This all suggests that the monster acts with human or near-human

intelligence and is not just guided by some sort of feral rage or instinct. As we will

discuss later in this chapter, this type of work is all but undone in Japan's 2016 answer to the monster *Shin Gojira*.

Earlier I used the phrase "kaiju-military porn" to describe this film's convergence of American military might and unbridled atomic kaiju energy, this conglomeration is no more potent than during the 2014 American film's climax, as can be expected. Godzilla and American special forces in San Francisco reach an unspoken alliance to save the city from the MUTO attack, albeit while destroying a large chunk of it. In particular, the sequence that depicts cascading parachuting soldiers with their red smoke marker trails surrounding the monster like ribbons of falling blood is a great manifestation of this on-screen alliance. If previous efforts of the film attempted to remake Godzilla's monstrous mythology and pacify the monster, sequences like these begin to accomplish new work altogether; the monster's anti-human aggression is gone and buried, his neutral calamitous destruction goes along with it. The monster is now remade as pro-military propaganda, a trend continued in the film's sequel and heightened yet again. Godzilla charges into battle against other ruinous beasts while flanked by fighter jets; they give the monster literal wingmen for his assault on the enemies of American hegemony.

Although the focus of this section is on the 2014 *Godzilla,* there is a particularly useful sequence in its sequel *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019) that makes almost cartoonishly explicit the film's connection to the Godly power of atom. *Godzilla: KotM* features an eco-terrorist named Alan Jonah (Charles Dance) using "bio-acoustic" research to reawaken the Earth's dormant titans in an attempt to wipe the slate clean of humanity, an unsubtle homage to Jonah, Sodom and Gomorrah. Through their efforts the team

manages to reawaken Godzilla's ancient nemesis, the three-headed alien lightning dragon King Ghidorah. Much like in the first film, Godzilla is naturalized as an integral part of Earth's healthy ecosystem, Ghidorah is pointedly described as "not from Earth" suggesting it came here from space to upset a delicate balance. It is also heavily coded as a Satanic figure given its serpentine form. *King of the Monsters'* construction on a Christian pseudo-Revelations foundation cannot be overstated. Godzilla is eventually given its own guardian angel in the form of Mothra, and its own Christlike sacrifice-to-resurrection arc. After the U.S. military deploys its "Oxygen Destroyer" weapon in an attempt to take out both King Ghidorah and Godzilla, an allusion to the climax of the 1954 film, Ghidorah is left virtually unharmed whereas Godzilla is left near-death and retreats to its subterranean lair. Serizawa (Ken Watanabe) pilots a one-man sub into the depths and sacrifices himself to deliver a nuclear payload to Godzilla, resurrecting him. Seconds before detonation, Serizawa removes the glove of his radiation suit and presses a palm to Godzilla's snout as the two share a moment of understanding before they are enveloped in radiant holy atomic light. *King of the Monsters* frames this nuclear recharge specifically as a resurrection as it furthers the film's frequent allusions to the Christian monomyth. It is through this sequence we see Godzilla's death, his entombing, and his resurrection all of which cement the monster's representational closeness to Christ and empowers its remaining screen time with righteous fury. The film does not specifically state how long Godzilla spends in his ancient tomb, but we can assume the monster is down for approximately one holiday weekend. Newly supercharged and back from the dead, Godzilla returns to the surface and annihilates Ghidorah amidst the flaming wreckage of Boston, cementing his place as the one true Alpha, after which the remaining

released titans once again are cowed by his holy reign, rule by what is obviously divine right.

How then can Godzilla's image and stature be reclaimed, given the massive work being undertaken to portray it here as a friend to humanity and yet another agent of American military propaganda? As if to answer this call and course-correct the goliath, we then come to Toho's 2016 *Shin Godzilla*, or in English, *Godzilla Resurgence*.

Shin Godzilla

Written and directed by Hideaki Anno of mecha series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* fame, 2016's *Shin Gojira*, or *Godzilla Resurgence* marks a return to the monster's roots; it is pure calamity that sees a modern Japan struggle against its own bureaucratic culture, neoliberal technocracy, and U.S. geopolitical supremacy as much as it struggles against the eponymous radioactive titan. The film follows Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Rando Yaguchi (Hiroki Hasegawa) as he navigates the labyrinthine Japanese parliamentary cabinet butting heads against other ministers whose approaches to governance range from zealous, to sycophantic, to outright incompetent. Eventually, once enough red tape has been stripped away, and once Godzilla has already wrought formidable destruction, Yaguchi assembles a group of, as described by Kanji Tsuda's Welfare Minister character, "lone wolves, nerds, marginalized heretics, and enemies of the academic bureaucracy," into a "flat organization" without need for "titles or seniority." One of the film's first major armament sequences does not depict the lining up of tanks, the racking of machine guns, or the fueling and takeoff of jets: it is the wheeling in of office chairs, the placement of photocopiers and the unfolding of collapsible tables. Yaguchi's weapons

against Godzilla are the banal trappings of a rigidly technocratic society, and he and his ragtag team must use them to defeat the monster through sheer administrative prowess.[66]

Eventually, after a series of attempts and setbacks, the research group is successful in understanding how Godzilla's biology operates and Yaguchi's team administers several tanker-loads of blood coagulant to the beast, freezing its skin and immobilizing it completely. The hard-won victory is not without its massive destructive toll: the entire previous cabinet and Prime Minister being counted among the dead. In many ways, the "resurgence" of the film's title applies equally to Japan and the Japanese national psyche and autonomy as much as it does to the monster itself. The ultimate reward for Japan's victory over Godzilla is a new found sense of national pride and charisma that seventy years of postwar subservience had denied them.[67] In a conversation before the film's final confrontation, Yaguchi's boss Akasaka (Yutaka Takenouchi) turns to his protege and says somberly, "Japan is a tributary state... 'postwar' seems to last forever," referencing both the prolonged Japanese psychic and political infantilism that is imposed and continued by U.S. economic, military, and political hegemony in the region. These political circumstances are the direct result of treaties such as the "Security Treaty Between the United States and Japan" ratified in 1951 that functionally made Japan a puppet to U.S. capital and empire interests.[68] Scholar Jameson Bivens explains, "America's role in the film, though often incredibly helpful, is usually that of a

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[66] Jameson Bivens, "Shin Gojira: Return of the Angry God," *Scientia et Humanitas* 10 (July 30, 2020): 71.
[67] Ibid, 72.
[68] Bivens, "Angry God" 74.

schoolyard bully, telling Japan what it should do or dictating what it will do to Japan."[69] This film serves as a rejection of Japan's diminished autonomy and depicts, or predicts, a second wave of Japanese cultural and economic development free of U.S. pressure. Themes of international tension references to political vassalhood appear frequently in *Shin Gojira* as a means of working through the obvious nuclear trauma, and the more subtle geopolitical wounds that scar the Japanese shared consciousness. It is a film where a cacophony of meetings, tribunals, councils, and boardroom gatherings often outshine the moments when the monster itself is onscreen.

Concerning the film's adaptation of the monster, *Shin Gojira* forwards what may be the most alien and least relatable version of Godzilla yet; whereas the first attempt was serious if not kitschy, and the American monster is stalwart and dependable, *Shin Gojira*'s monster is truly a species of its own. Distinct from its predecessors, this film's monster appears in multiple forms throughout the film. Initially it emerges from Tokyo Bay as a semi-formed larval or tadpole creature with sandy brown skin, exposed veins, and perhaps most notably, massive gills that vent all manner of radioactive red gooey detritus from the monster's neck. Its movements are much less deliberate than previous monsters as well, it wobbles around like a kabuki puppet and crashes itself up onto buildings for leverage, trying to pull itself upright. Again, the monster's eyes are also a telling point of its design. Gone are the expressive emotive eyes of the 2014 American monster, instead they are replaced with glassy static eyes, reminiscent of the cold dead

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[69] Ibid, 75.

stare of a fish for sale at market. The eyes are markedly inhuman and therefore convey no intelligence or personality, just raw animality. For scholar Crînguța Irina Pelea, "without well-established narrative patterns or original subtexts, this Godzilla represents for most of the story a tangible foe, the reason why its weakened, and superfluid identity is reduced to one single dimension, the one of embodying malefic forces of chaos and illogical destruction, while perpetually threatening the cosmos and the world order."[70] In remaking the monster the filmmakers have achieved a truly alien and monstrous Godzilla, it is very clear that the audience is never really meant to identify or sympathise with *Shin Gojira*'s monster.

Later in the film, the monster re-emerges in a more familiar bipedal form. Its limbs have now grown, its massive tail swings about in the manner of a tentacle, and its eyes remain the same kind of disinterested fisheyes as its previous form. *Shin Gojira*'s monster's tail is also worthy of discussion, as it is far larger and thus far more monstrous and alien than previous forms of the monster. Where the original monster's tail just hung lifelessly, and the American monster's tail was used as a sort of club, but typically just dragged behind the monster, the tail in *Shin Gojira* is usually depicted reaching skywards and either moving in a prehensile fashion or in some sort of autonomous instinctive manner. It is deeply unsettling, and actually the first part of this new monster design that the audience sees, as it is the first part of Godzilla to breach the water's surface the first time it emerges. I would be remiss to mention that the tail and its tip down also possess a phallic

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[70] Crînguța Irina Pelea, "Exploring the Iconicity of Godzilla in Popular Culture. A Comparative Intercultural Perspective: Japan-America," *Postmodernism Problems* 10, no. 1 (April 2, 2020): 31. https://doi.org/10.46324/PMP2001018.

quality that is also previously unexplored in most of the *Godzilla* canon. During the film's climax the monsters head and tail enter a sort of radioactive pissing contest as each sprouts a beam of ultraviolet radioactive energy that slices through buildings in a single swoop, another new quality for the monster. *Shin Gojira*'s monster is packed full of new defensive tricks that show its design has been seemingly modernized alongside methods of war making that have all changed drastically since the film's 1954 predecessor.

As monstrous as the creature has been made up for this film, the actual terror and trauma it inflicts is still secondary to the film's main interested antagonist, the United States. Where Godzilla is an avatar of wanton destruction, the U.S. in *Shin Gojira*, mostly explored through the perspective of Japanese-American consulate aide Kayoko Ann Patterson (Satomi Ishihara), has much more pointed goals that further its global hegemonic agenda. As a result of the previously discussed security treaty, Japan's ability to retaliate or seek outside military aid is capped by its subservient relationship with the United States. Patterson enters the film about a third of the way through, acting as a spokesperson for the *very* interested U.S. Department of Energy that clearly wishes to be the sole owner of data on Godzilla. Reluctantly, she and her team share their research with Yaguchi's task force, but at the cost of exclusive rights to dictate the course of kaiju intervention and in return for unlimited study of the monster's atomic-energy-producing powers. As the monster grows increasingly destructive and volatile, the United States, backed by the UN Security council then move to suggest that since all other attempts have been exhausted, the nuclear option is all that remains. In a decision that is pointedly devastating for the only nation to ever suffer a nuclear attack, the U.S. recommends that a

thermonuclear warhead be deployed on Tokyo to destroy the monster, assuring the

Japanese government (whose leadership was nearly entirely destroyed by a previous

Godzilla attack, leaving the Secretary of Agriculture in charge of the nation as Prime

Minister) that were their positions reversed, it would do the same to New York or Los

Angeles.[71]

This major plot development has an obvious psychic consequence on the film's

characters the previously cocksure and swaggering Kayoko Ann Patterson. "I do not want

to see a third bomb fall on the country of my grandmother, who had to suffer the other

two," she states as the camera pulls away from her conversation with Yaguchi, across a

series of high-speed rail platforms. Here, the filmmakers highlight the sterilized concrete

modernity of Japan, a nation that weathered a nuclear storm and emerged, through

serious pressure from the U.S., to turn itself into a hyper-mechanized industrial and

technological power, only to be set back again by another U.S. nuke. Immediately after

this conversation, a short montage of two Hiroshima devastation stills takes us into a

briefing meeting on the nuclear missile plan with the newly appointed Japanese Prime

Minister, the previous Secretary of Agriculture. Having completely capitulated to U.S.

demands, he declares that he will turn power over the entire nation to U.S. authority so

that they can commence their strike. As I previously noted, it is difficult to claim that

Godzilla itself is the antagonist of this film: it is feral and angry but it does not possess

goals or motives to further itself beyond basic animalistic instinct. Anno clearly positions

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[71] Bevins, "Angry God", 76.

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the United States' overreach as the film's actual antagonistic force when the Americans prevent the Japanese from martialing their own defense.

The film's climax depicts the "Yaguchi Plan" coming to fruition; a markedly non-military operation sees Japanese officials, workers, and drivers deliver a multipart attack on a dormant Godzilla using explosive laden trains and tanker trucks full of blood coagulant. Where I previously described the combination of kaiju and military as pornographic in *Godzilla* (2014) I feel that I can only offer the same description to this segment, albeit with a major caveat. This is truly civil infrastructure porn; it is the expert technocratic deployment of a city's public infrastructure to combat an existential threat. Soldiers are present, as are drone weapons and high-altitude missiles, but they only exist within the Yaguchi plan to serve as a distraction and to force the monster to play its atomic radiation beam hand early, forcing it into a state of dormancy. Bevins explains that the Japanese Self-Defence Force (JSDF) is less of a military force and more of a well armed search-and-rescue that has traditionally relied on the U.S. to make-up for its militarist shortcomings.[72] A jovial fanfare accompanies the attack on Godzilla, it almost seems out of place in this film, were this scene not to be just an all-out celebration of strong central planning and infrastructure. In its attempts to destroy incoming drones and protect itself from their missile barrages, Godzilla expends all of its nuclear energy. Immediately after its beams stop, the Yaguchi plan then sees the controlled demolition of the vast majority of downtown Tokyo, toppling its steel and glass behemoths on the

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[72] Bevins, "Angry God", 72.

monster. The next phase of the assault sees a fleet of crane tanker vehicles emerge from

the surrounding alleys and begin to administer a massive volume of coagulant to the

monster, an attempt to completely halt its metabolism and destroy it from within. Even

when the first wave of tanker trucks is destroyed, a second is ready to fill in the gaps, but

not before the aforementioned train bomb assault. It is hard to think of a symbol more

synonymous with a fully industrialized and mechanized Japan than its arterial stems of

high speed, high-capacity trains, and this symbol is exactly what the Yaguchi plan uses

next to halt the monster. In what is arguably the most ridiculous sequence in a film full of

ridiculous sequences, around 10 full length urban trains loaded with explosives are

remotely launched at the monster. As they ram into piles of debris at the end of their

tracks, they are launched skyward like tentacles, encasing the monster as they explode all

around. Again, there is something somewhat poetic and satisfying about seeing the

hallmarks of demilitarized industrial Japan using its civilian weapons to their maximum

effect.[73] When the monster is finally defeated, it succumbs to the coagulant as it stands

above Tokyo Station, the main metropolitan train hub of Japan's capital city, a fitting

final battleground for this ultimately civilian struggle. As the coagulant completes its

work, the monster is seemingly petrified in place above the station, a monument to

Japan's successful defense, a markedly non-nuclear one, against a catastrophic nuclear

threat.[74] I read this decision as a clear argument against U.S. militarism and foreign

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[73] Yuichiro Tsuji, "Godzilla and the Japanese Constitution: A Comparison between Italy and Japan," *Italian Law Journal* 3, no. 2 (2017): 452.

[74] Tsuji, "Godzilla and the Japanese Constitution." 455.

interventionism, a tributary nation making the absolute most of the tools that the superpower has consigned to it since the end of the Second World War.

After what seems like an appropriate level of merry-making and planning in which Yaguchi and Akasaka discuss the future of Japan's politics, the film's last shot closes in on the tip of the frozen Godzilla's tail. Amidst the hard cakey sinew and alien organic forms of the tail, we see what appear to be several humanoid forms, skeletons, and fleshy mishmashes fixed in place, reaching upwards along the tail with spine crests of their own. According to Crînguța Irina Pelea," this potential human-monster fusion should be culturally interpreted in the context of the Shinto-inspired animistic belief system, where the borders between humans and nonhumans have a fluid and dynamic character. Therefore, the pervasive presence of animistic attitudes in the film is intimately connected with the legacy of Japanese folklore permeated with myths of hybrid morphing."[75] The makeup of the monster's tail suggests a frightening closeness between Godzilla and its victims, but also quite possibly gestures towards asexual reproduction. There are no concrete answers as to how Anno intended for this ending shot to be read, but given his larger oeuvre, especially concerning his work on *Evangelion*, it is likely that these final shots are an attempt to confuse and conflate the roles of monster and victim into a more dialectic relationship than any previous installments in the franchise have attempted. As this project continues, it will further explore the representation of Japan as both imperial monster, and postwar victim.

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[75] Pelea, "Exploring the Iconicity of Godzilla," 29.

Fallout

When I originally envisioned this chapter I had anticipated, rather naively, that Japan and America's respective representation of Godzilla would exist in parallel but ultimately separate from one another. In doing the actual work I am pleased to see that I was very wrong. The two national cultures' storytelling and politics pervade each other in unexpected ways, radiating outwards, metastasizing, mutating in time and across space. The relationship is more dialectic than I had originally perceived, which speaks to the universality of horror that a creature like Godzilla can dredge up, and the universality of postwar American influence on its newly formed vassal states. I also never anticipated for this chapter to focus so heavily on the anti-American sentiment in Japanese monster movies, but I suppose this as well can be chalked up to naivety.

The years following *Shin Godzilla* have not brought about a proper sequel. Toho has moved on to distributing a trilogy of entirely animated off world science fiction Godzilla films, so that tasty morsel of post-nuclear human and monster convergence that closes Anno's film still goes unanswered. I would like to interpret this lack of a clear delineation between human and monster, and an overall lack of closure, as a metaphor for trying to unpack nuclear fiction. There are no easy answers or tightly wrapped ribbons to unravel through which the essence of the thing will be discovered. Having only ever experienced nuclear catastrophe from afar I am left mostly with mere speculation and closing thoughts. It is now the aim of this project to thrust ever upward, a ballooning mushroom cloud of untested hunches and observations, into new areas of work and to study a subject I have more personal familiarity with than a gargantuan atomic lizard: the tortured teen,

the monstrous adolescent, the metal wombs of mecha and the robotic fetishization of the 1980s.

Chapter 2: Mecha

Atomic Futures

Completing my first chapter on *Godzilla* felt like a small milestone, one I was eager to reward myself for with copious amounts of doing nothing. I am returning now to write about the bomb, and the anguished animated young bodies that it destroys, remakes, hardens, and softens. Coincidentally, this new wave of inspiration comes along with the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. Being reminded of the Hiroshima attack as the original impetus for this project, I am also reminded of *Barefoot Gen*, a 1983 Japanese animated feature directed by Mori Masaki and based on the manga of the same name by Keiji Nakazawa who himself was a childhood survivor of the blast. For Nakazawa, the *Barefoot Gen* manga is a memoir of his early childhood experience and trauma. *Barefoot Gen* is perhaps most notable for its astounding animated take on the destruction of Hiroshima. The first time I watched this film I went back and re-watched this pivotal sequence four or five times trying to catch every detail. There are still new things I pick out and discover each time I return to it, it is a mesmerizing and horrific sequence. With reference to the 75th anniversary of the bombing, *Cartoon Brew* recently shared a small listicle recounting five major depictions of the atomic bomb in animation, *Barefoot Gen* being second among them and noting that its own detonation scene is inspired by an earlier short *Pica-don* from 1978. In *Little Boy*, Murakami refers to the phenomenon of "pika-don" meaning "light blast" referring not only to the literal explosion itself, but the associated cultural fallout and trauma related. "Pika-don" can be read as a latent subgenre with its influence radiating through much of the Japanese

animation industry. For Murakami "Pika-don' symbolizes the visual, aural, and other

sensory imprints made on the Japanese psyche, which has been completely transformed

in the wake of the collective subjection to the Japanese people to the horrendous

experience of nuclear annihilation."[76] Murakami does not mince words when it comes to

the psychic impact of nuclear weapons, nor should he need to.

The goal of this chapter is to trace the appearance of "Pika-don" through the anime

medium, and to compare how Japanese and American animation represents, or ignores,

nuclear and military trauma through its depiction of young bodies. Murakami makes the

argument that adolescence is so commonly depicted in Japanese pop culture because of

the psychic stunting that occurred because of the nuclear attacks in 1945. Of particular

interest to my project is the "mecha" as it stands as a cybernetic foundation of this

chapter's work. What does the over-abundance of large robots in Japanese culture relay?

Why are they so often piloted by children and adolescents? To answer these questions

and more, the original 1981 *Mobile Suit Gundam* film trilogy will be closely examined

alongside Mark Seltzer's *Bodies and Machines* as a primary theoretical tool.[77] Then, as

with the first chapter these themes and readings will be analysed alongside its foremost

American counterpart *Transformers the Movie* (1986) directed by Nelson Shin. Moving

beyond mecha and back to Japan, this chapter will then transition to an examination of

Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 anime masterpiece *Akira* as a purposeful amalgamation of

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[76] Takashi Murakami, ed., *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, Bilingual edition (New York: Yale University Press, 2005) 19.

[77] The *Mobile Suit Gundam* film trilogy is the film adaptation of the original *Mobile Suit Gundam* TV series from 1979, repackaged into three films.

teenage angst, nuclear politics, and cybernetic body horror. What occurs to the body when it is broken by energies previously unknown? What does the depiction of broken and changing bodies tell us about nuclear trauma? Alongside Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, *Akira* will be examined as one of Japan's most pre-eminent nuclear cultural exports. Continuing from *Godzilla*, how can we better understand the postwar relationship between American and Japanese pop culture through the lens of animated media? Ultimately, it is the goal of this chapter to assert that animation, and particularly Japanese animation, is a most effective tool for navigating nuclear trauma and this trauma's effects on the body and mind of the adolescent, and by extension the effects of nuclear trauma on an entire population. American attempts to pacify the anti-war or anti-nuclear rhetoric of Japanese cultural products in favour of commerciality and American imperial hegemony are just as present in this chapter as they were in the first.

A Critical Introduction to Anime

Prior to delving into the texts themselves, a certain level of background information must be established. Anime is a uniquely Japanese artform, not completely detached from American popular animation but still possessing its own unique history and conventions. *Anime: A History* by Jonathan Clements and Rayna Denison's *Anime: A Critical Introduction* will each be used in this chapter to explore these aforementioned anime qualities. Both author's works are exhaustive, particularly Clements', as Denison begins her work with a discussion of Clements' work. The former is focused more specifically on the history of the industry and medium while the latter is devoted to, as the title suggests, the critical study of anime as a distinct scholarly discipline. It is not within the

purview of this project to provide a comprehensive summation of the history of anime, nor is it entirely relevant to this project's specific aims. However, work concerning the later discussed "mecha" genre will be accumulated and discussed in this section and the next as they are essential to describe how anime found global popularity and its own distinct identity as a serialized narrative format in the years following the Second World War.

In Clements' chapter "The Seeds of Anime: Japanese animation industries 1946-62" he begins with a discussion of Japanese animator Masaoka Kenzō who formed the "Shin Nihon Doga-sha" or "New Japanese Animation Company" in November 1945 during the American occupation of Japan. Clements explains that "the speed with which he began production in Occupation Japan is still remarkable," then goes on to point out that this rapid expansion of Occupation Japan's animation industry was steered by Occupation authorities seeking centralization of Japan's animation industry over the traditional small studio system of previous years.[78] To that point, it should also be noted that this was by no means the beginning of animation in Japan, but more so that it marks a moment of distinct transition in the industry's history, a transition from small unaffiliated artisan studios towards regimented, hierarchical large studios like the Hollywood studio system in America.

Additionally, as Japan's entertainment industries were modernized and expanded so too was the access to television, which in turn led to the growth of the television advertising

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[78] Jonathan Clements, *Anime: A History*, 1 edition (London: British Film Institute, 2013). 74, 75.

sector, again mirroring developments in postwar America. Clements points out that in

February of 1953, the time of Japan's first official public TV broadcast, the entire nation

only possessed 866 television sets.[79] This number booms exponentially in the coming

years and by 1959 the nation had four distinct commercial television channels which

needed an equal supply of programming and advertising. The feature films of the

immediate postwar could not adapt easily to this new format, and with that legendary

anime creator Tezuka Osamu's *Astro Boy* was born, Japan's first serialized televised

anime program. "The broadcast of *Astro Boy* on New Year's Day 1963 is generally taken

to mark the beginning of a new age in Japanese animation."[80] The runaway popularity of

Astro Boy then opened the doors to later anime series like *Space Battleship Yamato* in

1974*,* and *Super Dimension Fortress Macross* in 1982. Both series were later adapted for

export to America as *Star Blazers* and *Robotech* respectively. Also, among these new

series and later exports is perhaps Japan's most notable and widely known robotic anime

franchise *Gundam*, the original films of which will later be interrogated in this chapter.

Already, in this brief summary, I hope that the cross-cultural element of the anime

industry's growth is evident. Much like the kaiju films discussed previously, these

products have never been entirely Japanese nor entirely American, they are dialectic and

represent decades of tension and cross pollination between the Western superpower and

its sociopolitical vassal.

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[79] Ibid, 85.

[80] Ibid, 116.

Concerning reading anime as cultural texts this project will now turn to the work of

Rayna Denison in *Anime: A Critical Introduction*. Denison's work begins with this core

assertion of anime's polysemy:

> Anime constantly shifts meanings dependent on where we
> are when watching it; our access to anime is being limited
> or expanded by the relationships between distribution
> markets, by our understanding of language and,
> increasingly, by the flows of texts across the internet,
> whether generated by legitimate distributors or fans
> online.[81]

For Denison, unpacking the "meaning" of an anime text requires more knowledge than

simply what occurs in the frames on-screen, it is a deeply cool medium the meanings of

which are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated, particularly today in the age of

instant global communication. Towards this point, she later mentions that most existing

critical discourse on anime is mired in its science fiction subgenre. After all, the modern

anime industry and its eventual transnational success is in large part indebted to the

popularity of *Astro Boy* as Japan's first serialized narrative anime series, a series about a

small robot boy, aimed at children. In addition, Denison turns to Japanese film scholar

Daisuke Miyao who cautions against reading anime as a specifically children's medium,

as, particularly in its sci-fi offerings, the medium contains complex themes examining

Japan's relationship to the rest of the world, particularly in the postwar period, but also

while alluding to the nation's traditional history.[82] Simply put, anime media is not only

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[81] Rayna Denison, *Anime: A Critical Introduction*, 1 edition (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 1.

[82] Ibid, 31.

cartoons built to package advertisements: while anime is indeed a commercial medium, it is also a medium worthy of analysis.

Denison's third chapter focuses specifically on the representation of the body in anime, another line of interrogation that will prove vital to this chapter's explorations of its texts. As much as the medium can represent bodies as beautiful objects, they are also equally objects in change, objects that are malleable and mutable, to any extreme that the medium permits. Considering this is animation and nearly anything imaginable is possible, these limits are indeed extreme. Denison turns to the work of scholar Christian McCrea who writes, "The violence done to animated bodies and to our system of spectatorship is neither metaphoric nor metonymic. Rather, it is discursive, disruptive and incredibly excessive. It is resolutely physical, but never truly available for us to interpret in the way the violence of action films can be interpreted."[83] Here McCrea calls attention to these limits I mentioned earlier. As watchers of anime, we cannot simply expect to understand its bodily conventions in a "real" sense as these bodies aren't "real." They are wholly fictitious, the stuff of imagination, and thus these bodies can serve as potent vessels of meaning, particularly concerning pain and trauma. Anime bodies, and particularly adolescent anime bodies, considering the aim of this chapter, can feel and express pain and trauma in completely unhuman ways.

Lastly for the purposes of this primer, I will turn to Denison's chapter "Early Anime Histories: Japan and America" as it covers the early distribution of anime television in

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[83] Christian McCrea, "Explosive, Expulsive, Extraordinary: The Dimensional Excess of Animated Bodies," *Animation* 3, no. 1 (2008): 19.

America, which is of interest to this project due to its focus on the transnational dialectics of Japanese and American pop culture. Essentially, Denison argues towards the end of this chapter that the distribution of anime in the U.S. was fraught with the same existing postwar tensions that pervaded other aspects of the two nations' relationship. Chiefly, anime exports to America were meant to provide a stable and profitable flow of child-friendly content, in accordance with several postwar educational edicts, to U.S. audiences. On this topic, the question of violence, or more acutely what was to be considered violent, is centered in Denison's conclusions. She argues that even the incredibly childish *Astro Boy* was often considered too violent for American youth audiences, which in turn were embroiled in various moral panic issues, issues of nationalism, and even xenophobia. Series like *Robotech*, the Americanized version of *Macross* were subject to extensive editing, rewriting of dialogue and the replacement of music. Ultimately, these changes slowed the distribution and maturation of the anime medium throughout the West, and in Japan as well. Commercial concerns for the medium meant that anime production always veered towards child-friendly themes, without being able to explore mature ideas more freely like pain, war, and trauma. This aside, one subgenre, "mecha" soon became emblematic of this tension in Japan, and can be read as a distinctly transnational export, despite its obvious origins in Japan, because of its booming popularity in the west during the latter half of the 20th century and beyond.[84]

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[84] Rayna Denison, *Anime: A Critical Introduction*, 80-83.

Youthful Bodies in Sci-Fi Anime

Denison positions anime's obsession with depicting bodies because of the medium's "ability to depict constantly mutating, metamorphosing and transforming bodies that exceed the possibilities of the real world, even going beyond live-action cinema."[85] Denison's argument coincides with my own earlier assertion that the representational verism of both film *and* photography mean they cannot provide an ample level of room to represent the trauma of war. Barthes' work on the photographic image states, "Truly traumatic photographs are rare, for in photography the trauma is wholly dependent on the certainty that the scene 'really' happened: *the photographer had to be there.*"[86] He states that captured images of trauma are pacified by the series of rhetorical codes and that the true focus of the photographic code is to "integrate man, to reassure him."[87] This project then asserts that atomic and war-themed anime representation does little to reassure, and instead creates a new code of bodily signification that is unique to anime, and exists as a result of shared cultural trauma. Denison explains that specifically in the transformation of animated bodies—which is not itself a single technique but instead a broad group of representational tropes ranging from "chibi" to outright body horror—room is created for cross-genre representation that encompasses romance to horror and all in between.[88] [89]

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[85] Ibid, 51.

[86] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," *Image Music Text*, (London, UK: Hill and Wang, 1977,) 30.

[87] Ibid, 31.

[88] Rayna Denison, *Anime: A Critical Introduction*, 31.

[89] Chibi here refers to the shortening and simplification of characters in anime series to demonstrate moments of cuteness or infantilism.

Understanding the construction of anime and animation broadly as separate from photography and film is essential to understanding the rhetorical work performed by anime texts in their representation of bodies and the world generally. This follows my own earlier assertion that photographic verism is not the best tool culture has to understand or unpack the meaning of atomic weapons or war trauma. Perhaps only through abstraction, cartoonish abstraction, can humans be made to properly understand their horror and their lasting psychological footprints imprinted on victims and perpetrators alike.

Reading Mori Masaki and Keiji Nakazawa's 1983 anime film *Barefoot Gen* offers insight into this exact process; a survivor of Little Boy himself, Nakazawa's film deals explicitly with the transformation of youthful bodies because of nuclear trauma. The film's most striking sequence summarizes the detonation of Little Boy and its effects on the bodies of Japanese children; the film's first depicted casualty is a young girl whose eyes melt from her skull as her skin browns, shrivels and burns as she falls to the ground; each frame of this transformation is painstakingly rendered as a unique frame depicting a scene that is otherwise impossible to depict. The film's eponymous character, while saved from the blast itself, is later seen losing his hair, becoming emaciated and suffering effects of radiation sickness. By positioning youthful innocence as the primary target of nuclear aggression, Nakazawa's work cements the conflation of the bomb and Japan's freezing in perpetual adolescence. Pika-don animation representing bodies in change, and in painful change more specifically, demonstrates a useful distinction between anime and other

forms of serial entertainment media; frame by frame animation and body horror are matched effectively to render trauma literally and culturally by extension.

The remainder of this chapter and its shorter successor will discuss the adolescent body in anime and animation in relation to nuclear and war trauma. The adolescent body is perhaps the most popular and pervasive representational form in anime film and television, particularly in the mecha subgenre and its cyberpunk cousin. Anime scholars like Napier and Denison have written at length about the "monstrous adolescents" of anime. Napier expands, "despair and a feeling of entrapment are emotions often associated with adolescence. They are also frequently emotions projected onto the adolescent body."[90] In this way the film *Akira* and mecha anime more generally can be understood as a polysemic body of work and, "can be looked at on two levels: as a fresh expression of an alienated youth's search for identity and as a cyberpunk meditation on apocalypse."[91] This project supposes however, that these two readings are one and the same. The projection of despair, loss, and immense pressure onto the adolescent body— whether that body be human, a city, a whole nation— is both a comment on adolescence and also a tool through which viewers may peer into a deeply coded Japanese fatalism that emerges from the rubble of wartime devastation. Mecha series are uniquely poised to offer glimpses of this trauma through their own genre-wide obsession with the adolescent, with their focus on what John D. Moore describes as "interiority", and the

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[90] Susan J. Napier, "Akira and Ranma ½: The Monstrous Adolescent," *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation,* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 39.

[91] Ibid, 43.

constant use of grief, trauma, and loss as highlighted by Vyshali Manivannan in their article studying these codes in mecha series *Gurren Lagann*. The remainder of this section will explore these works broadly and generally as not text-specific phenomenon, but genre-wide conventions that form the nuclear core powering the mecha suit.

In the introduction to his thesis *Inside the Boy Inside the Robot: Mobile Suit Gundam and Interiority,* John D. Moore explains "Techniques of interiority are techniques of representation, and they narrate the internal conflicts and feelings of characters. The approach to interiority exhibited in Gundam echoes developments in other forms across modern media, including in its Japanese context."[92] As Moore's work's title suggests, the "interiority" in *Gundam* is layered: it refers to both the internal thoughts of the series' child soldier protagonists, as well as their actions within the confines of their "Mobile Suit" cockpits. In accordance, much of Moore's argumentation revolves around the tension created between these two insides, and the exterior world as well, a world at war in space and on Earth. "Interiority" is a convention that can be observed throughout the entire mecha subgenre, a constantly shifting balance between interior and exterior representation, between causes and effects, between combat, and its lingering post-traumatic effects. Moore describes these conventions in detail in his work but does not draw a broader connection to Japan's specific shared nuclear trauma as a possible inciting factor of these codes of representation.

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[92] John D. Moore, "Inside the Boy Inside the Robot: Mobile Suit Gundam and Interiority" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2017), 6.

In Manivannan's work ""Later, buddy": the politics of loss and trauma representation in tengen toppa Gurren Lagann" the 27-episode mecha series *Gurren Lagann* is studied as an exercise in traumatic and post-traumatic storytelling. Central to the series' plot, Manivannan focuses their work on the combat loss of 18-year-old charismatic resistance leader Kamina and the lingering effects his death has on the series' protagonist Simon. From this point on the series remains mired in a tension between overcoming trauma and succumbing to trauma. Manivannan writes,

> However, following the central traumatic event of
> Kamina's combat death, the protagonist, Simon, embodies
> major diagnostic symptoms of trauma, shown by the
> hermeneutic divergence of visual and verbal
> representations. At first, the imagery and dialogue collude
> to convey positive messages about self-validation, human
> resilience, and the ability to overcome traumatic
> experience. These qualities constitute Kamina's core beliefs
> and ultimately the belief system of Kamina, the remainder
> of Team Dai-Gurren, and viewers.[93]

Contrarily, Manivannan then explains how the series challenges these notions by conveying Simon's continuing struggled with Kamina's death, "Simon's dialogue recalls Kamina's pre-trauma assumptive world, but the cumulative meaning of reflexive imagery attest that the assumptive world, once violated, cannot be rebuilt," mentioning that the series ultimately presents loss and trauma as "enduring and insurmountable."[94] This challenging of the "assumptive world" which Manivannan refers to is common throughout mecha anime, as its protagonists, particularly in the *Gundam* franchise, often

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[93] Vyshali Manivannan, "'Later, Buddy': The Politics of Loss and Trauma Representation in Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 3, no. 1 (2011): np.

[94] Ibid.

enter combat from a very similar ignorant position. Amuro, the main protagonist of the original *Mobile Suit Gundam* is a prime example of this transition. He is initially cocksure, egotistical, and positive. In the following discussion of the original series' adaptation films, this chapter will then explore the transformative ability of trauma, specifically war-related trauma, and its ability to shatter the rosy-eyed assumptive worldview of mecha protagonists.

Mobile Suit Gundam: Boy Scouts and Machines

Writing as a self-identified nerd in 2021 it's difficult to imagine a world before *Gundam*. For over four decades the mecha super-franchise has inspired a love of giant robots in people young and old the world over. Alongside Pokémon and PlayStation, it is not difficult to view *Gundam* as one of Japan's predominant cultural exports. In Odaiba, Tokyo from 2009 to 2011 tourists and shoppers could marvel at a 1:1 scale, 59-foot-tall RX-78-2 Mobile Suit Gundam lovingly constructed from 35 tons of fiberglass, plastic, and steel. The original sculpture was damaged in the Tohoku Earthquake, the same quake that caused the nuclear reactor disaster in Fukushima, but has since been repaired, refitted, and relocated to the front of DiverCity Tokyo Plaza where it now stands as a perfectly ironic monument to Japanese consumerism and cultural history. Here the original Gundam stood until 2017, when it was replaced by the new RX-o from *Gundam Unicorn*, at the time the latest iteration of the franchise coinciding with Tokyo's gearing up to host the 2020 Summer Olympic games, an ultimately fruitless endeavour due to the

Covid-19 global pandemic.[95] Perhaps there is some poetry in this cycle of construction, destruction, renewal, and growth that links this one small facet of the Gundam universe to this project, but regardless of such musing it is clear that Gundam is a not only an important past-time, but in many ways an integral limb of Japanese culture, particularly on the global scale. Hobby shops around the world nearly always feature shelves lined with plastic "Gunpla" Gundam model kits at a vast variety of scales and detail grades. In cultural circles that venerate anime, sci-fi, or technology broadly, Gundam is ubiquitous, and it is for this reason that it has been chosen as a key text for this chapter. The following section will briefly outline the history of this franchise and its paratexts, will introduce the work of Mark Seltzer in *Bodies and Machines* with specific respect to the amalgamation of youthful body and machine, and will explore Seltzer's theories alongside the original *Mobile Suit Gundam* film trilogy providing both narrative and formal elements, elements specific to its animation and design, that express the politics of nuclear trauma. Climb aboard the 59-foot-tall robot and strap in!

Jonathan Clements outlines the creation of Gundam in *Anime: A History* by explaining how its creator Tomino Yoshiyuki endeavoured to "take the 'giant robot' shows more seriously, disregarding the vaguer, fantastical notions of children's entertainment, and attempting to inject more mature themes and explanations."[96] He allowed his work to age with the audience he had built up through previous work on the less sophisticated *Brave*

[95] "History Of The Gundam Statue In Odaiba!," *JapanSauce.Net* (blog), December 28, 2018, https://japansauce.net/2018/12/28/history-of-the-gundam-statute-in-odaiba/.

[96] Clements, *Anime: A History*, 154.

Raideen, through his handling of *Zambot 3* and the shocking killing of several main characters, to the eventual global phenomenon that would be *Mobile Suit Gundam.* However, Clements is also quick to point out that *MSG*'s original performance was lackluster, and its initial intended 52 week run in 1979 was cut short to 43 as poor ratings and toy sales for its sponsor Clover resulted in the decision to wrap the shop up early and rewrite its original ending to meet this new timeframe.[97] [98] Due to its "artistic heritage," television rebroadcasts, eventual movie-length edits—the exact films that this chapter will study—and the advent of home video technology, *Mobile Suit Gundam* would eventually soar to global popularity, eventually resulting in the sale of 4.4 million plastic model kits in the two years following the films' release in Japanese theatres. According to Clements, Tomino's gamble to age his media with its audience had paid off, as the audience that had followed his work through to maturity now had "money to spend on spin-offs" and toys.[99] For the purposes of simplicity, this project opts to study the *Mobile Suit Gundam* original film trilogy, the aforementioned re-cut of the originally airing series, as its primary *Gundam* text. The series by this point is simply too vast to be wholly contained within this thesis: its texts and paratexts now span genres, mediums, and decades. The original film series is still emblematic of the entire canon of *Gundam* texts, it focuses heavily on the adolescent body at war, the body in armor, and the devastating effects of super-weapon combat on those who take part, chiefly the child soldiers of the *Gundam Universe*. It should also be noted, as Clements discusses as well,

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[97] Ibid, 155.

[98] Moore, *Inside the Boy inside the Robot*, 3.

[99] Clements, *Anime: A History*, 155.

that *Gundam* marks a drastic shift in mecha's chief representational codes from the "super-robot" style of earlier series to the "real-robot" style that persists more prominently today. In short, the super-robot style was a hallmark of a less mature style of mecha storytelling; robots were heroic and moralistic with their own innate qualities. In contrast, the "real-robot" is simply a tool to be used by man, it is devoid of agency or agenda and is instead just a pilotable weapon, allowing storytellers like Tomino to focus on the human occupants more so than the machines themselves.[100]

The story of *Mobile Suit Gundam* takes place in the fictitious timeline of the "Universal Century" during the "One Year War" of UC 0079. This flash in the pan conflict is the result of the "Principality of Zeon"—a militaristic posthumanist human space colony cult—seeking independence from the "Earth Federation"—a militaristic liberal-democratic one-world-government cult—for which most of the combat occurs in space using man-shaped bipedal robots known as "mobile suits". The distinction between "mobile suit" and "Gundam" is not made exceedingly clear in the films but can be summed up as akin to the difference between a propeller aircraft and a supersonic fighter jet: the latter is sleeker, faster, sturdier, and carries a significantly higher payload than the former, and thus requires a new generation of pilot to meet its technological demands. These pilots are the "new types," psychically awakened adolescents capable of forming bonds with their machines to pilot them through intuition rather than training. Zeon sees these children as evidence of the evolution of humanity and have poured all their stock

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[100] Ibid, 154.

into the embrasure of the "new type" teen, while the Earth Federation is much more traditional and skeptical of these new unknowns and only discovers their potence by accident, through the series' lead character Amuro Ray, son of the chief *Gundam* development scientist. Regardless, neither side demonstrates any real reticence towards jamming these teenaged bodies into nuclear robot cockpits and forcing them to duke it out in the zero-gravity vacuum of space, the synthetic colony worlds of the Earth Federation, or on terra firma itself. The film trilogy tracks this conflict from beginning to end through the escapades of the crew of "White Base" a specially designed space frigate complete with a complement of fighter vehicles and mobile suits as they are set adrift after the surprise Zeon attack on the Federation colony of "Side 7."

In his essay comparing *Gundam* to its predecessor *Yamato*, William Ashbaugh summarizes the key differences between the two series/films/franchises as such:

> ...like Yamato, Gundam is a war allegory. Gundam, in its television and movie forms, represents creator/director Tomino's counter-narrative to Yamato's valorizing of the military and propagation of the master narratives of 'noble failure' and national victimhood. Gundam does advocate pacifism, but that is not all...[101]

He goes on to argue that applying a World War II lens to the series proves useful as well; the Dutchy of Zeon is the Axis powers, relatively newly established empire nations striving for a larger piece of the pie, and the Earth Federation as the Allies, well established superpowers that block newer rising powers from participation in colonial

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[101]William Ashbaugh*, "*Contesting Traumatic War Narratives: Space Battleship Yamato and Mobile Suit Gundam" *in Postwar Literature and Film*, *Imag(in)Ing the War in Japan* (Brill, 2010), 345.

markets.[102] Ashbaugh goes on to later describe the Zeon's actions as mirrors of early

Japanese imperial expansion at the outset of World War II citing the invasion of

Manchuria, the "Mukden Incident" and others not of particular use to this project. What

is of use is in discerning just how Tomino meant to remediate Japan's involvement in the

war to counter the prevailing narrative of sheer victimhood. Ashbaugh writes:

> Gundam effectively calls into question the postwar master
> narrative of special Japanese victimhood. While the work
> conveys the plight of all civilians caught up in total war, it
> only explicitly discusses and represents the sufferings of
> Federation, not Zeon, civilians. Although civilians play a
> lesser role in the movies than in the television series, there
> are still ample examples of the everyday difficulties and
> horrors faced by noncombatants. The background narrative
> explains how in the surprise attack Zeonic forces destroyed
> even fellow space colonists.[103]

To unpack the meaning of *Gundam*, this project will also rely on the theoretical work of

American naturalist literary critic Mark Seltzer and is seminal work *Bodies and*

Machines, particularly its fifth section "The Love-Master" which begins with an

exploration of Stephen Crane's classic war novel *The Red Badge of Courage*. There are

some immediate similarities of note between Crane's novel and *Gundam*, particularly

their shared focus on young bodies at war, the effects of prolonged combat stress on the

psyche, and the pursuit of "manhood," as well as the shared war-of-succession setting.

Additionally, Seltzer's work focuses on studying the Boy Scouts of America as a similar

"man-making" project that appeared around the turn of the 20th century.[104] For Seltzer,

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid, 347.

[104] Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, 1 edition (Routledge, 2014) 149.

"the craft of making men was the antidote to anxieties about the depletion of agency and virility in consumer and machine culture."[105] Seltzer argues that modernism and its embrace of technological reproduction of goods—and even people as seen through his study of postwar amputees given new mechanical limbs—was understood to have robbed the male species of its essential tenets, values, and powers. Citing "The Woodcraft movement" Seltzer explains that paramilitary organizations for organizing boys into men were essential "to combat the system that has turned such a large proportion of our robust, manly, selfreliant boyhood into a lot of flat-chested cigarette smokers, with shaky nerves and doubtful vitality." Degenerates, these boys are labelled. This project then supposes that the proliferation of mecha media, of which *Gundam* is most emblematic, operates as a criticism of this line of thinking, by demonstrating that "man-making" in a technological post-nuclear era is not only fruitless, but dangerous as placing boys into large robots does not adequately protect them from the horror of nuclear trauma, nor does it increase their "selfreliant" character. For this project, the boy soldiers of mobile suits and Gundams are the Boy Scouts of Earth in the stars, the logical conclusion of fascistic man-making military projects that seek to seed the universe with hyper-masculine weapons impervious to trauma.

Gundam grows to be critical of this type of mythmaking as a franchise: its later entries like *Iron Blooded Orphans* and *Gundam Unicorn* explicitly criticize the use of child soldiers on "both sides" of these conflicts, while the original trilogy perhaps stumbles

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[105] Ibid.

slightly in this endeavour. However, the assertion Seltzer puts forward that, "if turn-of-

the-century American culture is alternatively described as naturalist, as machine culture,

and as the culture of consumption, what binds together these apparently alternative

descriptions is the notion that bodies and persons are things that can be made," is entirely

true in *Gundam* and bereft in the following text *Transformers* which will clearly outline

the critical-Japanese approach to the robot soldier figures as contrary to the celebratory

American approach. Ultimately, a vision of "manhood" as tied to a nuclear-mechanical

society is inherently flawed as one must ask, what is the purpose of "making men"

through culture and paramilitary regimen when all of their hard bodied robustness can be

obliterated in the blink of an eye by the same blast that reduces those "flat-chested

cigarette smokers" to dust. To do this, this section will study combat and post-combat

sequences of the original *Gundam* movie trilogy in detail while leaning on Seltzer to

provide a theoretical background in parallel to his discussion of Crane and the BSA.

What must we make of our own resident "flat-chested cigarette smoker" Amuro Ray? For

Ashbaugh, he represents the destructive emotional toll of war and combat:

> At times in Gundam, the stress of combat provokes a
> violent rage, and he uses the Gundam to kill or destroy
> anyone or anything that moves. War leads [Amuro] to
> sickening sorrow, sleeplessness, and even brief catatonia.
> He becomes a great pilot, but as he grows as a person he
> comes to fight solely to protect his friends. He has no
> interest in heroism, unless a hero is defined as one who
> survives to protect those around him.[106]

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[106] Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 347-348.

Throughout the initial film trilogy, the viewer is tasked with identifying with Amuro through what anime scholar John D. Moore describes as "interiority," the audience is privileged to Amuro's private thoughts and memories, Moore himself citing a moment when Amuro returns to his home to see his sister's doll which triggers an aural and visual flashback within the series. For Moore all of these moments are employed to cement the "focalization" of Amuro as the series' protagonist. In addition, Moore points out that the serial narrative structure of the *Gundam* television series was novel for young Japanese audiences, used to series-style narratives that resolve minor plots each week. Unlike this, *Gundam's*—and by extension Amuro's—narrative built on itself week after week, using Amuro's interiority, his memories and thoughts, as narrative cement, reminding the viewers of Amuro's past deeds, his emotional state, and his relationships with fellow crew members.[107] At its nuclear core, the strength of *Gundam* is found in this tension. How does the series attempt to resolve Amuro the boy with Amuro the nuclear super mutant soldier? It does so by critiquing what Seltzer would refer to as "becoming-artifactual":

> The becoming-artifactual of persons...is perfectly
> compatible with the substitution of the regimental and
> regimented body for the natural body-the military 'making
> of men.' And the 'drilling and training' that makes men
> into members, components of the war 'machine,' also
> substitutes the invulnerable and artificial skin of the
> uniform-armor for the vulnerable and torn natural body.[108]

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[107] John D. Moore, "Inside the Boy Inside the Robot," 42-46.

[108] Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, 163, 164.

Seltzer goes on to describe the phenomenon by which texts use "battle" to "make interior states visible: to gain knowledge of the mastery over bodies and interiors by tearing them open to view." This is a very literal process that we will see throughout *Gundam*'s entirety, as battle often consists of "tearing open" the robot suits with weaponry, but also that battle in the series necessitates an emotional "tearing open" of traumatic wounds, the possibility of forming new wounds, and ultimately a critique militarism and the regimented body.

Amuro stands apart from Seltzer's projection of the typical regimented body as *Gundam* makes frequent attempts at levity in what would otherwise be a drastically more formal militaristic lifestyle for the inhabitants of "White Base." As the ship was the sole surviving vessel of the Side 7 surprise attack, White Base is home to an assortment of civilian and military personnel, so much so that the distinctions between these roles is often obscured. For instance, the series three foremost-featured Gundam pilots, Amuro, Kai and Hayato, were all teenaged civilian inhabitants of Side 7 before the One Year War began. The Gundam mechanics and support staff are drafted from the civilian population, even a trio of comic-relief children seem to have completely unrestricted access to the ship. All civilians on White Base are refugees and are presented with no other option than to serve the United Federation in varying capacities obviously including combat roles for Amuro and his peers. In his first time behind the controls of Gundam he sweats, pants, and hesitates as he slowly aligns the Gundam's beam rifle crosshairs on an enemy soldier. "I have to fire... he's my enemy! Now fire!" he convinces himself as he pulls the trigger and all rounds go wide. The enemy launches their own mechs, the "Zaku" units, in

response to which Amuro quickly reflects "somehow shooting the Zaku doesn't bother me as much as shooting people, it isn't the same." All of the series' dialogue is written in this matter-of-fact style as if their most basic internal monologue is always on display, as Moore suggested with "interiority" and this is particularly the case for Amuro. The trilogy's protagonist meets his foil in Zeon Lieutenant Char; where Amuro is unsure and driven by emotions, Char is the perfect example of the artifactual body, a fellow "New Type" not much older than Amuro. "We all gotta die eventually, why not today?" Char exclaims coolly and cocksure while beams fire in every direction. His character is incredibly reminiscent of World War One's most famous ace pilot Manfred "The Red Baron" von Richthofen for his skill as a combat pilot, his aristocratic upbringing, and the distinct red colouring of his Zaku suits.[109] In this first engagement Amuro scores a direct breaching hit through an enemy Zaku exploding the unit and killing its pilot. In the moment, all Amuro can think is "man, oh man, unbelievable!" After his first day of combat, Amuro is left despondent back in his White Base quarters., he lays on his bed "to rest" curled up silently. This is a rare moment when the audience isn't met with some quip or thought of Amuro's, only strained sighing. His friend Frau later tries to rouse him from his near-catatonia only for him to respond "I can't fight... I'm a coward... Coward! Coward! Coward!" already demonstrating the immense psychological toll of nuclear space combat.

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[109] "Manfred von Richthofen," *Wikipedia,* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manfred_von_Richthofen

Later, back in the cockpit of Gundam to defend White Base from more Zeon attackers, Amuro demonstrates that he is quickly taking to combat. Over his initial bout of post-traumatic stress, he returns to battle and defeats an entire squadron of Zeon fighter aircraft, going as far as to slice them in two with his beam sword, a Gundam-sized energy melee weapon. During a later scene still, Amuro hides with his mother from Zeon foot patrols in a small civilian infirmary. He hides his sidearm and uniform under the blankets of a gurney while two Zeon soldiers accost his mother, claiming they need to get a look at the boy under the sheets. At this point fires his sidearm from underneath the sheets, killing the closest Zeon soldier. Amuro then springs out of bed, chasing the soldier's startled companion out the door screaming while his mother yells "No Amuro!" The young pilot completely empties his sidearm, hands shaking. This is Amuro's first Gundamless kill, his mother accosts him for his actions claiming that the soldier could have had a family. He replies "What then? If you don't think I should kill our enemies, would you prefer I let them kill me instead?" This sequence in the first film is perhaps the first unequivocal anti-war moment in the franchise, Amuro mistakes his mother's horror towards his killing as cowardice and contempt, rather than genuine concern for his humanity, innocence, or wellbeing. She names him a murderer out of sorrow, not anger. Amuro is drawn here with multiple beads of sweat running down his face, his eyes jitter with insecurity as he rebuff's his mother's attempt to soften him and instead returns to White Base.

Over the course of the series from this point on, Amuro is continually broken, reforged, hardened and broken again by combat. Each sequence follows a similar narrative

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structure to the first few, Amuro justifies his involvement in the war as survival, kills gleefully to protect White Base, and then is incapacitated by guilt, over and over. Gradually the moments of trauma and guilt recede, as Amuro's mind and body become artifactual just like Char's. The original film series' climactic showdown features the two elite pilots in a duel to the death. Char blows off the Gundam's arms and head, forcing Amuro to eject from the chest-situated cockpit. The two finally meet face to face, free of their mobile suits and are trapped in a confusing embrace through which the pair's new-type powers unleash a powerful psychological energy binding the two together and revealing some ultimate New Type truth. In this moment they both realize that they have been treated as weapons rather than people by their respective sides and reach an uneasy armistice. Amuro escapes the encounter, as does Char, and as the former spots his marooned White Base family on an escape pod he remarks, with tears in his eyes "growing up sure wasn't easy but I'm glad I did it." Following the understatement of the Universal Century, Amuro slumps out of his cockpit and floats to his friends as his fighter craft drifts off into space. The voice over declares an end to the war after this climactic battle which created a "new age" and "lasting peace" shared by the United Federation and Principality of Zeon.

As made evident from its first series, *Gundam* marks an influential and poignant moment in Japanese anti-war, anti-nuclear storytelling. The series manages to infuse exciting "real robot" action, with a moralistic struggle for humanity all centered around the personal development, or personal obliteration, of Amuro Ray. The series' use of interiority as described by Moore, and its focus on serial narrative all help to deliver the culmination of

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its anti-war politics. As an artifact of nuclear culture specifically *Gundam* poses certain challenges, the first of which being "where are all the nukes?" Due to the "Minovsky Particle" technology of the Gundam universe, all combat occurs over relatively short distances with relatively low-yield weaponry as high-yield and long-range energy weapons and communication are rendered useless. Each mobile suit is powered by nuclear energy, making each one a bomb of its own, but the weapons they employ are much more traditional. The mobile suits physically hold beam rifles and beam swords, just as any soldier would brandish their service weapon. They aren't equipped with warheads, or any other WMD technology but this does not mean that these weapons do not exist in *Gundam's* Universal Century. The earliest engagements of the One Year War were surprise attacks by Zeon launched three seconds after the declaration of war. Zeon uses gas weaponry to elicit mass death upon the United Federations civilians, it also drops an entire massive space station into a city destroying it as thoroughly as the damage wrought on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In their early engagements the Zeon forces are stated to have destroyed *half* of the civilian population of the solar system, truly unprecedented death in a series that otherwise focuses on the small person to person engagements of its war. I cannot particularly reason out why such a narrative decision would be made as it only serves to weaken the series' attempts at reversing the "noble defeat" narrative patterns. Mass death is a footnote in this story that otherwise seeks only to situate the adolescent body as its main artifact of trauma. Only in the first film do we catch a brief glimpse of huddled and blooded civilian casualties en masse, from that point on death is relegated to robots and spaceships. Regardless, the politics and contradictions of the body machine complex remain at the heart of *Gundam*, but the same cannot

necessarily be said for its closest American counterpart, *The Transformers*, a franchise which asks its viewers nothing and instead tells them "you've got the power!"

Transformers: You've Got the Touch

I still remember the Easter I got my first *Transformers* toy, a transforming—obviously—manta-ray-robot hybrid named Depthcharge, belonging to a spinoff line of animalistic Transformers toys called "Beast Wars." My toy, while exciting and complex like the rest of the line, was also rather different from the mainstays of the franchise, why an animal and not a vehicle? I remember at the time feeling somehow cheated despite my excitement because I didn't think a manta ray was as "cool" as something like a tank or sports car, but he still possessed a very tough-looking robot form, and the transformation process still ignited my childhood fascination. Transformers are a global phenomenon; Transformers fans and even casual viewers undoubtedly recognize Optimus Prime and his iconic red and blue semi-truck alternate form, or the yellow and black sometimes-Camaro sometimes-VW Bug Bumblebee, now the star of his own movie. In its absolute infancy, the Transformers franchise and toy-line was not all that different from *Gundam.* The first Transformers toys, the Diaclone line manufactured by Takara Toys in 1980, "included transforming vehicles and robots that were piloted by miniature figures that came from the Microman toy line." Originally, the Transformers were much more akin to the "real robot" mech suits of Gundam than their eventual "super robot" form that millions would eventually become familiar with. In 1983 the American toy manufacturer Hasbro purchased the "car-robot" toy line from Takara for production in the United States. This transnational component, a shared Japanese and American origin, of the

franchise is what makes it of particular interest to this project. Where previously we saw the impact of American meddling in the kaiju genre, now we can see the effects of Americanization on the serialized animated program.[110] Popular culture scholar Jason Bainbridge explains:

> It is this 1986 film that also provides perhaps the best single example of how canny marketing decisions can give rise to complex transmedia narratives, for the narrative of this 1986 film literally killed off characters from the 1984 and 1985 toy lines as these toys were being phased out of retail assortments in favour of all-new characters. In this way the death of Optimus Prime serves as perhaps the perfect blend of creativity and commerce, simultaneously dramatic and providing momentum to the narrative, while encouraging children to seek out toys of the (possible) new Autobot leaders (Ultra Magnus and Rodimus Prime).[111]

Like the preceding section, this section will examine Nelson Shin's 1986 animated space opera epic *The Transformers: The Movie* along the same criteria as *Gundam* to explore the methods by which the Americanization of an originally Japanese concept alters its politics regarding war and trauma through representation—or near lack thereof—of the adolescent body. Again, like in Gundam, the explicit use of nuclear weapons does not appear in this series or in its culminating film, but the imagery and ethos of weapons of mass destruction, even at the planetary scale, exists throughout and thus must be considered a clear analogue to actual nuclear bombs. The foremost example of this is found in the planet-scale Transformer Unicron, which coincidentally served as Orson Welles' final acting credit before his death. The film opens with a sequence of Unicron,

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[110] "The History Of Transformers: From Toy To Legacy -," January 12, 2019, https://www.everything80spodcast.com/transformers/.

[111] Ibid.

who is neither an Autobot or Decepticon, using his superweapon to completely destroy a neutral robot planet and all but one of its inhabitants. A bright flash is seen followed by an expanding dome of explosion which completely tears the planet's surface from its core, potent nuclear imagery on display. Additionally, there is more scholarly work available studying the franchise's later live-action installments, all of which continue the same political themes established in the mid 1980s, so while the work doesn't explicitly reference scenes or instances of animation, the overall theoretical approach transforms easily to suit this inciting animated film.

The Transformers: The Movie depicts the events following a Decepticon surprise attack on "Autobot City" on Earth in the far-flung futuristic year of 2005. As a point of order it should be pointed out that the two major factions in *The Transformers*, the "good" Autobots and the "evil" Decepticons are strictly political categories—meaning any Transformer is capable of defecting to the other side, it is not an innate racial position—whose positions are eloquently surmised by scholar David William Underwood as "Freedom is the right of all sentient beings" for the Autobots and "Peace through Tyranny" for the Decepticons.[112] Immediately the same postwar prevalent narratives of Allies vs Axis emerge, the Decepticons own mantra too eerily echoing the Nazi's own holocaust rhetoric. Like the Nazis, the Decepticons also are noted to run forced labour camps and mines on their colonized planets or as part of their prisoner-of-war economy. The two factions led by Optimus Prime and Megatron respectively represent the two

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[112] David William Underwood, "American Socio-Politics in Fictional Context: Transformers and the Representation of the United States" (masters, University of East Anglia, 2013), 23, 28 https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/47858/.

struggling parties in the war for control over the Transformer home world of Cybertron, the Autobots serving as displaced Cybertronian diaspora seeking a new life and military existence on Earth alongside humanity. Overall, the two side's philosophies are simple, as this is a product for children, but when compared to *Gundam* the politics of *Transformers* with regards to war is illuminating. While Gundam staunchly towed the line of "war should be avoided at all costs, "the Transformers approach is much simpler, "war is good when you're on the good side," an ethos that is rife with its own contradictions. Much like in Gundam, the "good" side willingly brings a human child into space combat, their own espoused moral philosophy fails to account for any robots on the periphery of Cybertronian control, and perhaps the Autobots are much more "American" in a literal imperialist sense than they are in the mythic sense the program intends. At its core, this is a story about individualism, Reagan-era self-actualization, American liberalism, and the rule of sublime violence. And is it ever sublime! It is also a story of control politics, both the control of the body, the control of the stars, and everything in between. The Autobots' *other* guiding principle is "Until All are One," which can be read to mean "we will not stop fighting this war until all are one," which does not coincide with their other foundational belief that freedom should be desired above all. Therefore, the war for Cybertron and the galaxy at large is an existential one, unlike the One Year War in Gundam which has a clearly defined end short of total annihilation for one side. Again, this point near perfectly mirrors the shortcomings or downright fabrications of postwar American liberalism: freedom is only freedom when you're one of us.

The main object of study in this film will be its human male lead Danny, the son of long-time Autobot ally and scientist Spike. Danny serves the child audience as an object of projection and identification: the viewer is meant to identify with Danny like Amuro in Gundam, but towards drastically different ends. His first sequence depicts him enjoying a fishing outing with the Autobot "Hot Rod," or more formally "Hot Rodimus," until the Decepticon attack commences. The two race back to Autobot City while the movies' title track "The Touch" by Stan Bush blows out all other audio present:

> After all is said and done.
> You've never walked, you've never run.
> You're a winner
> You got the moves, you know the streets.
> Break the rules, take the heat,
> You're nobody's fool.
> You're at your best when the goin' gets rough,
> You've been put to the test, but it's never enough.[113]

As with Danny, the express purpose of this song is to tell the audience that they are infallible, invincible, and always capable as long as they exhibit the traits of the Transformers but more specifically the Autobots. The song's target is constantly shifting between the generic "you" of the audience and the specific "yous" of the Transformers when it refers to "hands of steel." Accordingly, this project posits that the absence of human identification in the film expressly exists to lead its audience towards this end, to want to be a Transformer, a living weapon of unimaginable power, rather than a weak and meek 3rd grader huddled over in front of the television or in crowded 80s cinemas. Even though during this sequence Danny falls from his hoverboard, Hot Rod is right

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[113] Stan Bush, "The Touch" from *The Transformers: The Movie*, De Laurentiis Entertainment Group (1986).

there to grab him, transform into a car, and throw Danny inside. This is one of very few

moments in the film when we see the convergence of human and machine bodies, unlike

Gundam where it is inescapable. Conversely, *The Transformers* leaves humans and

machines in two distinct technical categories, there is no artifactual body for Danny, he

remains childish and innocent throughout the story despite his friends having their

machine bodies hollowed and burned out by laser rounds and explosion and enduring

what would likely be a very demoralizing short protracted siege against Autobot City.[114]

Eventually the rest of the Autobots, led by Optimus Prime, return to break the siege; the

Autobot leader barrels through Decepticon lackeys in truck form before launching into

the air, transforming, and placing some expert midair laser shots taking down three more

of his enemies before returning to the ground. Unsurprisingly, Bush's ra-ra anthem is

back in full swing during this segment, declaring that Optimus "knows the moves" and is

"nobody's fool." After soundly beating his foil in single combat Optimus is killed by a

surprise shot following Megatron's underhanded false surrender. From this point on a

desperate Autobot diaspora once again venture out into the stars under the leadership of

Prime's protege Ultra Magnus to avenge their fallen leader and bring "peace" to the

galaxy. The purpose of bringing this robot-on-robot combat into a discussion about soft

human bodies is twofold: first, the film attempts to present war and combat as something

wholly freeing and exciting, not terrifying as robots don't bleed, cry for their mothers, or

experience post traumatic stress disorder. Second, it allows the film to keep Danny as its

viewer analogue as he never succumbs to the same barbarity as Amuro because he isn't

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[114] Seltzer, "Bodies and Machines," 163, 164.

taking human lives. Transformers aren't human biologically, but they are *people*; they have individual agency, emotions, and goals that are separate from their political affiliations, they understand friendship and can form attachments, they just don't bleed. This ultimately confuses the previously drawn distinction that human bodies and machine bodies are separate in this film, echoing the contradictions of the Autobot liberal philosophy as a somehow perfect counter to the Decepticons.

Later in the film, Danny accompanies several of the Autobots on a space-faring combat mission which eventually requires him to scout out with the robots using his father's specially designed mech suit. Unlike the mechs of Gundam, this suit never obscures Danny's face, thereby never obscuring his humanity, from the viewer. He sees the alien planet through a fishbowl-type glass enclosure. "What do I do, what do I do?!" Danny yells from inside his suit as Decepticon lasers strafe by, "Transform! Transform! You can do anything!" replies his comrade Soundwave, a smallish blue Autobot. When cornered by two Decepticons who refer to Danny as a "human germ" Danny is finally able to transform his mech suit into a four wheeled buggy vehicle and ecstatically crashes through his two assailants with a triumphant "yeah!" that is as much a laugh as it is a battle cry. This is more or less all we actually see Danny do during the film; we are not ever privileged to see his interior thoughts like we are with Amuro. Where Amuro is complex and burdened, Danny is completely one dimensional. In general, a comparison between *Gundam* and *Transformers* fares this way as well, the latter providing little substance other than serving as a protracted advertisement for action figures. Gundam has toys to sell too, but it is capable of pulling double duty in this respect. As the

Transformers film franchise ages into the 2000s under the direction of Michael Bay we see an extrapolation of these same themes. The property eschews Danny and his childlike innocence for the more mature teenaged Sam Witwicky (Shia LaBoeuf) and eventually upgrades again to former soldier Cade Yaeger (Mark Wahlberg). Cultural scholar Tanner Mirrlees points out that several of these Bay-era films specifically name U.S. Department of Defense personnel in the "Special Thanks" sections of their credit reels. As is the course of so many American children's franchises, the steady decline towards pro-U.S. imperialist dogmatism is in full effect with the remainder of the series, Mirrlees writes: "These films make DoD's personnel—from the top to the bottom of its hierarchy—look great and convey a "support the brass" and the 'support the troops' message. The Secretary of Defense Keller (played by DoD and Republican Party-supporting star, Jon Voight) is smart, decisive, capable, and willing to adapt to new threats and battle circumstances easily."[115]

Fallout

Thus, where Gundam is reticent and thoughtful, *Transformers* serves neatly as its antithesis, making clear this project's argued distinction between animated war storytelling in Japan and America. This chapter has drawn together disparate narrative animated properties under a loose umbrella of nuclear trauma and war depiction. Although the nuclear device itself is largely invisible in this chapter, its echoes are still

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[115] Tanner Mirrlees, "Transforming Transformers into Militainment: Interrogating the DoD-Hollywood Complex," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 76, no. 2 (2017): 417-419 https://doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12181.

heard through the political choices these properties decide to make in reference to mass death, planetary destruction, and war. What comes next then? When the simplicity of childhood is shirked and adolescence begins, we are left to consider and imagine what new horrors the young body will undergo, and there is perhaps no greater example than Otomo's 1988 animated film *Akira*. The following bridging chapter will introduce some needed connective tissue, and it will view *Akira* as a site of serious growing pains. I had never originally intended to separate Otomo's text from the preceding two mecha properties but much like adolescence itself the text doesn't quite fit, it doesn't feel comfortable in its surroundings. *Akira* is the tumultuous teenage phase of this project that I feel needs room to breathe on its own. Something uniquely mature, foreboding, and contemplative emerges in *Akira*. Difficult to name specifically *Akira* contains the impression of maturity and metamorphosis and imagines these processes as both perfectly natural and incredibly painful. The film serves as a potent metaphor for the maturing of postwar Japanese culture, imbued with a new sense of agency and critical self-determination. and also marks a major leap in the popularity of Japanese culture at a global scale. Into Neo Tokyo we go!

Chapter 2.5: *Akira*

Pika-don

Up until this point in the project I have been dealing with a series of reactive texts that follow a predictable transnational pattern: Japanese culture produces dire and unsubtle warnings, the American market and political engine warps these texts to serve American imperial interests, and Japanese creators react by going deeper to overwrite U.S. edits. For this project *Akira* marks a turning point. I had previously struggled to make it fit in amongst *Gundam* and *Transformers* but the connective tissue and wire wasn't there, it is something else and as I said, it needs its own room to breathe. The purpose of this small section is to explore Akira through the lens of pain, trauma, and change, to see how we can interpret the text as a site of maturation and how it represents a pained Japanese cultural identity in flux, at the cusp of adulthood. It is obviously not the intention of this project to dabble in chauvinism: *Akira* is a remarkable feat, not just a remarkable feat for a fledgling "teenage" technological superpower. The text is also often cited as *the* moment which Japanese culture entered the global consciousness through export and distribution as well as marking a renewed and massive interest of Japanese culture in the West. To begin, we must first outline the theoretical underpinnings that this section will use to explore *Akira*'s content and make some little sense of a largely senseless world.

In her work *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry positions pain as "as primal a fact about the human being as is the capacity to hear, to touch, to desire, to fear to hunger," but then points out that "it differs from these events, and from every other bodily and psychic event, by not having an object in the external

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world."[116] For Scarry, pain is incredibly difficult to represent verbally or materially because it lacks artifact, it is objectless and therefore cannot easily be objectified. She later explains that "the only state that is as anomalous as pain is the imagination. While pain is a state remarkable for being wholly without objects, the imagination is remarkable for being the only state that is wholly is objects." This chapter then puts forth that perhaps pain can find its object best in animation, which can itself be understood as a material manifestation of imagination. Nothing in animation "exists" until it is recorded on cells or in software; it may represent recognizable objects, but it is also not restricted to depicting the *real*. "Imagining is, in effect, the ground of last resort," Scarry explains. In the context of this project, imagining through animation is situated as its own "last resort" to both represent and work-through collective national trauma. When the world "fails to provide an object" one can be made, drawn up, frame by frame to situate and name pain.[117]

This section will focus solely on *Akira* as its object, and as a site of each semiotic framework: the infantilization of Japan's natural culture by atomic trauma, the representation of youthful bodies in change, and the exploration of pain through the medium of animation as a uniquely suited expressive form. Released in 1988, *Akira* is based on writer/director Katsuhiro Otomo's earlier manga series of the same name. In brief, the film depicts a group of wayward teenagers in a biker gang, headed by the red-clad Shōtarō Kaneda, in the post-apocalyptic city of "Neo Tokyo" in the year 2019. Neo

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[116] Elaine Scarry, "Pain and Imagining," *The Body in Pain,* (Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 1985,) 161.
[117] Ibid, 166.

Tokyo was built from the ashes of Tokyo, which is destroyed as the film opens by a radiant white blast akin to a nuclear explosion in the "World War III" of 1988. Now, the neon-bathed streets of Neo Tokyo are the site of civil unrest as anti-government activists, violent extremists and cultists alike protest a new "Tax Bill" the specifics of which are not discussed. The film's central teenage characters only find themselves involved in this conflict by happenstance when they are arrested following a biker gang rumble. Prior to their arrest, Kaneda's underling and childhood friend Tetsuo Shima is wounded when his motorcycle collides with a small boy, later revealed to be one of three psycho-kinetically powered youths, subjects of military-scientific testing and containment. As the film progresses, Tetsuo's own telekinetic abilities develop and mature with awesome atomic-like power as he is drawn to "Akira," a small boy-made-bioweapon that is responsible for the previous destruction of Tokyo, and who is additionally revered as a god-figure by the cultists.

For Denison, the film's significance within the genre of anime cannot be understated. She credits *Akira* with being the film that spurred anime beyond its "transnational infancy" and more broadly inspired a shift in Japanese media distribution patterns that saw other Japanese cultural exports on Western store shelves.[118] Similarly, Denison also notes *Akira* as an artifact of anime culture that is itself transnational while retaining distinctly Japanese qualities. She places the film within the larger genre of "cyberpunk" that she states was inspired chiefly by the work of William Gibson (*Neuromancer*) and Philip K.

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[118] Denison, "Sci Fi Anime: Cyberpunk to Steampunk," *Anime,* 35-37.

Dick (*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*).[119] She then later points out that initial

critics were quick to catch on to visual and stylistic similarities between *Akira* and Ridley

Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) which was based on the Dick novel mentioned above.

Denison turns to Susan Napier as well to explain the unique way that the film deals with

time and history; she describes the film's relationship to time as "a schizophrenic

treatment of time as 'perpetual present.'[120] Time appears semiotically within the film and

is linked to both the bomb and Murakami's theory of Japan as stuck in a cyclical and

endless adolescence. The film's use of chiasmus through nuclear-like destruction

suggests that Japanese culture is frozen on the verge of adulthood. The film opens and

closes with images of the destruction of Tokyo—and later Neo Tokyo—by the

cataclysmic power manifested within Akira and represented through a sphere of

expanding white light.

The allegory to real-world nuclear weapons is not subtle in these instances as there is

perhaps no more immediate comparison that can be drawn between the film and Japan's

history of subjection. Nevertheless, the "perpetual present" in which the film's

character's find themselves is emblematic of a sort of Freudian return to trauma ad

nauseum.[121] Characters throughout the film frequently remark that they have worked hard

to rebuild their city, but fear that it will inevitably slip away once more. Thus, mirroring

its teenage protagonists, Neo Tokyo is both perpetually adolescent—the uprising of

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[119] Ibid, 40-41.

[120] Ibid, 33.

[121] Sigmund Freud, "Excerpt from Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, ed. Anthony Easthope and Kate McGowan, (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1992). 78.

workers and students can be interpreted perhaps best as its moody teenage phase—and prone to massive transformation, breaking, reconstruction etc.; the city itself is a youthful body in a state of flux. The world of *Akira* is simply unable to "grow up" and move beyond the trauma of devastation, which Murakami would argue is a direct result of the nerve touching performed by nuclear violence. In "Introducing Little Boy," Alexandra Munroe explains that "perhaps such indulgence is a therapeutic response of Murakami's generation to the loss of power and expression; through fantasy, reality—or self-identity—is re-experienced."[122]

Beyond its narrative, the film's visual representation is also obsessed with depicting the trauma of perpetual adolescence. The previously mentioned powered children, named Kiyoko, Takashi, and Masaru or simply 25, 25, and 27, are constrained into sickly grey, emaciated, and withered bodies. A flashback sequence near the film's conclusion depicts each child before testing began in the late 1980s prior to the first explosion of Tokyo; the film takes place thirty years later and the children are still consigned to their youthful bodies, childish clothing, and infantile decorative trappings. When the three attempt to intervene as Tetsuo's power grows beyond his control, they appear to him as a giant teddy-bear, bunny rabbit, and toy car. They attempt to stop him by flooding his hospital room with milk and constrict him with Lego-like building blocks. Despite actually being much older than they appear, their own maturity appears to have been stunted as a result of science's meddling with this primal and atomic energy that fuels their abilities and

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[122] Alexandra Munroe, "Introducing Little Boy," *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture,* (New York, NY: Japan Society, 2005), 248.

they too are forced into a state of perpetual childhood, never free to mature by the shared trauma of scientific testing and nuclear devastation.

Tetsuo's own personal relationship to trauma manifests in a very similar way, but to discuss his role in the film it is also useful to discuss Kaneda, his counterpart, as well. If Tetsuo is "Little Boy"—a manifestation of trauma, defeat, inadequacy, and immaturity—then Kaneda is "Fat Man" for he is cocksure, strong, and often belittling his subordinate gang members, especially Tetsuo. Murakami uses the distinction between bombs as an allegory for the postwar cultural differences between Japan and America, which quickly manifest in a political, economic, and cultural hierarchy that again subjected Japan to eternal adolescence and "a state of disempowerment."[123] Like the U.S., Kaneda is dually aggressor and protector; Tetsuo's first appearance in the film has him seated on Kaneda's souped-up red bike—the depiction of which is now synonymous with the film itself—as Kaneda chides him for lacking the skill or capacity to handle such a machine. Anime scholar Susan Napier argues that, "while Tetsuo's marginal status in *Akira* may at first seem far from the conventional view of Japan as a largely homogenous nation, his character actually evokes a less obvious but deeply significant side of Japanese national self-representation, that of the lonely outcast."[124] She goes on to explain that when the film was released in 1988, Japan was perhaps at its postwar peak and that the tension embodied between Tetsuo and Kaneda on screen is emblematic of larger socio-political

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[123] Munroe, "Introducing Little Boy," *Little Boy,* 246.

[124] Susan J. Napier, "Akira and Ranma ½: The Monstrous Adolescent," *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation,* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 59.

tensions that occurred between Japan and other nations—chiefly the U.S.—as Japan grew into a technological superpower.[125] In *Akira*, the exponential growth of both Tetsuo and Neo Tokyo is depicted as wholly unsustainable; the film constantly calls into question the same Sartrean existential quandary found in Western super hero works like Spider-man; with great power, comes great responsibility so how should such power be used? Furthermore, the economic boom of Neo Tokyo and the literal telekinetic boom of Tetsuo are both depicted as bubbles poised to burst.

Herein lies the most foundational and grotesque change in the film, Tetsuo's rapid mutation and expansion as his body begins to self-replicate and merges with technology after exposure to Akira's energy. Napier refers to this rapid mutation—which really must be seen to be accurately understood—as the "not unfamiliar horror film trop of a youth who, made subject to sinister outside powers, is transformed into a monstrous creature, capable of doing great harm to others and to himself."[126] This is the ultimate "body in pain" manifest in the horrific frame-by-frame expansion of flesh, circuitry and metal. Tetsuo's rapidly compounding limbs sprout new limbs, his features balloon to monstrous proportions, and at his largest he resembles a screaming infant. Birth and death present simultaneously, another nod to the "perceptual present" in which the film is situated. Throughout this process Kaneda, Tetsuo's girlfriend Kaori, the three child weapons, and Neo Tokyo's de facto military dictator are all interred within his mass of expanding flesh. Tetsuo's inability to control his own power causes pain to himself and to others. Beyond

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[125] Ibid.

[126] Napier, "Monstrous Adolescent," *Anime from Akira…,* 61.

this end, it is Akira who finally emerges and defeats Tetsuo, by absorbing his entire body in the same sphere of light that destroyed the city thirty years prior. This devastation is wrought once more upon Neo Tokyo with indiscriminate might. Napier turns to scholar Peter Boss that names this type of representation the "intimate apocalypse," described as "the sense of disaster being visited at the level of the body itself."[127] Tetsuo is destroyed by his pain in what is read here as an allegory for collective nuclear destruction and the subjection of the Japanese nation to unthinkable trauma. The animated form is used to render this complex philosophical circumstance in a way that it is uniquely suited to doing, by embracing imagination to create what is both tonally horrific and technically marvelous at once.

Fallout

Akira is but a single film within a large canon of anime cyberpunk films, it also represents an even smaller portion of anime films generally, even among anime films that deal with youth and childhood as a major theme. Although it is not within this chapter's immediate purview to examine each major instance of Pika-don atomic logic pervading this popular Japanese cultural form, it is perhaps best to conclude with the knowledge that there is still work to be done. Applying Murakami's "Little Boy" framework to selected influential texts from Japan's postwar cultural exports will prove exceedingly useful in my own future research to compare broadly how American and Japanese cultural products diverge and overlap in their meditations on atomic weapons and nuclear

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[127] Ibid, 62.

culture. Beyond this point, examining *Akira* as a site of transnational storytelling is equally interesting as advances in communication technology make international pop culture increasingly accessible the world over. This new-found accessibility will perhaps represent increasingly blurred lines in what were once two distinct cultural engines—America and Japan—in the years since its release. This project will now turn its focus towards the interactive. I know that all media is "cool" to a degree, the act of consumption is never passive, and audiences are always bringing new information and readings to texts, but this is perhaps no more obvious than in the case of video games. The remainder of this project will move beyond its troublesome teenage years and into adulthood studying one of the most sophisticated, confusing, and downright fantastic expressions of transnational Japanese/American mythmaking, *Metal Gear Solid*.

Chapter 3: Ouroboros

I am returning to this project now, for what I hope will amount to my final stint, during what are hopefully the halcyon days of the 2020-2021 Covid 19 Pandemic. At the outset of this project, I had imagined that the perceived nuclear end times, while still seemingly inevitable, were much farther off than they appear to be. It has become increasingly clear with each new wave of grim tidings from war-hawks, climate scientists, and evangelists that these "end-times" are not some far flung peril to be dealt with by future generations: it feels as though we are living through the apocalypse right now. I then turn to my own work to find some form of sick parity, or parody, with respect to the world in which I am writing, a dying world that informs this work. How better then to close this loop of endless nuclear, militaristic, and ecological dread than by returning to a marked point of inception in my own political and intellectual development. I did not first become aware of the world-ending potential of nuclear weapons or unchecked military expansionism in a lecture hall, nor through the pages of history books, but instead in my friend's basement on a rainy summer afternoon.

Bad weather kept us from the trampoline in my friend Asher's backyard, we ventured indoors to see solace in the cool, damp concrete-floored basement where his family kept their gaming consoles. When we arrived Asher's older brother was playing at something I only understood at the time as a "game for older kids": the game was *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, a Cold War espionage and infiltration game from acclaimed Japanese game director auteur Hideo Kojima. I had heard of the franchise before but never in any detail, and what I was seeing on screen didn't align with my action-junky expectations. My

friend's brother Willem was controlling the game's lead character, an American agent

using the codename "Snake," through a seemingly endless waist-high water wading trek

down an eerily tree-lined stream. Eventually, shambling figures emerged from the fog

and worked their way lazily towards Snake. I asked Willem what I was seeing, he told me

it was a boss fight against another elite operative named "The Sorrow," a psychoactive

spirit soldier who was simultaneously living and dead. You know, basic military fiction

fare. Prior to this experience, I had assumed that *Metal Gear* followed closely in line with

other militaristic shooting games, but this boss fight represented an immediate departure

from my assumptions. Willem told me that "The Sorrow" collects the souls of those that

Snake had killed up to this point in the game and sends them to serve as a grim and

potentially lethal reminder of the human cost of Snake's meddlesome line of work. At the

same time, I learned that if the player chooses to avoid killing, this boss fight becomes

trivial; The Sorrow's only ammunition are corpses you have previously created: no

corpses, no challenge. I was awestruck.

 I had previously thought that "Mature" rated games were only truly mature in their

depiction of gratuitous violence or profanity, not that a video game was capable of

challenging its player like this. Most video games aim to challenge their player's ability

to strategize, dexterously press buttons, or their senses of perception. I was unaware that

a game could challenge its player's morality as well. Later that summer I begged my

parents for a PlayStation 2 of my own, and a copy of *Snake Eater* to go along with it. I

needed to see more. When my birthday arrived a few months later, so too did my future

best-friend and confidant Snake, what a thrill.

Introduction to *Metal Gear*

The *Metal Gear* franchise has always endeavoured to challenge its players in unique ways compared to its genre competitors. The franchise makes specific use of video game console technology and hardware in breaking the "fourth-wall" and performs constant interrogation of the relationship between its player and player character. This chapter focuses on the series' final canonical entry *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* as a distinctively novel instance of transnational and unsuspectingly resistant Japanese-American military myth-making through play. This project's final chapter will explore *The Phantom Pain* as a criticism of the concurrent rise of private militarization, information technology, unfettered neoliberal capital expansion, and of course nuclear domination and/or proliferation. Additionally, I will study *The Phantom Pain* as a unique site of Japanese-American cultural tension *and* collaboration presenting a resistance narrative that criticizes America's postwar imperialism in kind with Japanese power-holders' 21st century bid to remilitarize and nuclearize Japan.

The prolific stealth-action franchise is the brainchild of the infamously eccentric Japanese video game director and auteur Hideo Kojima. Known for its esoteric characters, sleek and unique mechanical design—all of which originate from Kojima's long-time artistic collaborator Yoji Shinkawa—and its often frustratingly convoluted plotlines, *Metal Gear* has delighted stealth action fans for over three decades. What's more, without *Metal Gear* there probably wouldn't be a stealth action genre as nearly every contemporary game of the sort can trace its roots and inspiration back to 1987 with the launch of *Metal Gear* on the MSX computer system. For fans of the franchise, or gaming broadly, the

names Kojima and *Metal Gear* carry a certain level of weight. Hobbyists unfamiliar with the acute details of *Metal Gear* will still likely recognize Kojima's name as he has become somewhat of an icon in gaming: he is either a creative mastermind or an overly ambitious charlatan depending who you ask. Regardless, Kojima's games have a reputation for delivering the unexpected. In *The Phantom Pain*, Kojima's final foray into the *Metal Gear* universe, the auteur and his studio attempt to conclude nearly thirty years of game development, myth-making, and ever-present societal criticism. As a final note towards this end, it should also be mentioned that *The Phantom Pain* that was delivered to fans is almost certainly not *The Phantom Pain* that Kojima had intended. The release of this game marked the auteur's sudden departure from his long-time employer Konami amid reports of creative and financial differences while he was already working on a new *Silent Hill* horror game title for the company.[128] The ordeal was dragged through the video game press news cycles for several weeks, even receiving comment from *The Game Awards*' creator, presenter, and Kojima fan Geoff Keighley at what is arguably akin to the Oscars of video games. This awkward division between Kojima and Konami is commonly cited in gaming spaces as the reason that *The Phantom Pain* is unfinished and therefore the game's true meaning and politics—admittedly lost on many, particularly fans with a weaker investment in the franchise—can never be discerned. Contrastingly, this project will argue that this game *is* finished and serves as the self-described "missing link" in the series' narrative.

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[128] Samit Sarkar, "Konami's Bitter, Yearlong Breakup with Hideo Kojima, Explained," *Polygon* (blog), December 16, 2015, https://www.polygon.com/2015/12/16/10220356/hideo-kojima-konami-explainer-metal-gear-solid-silent-hills.

The aim of the beginning of this chapter is to explain how *The Phantom Pain* exploits

veteran-player familiarity to shape and then defy player expectations and manipulate

player behaviour. The *Metal Gear* narrative is separated into two timelines, one

beginning in the early '60s and ending around 1988, the other beginning right when the

latter ends and continuing onwards until 2014.[129] Analyzing the entire series' narrative is

beyond the scope of this project: the games are known for their frustratingly dense stories

propelled by long cinematic cutscenes.[130] Instead I will provide a brief overview of the

franchises' three main avatar player characters, Naked Snake/Big Boss, Venom

Snake/Punished Snake, and Big Boss's cloned son—one of three—Solid Snake. Big Boss

is the first player protagonist and the progenitor of the series' final player protagonist

Solid Snake. Originally a U.S. special-ops soldier, Big Boss becomes disillusioned with

the United States and forms his own private military nation and unwittingly develops the

"war economy" that will plague the game's world until its chronological climax in *Metal

Gear Solid 4*, where the world is run in tandem by supercomputer AI and several

competing private military firms. Once he realizes his massive error in judgement, Big

Boss goes to ground and begins to undo his life's work and aid his cloned son, Solid

Snake, in the process. Solid Snake is also a legendarily skilled infiltration operative and

remains committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons through his own soldierly

enterprise "Philanthropy." Both Big Boss and Solid Snake espouse their own forms of

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[129] The series final installment chronologically is *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* and was released in 2008.

[130] *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriot*'s final cutscene goes on for nearly an hour and a half, all without requiring input from players.

anti-nuclear views but as the former prefers deterrence through the global ubiquity of

nuclear arms, the latter seeks complete global nuclear proliferation. Throughout each

prior installment—with one notable exception in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* that

will be discussed in the succeeding section—players have controlled either Big Boss or

Solid Snake. In *The Phantom Pain*, players believe they are continuing Big Boss's legacy

and accompanying him on his descent into villainy, but they are actually controlling

another body double, a medic of their own design who was present with Big Boss during

the attack that left him comatose for nearly a decade.[131] Through surgery and hypnosis,

this soldier who I named "Aidan" is made to resemble Big Boss and assume his mantle

while the real legendary hero works from the shadows. The player character of *MGSV*,

"Venom Snake", eventually becomes the series' first main antagonist "Big Boss" in

Metal Gear and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*. Like an Ouroboros, the series leaves its

players right where it meets them, set to eat their own tail in a cycle of endless violence—

pretty good for a franchise whose first chronological instalment is simply subtitled *Snake*

Eater. If anything, this cycle of violence is *the* central narrative and political theme of the

Metal Gear Solid franchise: violence begets violence, and more specifically, nuclear-

armed capitalist imperialist violence will consume and expand itself until there is no

room left to grow. *The Phantom Pain* offers an indictment of contemporary global

American nuclear militarism and addresses the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party's and

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's constitutional re-armament amendment efforts during the

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[131] The game begins with the player designing an avatar, naming them and assigning a birthdate (supposed to be their own). This avatar isn't seen throughout the game because they have been disguised as Big Boss, but at the game's conclusion this is revealed to the player.

2010s which peaked roughly around the time of this game's release in 2015. Similarly, like *Akira*, the *Metal Gear* canon does not fit neatly alongside its genre contemporaries: it is esoteric where others are self-serious, introspective where others are shallow, and frustrating in ways that will only begin to be explored in this concluding chapter. Now that we have our perimeter established, let's get dug in.

Kept You Waiting, Huh?

Snake's first real mission in *The Phantom Pain* is to rescue his former second in command, Benedict "Kazuhira" Miller, from a heavily defended Soviet outpost in rural Afghanistan. Immediately this game sets itself apart from past entries in the franchise by giving the player free reign of an open world minutes into the game. Players familiar with the franchise remember the previous games' levels as rigidly contained, consisting of military base hallways, densely shrouded jungles, and top-secret development labs. On the surface *The Phantom Pain* is telling you that it is something new, something unexpected, and it continues to do so with each new mission. Specifically, the game conceals the identity and location of the real "Big Boss" to convince the player to act as an unwitting smokescreen dupe for the *real* legendary hero's return to power after nine years of comatose absence. Mirroring Snake's own return to violence, it has been a few years since I last picked up *Metal Gear Solid V* and returned to the game's mountainous landscape. The first portion of *The Phantom Pain* is set amidst the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s. At first I feel unfamiliar with the game's area of operation but the more I muddy and bloody my boots in the unforgiving desert, the more I feel like I've come back to something familiar.

At the game's outset players must escape a Cypriot hospital with the help of a mysteriously bandaged patient named "Ishmael."[132] *The Phantom Pain*'s prologue game *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes* takes place nine years prior and concludes with a surprise attack on the player's already established seabound military complex "Mother Base," destroying it completely and killing most of the soldiers Snake and I recruited in previous entries *MGS: Portable Ops* and *Peace Walker*. Snake then spends the interim secretly recovering in Cyprus before the perpetrators of the initial attack finally catch up with the legendary super-soldier. After escaping with Ishmael, players will then travel with series mainstay "Revolver Ocelot" via the Suez Canal to Afghanistan, specifically a remote rural region outside of Kabul. Ocelot, your foremost intelligence officer, briefs Snake on the scope of the war, the Soviet and Mujahideen combatants involved, and the landscape itself before sending him off into the wilderness. Ocelot's last words before departure sound equally encouraging and commanding: "let the legend come back to life," a line that specifically targets long-time fans of the series, players like me who have invested hours into the *Metal Gear* mythos. So, there we sat Snake and I, atop our trusty equine companion codenamed Diamond Horse with the vast expanse of the Afghan desert unfolding before us, radiating heat, violence, and potential. It was time to get back into the war business, rebuild my private army, and show the world who's Boss.

Previous chapters in this project have attempted to sketch out a paternal relationship between "Fat Man" America and "Little Boy" Japan, following Murakami's lead, and it is

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[132] As vengeance is a core theme of this game, and the obsession contained therein, Kojima has littered this game's plot with references to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*.

only fitting that this project conclude with a text and franchise that is endlessly obsessed with relationships between fathers and sons. This final chapter will first explain how *The Phantom Pain* dupes its players into demonhood applying theory from James Clinton Howell's "Driving Off the Map: A Formal Analysis of <u>Metal Gear Solid 2</u>" and the Alexander R. Galloway's work on the illusion of choice in games as an allegory—or "allegorithm—for our contemporary informatized military society." Then, I will deliberately map the plot action and themes of *The Phantom Pain* onto the 21st century U.S.-encouraged attempts towards Japanese remilitarization and nuclearization under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Ultimately, this will demonstrate that *The Phantom Pain* is a misunderstood anti-war epic, a game whose true meaning and philosophy requires dozens of hours of play to uncover, and dozens more hours of narrative and franchise investment to truly understand. Despite the confusion of its delivery *The Phantom Pain* presents a resistant narrative that is enthralling and devastating in its warnings against global imperial militarization and informatic control.

Metal Gear Scholar

The vast majority of existing scholarly on *Metal Gear* focuses on its geopolitical themes, its criticism of capital, empire and militarism, and the series' commentary on AI and technological development. For example, Nick Dyer-Witheford has extensively catalogued and analysed the series' portrayal of the military-industrial complex, systems of information and capital control, and its commentary on specifically U.S. imperialism as it relates to Japanese sovereignty. In "Sneaking Mission: Late Imperial America and

Metal Gear Solid" Dyer-Witheford and Derek Noon turn to series auteur Hideo Kojima's

own explanation of the cross-cultural tension present in his games:

> Kojima, who was born in 1963, has said that his father told
> him stories of how, in the bombing of Tokyo, "he was
> running the streets searching for shelter from the bombs
> and fires" and "carried wounded children to safe places."
> These stories had "a tremendous impact" on Kojima. His
> father's attitude to the United States "was like walking a
> tightrope"; he "hates the Americans for the war" but "when
> he got older... accepted and finally fell in love with
> American culture." Kojima remarks "I believe I share that
> tightrope ambiguity with my father."[133]

Writing broadly on the series the two also add that what makes *Metal Gear* a uniquely

potent tool for criticizing nuclear foreign policy and militarism is "the way it posits a

critique of imperial power from within mainstream gaming's culture of 'militarized

masculinity.' It operates... by offering a subversive possibility even while remaining

within a cultural niche close to the heart of American empire's military-industrial-life

complex—that of the 'hard core' male gamer who is the most reliable consumer of war

and espionage games."[134] This framework can be applied easily to the entire series, but

fits exceedingly well into a discussion of *The Phantom Pain* because the game's narrative

and political goals rely on its players' investment in the franchise *and* on their willingness

to participate gleefully in the brutality of militarized global imperialism.

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[133] Derek Noon and Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Sneaking Mission: Late Imperial America and *Metal Gear Solid*," *Utopic Dreams and Apocalyptic Fantasies: Critical Approaches to Researching Video Game Play* ed. J. Talmadge Wright, David G. Embrick, and Andras Lukacs, (Blue Ridge Summit: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2010), 60.,

[134] Ibid, 74.

In *Parables of the Posthuman: Digital Realities, Gaming, and the Player Experience,* scholar Jonathan Boulter argues that Kojima's games include a self-reflexive critique of the video game medium and industry, and its participation in the military-industrial-entertainment complex. Boulter refers to the franchise's phenomenon of "VR training," through which recruits are made battle-ready through virtual simulated combat exercises instead of field experience, as an obvious analogue for the role of video games in our own world. He describes an interaction between series protagonist Solid Snake and one-time series player character Raiden:

> Snake's wry commentary ends with a representation of hundreds of virtual soldiers—all resembling Snake himself—marching, as it were, to war. Kojima's commentary, self-reflexive, perhaps in some ways typically postmodern, is clear: the medium he exploits to offer commentary on the negative militarism inherent in global politics is the same medium creating that militarism in the first place. In some ways, Kojima seems to suggest, this game is training his fans to become the very thing he critiques.[135]

This project will continue this line of questioning that Boulter, Dyer-Witheford, and Noon have begun, to explore how these aforementioned tensions and processes emerge in the franchise' final canonical entry, and asks towards what end does the series aim? As Boulter describes in his introduction, to play and inhabit worlds and avatars is to engage in posthuman fantasy, and to participate in "virtual tourism" not only in space, but in subjectivity as well. When we play games like *Metal Gear Solid*, we briefly become games like *Metal Gear Solid*, and must then learn to navigate the disparities between our

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[135] Jonathan Boulter, *Parables of the Posthuman: Digital Realities, Gaming, and the Player Experience*, Contemporary Approaches to Film and Media Series (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015 np.

"real" selves and the posthuman subjects we become during play, and even after while we think about the virtual blood on our hands.

Since *The Phantom Pain*'s release in 2015, scholars from various disciplines have attempted to examine the game through lenses that are both contradictory and analogous to this project and its thesis. Critics of the game's depiction of its landscapes and narrative action appear to have misinterpreted the game's key narrative twist as some form of endorsement for the heinous acts that Venom and the player will commit through play. These arguments are predicated on the game and its developers *intending* to obscure the very real political themes in favour of increased marketability. Having played the game in its entirety twice now, I am confused as to how someone could land on this position, as the game very deliberately asks its players to *participate* in imperialist violence by constructing conquerable and conflicted nations, 1980s Afghanistan and Angola in this case, as military sandboxes. These analyses typically point to the same evidence as my own project (the murder, kidnapping, resource extraction, etc.), only they seem to forget that Venom Snake is not the hero of this game and was never meant to be. Emil Lundedal Hammar's article on the game explores how the game inaccurately represents its various spaces and battlefields by arguing "In the game's depiction of Afghanistan...there is no sign of technological progress or civilization beyond military installations, thereby reproducing the depiction of colonized countries as uncivilized and conflicts only struggles over land without people or infrastructure."[136] Previously, he had

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[136] Emil Lundedal Hammar, "Manufacturing Consent in Video Games—The Hegemonic Memory Politics of Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain (2015)," *Nordlit*, no. 42 (2019), 11. https://doi.org/10.7557/13.5016.

turned to Soraya Murray's work *On Video Games: The Visual Politics of Race, Gender and Space* where she argues that the game's imperialist themes are largely relegated to optional audio-cassettes that will better inform players on the concurrent geopolitical struggles of its particular theatres of war.[137] What is perhaps absent from this reading of the game's refusal to comment strongly on imperialism, is the fact that as its main character you are actually *committing* imperialism just by playing the game. The argument that the game's human geography is obscured to further its "apolitical" nature is the opposite of what this chapter will argue. Soraya writes, "throughout the game, spaces are visually treated as uninhabited, except by occupying Soviet soldiers. In the clusters of buildings and rundown maze-like villages, through which one engages in semi-urban warfare, the inference [sic] made by the nature of the space is that they no longer contain Afghanis engaged in their everyday lives."[138] The game presents its world and characters as empty to dupe its players into being unwitting perpetrators of colonial violence by presenting them with "dream" spaces and arsenals to play in and with. Soraya refers to the term "dreamwork" to explain how *The Phantom Pain* constructs the action of imperialism on virtual landscapes that do not resemble *real* spaces, but specifically designed action combat environments. She expands:

> Particular kinds of fantasies are enacted within a fully
> realized simulation that purports itself as given and
> inevitable, although it is not. And, in relation to third-
> person perspective games, the configuration of a playable
> character in the frame repeats the paradigmatic situation of

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[137] Soraya Murray, *On Video Games: The Visual Politics of Race, Gender and Space*, Reprint edition (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021) 162.

[138] Ibid, 151.

<blockquote>
figure within the pictorial landscape, albeit a dynamic one,
in which we, too, lose and find ourselves.[139]
</blockquote>

What Soraya sees as a political weakness of this game; I interpret as one of its foremost strengths; *The Phantom Pain* allows its players to construct their own villainous origins before telling them that they've been controlling the villain all along. Soraya's argument maintains that this departure from the *real* Angola or Afghanistan somehow weakens the game's political allegory but, as I will argue in this chapter, it achieves the opposite by empowering the player to exert their will, and Venom's will as well, on the landscape with no regard for collateral damage. This chapter's next section will provide a deep description of these processes in action to better articulate how the game constructs and empowers its player and player character as neo-colonial super-beings to directly provide political commentary, not bury it.

More analogous to this project, scholar Amy M. Green has already mined the game for its mediation of trauma, and post traumatic stress disorder. In her introduction, Green actually offers her own convincing rebuttal to Soraya and Hammar's assertion that the game is scrubbed of politics to make it more marketable:

<blockquote>
Although much of the critique and narrative exploration is aimed at America's own specific actions post 9/11 in many areas of the Middle East and in its war against terrorism, *The Phantom Pain* also explores a larger web of Western incursions and influence across the Middle East, while also more generally exploring despotism and cruelty, as in its exploration of the trauma inflicted on African child soldiers.[140]
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[139]Murray, "The Landscape of Games as Ideology," *On Video Games*, 144.

[140] Amy M. Green, *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Trauma, and History in Metal Gear Solid V* (Springer, 2017) 4.

Arguably, the fact that we only see private military contractors and child soldiers on the battlefield is more of a commentary on the contemporary nature of global warfare, more so than a distinct remediation of 1980s' proxy conflicts. It is beyond the scope of this project to comment exhaustively on the decades-long conglomeration of state and private military power in the West, specifically concerning the U.S.' defence spending, but luckily writers like William Hartung for *Jacobin* have already done this work. Writing about the close of the U.S. ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, Hartung explains "Since the start of the Afghanistan War in 2001, Pentagon spending has totaled a staggering $14 trillion. And half of it has gone directly to the biggest beneficiaries of the U.S. empire: defense contractors."[141] He continues:

> The number of personnel deployed and the revenues
> received by security and reconstruction contractors grew
> dramatically as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wore on.
> The Congressional Research Service estimated that by
> March 2011 there were more contractor employees in Iraq
> and Afghanistan (155,000) than American uniformed
> military personnel (145,000). In its August 2011 final
> report, the Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and
> Afghanistan put the figure even higher, stating that
> "contractors represent more than half of the U.S. presence
> in the contingency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, at
> times employing more than a quarter-million people."[142]

Coinciding with Green's analysis of *The Phantom Pain*'s space and politics, it is clear to see that although it is set during the 1980s, the game is much more focused on interrogating the contemporary nature of privatized military spending and the erosion of

[141] "U.S. Empire Is Lining the Pockets of Defense Contractors," *Jacobin*, accessed October 26, 2021, https://jacobinmag.com/2021/09/united-states-war-iraq-afghanistan-profiteering-defense-contractors.

[142] Hartung, "U.S. Empire Is Lining the Pockets," *Jacobin.*

the state's monopoly on legitimate violence as determined by the Treaty of Westphalia 1648.[143] This chapter will continue to argue that the game's construction of its world and conflicts as primarily profit-driven imperialist exercises, and its tacit invitation for Venom and the player to take part, is at the core of *The Phantom Pain*'s rhetorical potency.

As one can surmise from the game's subtitle *The Phantom Pain*, trauma, injury, loss, and memory are all key themes at play here. Green explains, "The idea of phantom pain permeates the game's narrative and is the intended player focus of the entire game, across all its initially seemingly disparate narrative pieces and characters. Phantom pain finds form literally, as Miller and Snake experience the literal loss of their limbs, and symbolically via the continued mental anguish of the characters."[144] Explaining the psychosomatic phenomenon of "phantom pain," Green elaborates that to feel the pain of limbs, or comrades, lost implies that the game's construction of the "body" is also core to its politics.[145] Mother Base becomes "crippled" after the surprise attack nine years ago, just like Miller does, losing his arm, leg, and eyesight. Venom loses his arm, allowing the game to provide another anachronistic biomechanical appendage for the player that, like everything else in the game, can be upgraded and customized to suit the player's desired method of play. Unlike Snake, Miller forgoes prosthetics and claims that the Diamond Dog's new soldiers will be his limbs, and later in a bout of extreme paranoia, his eyes.

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[143] "Peace of Westphalia | Definition, Map, Results, & Significance," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed October 26, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/event/Peace-of-Westphalia.

[144] Green, *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,* 108.

[145] Ibid.

Green's work deftly navigates this tension with respect to the game as a tool for better understanding how post-traumatic injuries affect individuals, particularly soldiers. This chapter will conclude by extending this metaphor of phantom pain onto the international level, concerning the postwar relationship between Japan and America. In the surprise attack on Mother Base, Kaz, Venom, and Huey essentially endure their own microcosmic version of surprise nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, devastating events that will leave them literally in tattered pieces, with an urge to rebuild, re-arm, and avenge their lost comrades.

Let the Legend Come Back to Life

I wanted this chapter to include a dense description of a typical *Phantom Pain* gameplay experience I had that I feel is quintessentially *Metal Gear* while paradoxically only possible in the franchise's final instalment. Largely due to previously unavailable hardware requirements, Kojima was never able to demonstrate "the battlefield" like this before, as a living and changing environment. As was explained earlier, levels in previous installments have all felt cloistered: while the games have always offered branching paths and multiple routes through predefined areas, players have never before been able to go virtually wherever they want. To my mind *The Phantom Pain* owes its critical success to a near seamless and simultaneous amalgamation of its constantly changing open world action gameplay and more passive base-building. The combination of completing a perfect stealth infiltration of an enemy base while your soldiers simultaneously develop the latest weaponry easily achieves its desired effect: as a player in control of Snake you begin to feel unstoppable. The play session I will describe next surmises the core

gameplay loop in *The Phantom Pain* and will be used to explore the game's mechanics and how they operate in concert to covertly warn the player of the pitfalls of such a ruthlessly expansive global military project.

Snake and I were out in the field completing "Side Ops," an extensive series of optional missions that net us specialist soldiers, base development resources, and extra income for my fledgling soldier's paradise. I've taken to calling my business "Silver Zeroes," our logo is a rat: I thought a rodent served the scrappy upstart nature of the biz and "Silver Zeroes" is a nod to the game's major "you're not actually playing as the legendary Big Boss" plot device. After all, he is the series' original golden boy. I decided we should probably move the game's main story along so I opened my iDroid, a handheld holographic display device through which all base information flows and selected the sixth main mission "Where Do the Bees Sleep." A waypoint marker appeared on my map and Diamond Horse and I were off to find the electronic briefing package our Support team had delivered to the field. I also took the opportunity to reequip myself, calling in a supply drop via a marker grenade, and a change of camouflage. My old fatigues were caked in blood and their woodland pattern wouldn't help me in the mountain pass I would be sneaking through next. *The Phantom Pain* lets players customize each piece of their equipment either during mission deployment or through supply drops delivered to the field. I opened my map to plot my course, D-Horse and I would need to sneak along a winding mountain road, through a Soviet array base and a couple of scattered lookout posts into a captured Mujahideen base at the end of the trail. This was going to be a trek.

Along the pass I was discovered by enemy patrols several times. I mentioned I haven't played in years; I like to think that the rust in my own gamer gears makes sense in light of Snake's nine-year coma. We were just warming up. Eventually I was able to infiltrate the base at the end of the pass, I took a surveying glance through my scope being sure to focus on each enemy combatant and piece of equipment I could spy so they would be marked and visible. Game mechanics like marking help emulate Snake's nearly superhuman sensory awareness: once an enemy has been surveyed deliberately through your scope, you can always tell where they are. The pass opened up into a wide cylindrical basin, the opposite side of which was excavated into cliff dwellings, shelter for the Mujahideen resistance fighters. I knew that the guerillas would have stashed the experimental "Honey Bee" launcher system—a play on the "Stinger" missile system supplied to the Mujahideen by the United States for shooting down Russian gunships and other aircraft—would be deep in the encampment. Through my reconnaissance I was able to tally up around ten enemy combatants in the basin, but I had no way to tell how many more were inside the cliff dwelling searching for Uncle Sam's secret weapon. Snake and I crept slowly around the outskirts of the basin, keeping low and sticking to shadows to avoid detection. When enemy soldiers were directly in our path a quick headshot from my suppressed tranquilizer pistol made for a quick fix. I planted C4 explosive charges on the base's radar array, its anti-air gun installment, and its comms equipment. My trap was set.

Snake and I took a moment to survey our surroundings once more before calling in the cavalry. I dialed up Pequod on my iDroid and requested a fire support mission. Moments

later I could hear the distant reverberations of Hall and Oates' "Maneater" playing as my

helicopter approached in support.[146] Predictably, the Soviet guards scrambled to

defensive positions, at which point I detonated my C4, destroying their bases'

infrastructure, protecting Pequod, and cutting them off from calling for reinforcements. A

few more soldiers emerged from the cliffs to aid their comrades in the basin, and I snuck

right past, grabbed the "Honey Bee" and made for the exit. At this point the game's main

plot takes over and in usual *Metal Gear* fashion Snake is attacked by psychoactive

commandos called "Skulls Parasyte Soldiers" who infect the newly dead and return them

to the line of duty as shambling zombie soldiers. Unfortunately for Snake, Pequod and I

had wracked up quite a body count, meaning more zombie soldiers to deal with on top of

the Skulls already in the field. Eventually we were able to fight our way through and

rejoin Pequod to extract back to Mother Base, mission complete.

I have chosen to include this deep narrative description of one single outing in *The

Phantom Pain* because it is paradoxically typical *and* completely novel. I had never

attempted to complete this particular mission in this way but knowing that I had the

freedom to try whatever I wanted just made me want to come back and replay it with a

completely different approach. I chose a very lethal method which also means no new

recruits, no expansion for Mother Base. What if I went in completely silently instead, no

fire support and no lethal weapons? What if I had a "liberated" Soviet T72 tank deployed

with me from Mother Base? For a player raised on a healthy stream of Arnold and Sly,

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[146] The game features a robust catalogue of 1908s' pop hits and series mainstay songs that can be hooked up to your helicopter's AV system to play as it enters the level. When called in on fire missions the helicopter provides a backing track for whatever carnage Snake is currently creating.

the possibilities are nearly endless, and they are exciting. The game recognizes this and traps its players in endless loops of violent possibility, offering them a constant stream of upgraded weapons and gear to use against Big Boss' enemies. *The Phantom Pain* is essentially an open world military sandbox that presents problems with no fixed solutions, it is up to Snake and the player to decide how each objective is met. Ultimately this level of freedom and control directly leads to a deepened investment in the game, its story, its systems, and most of all its avatar. In addition, nearly every single decision or tactical choice I described making in the field was related to a previous managerial or administrative decision I had made concerning Mother Base. I knew Pequod could survive a sustained firefight because I had upgraded the helicopter's armour, I knew what the Russian soldiers were saying because I had previously recruited a linguistic interpreter to my intelligence team. This is *The Phantom Pain* working exactly as intended, a concert of strategic planning, resource development, and on the fly thinking all aided by the game's various overlapping systems. The customization doesn't end there.

Players can kitbash different assault rifles together into their dream weapon, apply cosmetic and equipment changes to your transport helicopter designated "Pequod" and even personally outfit your base's elite security detail. This hardly scratches the surface of what *The Phantom Pain* allows its players to do with regards to managing their own soldiers' paradise. Mother Base's management systems all flow together into a seamless convergence of military bureaucracy and childish experimentation in a manner that is surprisingly engrossing. It also serves to deepen my connection to the Silver Zeroes: I

recruited these soldiers myself by out of their outposts and bases using the "Fulton

Recovery System," a rather cartoonish device with a self-inflating balloon that whisks

unconscious or surrendered soldiers into the air for high-altitude retrieval. From there

they are sent to the brig until they can be reasonably convinced of the righteousness of

the Silver Zero's plan to establish a stateless nuclear superpower, all for revenge. More

experienced soldiers with specific skill sets may take longer to convince than more

rudimentary grunts. These elite soldiers' skills—like the Russian interpreter, or the

gunsmith I need to kitbash my weapons, or the bio-augmenticist I need to upgrade

Snake's multifunction bionic arm—connect me to my private army, and further indulge

my power and revenge fantasies. They thought they could destroy the army I spent

hundreds of hours assembling in *Peace Walker?* They're going to learn from their

mistakes.

Venom Maps, Mother Base, and Phantom Limbs

Readers will notice that I have only mentioned the game's official "antagonist" in vague

terms, a secret U.S. military organization known as "Cipher" represented by a burned and

disfigured Jack Palance-type named "Skullface." In short, Skullface plans to disseminate

a language-activated parasite that will rid the world of every language except English *and*

to arm every conceivable world power with its own nuclear weapon, all of which he will

retain secret control over. Players will eagerly battle this organization across the globe all

the while expecting some great reveal: which enigmatic fan-favourite villain will

Skullface be revealed to be? As it turns out, he's no one, just another lost dupe spreading

violence in the name of revenge, he isn't even the main villain of this story. You are. I

am. In the game's final mission, a restructured version of "Prologue: Awakening" the player learns that the character they have played as the entire game is not Big Boss. Instead, the player has been controlling a medic character—named "Aidan" in my case— who was present during the coma-inducing helicopter crash and who underwent plastic surgery to resemble Big Boss.

In James Clinton Howell's work "Driving off the Map: A formal analysis of *Metal Gear Solid 2*" he refers to player expectations as "maps" to be followed based on existing game knowledge and insight,

> A map can be dangerous. We tend to see what we are prepared to see, and maps prepare our expectations. A traveler might wander for hours when he trusts a flawed map more than directions from the locals.[147]

When read through this mapping lens, it is clear that *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* prefers uncharted territory. The game manipulates its players' expectations and continues to uproot them completely through a series of deliberate design decisions.[148] The aim of this section is to explain how *The Phantom Pain* exploits veteran-player familiarity with *Metal Gear* broadly to first shape and then defy player expectations and manipulate player behaviour. Specifically, the game lies to its player about who the real "Big Boss" is—remember Ishmael?—to convince the player to act as an unwitting smokescreen dupe for the *real* legendary hero's return to power after nine years of comatose absence. Originally, Clinton-Howell was writing about *Metal Gear Solid 2:*

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[147] James Clinton Howell, "D-T-G || Driving Off the Map," https://www.deltaheadtranslation.com/MGS2/. np.

[148] Ibid.

Sons of Liberty which begins with a short prologue section where players control Solid

Snake through "the tanker incident." Two years later narratively, play resumes with

"Raiden," a VR (virtual reality) trained recruit on his first infiltration mission picking up

the threads left by Snake's disappearance two years prior. As Howell points out, Raiden

was meant to be a clearer analogue for the players who obviously had more in common

with a bratty, over-eager gamer than a stoic and legendary infiltration expert:

> MGS2 used the medium's particular qualities to manipulate both the player and the actor when they stitched their identities together. At the start of the Plant Chapter, Raiden's Commanding Officer (C. O.) told him to access a digital node, to which Raiden responded: "Did you say nerd?" When Raiden accessed the node, the player had input his own name that later appeared on Raiden's dogtags. MGS2 bound Raiden to the player—a nerd—when Raiden accessed the node, and it bound the player to an actor who he didn't always like but who obeyed his commands, even when those actions violated Raiden's character.

I am choosing to return to Howell's work on *MGS2* as it provides an excellent foundation

for exploring *The Phantom Pain*. As with Solid Snake, the franchise has worked

tirelessly to establish a mythos for its protagonist Big Boss throughout *MGS3*, *MGS:*

Portal Ops, MGS: Peace Walker, and *MGSV: Ground Zeroes.* These myths and markers

are then operationalized against *The Phantom Pain*'s player by exploiting their

expectations and emotional investment in *Metal Gear* and its characters. Howell's work

also helps establish the continuum of subversive meta-commentary that Kojima's

hallmark franchise has employed since their inception: players rarely know what it is

they're actually doing, let alone who they're doing it as, and even less who they are doing

it for. The remainder of this section will closely examine the differences in the

expectations and Big Boss myths as they compare to the reality of "Venom Snake" who players control in *The Phantom Pain*. By feeding the player an endless stream of encouragement, often bordering on hero-worship, the game allows its players to tell on themselves, to act in ways they *believe* a legendary soldier like Big Boss would act and begin their descent into posthuman demonhood. Borrowing Howell's terminology, it is clear to see that players of *The Phantom Pain* experience this same phenomenon, based on the game's key narrative *twist. The Phantom Pain* denies player expectations of navigating the "Big Boss Map" and instead they come to realize they have been constructing a new narrative for a character that neither acts nor performs exactly like the real Big Boss, only as a double made in the image of his myth and reputation: a demon. This dissonance is what allows players to apply their expectations for the performativity of Big Boss to Venom Snake, and also allows for a deeper implicit connection to the latter who becomes the series' main villain moving forward. Continuing with Howell, *The Phantom Pain* intentionally confuses the dichotomy between puppet and player, following behind one of its predecessors, S*ons of Liberty*, but the meaning is nearly the inverse. If *Sons of Liberty* taught its players that anyone could be the hero Solid Snake, *The Phantom Pain* teaches its players on its surface that anyone could become a demon if one makes the wrong choices. However, the work the game actually achieves is in instructing its players that personal choice rarely matters and that militarism for any sake is an exercise in depravity, no matter how noble, emotionally driven, or egalitarian its original intentions may have been. In short, players may have nearly unlimited choice over how they complete their missions, so long as they continue to complete those

missions, amass more wealth, resources, weaponry, and soldiers. Al is accomplished in the name of revenge, to heal phantom wounds.

To further my exploration of one of *The Phantom Pain*'s core themes I have turned to Alexander R. Galloway's essay "Allegories of Control" which argues that increased freedom of choice in games is evidence of a strengthening of control politics and not the opposite, as one might immediately assume. Galloway uses the allegory of the freeway to explain his thinking here, and to draw connections between the material world and the digital worlds presented in games. He makes a point of noting that "to play the game means to play the code of the game. To win the game means to know the system." With relation to freeways, he explains that the material form—what would be "the code"—of the freeway is antithetical to the signified concept of freeway. These roadways emerged at a particular point in history with supposedly liberatory aims: freedom of mobility, speed of transport, the expansion of supply chains to serve greater geographic distances, but in actuality a freeway is simply a new form of control. It constrains its users by offering the illusion of freedom so that they don't seek more; a freeway offers limitless potential for motorists so long as they stay within the lines, use the proper entrances and exits, and continue along in the seamless flow of bodies and steel. Galloway concludes:

> Video games are allegories for our contemporary life under
> the protocological network of continuous informatic control
> In fact, the more emancipating games seem to be as a
> medium, substituting activity for positivity or a branching
> narrative for a linear one, the more they are in fact hiding

the fundamental social transformation into informatics that
has affected the globe during recent decades.[149]

Metal Gear's gameplay works in a nearly identical fashion, players are presented nearly

limitless choices on *how* to commit violence and develop nuclear-military proto-

statehood, but they are not given the choice to pursue different ends. Narratively, this is

because the player is not actually the game's hero and never was, but informatically we

must consider that this is also a limitation of the game's material existence, of the fact

that it is a digital object confined by computer language. Although the game presents its

players with various open military sandboxes, its narrative and political conclusions are

not fluid. Whether the players understand the stories' core twist or not, they still must

play by the game's rules. Beyond just games themselves, Galloway argues this shift from

disciplinary control to informatic control appears as "a larger process of

postmodernization that is happening the world over.[150] Galloway expands on the

symptoms of informatic control in contemporary culture:

> [These symptoms] are seen whenever a company like
> Microsoft outsources a call center from Redmond to
> Bangalore, or in the new medical surveillance networks
> scanning global health databases for the next outbreak of
> SARS. Even today's military has redefined itself around
> network and computer-centric modes of operation: pilot
> interfaces for remotely operated Predator aircraft mimic
> computer game interfaces; captains in the U.S. Army learn
> wartime tactics through video games like *Full Spectrum
> Command*... in the military's Future Combat Systems
> initiative, computer networks themselves are classified as
> weapons systems.[151]

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[149] Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, Electronic Mediations 18
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006,) 106.

[150] Ibid, 88.

[151] Ibid.

His last few examples here are of the most immediate relevance to this project, as they too are concerned with the conglomeration of information technology and the military. Anachronistic information technology is littered all throughout *The Phantom Pain* but is mostly localized in the player's "iDroid" device that acts as an omni-tool for all your militaristic superpower needs. The game's choice to provide a technological object within its story that serves this purpose, rather than just non-diegetic menus, like all other choices in this game, is a pointedly political one. The iDroid offers players nearly limitless freedom to commit violence the way they want, so long as committing violence is what they aim to do. The fact that the player and avatar interface with secret futuristic military hardware frequently throughout the game furthers *The Phantom Pain*'s critique of the conglomeration of informatic control and the global military industrial complex by placing the power to participate in that future, our future, in your hands.

The iDroid is also remarkably adept at obscuring and offshoring death, destruction, and profiteering into easily digestible trickles of on-screen data through the game's "Combat Deployment" feature. As Venom Snake and the player continue to rebuild Mother Base they are eventually able to assign combat units to military support contracts the world over. Deployment missions are carried out offscreen and include such objectives as "Far Waters Exploitation," "Ambush the Medical Supply Caravan" and "Assassinate the Dictator." Completed combat deployments award Gross Military Product (GMP) which is the game's main unit of currency. The player's payment is accepted through the "Rewards" menu which also provides casualty and injury information for your deployed units. I rarely spend any time focusing on these losses as replacing my dead comrades has

never been easier or more efficient now that I can just deploy units on "Staff

Headhunting" missions that are tantamount to human trafficking campaigns. Combat

Deployments are a key facet of *The Phantom Pain*'s gameplay loop which aids in the

player's construction of an endless cycle of violence, and the deployment missions'

rhetorical potency stems mainly from their completely clean, streamlined presentation.

We don't get to engage in the action occurring on deployment, we only see the numbers,

and the numbers are always climbing. As the game goes on, Snake can construct

additional "Forward Operating Bases" (FOBs) and dispatch more concurrent deployment

missions. Eventually, you are even able to use the game's online multiplayer

functionality to invade other players' FOBs, kidnap or kill their soldiers, and steal their

materials.

What more potent allegory could we need for the limitations of individual choice in

informatic society than to view our own lives as coded, scripted events. Moreover, the

point of *Metal Gear* demanding its players grapple with this idea is the opposite. Players

are encouraged to break the cycle of violence in their own lives where Venom Snake is

found incapable of doing so. This dissonant element—a narrative and ludological schism

between the player's goals and Snake's goals—of *The Phantom Pain*'s rhetorical work

demonstrates a maturation of the series' politics into adulthood. As was previously

discussed, games like *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* directly confront the

informatic control society as a rhizomatic and nearly inextinguishable blight on the

formation of the contemporary self. The game calls constant attention to its own

construction as code, as a game, to inform its players. *The Phantom Pain* offers an

inversion of this concept, and as series fans are quick to notice, represents a formal ludological and narrative inversion as well.

Men Become Demons

As *The Phantom Pain'*s narrative continues, players are tasked with diversifying their military industrial portfolios, so to speak. Supposedly an act of altruism, Snake will eventually begin to swipe child soldiers off the battlefield and hold them at Mother Base where they can do "simple jobs" and "have a chance at a real life." Only Huey Emmerich voices any opposition to this trend, and over the latter half of the game his voice is employed sparingly to serve as opposition to Kazuhira Miller's paranoid machismo. Huey eventually helps the children escape with the Diamond Dog's newly acquired Metal Gear superweapon "Sahelanthropus," helps Snake's enemies launch a second viral attack against Mother Base and is eventually exiled for his attempts to sabotage the player's ruthless military expansionism. He is also adamantly opposed to the idea of Mother Base developing its own nuclear arsenal, a plan that is obviously championed by Kaz, with the player caught in the middle. Ultimately, the choice to go nuclear is up to you, up to me. In the game's logic, developing a nuclear weapon serves as a deterrent for other players who might try to steal your resources and soldiers, knowing they could be nuked if they are found responsible.

"Episode 43: Shining Lights, Even in Death" requires the player to murder his own soldiers to prevent the outbreak of the weaponized virus on Mother Base. In this strictly linear mission, the player is forced to procedurally sweep from room to room on their "quarantine platform" systematically executing the soldiers that they recruited earlier in

the game. Although the game does not offer the player a choice, there is still a level of

implied responsibility, which serves to strengthen the player's emotional attachment to

Venom Snake, but also to the Diamond Dogs at large. In an overtly dramatic scene,

bordering on the absurd, Venom is named by Huey as the inciting cause of the disaster,

he then spreads the ashes of his fallen comrades over his face and declares,

> I won't scatter your sorrow to the heartless sea. I will
> always be with you. Plant your roots in me… I won't see
> you end as ashes, you're all diamonds… We'll make
> diamonds from their ashes, take them into battle with us.

Here, Venom is at his most sympathetic, portrayed as a loving father figure to his fallen

soldiers, while paradoxically being presented at his most demonic. Preceding cinematics

show the forlorn "hero" trudging through the blood-caked halls of Mother Bases'

quarantine platform, while equally caked in blood himself. This moment is an outlier in

the game, as Huey blames the player for the murder of Diamond Dogs, ironically, when

they are not given choice. In previous installments, players are criticized for committing

excess violence by other characters in the game, but throughout the majority of *The

Phantom Pain*, the player is free to act as violently as they desire, to perform as Big Boss

and lend credence to his terrifying legend without criticism from the game or its

characters, save Huey.

The game also features a number of torture sequences where captured soldiers, loyal

Diamond Dogs, and named series mainstays alike are zapped, injected, and beaten.

Scholar I. Girina explains:

> Crucially, the reification of power is a statement of the
> agency of the torturer, which can only be uttered through
> the pain exhibited on the body of the tortured. In visual
> terms, the agency of the torturer is vicariously shared with

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> the spectator via camera, who takes part in the event as a
> witness through the photographic apparatus. The
> problematic relationship between torture, its representation
> and fruition is not exclusive of video games which are only
> an instance of wider discourses on media violence.[152]

If the reader needed further clarification or evidence to support this project's claim that you are not the hero of this story, this example should serve. In *The Phantom Pain*, the player is both the perpetrator, voyeur, and victim of torture, the latter albeit is less literal and more emotional. Girina extends their analysis of the game's torture mechanics beyond its cinematics and criticizes the core gameplay "interrogation" mechanic as an exercise in torture as well. To interrogate an enemy soldier, Venom must sneak up behind them and initiate a grab and choke hold. From this point, the player is free to interrogate the soldier for crucial mission information, execute the soldier by slashing their throat, or subdue the soldier nonlethally by choking. For Girina:

> The metaphor of the world is literalised in The Phantom
> Pain, as the interrogation takes place on the field and the
> player gathers information on the virtual world, mapping it
> in order to achieve control of it. The torture-interrogation
> mechanic mirrors the structure of torture as it becomes a
> manifestation of the player's agency over the world through
> the tortured body.[153]

Each soldier we torture, capture, interrogate, train, and brainwash is another facet of the game's overarching warning to players, that militarism is akin to demonhood, and that its logics and politics should be resisted with intense vigour. As Venom we torture our

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[152] I. Girina, "'Needs to Be Done': The Representation of Torture in Video Games and in Metal Gear Solid V" (Routledge, 2018), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429397851-9, 3-4.

[153] Ibid, 14.

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enemies, torture our allies, torture the natural world, and torture the completely innocent, all in the name of expansion and revenge. In games where players control "Solid Snake," the actual *hero* of the franchise, this is made clear, as it is only the "Big Boss" games where players build these destructive forces, Solid Snake's only interest is in tearing them down.

As a cultural product of Japan, Venom's tendency towards violence is seen mirrored in Japanese mythology, due to his representation as a demon, or "oni". Michelle Osterfeld Li explains that in Japanese mythology, an oni is "sorrowful" and shares a deep connection to human emotion.[154] Additionally, the transformation from human to oni is connected to an unrelenting desire for revenge. Osterfeld Li goes on to explain how diachronic representations of demons have become more sympathetic, rather than being outright monstrous. Venom Snake can be understood as an extension of this tradition; his protruding shrapnel horn grows as he commits more violent actions but also marks him as "demon." This process is abstracted from the player in the form of a hidden "Demon Score" that accumulates if players choose to develop nuclear weapons or kill enemy soldiers rather than recruit them. As my second play through of the game concluded, I too decided to develop a nuclear weapon for the Silver Zeroes. After spending an immense amount of fuel, metal and GMP, I was then asked to wait one real world day for my R&D team to complete development. When I logged back in the next day, my "Heroism" score had dropped 50,000 points from 200,000 to 150,000, and my Demon

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[154] Michelle Osterfeld Li, "Human of the Heart: The Pitiful Oni in Medieval Japan," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Brookfield, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/west/detail.action?docID=4920515. 174, 175.

score had likely risen in parallel. I also noticed that Snake's fatigues would stay bloody even when I changed them in the equipment menu; I took a ride back to Mother Base and hit the showers, only to find that the blood wouldn't wash off. Developing the Silver Zeroes' first nuclear weapon had transformed Venom into "Demon Snake," a hidden alternate state for the character that kept him caked in dried blood and extended his shrapnel "horn" further out of his head, adding to the villain's demonic characteristics, again an unsubtle nod to the character's growing villainy. Hero and Demon scores affect whether Snake is loved or feared by his soldiers, the skills and temperaments of recruits that Mother Base will periodically attract, and the types of ghost stories enemy soldiers will tell each other about the legendary "Big Boss." Every time I hear a Soviet grunt recount one of my vicious exploits, I smile. It should also be noted that what the game considers "Heroics" are not actually altruistic, they simply represent the economic growth of Mother Base. Soldiers and children captured and brainwashed add to your Hero rating because they grow your company's influence and resources. This system would perhaps more accurately be titled the "Imperialism Score" but that sounds a lot less heroic.

Demonhood is the game's goal for its player as evidenced by *The Phantom* Pain's narrative which sees the transformation of Venom Snake into the villain "Big Boss" who served as the series' first villain. Essentially, through nearly unlimited acts of malice and coercion, one unsuspecting helicopter medic and his gamer puppeteer have become the worlds' foremost militarized monster, a nuclear-equipped boogieman who kidnaps and brainwashes soldiers into joining his aimlessly violent cause. During the game's

conclusion, the player will receive an audiocassette from the actual Big Boss himself, stating that,

> You've written your own history, you're your own man.
> I'm Big Boss, and you are too… no… he's the two of us
> together. Where we are today, we built it. This story, this
> 'legend,' it's ours. We can change the world, and with it,
> the future.

Thus, the game implicates both player character and player in the larger series' plot movements. The *change* observed in the world is one towards militaristic control and neoliberalization which eradicates all state power in favour of privatised industrial military. Again, this is the real Big Boss continuing the lie, he does not ever intend to aid Venom Snake in world domination, only to continue to inflame his—my—ego and encourage future villainy. Until this point in the chapter my work has dealt near-exclusively with *how The Phantom Pain* achieves its political aims through dissonance between myth, player, and avatar but I have not yet acutely covered the *why*, the *so what?* What can we make of the world I helped build in Kojima's game, and how can we apply its lessons to our world outside the gamespace?

A War Without End

As this project begins to close, I will continue to interpret this game as both an indictment of U.S. militarism *and* a warning to Japan teetering on the cusp of remilitarization. Earlier sections of this project have already discussed the socio-political vassalhood that the American re-writing of the Japanese postwar constitution created, but this concluding chapter is more focused on the future than the past, as is *The Phantom Pain.* This chapter's concluding section will draw on scholarship and coverage of recent Japanese-

American military policy changes that point towards rearmament and will then explain how this debate, between remilitarization and continued anti-militarism, serves as the core dramatic and philosophical thrust of *The Phantom Pain*, particularly in its latter half once the player has defeated Skullface and his plots. With no enemy left to seek vengeance on, the Diamond Dogs begin to look inward with intense scrutiny, paranoia, and a tragic descent into villainy.

Writing in 1993, scholar Thomas U. Berger claims that remilitarization is unlikely for postwar Japan, not due to any "structural factor" like dependence of foreign trade or an absence of foreign political threats, but instead because what he describes as "Japan's postwar culture of anti-militarism" that he claims, "has its roots in collective Japanese memories of the militarist takeover in the 1930s and the subsequent disastrous decision to go to war with America." He continues to explain that "Japan's culture of anti-militarism originally developed under the aegis of a benevolent U.S. hegemon during the 1950s and 1960s." Given what this project has already explored concerning the "benevolence" of this hegemon, perhaps anti-militarism in Japan does not originate from American intervention, quite the opposite. The purpose of Japanese constitution Article 9, drafted by U.S. statesmen, was to install pro-U.S. puppet leadership and to prevent the rebuilding devastated nation from taking up arms against its new occupier, among other things.[155] As relations between the two powers have smoothed through the rise of neoliberalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union we see a very clear trend of cooperative

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[155]*Japan: Interpretations of Article 9 of the Constitution*, Law Library of Congress: Global Legal Research Center, 2015.

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remilitarization occurring between The U.S. and its long-time vassal, particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Abe is a legacy career politician whose family has remained firmly entrenched in political and economic power through the Japanese Empire and throughout the postwar period. Abe's maternal grandfather Nobusuke Kishi oversaw the occupation of China and Manchukuo, the WWII Japanese puppet state in Manchuria.[156] Upon Japan's defeat, rather predictably considering America's postwar rehabilitation of Nazis officials and scientists, American powermakers sought only to reward Abe's inscrutable instrumental rationality with prestigious political appointments in their anti-communist "Liberal Democratic Party."[157] This is the same party under which his grandson Shinzo would lead the nation from 2006 to 2007 and then again from 2012 to 2020. It is also the party that was massively supported by the CIA and other U.S. state apparatuses throughout the early postwar period as a means of combating the growing trends of socialism and communism that largely sought to—correctly—distance Japanese policymaking from external imperialist factors, chiefly the U.S.[158] Throughout his terms as president, Abe made significant efforts to remilitarize the island nation. His cabinet argued for remilitarization as a means of securing increased political autonomy for Japan, a stronger

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[156] Ofer Feldman and Linda O. Valenty, *Profiling Political Leaders: Cross-Cultural Studies of Personality and Behavior* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 173.

[157] Ibid 177-180.

[158] Tim Weiner, "C.I.A. Spent Millions to Support Japanese Right in 50's and 60's," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1994, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/1994/10/09/world/cia-spent-millions-to-support-japanese-right-in-50-s-and-60-s.html.

prepared self-defence force, and perhaps most importantly, the ability for the Japanese

military to deploy its forces in support of its long-term Western ally.

Concerning this ally, scholar Christopher W. Hughes has written at length about what he

describes as the "Abe Doctrine" and the contemporary state of U.S.-Japanese alliance

relations. Hughes argues that a return to actual military autonomy for Japan is unlikely

given its current subservient relationship to the U.S. He explains,

> Abe's attempts to strengthen Japan's great power profile
> through deepening integration into the military alliance can
> only really spell dependency. Japan is gearing its security
> doctrines and capabilities in the revised NDPG, its
> breaching of collective self-defence and the revised
> Defence Guidelines to the service of U.S.–Japan alliance
> ends, rather than building genuine military autonomy.[159]

His work explores the continuum of slackening official Japanese pacifism, as efforts at

greater security *cooperation* have been pursued by the U.S., ramping up during the late

'90s coinciding with China's massive economic growth and now an emerging nuclear

threat from North Korea. U.S. and Japanese power holders have sought to redefine "self-

defense" as permitted by Article 9 as something more "situational" than specifically

"geographic." Hughes argues the intent of this change is only to revise Japan's ability to

operate combat zones alongside the U.S.:

> The Abe administration's stance that there now needs to be
> no direct attack on Japan itself for the exercise of the right
> of collective self-defense, and the possibility to argue that
> in line with the 'three new conditions' any contingency,
> without geographical specification, if left unaddressed
> could impact on Japan's security and mandates the use of

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[159] Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Foreign and Security Policy under the "Abe Doctrine": New Dynamism or New Dead End?*, Palgrave Pivot (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 94.

collective self-defence, means that the JSDF could be
despatched under the revised Defence Guidelines to
support the U.S. in a contingency in any part of the
globe.[160] [161]

Drawing connections to *The Phantom Pain* deliberately here, your company's largest

client remains the United States throughout the majority of the game, despite their

complicity in the destruction of the first Mother Base. You will kill, plunder, torture

Soviet military forces in Afghanistan for GMP while claiming no actual allegiance to the

Western superpower. As the series progresses chronologically, the conglomeration of

Mother Base, later renamed "Outer Heaven," and American state power is made more

deliberate as U.S. ground forces are nearly entirely replaced by private military

contractors originating from one of the corporations apparently under Big Boss/Venom

Snake's control. These soldiers are dispatched globally according to the whims of a

supercomputer AI which orchestrates all global conflict into standardized supply and

demand proxy wars meant to enrich defense contractors at the expense of everyone else.

Sounds familiar.

The process of remilitarization in this context does not only concern "boots on the

ground" deployment for soldiers, remilitarization also includes a revitalization of Japan's

military technology exporting guidelines as defined in the 1967 "Three Principles of

Arms Exports" which has prohibited Japanese industry from selling arms to communist

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[160] Ibid.

[161] From Hughes on "three new conditions": "The draft Cabinet Decision provided for 'three new
conditions' (shinsanjōken), drawn from the 1972 statement, stipulating that Japan could exercise collective
self-defence in instances where an attack on another state threatens to overturn the people's right to life,
liberty and the pursuit of happiness; where there is no other appropriate means to repel the attack; and
where the use of force is restricted to the minimum necessary to repel the attack." (63)

bloc nations, nations embargoed by the United Nations Security Council, and any nation

currently experiencing or perpetrating global conflict.[162] Scholar Bee Yun Jo explains:

> The first significant easing of TPAE took place in 2011 by
> the release of 'The Guidelines for Overseas Transfer of
> Defense Equipment, etc.' The guidelines are critical as they
> loosen the previous TPAE by permitting the overseas
> transfer of defense equipment under exemption.
> Specifically, the new guidelines no longer limit the joint
> research and production, e.g., BMD systems, under three
> conditions: (1) each partner country is in cooperative
> relationship with Japan in security; (2) the joint program
> will contribute to the security of Japan; and (3) the case-by-
> case overseas transfer of defense equipment, e.g., with prior
> consent from the government.[163]

The remainder of their article catalogues the continued erosion of these provisions while

pointing out that Japanese manufacturers, stylized and generalized here as "Japan Inc.",

have never really demonstrated postwar inclination towards pacifism and also that certain

firms, chiefly the nation's largest Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, demonstrates reluctance to

re-arm. Jo describes the firm's reluctance as "risk-aversion" given the ambiguity of the

Japanese state *and* population's general position on rearmament. As this project

concludes I will attempt to map these various points of view onto *The Phantom Pain*'s

core characters to better demonstrate how the game allows players to play through this

discussion by applying emotional and narrative stakes.

Further yet, characters like Miller who insist that Mother Base have its own arsenal of

nuclear weapons also echo recent U.S.-driven calls for Japan to do the same. The United

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[162] Bee Yun Jo, "Japan Inc.'s Remilitarization? A Firm-Centric Analysis on Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Japan's Defense Industry in the New-TPAE Regime," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 16, no. 1 (2016): 137–66, https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcv011.

[163] Ibid.

States has effectively used the island nation and its returned Pacific island colonies as missile bases akin to Mother Base itself, a flotilla of offshore sites housing devastating weapons to act as deterrents. Writing for *The Federation of American Scientists*, Mercedes Trent explains, "In 2016, the U.S. government officially declassified the fact that nuclear weapons were deployed to Okinawa before 1972. It also declassified 'the fact that prior to the reversion of Okinawa to Japan that the U.S. Government conducted internal discussion, and discussions with Japanese government officials regarding the possible re-introduction of nuclear weapons onto Okinawa in the event of an emergency or crisis situation."[164] Following U.S. President Obama's visit to the Hiroshima blast site in 2016, the White House records of his remarks solidify that rhetorically, both he and Abe are committed to "a world without nuclear weapons." To his credit, Obama's anti-nuclear agenda remained a key focus of his second term in office, going so far as to spur on the 2017 formation of what would eventually become the U.N. "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," which the U.N. itself describes as "comprehensive set of prohibitions on participating in any nuclear weapon activities. These include undertakings not to develop, test, produce, acquire, possess, stockpile, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons."[165] The treaty was ratified on January 22, 2021 with nearly unanimous support from member nations, save for a vote of "No" from the U.S., in the

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[164] "The History of U.S. Decision-Making on Nuclear Weapons in Japan," *Federation Of American Scientists* (blog), accessed October 29, 2021, https://fas.org/blogs/security/2019/08/the-history-of-u-s-decision-making-on-nuclear-weapons-in-japan/.

[165] "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – UNODA," accessed October 29, 2021, https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/.

opening days of the Biden administration and an abstention from Israel.[166] It appears that

whatever anti-nuclear progress was made under Obama, however uncharacteristic of a

liberal establishment politician, the following four years of Trump have represented a

slide back towards nuclearization. President Trump's apparent fondness for North Korea

and his general disregard for political conventions placed the U.S.-Japan alliance in new

and uncertain waters. Writing for *Foreign Policy* William Sposato elaborates:

> Trump has railed against Japan on numerous occasions,
> even as he seems to retain some fondness for Japanese
> Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. But he has even kinder words
> for Kim [Jong Un]. Trump's much-heralded North Korean
> deal is still up in the air, but he famously declared when he
> returned to Washington from the pomp of the Singapore
> summit that the United States was now safe. The choice of
> words was not lost on the Japanese government, which
> rushed to ensure that it was not being left out in the cold (or
> the rain).[167]

Now, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, his successor Yoshihide Suga, and U.S.

President Joe Biden have already expressed their unequivocal desire to remain military

allies. Whether or not Abe's thrust for militarization will persist remains to be seen, but

given joint statements like the following, this scholar predicts it is likely: "President

Biden and Prime Minister Suga exchanged views on the impact of China's actions on

peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and the world, and shared their concerns

over Chinese activities that are inconsistent with the international rules-based order,

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[166] Ibid.

[167] William Sposato, "In Trump's World, Nukes Are Self-Defense," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed October 29, 2021, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/28/in-trumps-world-nukes-are-self-defense/.

including the use of economic and other forms of coercion."[168] So long as there is

anticommunism and imperialism to pursue, or a new Cold War to prosecute, these two

will surely remain thick as thieves. Obviously, *The Phantom Pain* could not offer

commentary on these post-2015 developments in U.S.-Japanese nuclear and military

policy making, but it has proved itself to be a prophetic text and a useful tool for helping

its players understand how *they* fit into this violent atomic equation.

Fallout

The Phantom Pain's main theme "The Sins of the Father," is a harrowing ballad written

for the game and performed by Donna Burke. Paternity is another core theme across the

Metal Gear canon, as players are constantly asked to consider the morality of cloning, the

tension between free-will and genetic programming, and the relationship between father

and son. The gendered aspect is important here, as *Metal Gear*'s female characters

typically resist violence or find themselves as unwilling participants without other

options. Specifically, the games critique a form of dual Japanese-American masculinity

best exemplified by its core male characters all of which demonstrate elements of

American and Japanese cultural identity. Kaz Miller is an ethnically Japanese and

European-American military-base brat, Huey Emmerich, and his son Hal "Otacon"

Emmerich are Americans obsessed with Japanese culture. Even Snake himself exhibits

countless specifically Japanese physical mannerisms tying him to a long tradition of

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[168] "U.S.- Japan Joint Leaders' Statement: 'U.S. - JAPAN GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR A NEW ERA,'" The White House, April 17, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/16/u-s-japan-joint-leaders-statement-u-s-japan-global-partnership-for-a-new-era/.

anime and theatre while being named for and chiefly inspired by Snake Plissken, the protagonist from John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* played by Kurt Russell. In short, the series' DNA is transnational which aids in its dual critique of America's military imperialist history and present, and the potential of Japan's neocolonial resurgence. Together, Venom Snake, Huey, and Miller serve allegorically in Kojima's imagined wrestling-match for the future soul of Japan and its continued pacifist existence.

These three characters cannot be *so* easily mapped onto figures in our world as to allow a one-to-one literal connection. Kazuhira Miller is as much Trump as he is Eisenhower, Abe, or Hirohito. The characters don't represent fixed points in history or space, but instead broader ideas addressing Japan's continued existence as an officially pacifist state. In short, Kaz is a war-crazed and deeply traumatized lifelong soldier whose presentation and viewpoint is equal parts Imperial Japanese and Cold War American. He thirsts for revenge and conquest, he inflames the suspicions and anxieties of Mother Bases' soldiers, and more than anyone in the series, he is obsessed with amassing power and influence according to the cruel order of a neoliberal world. His foil is found in Huey, an effeminate and pacifist biomechanical scientist, the original designer of the game world's first true "Metal Gear " weapons. Now, endlessly remorseful for the part he played in building the nuclear age, Huey preaches compassion and patience to the soldiers of Mother Base. The player and Venom Snake, completing this dramatic trifecta are only informed by their own expectations of the series and its themes. The inversion of these themes present in *The Phantom Pain* allows players to discover the evil of their

deeds as the story unfolds, revealing the game's true pacifist intentions. In keeping, Venom and the player can simply represent the *potential* of Japan's return to military imperialism. With all of this in mind then, we can better understand how *The Phantom Pain* mediates Japan's constantly evolving debate over remilitarization while also acknowledging the immensely potent external pressure that is applied by the U.S. war machine, represented in part by Kaz Miller.

At the close of this project, just like its beginning, I will turn to Julia Kristeva's "Approaching Abjection," the introductory chapter to her work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* Kristeva's work describes the role of the "abject" in the formation of the self, as both something that exists within and without. In *Metal Gear* the illusion of choice is granted to players that ultimately leads them towards singular violent ends; while we have control over Venom Snake and how he chooses to complete his missions, we don't have control over what missions the game offers us, and the narrative results of completing these missions are unchanged whether you play Snake as a paragon of virtue and honour or as a ruthless hired killer. Players are forced to confront "abjection of self" in *The Phantom Pain* through "the shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery," and as a result the game's most potent political meaning emerges by furthering the abjection of the individual and projecting it towards the abjection at national or supranational levels.[169] The game forces its players to confront the horror of their actions as a criticism of a particularly globally pervasive brand of U.S. imperial

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[169] Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," *Powers of Horror*, (New York, NY: Colombia University Press, 1941,) 5-7.

militarism but *also* to serve as a warning against the remilitarization, or even nuclearization of the Japanese state under the Abe Doctrine.

When first devised I had intended to write about the dialectical struggle between Japanese culture and American culture concerning nuclear weapons. Now after a couple years and several rounds of personal abjection experienced through play, the COVID-19 pandemic, the ever-increasing crumbling of U.S. military global hegemony, this project and its scholar have new things to say. In my ignorance I viewed the Japanese response to American intervention as homogenous, and I viewed Japanese cultural producers like Kojima, Otomo, Anno, Tomino, and Honda as voices of cultural and political authority within Japan. While this is still true, I now better understand that these voices are divergent from the actual sites of Japanese power. I thought that their work had to represent a totality of Japanese thought on nuclear weapons, militarism, and sovereignty, but I now better understand their value exists chiefly in their subversive transnationalism. Here I have argued that each text is uniquely Japanese *and* American, which makes them capable of telling potent and unignorable allegories about the relationship between Japan and the U.S. Moreover, while they may not represent a schism in the actual foundations of power between Japan and America, they do represent an entire continuum of resistance narratives that have only grown in sophistication and complexity since *Gojira* first lumbered out of the ocean after its nuclear wake-up call.

I first chose to name this chapter Ouroboros as a joke to myself. My long-time favourite game in the *Metal Gear* franchise was the first chronological installment, *Snake Eater*, a game about a man called Snake who eats snakes to survive in the jungle. It was the first

Metal Gear game that I ever saw, it was the first video game that ever truly asked me to consider its meaning and is the sole piece of media responsible for my decision to view games as more than just toys. As I continued to work on this project and develop my ideas, I kept returning to this idea of cycles of violence, cycles of abjection, all while trying to navigate what it means to truly feel stuck wedged between the scales of a massive serpent hell-bent on self destruction. I have found that the Ouroboros, a serpent devouring itself, is a uniquely potent metaphor for describing both the topic and conclusions of this project *and* for describing my own relationship to writing it throughout a global pandemic during what feels uncannily like the end of the world as we know it.

Conclusion: Proliferation

It has been more than two years since these ideas first dredged their way out of my brain and onto the page, lumbering up from dormancy. In that time, by writing, reading, watching, playing, and thinking, I have attempted to trace the veins between several Japanese mega-franchises and consider how these different franchises demonstrate anti-nuclear and anti-military politics through signification. By close reading and semiotic analysis, my project has explored a pervasive tension found in several of Japanese popular culture's most successful global offerings: a deep-rooted anxiety about American intervention, militarism, and global nuclear supremacy. Undoubtedly when this project began, the latter anxiety, the atomic one, was at its core. As work proceeded, it became apparent that collective nuclear trauma was only one facet of a much larger and evolving traumatized pacifist tradition in Japanese popular culture.

I made the mistake of imagining Japanese culture as homogenous, as though its cultural output would perfectly mirror what its power holders worked towards. As I began to research the texts and learn more about the nation's political history I started to see a schism between what the texts were arguing for and what Japan's institutions represented. As much is made obvious at the beginning of *Gojira* when the Odo Island refugees see themselves cast aside by an uncaring power system more concerned with placating America than helping its own citizens. While each of these texts is undoubtedly concerned with mediating the relationship between Japan and the United States, they are each also concerned with Japan's relationship to itself in the present, its own imperial past, and its hopes for a radically different future. As this project made landfall, like the

monster Gojira's ascent on Odo, I carved broad strokes through the terrain while still stumbling to find my proper footing. What emerged at the end is a blend of cultural criticism and history that traces the *Godzilla* franchise's anti-militarist and specifically anti-nuclear views from its inception through to its most recent Japanese iteration. Ultimately, *Shin Gojira* argues for an autonomous Japan that is as unlike the United States as it is unlike Imperial Japan, rejecting militarism in the name of civil coordination, rejecting the stymied gridlock of traditional postwar Japanese politics in favour of something new, collaborative, and exciting.

Pun unintended, *Gundam* followed suit, presenting a series of complex questions about the negative psychological impact of combat, training, and militarism broadly on the body, particularly the youthful body in change. *Gundam's* "Zeon" and "Earth Federation" factions drift semiotically between historical spaces and approaches occupied by Imperial Japan, the Axis Powers, and the Western Allies as well. We have seen the Americans' answer to mecha prove all but unwilling to address these same ideas with the same consideration, all in the name of increased action figure sales. Where *Gundam* is thoughtful and grows increasingly so over time, *Transformers* is pallid and shallow by comparison. *Akira* answered for this disparity by demonstrating the true horror of the technological body, one caught in a permanent state of change and stasis at once, but also offered glimmers of hope, of a radiant light that is not wrathful or scourging, but healing and representative of new beginnings. Where there are beginnings, we also find endings, from *Snake Eater* to *The Phantom Pain*, my own *Metal Gear* fantasy drawing to a close after a decade and a half. Concluding this work felt like a journey of minor self discovery

with one of the Japanese video game industry's most prolific and politically sophisticated franchises. Working with *Metal Gear* provided new challenges and opportunities for interrogating how Japanese popular culture continues to reflect the aforementioned anxieties in the age of technological globalization and how the increasing transnational quality of popular culture production affects the representation of these traumas, fears, and hopes.

Here we have seen how major Japanese texts have established a tradition of questioning the paradoxically evolving yet apparently stagnant relationship that the small island nation has shared with its World War II conqueror for over 70 years. The texts studied in this project demonstrate key points of resistance to American militarism, political and cultural hegemony, and Japanese remilitarization as well. Whether the texts' critiques are fixed in a specific historical moment, or attempt a broader societal realignment for Japan, it is clear that *Godzilla, Gundam, Akira,* and *Metal Gear Solid* have each made clear their existential distrust in the American power machine, its operation in Japan, and its effects on the world broadly. While their lessons and goals are not homogenous, the texts surveyed demonstrate a clear reticence towards postwar American militarism, specifically as it concerns Japan.

Moving forward from my project could take a number of different paths. Future scholarship could look inward to perform similar semiotic readings on different offerings from my subject franchises. There are numerous *Gundam* series that are simply beyond the scope of this work to consider, much like the numerous installments in the *Metal Gear* canon, and the continually growing library of *Godzilla* kaiju films, each with their

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own politics and warnings. Additionally, due to their commercial nature, each of these franchises are horizontally integrated across toys, movies, games, web series, animation etc. One could easily pick a single medium and explore all of these texts' offerings: a games studies look at Godzilla, a histological study of the *Gundam* model kit hobby and its spread across the world, or a return to *Akira*'s expanded manga source material. Alternatively, one could search for these cores anti-militarist, anti-American themes in other U.S.-dominated nations' cultural output. Would we see the same antagonism at play in German popular culture, or on display in the numerous Latin American nations that the U.S. has considered its backyard playgrounds for so many decades? Regardless of approach, there is still work to be done and battles to fight over the warring forces of militaristic signification, but for the time being I am more than ready to give peace a chance.

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