EXPLODING EMPIRE:

POST|APOCALYPTIC REPRESENTATIONS 1979-2016

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, Jack Bigley (1920-2015), whose commitment to peace and security as a World War II veteran, police officer, and fireman has been a guiding force throughout my life.

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ABSTRACT

Exploding Empire: Post|Apocalyptic Discourse 1979-2016, is a cross-medial,
transnational study of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narrative representations in the United
States, Canada, England, and Japan. In particular, this dissertation examines the antagonistic
relationship such discourse has to empires and the history of imperialism. The vertical bar in
"Post|Apocalyptic" indicates that the term refers to both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic
discourses. I chose that character to reinforce the significant conceptual overlap among different
media forms (novels, films, video games) and sub-genres (post-apocalyptic, science fiction,
horror). This dissertation responds to the common critique of post|apocalyptic discourse, posited
by critics from Susan Sontag to Naomi Klein, that it primarily atrophies political activity and
fails to provide meaningful social criticism. This dissertation argues that while some forms of
post|apocalyptic discourse can reinforce hegemonic beliefs, post|apocalyptic narrative forms can
also contribute to rational-critical debate within the public sphere and help foster awareness of
global concerns, such as climate change. This dissertation focuses on Octavia Butler's 1980s and
1990s prose fiction, Japanese animation during the 1990s, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and
Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, the trans-national films of Guillermo Del Toro and
Alfonso Cuarón, and the game *The Walking Dead* from Telltale Studios.

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The post|apocalyptic since 1979 has dominated multimedia representations of the future, participated in and critiqued transnational cultural production, and epitomized the confluence of mass culture and literary recognition. It is no accident that stories of global transformation have taken place during a time of overwhelming cultural and economic change. The post|apocalyptic emerges from the transformations of modern life. Earlier narratives focus on the threat of new technologies, particularly nuclear weapons, but more recent discourse also focuses on globalization, the preponderance of disposable labor, and loss of faith in the public sphere. Additionally, post|apocalyptic narrative characterizes the struggles between different institutions: the state, corporations, and sometimes the church. Post|apocalyptic representations are sometimes accused of being complicit in the formation of neoliberal globalization, where states and corporations collude in producing passive, compliant subjects on a global, transnational stage. Whether it be Susan Sontag in the 1960s or Naomi Klein in the 2010s, critics of post|apocalyptic representations often blame them for a banal inertia concerning issues at the heart of democracy: to what extent can individuals take part in the formation of the rules that govern their lives? To what extent do individuals believe they can take part in the discussions and debates dividing the public sphere? Why, after all, should individuals even bother with "issues" when everything is hopeless anyway?

The critique that post|apocalyptic narratives atrophy democratic thought will be true for some texts, when there is such a broad and diffuse range of texts under consideration. The post|apocalyptic has exploded across media forms. Despite the reliance of blockbuster films on transnational cultural production, many post|apocalyptic texts at least ostensibly critique globalization, such as *Children of Men* (2006), *Pacific Rim* (2013), and *Mad Max: Fury Road*

(2015). But post|apocalyptic discourse can also reify nationalist ideology, instigate theological paranoia, or echo the dogmatic pessimism often apparent in post-modern narrative structures. Post|apocalyptic narrative contributes to shaping the tenor and tone of cultural moods, national conversations, and transnational metanarratives. This is where literature and rhetoric collide.

By post|apocalyptic, I am piping together the "apocalyptic" with the "post-apocalyptic" because the various forms of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narrative inform each other, despite generic and modal differences. In "apocalyptic" texts, humanity comes face to face with existential threats, but can avoid cataclysm (for example, in *Pacific Rim* (2013)), whereas in "post-apocalyptic" texts, the cataclysmic event has already occurred (as in *The Road* (2006)). The post|apocalyptic is a discursive formation that includes all of these disparate modes and genres. It expresses the multivalence of contemporary subjectivity, foregrounding the fact that contemporary life abounds with a multiplicity of strategies and options for confronting ethical, political, and economic challenges. Subjectivity refers not just to opinions and beliefs based on personal experience, but the formation of the subject politically and ideologically through the vectors of desires: the desire for safety, the desire for autonomy, the desire for structure.

The post|apocalyptic can contribute to political, aesthetic, and cultural paralysis. It can reify apathy and indifference. It can use marvelous worlds to impose pernicious concepts of normativity on the authors' living presents. Moreover, the prevalence and persistence of post|apocalyptic discourse can unintentionally act to make the emergence of oppressive conditions or the deterioration of modern life feel inevitable and therefore living individuals feel helpless. Sometimes the overabundance of hopeless representations can have a dampening effect on the desire to innovate solutions to real, living problems.

But the post|apocalyptic can also inspire. Post|apocalyptic narratives can challenge apathy and indifference. They can present worlds where empire explodes, where individual subjects can and do attain individual agency and respond to the exigencies pressing at the heart of not just narrative fictions but lived reality. The post|apocalyptic can criticize transnational globalization, post-modernity, and colonialism. I am going to explore and engage both tendencies within the post|apocalyptic, particularly the ways that they contradict and conflict with each other. Some works emphasize the need for the strength of the state, while others emphasize the ways the state can be corrupted. Some presume that the best way to realize the desire of security is through individual action and a rejection of the public sphere. Others presume the best route toward security is through severe retribution toward anyone who breaks the rules of a centralized authority. The post|apocalyptic is a site of struggle, one where I see the fault lines of contemporary civic discourse.

"Apocalypse" comes from the Latin *apocalypsis* and the Greek ἀποκαλύπτειν, "to uncover" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). It is a concept overloaded with concurrent meanings and connotations. The etymological history of "apocalypse" builds on the Christian eschatology of God unveiling ultimate purpose in the universe. The word has been appropriated in 19th, 20th, and 21st century literature to be much more synonymous with political or natural disaster, rather than exclusively with theological end times. Anette Holba and Kylo-Patric Hart (2009) remark that "scholarship has shifted focus to consider 'apocalypse' as a literary genre, 'apocalypticism' as a social ideology, and 'apocalyptic eschatology' as a set of ideas found in other genres and settings" (viii). That being said, the resilience of *Left Behind* (1995-2007) (which presents a premillennial narrative wherein the Christian God raptures those free of sin and sinful survivalists must combat the antichrist) as a franchise makes clear that the theological

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component of the post|apocalyptic continues to work in parallel with speculative formulations of the post|apocalyptic, and indeed both theological and speculative formulations frequently appropriate elements from each other. The ostensibly theologically-driven *Left Behind* has some elements which would generally be associated with science fiction. Many post|apocalyptic texts devote as much time to creating fictional religions as to representing fictional technologies or going for shocking thrills. Margaret Atwood creates an environmentalist religion for *The Year of the Flood* (2013), Kurt Vonnegut creates "Bokononism" for *Cat's Cradle* (1963), and *AKIRA* (1988-1995) features cults that worship Lady Miyako and Akira as major forces. Post|apocalyptic texts sometimes spend time exploring the resurgence (or appropriation) of spirituality outside the Judeo-Christian framework, such as Hawaiian chants in *The Islands at the End of the World* (2014). The spiritual dimensions of the post|apocalyptic are not incidental, particularly as the genre remains successful despite emerging in an increasingly secular society.

The earliest iterations of the apocalyptic theological and prophetic tradition foregrounded warfare as the preeminent form of apocalyptic transformation. Conversely, the texts which began to suggest the emergence of contemporary post|apocalyptic conceptions dealt with pestilence or with asteroids colliding with the earth. 19th century texts like Camille Flammarion's *Omega: The Last Days of the World* are treated as part of post|apocalyptic discourse because of their speculative nature: *this could happen*—not "this will happen" (prophecy) or "this is only comprehensible as a metaphor" (allegory). The post|apocalyptic, if it is not regarded as a subgenre of science fiction (which is its usual designation), developed contemporaneously with science fiction. By 1916 the semantic elements and syntactic structure of a transnational, trans-medial genre was in place. Consider the 1916 film *Vedens Undertang* ("The End of the World")—a Danish film that focuses on a comet that approaches the Earth and causes natural

disasters. The film appropriates narrative themes used by authors like H. G. Wells ("The Star" (1897)), and Camille Flammarion (*Omega: The Last Days of the World* (1894)). The theological dimensions of post|apocalyptic discourse remain important, but the speculative character of the discourse has taken on increasing significance.

While the eschatological and theological dimensions of the post|apocalyptic remain relevant, this dissertation examines this discursive formation in its frame as speculative fiction. Post|apocalyptic fiction has been foundational to understandings of science fiction and speculative fiction. For example, David Ketterer defined science fiction in its relation to when "an apocalyptic transformation results from the creation of a new condition, based upon a process of extrapolation and analogy, whereby man's horizons—temporary, spatial, scientific, and ultimately philosophic—are abruptly expanded" (Ketterer 148) (1974). When considering the relation of post|apocalyptic fiction to political philosophy, Claire Curtis emphasizes the importance of the post|apocalyptic in secular terms as, "any account that takes up how humans start over after the end of life on earth as we understand it. The apocalyptic event or events cause a radical shift in the basic conditions of human life; it does not require the destruction of all humans or even the destruction of all potential conditions of human life" (Curtis 5) (2010). Likewise, post|apocalyptic texts remain crucial to understanding the evolution of science fiction and its relation to broader historical trends. For instance, John Rieder argues that, "although science fiction disasters are often about the end of the world, whether it be the coming of a disaster that recalls the fire and brimstone visitations of the wrath of Jehovah, or the dawning of Armageddon, a war to the death of a race or a civilization, what is most persistently at stake in them is not the world's end but its transformation by modernity" (Rieder 123) (2008). There is significant overlap between post|apocalyptic discourse and related modalities, such as science

fiction, dystopian narratives, horror, adventure, etc. Focusing on the discourse of this formation means accepting the connections without trying to formulate some essential definition that would arbitrarily limit the category.

Post-apocalyptic literature, post-apocalyptic film, and post-apocalyptic television are discursively relevant to each other despite being generically and modally distinct. The distinction between genres and modes is not precise, as there is significant overlap. Relevant theoretical models to discuss the concept of "mode" and its distinction from "genre" are presented from Alistair Fowler (1982), Rick Altman (1999), and John Frow (2006). According to Altman's *Film/Genre*, genres and modes are not fixed categories subject to categorical distinction, but rather ongoing processes enmeshed within a larger system of sometimes competing and sometimes overlapping processes. The theory of genres and modes has transformed over the past fifty years from a structuralist approach to narrative form to a cultural studies approach. Rick Altman's semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach (1999), reflects the movement away from structuralism which prioritizes textual properties; instead, Altman emphasizes cultural institutions. The cultural studies approach is further exemplified in Jason Mittel's work in *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (2004). Mittel marginalizes the semantics and syntactics of genre in his central formulations, which emphasize first and foremost that genres "matter as *cultural categories*" (xii). Although Mittel limits his analysis to genre in the context of television, he emphasizes that "genre is best understood as a process of categorization that is not found within media texts, but operates across the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics, and historical contexts" (xii). Mittel's emphasis on genre's cultural dimensions does not, however, mean that he sees genres as emerging trans-medially. Even theorists who emphasize the cultural dimensions of genre usually still see genres

as medium-specific. Yet, if the *culture* of the text is the primary site of interest, then restricting discussion to a specific genre (such as post-apocalyptic television) would be ignoring the interplay and dynamic interaction each genre and mode has with the others.

Due to the significant overlap between generic and modal iterations of the post-apocalyptic and the apocalyptic, I emphasize the need to approach the broader spectrum of texts under the umbrella of the post|apocalyptic discursive formation. Discursive formations conceptualize large bodies of knowledge and the discourse surrounding those bodies of knowledge, including the elements of the discourse that are seen in opposition to that discourse which indirectly give it form. Michel Foucault popularized the idea of discursive formations in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) precisely to address large groups of statements which nonetheless, due to their persistence over time and the expansion of their discourse over time, have apparently variable objects of analysis, evolving styles and modes, impermanent and seemingly incoherent concepts, and variable themes (Foucault 32-35). Exploring a discursive formation means exploring systems of dispersion. Discursive formations "ignore no form of discontinuity, break, threshold, or limit" (Foucault 31). Discursive formations are as mutable as discourse itself.

Discourse, including literary and narrative discourse, always has rhetorical dimensions. Rhetoric includes the strategies wherein one can identify differing avenues of persuasion. Persuasion here does not merely mean sudden changes in specific opinions, but also includes shifting attitudes and changing perspectives. Contemporary rhetoric is increasingly visual and multimodal, and so understanding contemporary rhetoric means understanding the way discourse operates across modalities. With that said, let me define a few key terms.

By "rhetoric" I mean: the use of discourse to shape attitudes. Aristotle's definition, "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (1.2), remains a useful point of departure for understanding the concept. While Aristotle's definition remains helpful, the concept of "persuasion" implies a greater amount of intentionality than is necessary to modern usage. Richard Weaver, in *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (1953) put the emphasis on language, that language "can move us toward what is good; it can move us toward what is evil; or it can, in hypothetical third place, fail to move us at all" (6). Burke, by contrast, puts the emphasis on the relationship between reader and text, arguing that the key concept in rhetoric is not "persuasion" but instead "identification" (*Rhetoric of Motives* xiv). Burke further emphasizes that "rhetoric seeks rather to have a formative effect upon *attitude*" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 50). Texts act rhetorically by shaping attitudes, by eliciting the audience to identify with certain characters in certain situations, and in doing so reinforcing ideological forms.

When I refer to "empire" I am drawing on the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. While the commonplace definition of empire refers to a group of states ruled by a single emperor, Hardt and Negri define empire as the exercise of hegemonic power not through political rule, but rather through globalized, neoliberal capitalism. Empire works by co-opting desires, by eliciting states to work in collusion with the oligarchic power of multinational corporations. A major topic in exploring empire is the way in which states interact with other systems of power, including international orders and corporations. For instance, the creator of the comic *Romantically Apocalyptic*, Vitaly S. Alexius, is explicit that his comic "is a critique of capitalism. *Romantically Apocalyptic* takes place in a world ruled by mega corporations, stemming from a future in which all socialist ideas are destroyed and forgotten. A place in which basic concepts such as dreams, memories, sleep, love, talking, breathing, etc are copyrighted"

("Interview 5: Vitaly S. Alexius").[1] This fear of the mega-corporation has become a growing trend in post|apocalyptic discourse, particularly in combination with another trend since the 1980s.

Post|apocalyptic fiction since the 1980s frequently suggests that the nation state is an institution in decay. When post|apocalyptic fiction does not imagine the immediate and complete annihilation of the nation-state, it reinforces the idea that the ideological state apparatuses are in decay (are unable to protect individuals, are unable to enlist consent, or are unable to manage essential resources—the failure to protect individuals being the most common concern), and thus the repressive apparatus begins to overreach in tyrannical fashion. Post|apocalyptic fiction can be jingoistic, as in Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996), which suggests that through a recuperated political and patriotic subjectivity the state can reassert its ability to uphold liberty. But since 2001, Western artists have been increasingly critical of this paradigm, as in Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*. Post|apocalyptic narratives represent the failures of modern institutions, but often simultaneously express skepticism of practical alternatives. So, while post|apocalyptic narratives often seem initially quite hostile to the state, they nonetheless can double-back and see the haphazard half-working decayed state as preferable to authoritarian rulers, corporations, and vigilantism. Post|apocalyptic narratives are a site of struggle, where various aspects of empire and neoliberalism are interrogated.

"Neoliberalism" is the resurgence in laissez-faire capitalism in the late twentieth century; the belief that the state should exercise minimal control over economic systems. David Harvey emphasizes that:

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[1] The full text of the interviews can be found in the appendix.

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that

proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual

entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by

strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (2)

In neoliberal ideology, the state has certain key responsibilities: the protection of the value of money, and the protection of private property through police and military forces. Beyond this, the state must not interfere with markets. Neoliberalism and libertarianism have significant overlap; both advocate the absolute minimal amount of state intervention in the lives of individual citizens. A common point of confusion here is the conflation of the broad concept "liberty" with "liberals," "neoliberals," and "libertarians." Many branches of modern liberalism follow from the work of John Maynard Keynes, and the presidential legacies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson. Keynes, Roosevelt, and Johnson, each in their respective eras, saw the state as a way of mitigating the inequality and collective suffering of individual citizens. Neoliberalism, by contrast, focuses on the economic policies advocated by Adam Smith that relied on the belief that the overall wealth of a society is most increased by a lack of regulation.

Empire and democracy are not co-dependent, but rather in constant competition with each other as they seek to negotiate individual liberty and influence individual subjectivity. Post|apocalyptic narrative is a site of struggle where the fault lines of contemporary subjectivity come into relief. Environmentalist narratives contemplate ecological collapse while post|apocalyptic narrative tests the limits of the public sphere. The stories we tell shape not only the actual rhetorical action we take, but the ways in which we imagine rhetorical action being possible in the first place. Spivak (1988) builds on Foucault to further emphasize the relationship

between the subject, desire, and hegemonic power institutions in the context of post-colonial theory. Subjectivity refers not only to the intersection of identity and agency, but to how power shapes systems of desire.

While the struggle over the role of the state and the extent of empire is the focus of this project, contemporary post|apocalyptic discourse stems from a literary tradition stretching back millennia. *From The Epic of Gilgamesh* to the *Book of Revelation*, images of disaster have shaped the eschatological concerns of cultures and peoples, imagined the ends of empires, and produced narrative spectacles that demanded to be remembered and retold. Post|apocalyptic fiction since the end of the 1970s has become increasingly visually oriented, and thus needs to be considered with a multimedia focus. Post|apocalyptic fiction has always engaged a variety of genre systems, modes, and registers. By 1980, it was a pervasive topic in novels, short stories, games, music, and cinema. Also, Post|apocalyptic fiction since the end of World War II has registered not only "Western" concerns in narratives from the U.S.A., England, Canada, France, Mexico, and Australia, but also "Eastern" ones, as we will see in narratives from Japan and Russia.

In this study, I am foregrounding the trans-medial character of the post|apocalyptic. The novel *The Islands at the End of the World* (2014) makes explicit allusion to the film *Army of Darkness* (1992) while manifesting a hyper-textual relationship with Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). The game *Fallout* (1997) draws just as heavily from Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and His Dog* novella (1969) as it does from the earlier post|apocalyptic game *Wasteland* (1988). When Trent Reznor and *Nine Inch Nails* released the album *Year Zero* (2007), the album was marketed in conjunction with an alternate reality game: the game used websites with hypertext prose narrative to direct players to a phone number which played a pre-recorded message from

the "US Bureau of Morality." The post|apocalyptic is suited to high and mass culture, visual and literary culture, the processes of the digital environment and the fixity of prose on a page. Partly this is due to the increasing nature of globalized media; as Damon Lindelof argues, "Once you spend more than $100 million on a movie, you have to save the world" (Brown "Star"); highly expensive films need to be marketable to global audiences. Partly this is due to the capacity of post|apocalyptic discourse to imply metonymic importance by reducing institutions and ideas to clearly representative characters. Since it draws upon the full range of multimedia technologies today, the post|apocalyptic is uniquely suited to examining cultural transformations over the turn of the century.

Some scholars favor medial exclusivity. Kyle Bishop's *American Zombie Gothic* (2010) starts with the development of the zombie along its anthropological roots, but primarily analyzes the phenomenon within purely the filmic medium. Film exclusivity is also characteristic of Jerome Shapiro's *Atomic Bomb Cinema* (2001). For Bishop, this medial exclusivity allows quantitative surveys of semantically (but not syntactically) linked films. That is, all films he considers must include zombies, but not all films he considers must be about surviving amidst a zombie outbreak. While the semantic approach to scope offers quantitative appeal, it also risks rendering the quantitative data misleading. So, while the data surrounding films suggests there was a demonstrable "zombie renaissance" shortly after September 11th, 2001, the "zombie" as a semantic trope is also a major figure in interactive digital media ("computer games"), which has had a most noticeable upswing following the Great Recession. Medial exclusivity has many benefits in analysis, but also risks being misleading, either failing to notice or overstating trends.

The atomic bomb and its legacy continues to haunt the global imagination, but while the Cold War had its different phases, such as détente, escalation, and then the collapse of the Soviet

Union, the post|apocalyptic imagination has worked through trends that seemed at times asynchronous with specific social developments. The fear of nuclear annihilation served as the focus for a critique of modernity for authors in the 1950s like Ray Bradbury (*The Martian Chronicles*), Arthur C. Clarke ("The Nine Billion Names of God"), and Walter Miller (*A Canticle for Leibowitz*). Post|apocalyptic fiction of the 1960s varied from biting satire (Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*), to surrealist fantasy (Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream"), to a venue to recapture the adventure of the American West (Harlan Ellison's "A Boy and his Dog"), to gothic horror (Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*). By 1962, Rachel Carson drew on the rhetoric surrounding the atomic bomb to situate her environmental work *Silent Spring*. In the 1970s, a series of oil crises demonstrated the consequences of globalization, a concern visualized in film with *Mad Max*.

By the 1980s, the narrative preoccupation with the atomic bomb became infused with environmentalism, concerns over scarcity and globalization, and modernity generally. Neoliberal ideology pervaded first world countries, whether it be the policies of Ronald Reagan in the United States, Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, or Yasuhiro Nakasone in Japan. This is not to conflate the political and economic particularities of these countries with one another, but rather to propose that there is significant commonality in the aesthetic relationship to politics across first world countries leading up to the 1990s. David Harvey argues that "historians may well look upon the years 1978-80 as a revolutionary turning-point in the world's social and economic history" (1) due to the emergence of Paul Volcker in the US Federal Reserve, Ronald Regan as President of the United States, Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, and Deng Xiaoping's liberalization of China's economy.

This dissertation maps the iterations of post|apocalyptic discourse across decades and media forms. Chapter one considers the prose fiction of Octavia Butler. Butler's short stories and novels are representative of the transformation in the rhetoric of post|apocalyptic narratives in the 1980s and the 1990s. In particular, the chapter focuses on Butler's multivalence with state institutions: the fear of state decay (and concern with the capacity of police to protect individuals), the concern of collusion of the state with exploitative capitalist practices, and yet also the unending belief that the state and educational institutions are essential to the survival of the species. Claire Curtis argues that Butler's Parable series "re-imagines the social contract in a context of human vulnerability" and consequently that it "moves from an argument about striving for security to an argument for flourishing" (14).

Butler critiques both the failing national state and neoliberal colonial states; in doing so, Butler's narrative is a reaction to the conditions of neoliberalism emerging in the 1980s. Butler's narratives foreground the rhetorical acts necessary to respond to those changing conditions. Butler's text has taken on a prophetic quality, as the political uprising of Andrew Steele Jarret seems to anticipate some of the trends characteristic of the campaign of Donald Trump in 2016. Consequently, Butler's narratives serve as an effective point of departure in considering the thematic transformation in the post|apocalyptic imaginary at the end of the 20th century and its relationship to rhetoric.

Like Butler, Japanese artists during the 1980s and 1990s were also preoccupied with the decay of state institutions, although their works were further informed by the constitutional mandate for peace. Chapter two considers two Japanese texts, *AKIRA*[2] and *Neon Genesis*

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[2] Akira vs. AKIRA is an ongoing debate. Otomo favored the uppercase, and that is how it appears in contemporary marketing materials. Some critics, such as Brown, favor the uppercase form, for this reason. Many fans and critics

Evangelion.[3] Japan is the world's leading critic of nuclear weapons, with living survivors that have been vocal in critiquing the use of such weapons called *hibakusha* (explosion-affected people). Largely as a result of the United States' demands at the end of World War II, Japan's constitution demands that it remain a peaceful nation. This constitutional peacefulness has been under increasing pressure, partly as the United States' concerns in Southeast Asia have shifted more to China. *AKIRA* was produced at a time when the neoliberal agenda was becoming increasingly critical of the ostensible peacefulness of Japan. Political figures are factional, incompetent, and opportunistic. Although the military can assert leadership which gives focus to the society, it nonetheless is unable to control the direction of its citizens; in turn, its own people perpetuate a catastrophe on the scale of Hiroshima or Nagasaki. The narrative and visual spectacle is particularly appealing to American audiences, and *AKIRA* was instrumental in a boom of Japanese animation in American markets through the 1990s.

Whereas *AKIRA* focuses on the decay of state institutions, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* overwrites the imperial history of Japan to offer a neo-imperial critique of Japanese passivity. Motoko Tanaka (2014) foregrounds *Neon Genesis Evangelion* as the pivotal narrative of Japanese Science Fiction since 1995, contributing to the development of the facetious *sekaikei* (world-type) sub-genre. For Tanaka, *AKIRA* furthermore reflects the possibility "that Japanese society may have a chance to confront the meanings of the apocalyptic catastrophe and defeat objectively for the first time since the war" (105). Chapter two builds on the work of Tanaka in *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction* in foregrounding the central position of

nonetheless favor the lowercase version. Although I personally find the uppercase form unappealing to look at in the text of this essay, I am respecting Otomo's favored form.
[3] Although some prefer to say *Shin Seiki Evangerion* since this is the Romanization of the title, all marketing material for the film in the West presents the title as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. As far as I know, all scholars favor *Neon Genesis Evangelion* when writing in English, although indexes sometimes have the English translated title redirect to the Romanized title.

AKIRA and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* in understanding the role of post|apocalyptic speculative fiction in Japan through the 1980s to the 1990s. Despite the critique of empire latent in both animations, both texts reflect a struggle with Japan's imperial legacy and the growing demands of transnational capitalist empire.

Although works from the 1980s and 1990s tended to focus on the role of state institutions, much of contemporary post|apocalyptic discourse focuses on the ethics of individuals who learn indifference to human action amidst the conditions of scarcity, particularly coupled with complete lack of faith in collective action. Chapter three focuses on Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* which heralded this trend. McCarthy's *The Road* attracted critical and commercial attention to the post|apocalyptic genre, leading to an influx of post|apocalyptic narratives after it received the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in fiction. Caren Irr argues that "Emerging from the ruins of twentieth-century revolutionary fiction (and movements), we find a self-consciously restricted social sphere that is detached from the traces of political action " (172). Irr's argument implies that *The Road*'s violence is so pervasive because of the scarcity its premise necessitates, not because of its ability to imagine conflict with real political institutions or as a way of imagining social change. *The Road* celebrates commodity fetishism and teaches a pragmatic ethics at ease in the conditions of neoliberal empire.

Whereas *The Road* reifies general principles of neoliberalism, Naomi Klein critiques contemporary science fiction as antagonistic to civic discourse on the topic of climate change. In a 2015 lecture at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, building on her work in *This Changes Everything* and *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein argued that every sci-fi movie tells us the same thing—the future is post-apocalyptic, and ecological disaster has produced a hyper-

stratified world. In particular, Klein argued that post|apocalyptic speculative fiction works in concordance with neoliberal ideology, that we "can't imagine another future for ourselves, and that ultimately is the triumph of market fundamentalism—it has convinced us that we are incapable or unworthy of being saved, or saving ourselves" ("This Changes Everything"). Chapter four explores Klein's argument in the context of Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, particularly *Oryx and Crake*, and Austin Aslan's *The Islands at the End of the World*. Both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Islands at the End of the World* reverse, parody, or undermine conventional colonialist frameworks while coupling their rhetorical trajectories with environmentalist concerns. Both novels foreground the need for greater sustainability, while reflecting multivalence about larger trends in western culture.

While some narratives focus on the threat of a particular exigence, such as climate change, the broader trend in post|apocalyptic discourse is to consider the role of the individual in civic life. Chapter five explores two stereotypes of contemporary apocalyptic films, focusing primarily on examples from Alfonso Cuaron's 2006 *Children of Men* and Guillermo del Toro's 2013 *Pacific Rim*. The first stereotype involves the awakening of political consciousness in characters who have otherwise become mired in hopelessness and despair. The second stereotype involves the disregard of collective political authority in favor of individual action. While apocalyptic film centers on the awakening of an individual's political consciousness, this political consciousness nonetheless parodies the paroxysms of collective action and eschews entirely the precept that the public sphere offers a viable venue for social change.

Whereas Octavia Butler in the 1980s and 1990s focuses on the necessity of the police and state institutions, contemporary representations of African American families tend to focus on the impact of the prison system and the production of delinquency. As such, contemporary

post|apocalyptic discourse responds to the precepts and conclusions of earlier narrative forms. Chapter six focuses on Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* season one. The game struggles with racist metanarratives in the history of representing African-American families, and the necessity of articulating ethical codes in times of scarcity and crisis. The relationship between camera, character/avatar, and player presents a didactic visual structure. Several key concepts integral to neoliberal and libertarian ideology are interrogated in this series, namely the role of the state in guarding communal property and the competing ethics of expediency and security. While the game ultimately favors conventional wisdom on the importance of personal responsibility, the broader patterns in the game's discourse is highly critical of overvaluing the ethic of security that has been devastating to America in the past thirty years in the creation of a prison-industrial complex.

The conclusion explores the role of post|apocalyptic texts in the classroom, particularly in the context of composition. In the thematic struggles present in post|apocalyptic discourse, students are compelled to explore global issues that nonetheless affect them on an everyday basis.

Chapter One: Making America Great Again:

Octavia Butler's "Speech Sounds" and the *Parable* Series

Post|apocalyptic discourse exploded after World War II, with the threat of nuclear Armageddon shaping the imagination of decades of writers such as Ray Bradbury (*The Martian Chronicles,* 1950), Jack Williamson ("With Folded Hands," 1947), Nevil Shute (*On the Beach,* 1957), Peter George (*Red Alert,* 1958), and Pat Frank (*Alas, Babylon,* 1959) either focusing on the threat of the use of nuclear weapons directly, or referring to it metaphorically through broader concerns in modernization and the development of new technologies. The transformation of modernity by new technologies was further explored by Philip K. Dick ("Second Variety," 1953 and also *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, 1968) and Ralph Ellison ("I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream," 1966). In the 1960s, the environment began to more frequently be the locus of apocalyptic change, such as in J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963, serving as a metaphor for the atomic bomb). In the 1970s, premillennial, dispensationalist eschatology began to take off with *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (1970). By the 1980s, post|apocalyptic discourse reflected a myriad of cultural concerns, including the threat of nuclear weapons, the role of technology generally, the importance of the environment to human existence, and the role of theology in everyday life.

Throughout this time, the threat of nuclear annihilation as a result of the cold war kept the threat of nuclear weapons on the minds of artists and audiences. In the 1980s, the threat of nuclear annihilation hit a new peak in visibility with the release of *The Day After* (1983), a television series depicting the results of nuclear war on a Kansas town. Post|apocalyptic narratives became increasingly stylized with the popularity of the *Mad Max* franchise as well

(1979-). After the end of the Cold War in 1991, although post|apocalyptic discourse continued to expand, it tended to focus slightly less on nuclear holocaust as the definitive apocalyptic event. Artists working during the 1980s through the 1990s, then, reflect a nascent transformation in post|apocalyptic discourse that struggled to understand the legacy of the Cold War. This was particularly the case for Octavia Butler, who struggled to understand how the Soviet Union collapsed. For generations, post|apocalyptic discourse had lived in the constant threat of nuclear annihilation as a result of the Cold War. Yet, the idea that the Soviet Union could collapse on its own—because of economic struggle—suggested that it was time to focus on how economic structures interacted with the stability of state institutions. In a way, the move away from the emphasis on the Atom bomb allowed a greater exploration of the ideological differences, and especially the ideological transformation that had taken place in the West since the birth of the environmental movement, the growing awareness of the international dependence on oil, and the emerging hegemony of neoliberal ideals.

Octavia Butler explores the way that ideological structures produce collusion in citizens in fascistic and theocratic states, while simultaneously rejecting the appeal of a neoliberal paradise. In Butler's fiction, all systems of power can be corrupted, whether they be statist, corporate, or theological in nature. The *Parable* series is a reaction to the conditions of neoliberalism that emerged in the 1980s and the reactionary political rhetoric of the 1990s. Butler's narratives foreground the rhetorical acts necessary to respond to the changing conditions of both neoliberal economic structures and reactionary rhetorical paradigms. Consequently, Butler's narratives serve as an effective point of departure in considering the thematic transformation in the post|apocalyptic imaginary at the end of the 20th century and its relationship to rhetoric.

Octavia Estelle Butler was "a pioneering African American woman sf writer" (*Wesleyan* 566), one of "the most distinctive and original voices in sf" (*Science Fiction* 119), and "the first science fiction writer to receive the MacArthur Foundation's prestigious 'genius' grant" (*Wastelands* 245). This combination of signifiers, "African American," "woman," and "sf writer" have different implications for how Butler has been approached rhetorically and theoretically, since her work is at times caught up with considerations of late twentieth century feminism, intersectionality, and genre theory. While this project generally is approaching Butler's works in the context of its contribution to post|apocalyptic discourse, it is worth taking some time to explore what it means for her to be writing genre fiction.

Genre Theory: Literary Institutions and State Institutions

Genres are institutions. Genres have purpose, transcend individual intentions, and are supported with cultural force. Genres are the by-product of ongoing cultural practice. Consequently, they are ongoing sites of cultural and ideological struggle. Some wings of genre criticism in the 20th century follow from Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), which tends to present genres as more static and more abstract, in contrast to the claims I make above. This is the case up through, for instance, David Ketterer, in *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature* (1974), who defines apocalyptic literature as narratives where "an apocalyptic transformation results from the creation of a new condition, based upon a process of extrapolation and analogy, whereby man's horizons—temporary, spatial, scientific, and ultimately philosophic—are abruptly expanded" (148). He further argues that the utopian/dystopian tropes in science fiction are symptoms of an American imagination preoccupied with the promise of the American dream. While Ketterer

recognizes that there is an ideological dimension to narrative genres, he tends to present them as more static and abstract.

In contrast to this, Jameson (1981) argues that "Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (106). For Jameson, the way that texts become further and further removed from immediate performance contexts relegates generic formation to the market. Like Jameson, Rick Altman (1999) critiques the assumption that "producers, readers, and critics all share the same interests in genre, and that genres serve those interests equally" (12). Altman maps out Dudley Andrew's concepts, and recognizes four meanings of genre:

> genre as *blueprint*, as a formula that precedes, programmes and patterns industry
>
> > production;
>
> genre as *structure*, as the formal framework on which individual films are founded;
>
> genre as *label*, as the name of a category central to the decisions and communications of
>
> > distributors and exhibitors;
>
> genre as *contract*, as the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience.
>
> (14)

By moving away from emphasis on the individual artist, Altman emphasizes that genres are "the temporary *by-product* of an ongoing *process*" (54) [italics Altman's]. Instead of understanding genre as a structure, Altman argues that genres are situations, "a concatenated series of events regularly repeated according to a recognizable pattern" that is "produced, broadly distributed, and exhibited to an extensive audience and received in a rather homogenous fashion" (84). As such, genre is bound up with ideology. The result of all this is that, instead of categories and taxonomies, genres are "a site of struggle among users" (99).

This site of struggle does not, of course, always fall in the rhetorical lines that critical scholars want. As mentioned in the introduction, Susan Sontag's withering critique of science fiction films from the 1950s and 1960s was that, while they ostensibly discuss current political issues, they do not produce experience in the audience likely to result in political action. In Sontag's argument, while science fiction films touch on some of the deepest anxieties about contemporary life, they both reflect these anxieties and "allay them" (225). The consequence of watching the films is that they "inculcate a strange apathy concerning the processes of radiation, contamination, and destruction" (225). The consequence of being a site of struggle, rather than always a site of political action, is that many contributions to post|apocalyptic discourse offer placebos rather than solutions to real problems.

This contentiousness and openness, nonetheless, was part of the reason Butler chose to write science fiction. Butler embraced science fiction partly because of its generic fluidity, that "there are no walls around science fiction" (Francis). Much of Octavia Butler's work engages post|apocalyptic themes as a way of exploring a particular type of science fiction in a term she borrows from Heinlein, an "if-this-goes-on story" (Butler, "Devil Girl"). She writes about hanging political cartoons up on her walls while writing as a way of reminding her to engage living political issues. For this reason, she actively and intentionally meant to address issues that emerged during her life in California: the rise of the prison-industrial complex, the move toward "throw-away" laborers, global warming, modern slavery, and the repercussions of drug use on children. Butler saw post|apocalyptic fiction as a way of contributing to the ongoing political struggles in her life, particularly as those struggles pertained to the intersections and struggles between the state and neoliberal corporate interests.

The Choice of Civic Action in "Speech Sounds"

In Butler's short stories, her ideological presuppositions and concerns are distilled. Butler is a master of depicting decayed state institutions. In "Speech Sounds," as in the *Parable* series and her other post|apocalyptic narratives such as *Clay's Ark*, she does not represent the total destruction of the United States government (as, for instance, is the case for McCarthy in *The Road*)—rather, the state exists, but it struggles to maintain the basic levels of security that might be expected of it. There is still material value in paper currency and some institutions continue to function (such as the bus) while the extent of decay is left to implication, such as in decayed roads and the absence of police. A consequence of state institutions being decayed rather than destroyed is that Butler can interrogate commodity structures in the conditions of scarcity.

"Speech Sounds" begins with a conflation of commonality of the diegetic world with our own: "There was trouble aboard the Washington Boulevard bus" (567). This sentence highlights the sense of realism that pervades Butler's narrative: there is, at this point, nothing to separate the world of "Speech Sounds" from our own. For the reader, the sense of discrepancy between the real world and the fictional world begins with subtlety: "She believed she might have one group of relatives left alive—a brother and his two children twenty miles away in Pasadena. That was a day's journey one-way, if she were lucky" (567). This simple observation is so subdued that it might be missed: in what context would twenty miles constitute "a day's journey"? Only one in which the basic fabric of 20th century American life would have eroded: travel by car. Butler's subtle interrogation of the presuppositions of modern life highlights the contemporary reliance on certain technologies and their reliance on the non-renewable commodity of oil.

The nature of the "trouble" on the bus intensifies due to the decay of state institutions. Rye indicates that "Two young men were involved in a disagreement of some kind, or, more likely, a misunderstanding" (567). This is the first of many instances of intentional grammatical

uncertainty. The trouble manifests itself through the simulacra of conflict, through "mock punches, hand games of intimidation to replace lost curses" (567). The narrative here could be more simplistic: humanity loses its ability to communicate and thus small problems quickly escalate into violent confrontations. That is not exactly what goes on here: instead, just as there is a visible period of indeterminacy in how severe the conflict is, so is there by conjunction a period in which the *apparent* conflict is mediated by a performance of conflict instead of actual confrontation. Of course, it does not take long for the bus to hit a pothole, at which point one is thrown into another and "Instantly, the shorter man drove his left fist into the disintegrating sneer" (568). In this case, the literal decay of state institutions (such as road maintenance) aggravates and escalates the ongoing conflicts of individuals. The failure in the technology of communication, the ability of people to resolve their conflicts through speech, is intensified by the failure of state institutions.

Just as there are moments of indeterminacy in the conflict on the bus, so does the entire pandemic lack a clear cause. There is never an objective explanation of what disrupts the language ability of people in the story, and the only explicit hypothesis comes five pages in, leaving the reader to infer and reach their own suspicions for the first four pages. At that point, Rye-as-narrator explains that:

> The illness, if it was an illness, had cut even the living off from one another. As it swept over the country, people hardly had time to lay blame on the Soviets (though they were falling silent along with the rest of the world), on a new virus, a new pollutant, radiation, divine retribution. . . The illness was stroke-swift in the way it cut people down and stroke-like in some of its effects. But it was highly specific. (571)

"If it was an illness" casts doubt onto the entire scope of the pandemic and reinforces the indeterminacy of the cause. This malleability in cause means that Butler can be coy in the ideological frame. It could be political (the Soviets). It could be cosmic (divine retribution). By presenting a multiplicity of possibilities, and no explicit answers, Butler reframes the conflict not on to what caused the pandemic and the breakdown in the basic conditions of civil life that ensues, but instead puts the emphasis on to what happens next, and the failure of the state to handle the problem whatever its cause may be.

Rye both witnesses and imagines a multiplicity of violent actions with spectators who either are unable or unwilling to intervene in ethical or empathic ways. The trouble on the bus escalates and a former police officer stops the violent confrontation by means of teargas. Outside, the former police officer—Obsidian, he is later named—offers for Rye to leave with him. The people who had caused trouble on the bus notice this offer, and make obscene gestures to Rye, at which point she reflects: "People might very well stand by and watch if he tried to rape her. They would also stand and watch her shoot him. Would he push things that far?" (571). The breakdown in civic behavior has forced Rye to constantly travel armed; but it has also resulted in a scenario where men attempt to possess, assault, and control women. The state of nature is not exactly a Hobbesian war of all against all, but rather a primal competition among men for the possession of women; a set of themes that plays out in a century of post-apocalyptic narratives from London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) to James' *Children of Men* (1992).

The possibility of civilized behavior is presented at times as a choice. The behavior of Obsidian, in his single-handed desire to apparently resurrect the LAPD and with it the idea of a connection to an organized state is sharply contrasted with a man who lives across the street from Rye. Rye reflects that the man across the street from her "rarely washed since his bout with the

illness. And he had gotten into the habit of urinating wherever he happened to be. He had two women already—one tending each of his large gardens. They put up with him in exchange for his protection" (572). This man, with his uncleanliness and his polygamy, showcases what men *can* become. Yet Rye, despite her disgust, nonetheless sees his behavior as coherent. It is Obsidian that she cannot understand. She is left wondering why Obsidian "had decided on his own to keep the LAPD alive with what he had left. He was sane enough otherwise. Why wasn't he at home raising corn, rabbits, and children? But she did not know how to ask" (574). The indeterminacy here of course suggests alternatives to a bio-deterministic ideology that some critics of Butler see in her writings. For instance, Zaki writes about the "force by which humans are wedded to their biologically-determined natures and their inability to transcend it" (242) as being endemic to Butler's writing. While Zaki's claims are contested by some critics (see Miller 1999), it is certainly the case that even if Butler presents some bio-deterministic views, it seems more likely that the extent that Obsidian is beholden to bio-deterministic behaviors is itself one of the central questions of the narrative.

Rye, despite her inability to understand Obsidian's decisions, nevertheless needs to subsume his position when the possibility of rehabilitating civilization emerges. After a confrontation in the street, Obsidian is shot, and Rye discovers two children who still have the capacity for speech. Why they can speak is unknown, although Rye hopes that it is because children born after the onset of the disease are immune. In regard to the dead Obsidian, Rye reflects that he "had been the protector, had chosen that role for who knew what reason. Perhaps putting on an obsolete uniform and patrolling the empty streets had been what he did instead of putting a gun into his mouth" (578). Rye consistently feels that Obsidian's desire to protect is contextually insane. Yet this question of sanity and madness reflects Rye's (and perhaps

Butler's) doubts about bio-deterministic behavior, and what pattern should emerge from bio-deterministic behavior. Is Obsidian's decision to retain structure in society (to some extent, like Marcos's decisions in *Parable of the Talents* that I will discuss soon) contrary to a man's innate desires?

Rye further reflects that "She had been a teacher. A good one. She had been a protector, too, though only of herself. She had kept herself alive when she had no reason to live. If the illness let these children alone, she could keep them alive" (578). Obsidian's "faith" in the protector-role, in the *individual choice* to embody the state apparatus through the visual iconography of the LAPD is fully realized when Rye recognizes that to protect these children she too must become the embodiment of protector-educator—she becomes a living ideological state apparatus for a state which is now reconstituted through her embodiment of it. "Speech Sounds" reflects deep multivalence to modern state institutions. On the one hand, there is the aspiration, the desire for the roads to be good, the people to be educated, the bus to transport people, the police to protect. Simultaneously, there is a recognition that many of these institutions are decayed, are failing the people they are meant to serve, are in some cases abandoned or have become exploitative. This juxtaposition of aspiration and doubt is more fully developed in the *Parable* series, particularly in *Parable of the Talents*.

<center>The *Parable* Series and Making America Great Again</center>

The post|apocalyptic imagination pushes along nationalist, rhetorical, and political dimensions, but hinges upon nuanced aesthetic representations which are predicated on multivalence, both between audience and text, and between the characters and explanations for the systems of oppression under which they find themselves. Post|apocalyptic narratives represent the ways that people attempt—and sometimes fail—to understand themselves in

political contexts, and how they come to understand the ways in which they can gain agency in their own lives.

Through journal entries, *Parable of the Sower* tells the story of Lauren Olamina, who suffers from an empathic disorder that causes her to experience the perceived pleasure or pain of others herself, a disorder she characterizes as "sharing." This disorder is brought on because her mother took the drug Parateco while pregnant. At the start of the novel, she lives in the walled city of Robledo with her family. Due to the breakdown of the California economy and the weakening of the entire state, in particular the police force, Lauren's community is vulnerable when the gates of the community are broken down and the town is destroyed by a rampaging group of Pyro (a new drug) addicts and thieves. Lauren survives but is unable to find surviving members of her family. With other survivors from the community, Lauren begins to head North along the highway. While collecting more survivors, Lauren begins to more fully develop her own belief system based around defining God as change, which she calls Earthseed, since Lauren believes the survival of humanity necessitates interplanetary settlement. The novel comes to the close with the foundation of a new community with the survivors Lauren has collected (including a new husband, Bankole), at a place Lauren terms Acorn.

Parable of the Talents continues the pattern of using journal entries to tell the story, but now the journals also include commentary and related journals: the commentator is Lauren's daughter, who is named Larkin but goes by the name of Asha Vere, who was separated from her mother while still an infant and rejects much of her mother's belief system. Asha also includes relevant journals from other authors, including her father, Bankole, and her uncle, Marc. Most of the narration focuses on the growth of Acorn, in conjunction with the rise of a new political figure, Andrew Steele Jarret, who infuses a new religio-political movement, Christian America,

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with a subset being Jarret's Crusaders, a militaristic wing of that movement. After Jarret is elected president, Acorn is attacked by Jarret's Crusaders, and they enslave the survivors at Acorn, separating the children from the parents. The narrative continues, splitting descriptions of Lauren's slavery, and her daughter's upbringing among foster parents in Christian America. After a landslide, Lauren and her followers break free, kill their captors, and try to find their children. When that attempt is unsuccessful, Lauren begins to grow her movement, Earthseed, and eventually gathers enough followers to initiate her ancient dream of interstellar settlement.

Hoda M. Zaki (1990) does not write in regard to the *Parable* series (Zaki's argument was written before the *Parable* series was released), but her critique of Butler's work is nonetheless generalizable. Zaki's argument echoes Susan Sontag's critique of science fiction films of the 1950s. Regarding Butler's work through the 1980s, Zaki argues that the "public arena of politics, where dialogue and dissent occur, is nullified in most of her novels by her construction of permanent states of emergency, which pre-empt any full exploration of the moral and ethical dimensions of political decisions; there can be no room for real debate when the very survival of the individual or group is at stake" (242). First, I find it odd that Zaki suggests "there can be no real debate when the very survival of the individual or group is at stake," since exigent threats with an intrinsic *pathos* are very much subject to "real debate." What Zaki seems more to be getting at is that it is difficult to imagine a political discussion in many of Butler's narratives that touches on the other domains of rhetoric: epideictic, forensic, and more long-term issues of deliberative rhetoric.

These forms of rhetoric are certainly a part of *Parable of the Talents*. For instance, in Bankole's journal, he engages in epideictic rhetoric when he reflects on the cause of the "Pox," wherein he has read it was "caused by accidentally coinciding climactic, economic, and

sociological crises. It would be more honest to say that the Pox was caused by our own refusal to deal with obvious problems in those areas" (8). That is, understanding the premise of the narrative relies on the reader engaging with the mediated impression of the causes of the apocalyptic scenario. Bankole is aware of the impact of climate change (which for Butler means global warming), economic collapse (which results in rampant poverty and the encroachment of multinational corporations, who in turn exploit the remaining workers), and sociological crises, which Bankole associates with a decline in educational opportunities and in turn the arousal of reactionary religions and mysticism. Yet Bankole characterizes the baseline problem as one of indifference and apathy in confronting the problem on the part of social consciousness and state work. On the one hand, Bankole feels that the loss of the protective power of the state government, in terms of exploitative police forces, and the lack of federal action toward education are both contributing factors toward the Pox. On the other hand, Bankole is keenly aware that "inadequate leaders" had also contributed to the Pox by engaging in wars that only amount to "wastes of life and treasure" (8). That is, Bankole is multivalent; he is aware that inadequate state power and action is an issue, but also that misguided state action can be equally wasteful. To this extent, Butler begins *Parable of the Talents* with a multivalent consideration of Bankole's epideictic rhetoric about the causes of the Pox.

There is also a significant exploration of deliberative rhetoric, particularly in the contradictory modes of the political slogan and organized public spheres. One of the central focuses of *Parable of the Talents* is in the hypocritical political campaign of Andrew Steele Jarret and the xenophobic attitude legitimized by his political ascendance. Jarret's reactionary theocratic jingoism is juxtaposed and contrasted to the reasoned political discussions that Lauren establishes at her small community of Acorn. While Butler recognizes that small political

institutions can be destroyed by xenophobia, she believes that ideological constructions can survive the destruction of specific institutions.

When Butler chooses to frame the antagonistic political campaign of Jarret around the slogan "Make America Great Again" she does so in the context of decades of political history. Making countries great again has been a prevalent conservative mantra across decades and national boundaries. In 1950, at the onset of her political career, Margaret Thatcher argued in her general address that "We Conservatives are not afraid to face the future whatever problem it entails, because it is our earnest desire to make Great Britain great again." Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines argued in his inaugural address in 1965 that "This nation can be great again," "We must renew the vision of greatness for our country," and "Offering all our efforts to our Creator, we must drive ourselves to be great again." Moreover, Ronald Reagan, in the 1980s, had campaign buttons reading "Let's Make America Great Again / Reagan '80." In 2016, it has become the center slogan of the Republican presidential candidacy of Donald Trump. Due to the invective surrounding this campaign, some critics have begun to use it as a synonym for fascism, as in Joji Sakurai's discussion in the *New Statesman* "Make Croatia Great Again: Fascism in the EU's youngest state." The emphasis on a nostalgic vision for the state has also been associated with Hitler, particularly in comedy pieces such as those by Bill Maher (Gauthier). Of course, the phrase following Reagan was at times rehabilitated for liberal causes as well, such as by Peter Beinart in *The Good Fight: Why Liberals—and Only Liberals—can win the War on Terror and make America Great again* (2006). The heavy media coverage of the Trump campaign has, for the near future, probably guaranteed the association of the phrase with the politics of the 2016 national election.

Several scholars recognize that Butler's real political attitudes shape the presentation of her narrative worlds, although there is not total consensus on the interpretation of the political themes in her novels. Writing about the Xenogenesis trilogy, Jessie Stickgold-Sarah argues that "certainly Butler's fiction is part of her political stance and identity. Utopian fiction cannot be non-political any more than political utopia can function without imaginative features" (419). Most scholars recognize that there are political dimensions to Butler's work; what is less certain is the didactic quality, or the straightforwardness of the concepts that are meant to be taken away. Partly this is a result of Butler's antipathy toward ideological "purists" or individuals who deny the complexity in achieving political or economic goals. As Stacy Magedanz argues, in Butler's fiction, "it is always the hybrids, the boundary-crossers, the mediators, who hold the promise of the future. Hold-fasts and purists. . . fade inevitably into the past" (56). This is not to say that Butler advocates for incoherent ideological positions. Rather, Butler (through Lauren and her movement of Earthseed) argues that all ideological systems need to be open to discussion and negotiation if they are going to be productive systems.

The range of what the reader can take away from Jarret and his movement is sometimes reflected in characterizations of Jarret's power. Although not one of her central points in her writing, Marlene D. Allen comments that "The United States government in the novels is virtually impotent and the President is a mere figurehead with no real power, simply a vestige of times past, until the advent of Andrew Steele Jarret as President in *Parable of the Talents*" (1355). The implication that Jarret has more power than the previous presidents is telling, since this is not totally explicit in the novel. In the novel, Jarret never seems wholly culpable for the actions that his followers perpetrate. Indeed, can it be said with certainty that Jarret truly has power when the actions done in his name are done without his knowledge? It is not clear that

Jarret is more powerful than his predecessors; he starts a war with a seceded Alaska, although if power is to be understood as the capacity to make people act in a particular way, then this could be more characteristic of a failure of power than a sign of power. If Jarret can be seen as having power in the novel, it is rather in the way that he empowers groups to advance their own agendas, in particular "Christian America." This point comes to a head in the novel's focus on the destruction of Lauren's community, Acorn, by a group claiming to be supported by Christian America. Yet, Lauren's brother, Marc, continues to believe that this group operated without the support or knowledge of Christian America. The impact of Jarret's rhetoric on what remains of the public sphere cannot be characterized purely as Jarret's power.

The role of Jarret further undermines readings of Butler's work that downplay the role of national politics. Jim Miller, for instance, favors a view of the novel that exclusively focuses on the role of multinational capitalism:

Butler puts the American reader in the shoes not of some oppressed 'Third World' person but of someone [with] whom they can more directly identify. In the world of multinational capitalism, Butler is telling us, national boundaries are meaningless, and just as American companies have taken advantage of Third World labor, leaving American workers jobless, foreign multinationals may someday make us the same offer of economic salvation. In the era of downsizing, no work or bad work is a choice facing more and more people worldwide. In the example of Olivar, Butler is showing us how local and national problems are interrelated with the international movement of capital (354).

Miller's comments seem convincing for a discussion of *Parable of the Sower*, but much less satisfactory when considering *Parable of the Talents* (which probably came out just after

Miller's essay was written). The control of the town of Olivar by the corporation Kagimoto, Stamm, and Frampton (KSF) Lauren feels would be greater than that of any government. Miller in his general conclusion that "local and national problems are interrelated with the international movement of capital" and the apparent attempt of KSF to induce a form of wage slavery over its employees is meant to foster sympathy for peoples who are exploited by American companies abroad. Yet his statement that "national boundaries are meaningless" reflects how the dialectical tension Butler explored was not fully developed in the first novel. At the heart of the *Parable* series is the conflict and collusion among corporate, national, and spiritual institutions. Jarret, his nationalist uprising, and his war with Alaska reshape the landscape and avenues for movement in *Parable of the Talents*. National borders might not seem to matter at times, but when they do begin to matter, they can redefine the lives of everyone within its constituency.

Butler's emphasis is on the negotiation of different ideological systems, and the way this negotiation often fails individuals and outsider groups in different ways. While Jarret serves as the ideological mouthpiece of Christian America, he is not the novel's villain. Matthew Nilges argues that "Identifying Jarret as a totalitarian, paternalistic leader whose Christian America movement attempts to restore lost order and control is relatively easy. Butler, however, does not allow us to take pleasure in seemingly easy answers and an analysis of the novel that clearly distinguishes between good and bad, regressive and progressive characters and sociopolitical projects" (1343). "Making America Great Again" has an intuitive quality when we consider the desperation and depravity of *Parable of the Sower*; certainly Lauren's brother Marc feels that the religious and political structure of Christian America offers a welcome alternative to the indifferent corporate and political institutions that work together to eject the poor from their homes, and continues to hold on to Christian America even after the dystopian slavery

experienced by his sister at the hands of their ostensible supporters. It is precisely when people do not feel safe in their homes, when the government seems to be in collusion with neoliberalism and multinational corporations that a populist, ideological conservative figurehead is both most appealing and most capable of inspiring fringe groups who are only too ready to take advantage of the populist rhetoric for their own ends.

The reactionary rhetoric of Jarret emboldens and legitimizes groups who take out their frustrations over larger institutional and geopolitical issues on minority groups like that of Lauren's Earthseed group. Lauren recognizes that "We're 'that cult,' 'those strange people in the hills,' 'those crazy fools who pray to some kind of god of change'" (20). Jarret seems like something of a hybrid of Ronald Reagan, Marion "Pat" Robertson, and perhaps even Pat Buchanan, making him something of a synecdoche of conservative figures throughout the 1980s and 1990s. While Jarret has the slogan (and hair) of Reagan, Jarret is a former Baptist minister like Robertson. Robertson ran for president in 1988. In terms of tone, Jarret seems in line with Buchanan, whose 1992 Republican National Convention speech argued, "There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America." Whatever the case, Lauren never seems to believe that Jarret himself would directly attack her. Rather, Lauren's concern is that "President Jarret, if the country is mad enough to elect him, could destroy us without even knowing we exist" (21). For minorities, for groups living on the fringe of American society, reactionary rhetoric meant to alienate outsiders does not have to be specific to legitimize vigilante gangs.

Marc emphasizes that Jarret "disclaimed all connection" with the group that enslaved Acorn. In a letter to Lauren after she finds him again, Marc writes that the group that attacked

Acorn "call themselves Jarret's Crusaders, but they lie. They're extremists who believe that reeducating heathen adults and placing their young children in Christian American homes is the only way to restore order and greatness" (322); Marc has likewise been told "they really do find good homes for the children they rescue" (322). Finally, Marc argues that "if you really want to find your daughter, you should join us—join Christian America. Your cult has failed" (323). The irony of course is that Marc completely ignores the extent to which Christian America condones the behavior of "Jarret's Crusaders." Marc ignores the fact that Christian America accepted the task of rehousing abducted children and has no interest in reuniting families broken by its extremists. Moreover, the sway of Jarret's Crusaders over Christian America remains in enough force that he is unable to investigate very thoroughly into the group. Finally, Marc emphasizes that even if Lauren did join Christian America, she would have to accept being subservient. Butler does not beat around the bush in emphasizing Marc's hypocrisy and blindness in believing that Christian America had no complicity with the actions of "Camp Christian" where Lauren was enslaved in the same way that he believes Jarret's "disclaiming" the actions of Jarret's Crusaders. Denying connections to fringe groups is irrelevant when Jarret's rhetoric seems to be precisely what the group rallied around to begin with.

Jarret's rhetoric consistently called for violent action against outsider groups. Lauren records his sermon in her journal from before he became president:

> "Can our country be just a little bit Christian and a little bit Buddhist, maybe? How about a little Christian and a little Hindu. Or maybe a country can be a little bit Christian and a little bit Jewish? How about a little bit Christian and a little bit Moslem? Or perhaps we can be a little bit Christian and a little bit pagan cultist?"

And then he thundered, "We are God's people, or we are filth! We are God's people, or

we are nothing! (88)

Later Jarret continues: "What do we do to weeds, to viruses, to parasitic worms, to cancers?

What must we do to protect ourselves and our children?" (89). Jarret combines religious and

ideological essentialism with apparent advocacy for violent, vigilante action and forced

indoctrination. For the reader, Marc's belief that Jarret has "disclaimed all connection" with

Jarret's Crusaders ignores the fact that Jarret's Crusaders are simply following Jarret's non-

specific instructions to eliminate all outsiders and non-Christians.

While Butler focuses heavily on the hypocrisy of advocates for authoritarian, theocratic

states like that of Jarret which marries "Christian America" to the United States government, she

also explores how Jarret's America fails to address the ongoing economic and environmental

crises of the United States. These economic issues are at the heart of the novel, even the core

idea of the "Parable of the Talents.

The Parable of the Talents and Disposable Labor

The novel is framed around the biblical parable of the talents, wherein three servants are

given five, two, and one talent. In the parable, the servants with five and two talents "trade" with

theirs and amass more talents. The servant with one "digged in the earth, and hid his lord's

money" (Butler 14, Butler uses the King James translation). When the master returns, he rewards

the profitable servants, and takes the one talent from the servant with only one and gives it to the

servant who started with five. The moral that, "For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he

shall have in abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath"

(15). Butler presents the parable in the context of one of Lauren's journals, in particular as she

has a nightmare where she remembers the mob attack on Robledo where she grew up. The

translation of "talents" presents a double entendre wherein the "talent," a considerable amount of roman currency, is analogized to the "talents" as in skills in modern English. In an interview presented at the end of modern editions of *Parable of the Talents*, Butler emphasizes that her metaphor is not meant to be for individual talents, but rather for the talents of humanity, wherein:

> We human beings will use our talents—our intelligence, our creativity, our ability to
>
> plan, to delay gratification, to work for the benefit of the community and of humanity,
>
> rather than only for ourselves. We will use our talents or we will lose them. We will use
>
> our talents to save ourselves or we'll do what other animal species do sooner or later. . .
>
> Earth is finite. (409)

This sense, of using human talents to better the species, indicates the junction between the "Earthseed Destiny" that Lauren creates and the parable that frames the novel. Lauren, at least, emphasizes that "Earthseed must be not only a belief system but a way of life" (389), that the theology of the church and the ideology of the school should work together for the betterment of mankind and the survival of the human species.

Ultimately, the economic system exploited by Jarret's Crusaders to enslave Acorn is a major part of Butler's critique. Lauren observes that for two young girls whose family was attacked:

> If they had no adult relatives, even the police would either sell them illegally or indenture
>
> them legally. the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments—the ones abolishing slavery
>
> and guaranteeing citizenship rights—still exist, but they've been so weakened by custom,
>
> by Congress and the various state legislatures, and by recent Supreme Court decisions
>
> that they don't much matter. Indenturing indigents is supposed to keep them employed,
>
> teach them a trade, feed them, house them, and keep them out of trouble. In fact, it's just

one more way of getting people to work for nothing or almost nothing. Little girls are

valued because they can be used in so many ways, and they can be coerced into being

quick, docile, disposable labor. (40)

Lauren returns to her critique of the ideology behind disposable labor with the Earthseed poetic

passage: "More people die / Of unenlightened self-interest / Than of any other disease" (80).

Butler critiques the premises behind Adam Smith's paradigm, and in doing so the underlying

ideological presuppositions that make up the core of neoliberal empire. Adam Smith believed

that enlightened self-interest would come naturally to most people and in doing so would ensure

universal prosperity (in addition to limited government and free-market economies). Yet, this

belief in universal prosperity directly contradicts the experiences of those who lived through

slavery, both the American transatlantic slave trade that Butler also touches on in *Kindred*, and

modern forms of slavery that Butler also remained aware of.

In this regard, Adam Johns is right that there is a neo-Hobbesian quality to Butler's

ideology. Johns argues that:

Butler is to be understood as a utopian or post-utopian, who portrays an

open/contingent/incomplete/imperfect utopia, without surrendering the utopian drive

itself. Butler's work is utopianism matured: this utopia navigates through a dystopian

field characterized by capitalism run amok, environmental decay, a collapsed

government, and a Hobbesian war of all on all, while remaining paradoxically true to its

utopian heart. (400-401)

Hobbes' idea that the state of nature is a war of all against all was central to his argument for a

national state in *Leviathan*. Butler returns to Hobbes' argument while coupling it with the real

premises of Smith's capitalist utopia (universal prosperity through enlightened self-interest) to

critique the facetious interpretations of Smith's reasoning common in neoliberalism. Smith himself characterizes the second duty of the sovereign as that of "protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it" (*Book V*, Chapter 1).

Butler evokes the history of slavery in the United States to reject the idea of disposable labor, reject the fetishistic view of the free market, to argue for the rights of workers, and to embrace the necessity of a civil, active public sphere. In doing so, Butler presents state agencies as in a place of decay, but where the possibility of a return to older forms of imperialism can emerge quite unexpectedly. In this regard, her novel shares many commonalities with some Japanese texts from the 1990s, such as *AKIRA* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. While Lauren ultimately must use violence to escape from "Camp Christian," she never ceases from believing in the importance of civic discourse and education, characteristics that put her at odds with the heroic narratives of post|apocalyptic films in the last few decades (such as *Pacific Rim* and *Children of Men* discussed in chapter five). Finally, in her advocacy for the state's protection of individuals from the conditions of slavery, she comes off as an advocate for stronger police forces, a characteristic that puts her work in some ways tonally distinct from some liberal political movements of the 2010s, such as #BlackLivesMatter, which are increasingly concerned with the militarization of police forces. In this regard, Butler's work can perhaps even be read as a counterpoint to that of *The Walking Dead* franchise.

Butler recognizes that different institutions are in a perpetual site of struggle, and that the conflicts between these institutions are not always productive. Lauren, at least, advocates for an ideological marriage between the church and educational institutions. Aside from this, Butler seems skeptical of the collusion between state, religious, and capitalist institutions, especially

when the state and religious institutions jettison their principles in the name of exploiting

individuals. Although Butler is sometimes characterized as utopian, she implies this conflict will

be ongoing. Although the triumph of Earthseed as an ideology at the end of *Parable of the*

Talents may seem wholly positive, conflict remains. Earth's first starship is named "the

Christopher Columbus" (406). While Lauren believes that "This ship is not about a shortcut to

riches and empire" and that it's not "about snatching up slaves and gold and presenting them to

some European monarch" (406), she capitulates to the Earthseed movement on the belief that the

"name is nothing" (406) and allows it to launch with that name. As utopian as Butler may be, she

accepts that even as humanity reaches for the stars, it will continue to struggle with the history of

colonialism and capitalist exploitation that has haunted the preceding epochs of exploration.

Chapter Two: Tokyo Apocalypse: *AKIRA* and The Ends of *Evangelion*

AKIRA[4] and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*[5] show why post|apocalyptic discourse is best understood in a transnational framework, and also help show differing attitudes toward empire. They also show the cultural power of the post|apocalyptic during the 1980s and 1990s. First, these texts reinforce the extent that concerns about the fate of the world, particularly as it pertains to the conflict between state institutions and late capitalist culture, are not exclusive to Western or American audiences. Second, Japan is the only country to suffer attack by nuclear weapons, so it has developed a particular rhetoric against nuclear weapons, particularly through the *hibakusha*, survivors of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Third, Japan's constitution after World War II made it a legally and explicitly peaceful nation; perhaps the only constitutionally peaceful nation on Earth. Studying Japanese texts, then, is important for cultural, rhetorical, and political understandings of apocalyptic discourse today. Structurally and thematically, these texts can also show how Japanese attitudes toward empire tend to be multivalent or mixed rather than wholly antipathetic. I am not suggesting that *AKIRA* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* intend to explicitly support the concept of empire or the history of Japanese imperialism. Rather, these texts critique the concept of empire, but do so with reservations. The mixed feelings of their critique suggest a changing, sometimes reactionary attitude that can help explain the contemporary resurgence of Japanese militarism.

The Multivalence of the Japanese Fantastic

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[4] Or "Akira." I am opting for Otomo's capitalization here and throughout.
[5] This is the form most common in marketing materials for the American release. "Shin Seiki Evangerion" is a closer Hepburn transliteration of the Japanese title 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン, but most scholarship on these texts opt for *Neon Genesis Evangelion* due to the presentation in western marketing.

Japanese animation and manga often express multivalence. By this I mean that the combination of differing levels of cynicism and optimism, desire and abhorrence, can articulate themselves in overlapping and contradictory ways. These overlapping contradictions in turn create a complex, dynamic system of signifiers that can leave a wide range of possible interpretation. This becomes particularly clear when one examines the dynamic between two major narratives of Japanese manga and animation, *AKIRA* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. I would like to suggest the following:

1. First, these narratives are generally cynical regarding world order. This is particularly important considering Japan's complex relationship with the United Nations.

2. These narratives are also cynical toward pacifism, viewing it as unrealistic or untenable.

3. These narratives can *seem* cynical about national military forces.

4. These narratives tend to view war as horrific and undesirable.

5. Despite their apparent cynicism toward war and the role of a national military, these narratives can advance a nationalist subjectivity.

This last claim is easy to misinterpret so let me clarify. I am not suggesting that Hideaki Anno and Katsuhiro Otomo have a secret nationalist agenda that they are trying to push on unsuspecting readers. Rather, both narratives express an indignation at alienated subjectivity. This indignation shares the dominant sentiment of neo-nationalist Japanese politics, and so the narratives reinforce the emotional basis of nationalist politics rather than explicitly endorsing the politics themselves. There are other patterns here, particularly regarding sexual dynamics, the emasculation of adolescent male heroes, and the realization of male self-identity through

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mystical experiences with women, but these general attitudes toward war, world order, and the military are a commonplace set of patterns to begin with.

These at times conflicting perspectives are articulated through what I term the Apocalyptic Fantastic. In the Apocalyptic Fantastic, the desirability of apocalyptic destruction is indeterminate or unclear. While some may see destruction as horrific, others idealize rebirth through destruction. Moreover, violence may be presented as intrinsic to human nature and so rejecting the destructive nature of mankind may be untenable. In this way, the narratives can take on a Hobbesian mentality, wherein the intrinsically destructive nature of mankind necessitates a subjectivity that is fully aware of the destructive horror of war but willing to engage in it regardless to preserve the female body and the feminized and passive city. Although the desirability of "saving the city" may seem intuitive and intrinsic to any ethical state—indeed the entire premise of the state—it takes on particularly loaded dimensions in Japanese animation.

The Post|Apocalyptic

By post|apocalyptic, I mean worlds that not only have already suffered catastrophe, but where what remains of the world and civilization still must be preserved through violent, military means. "Apocalypse" comes from the Latin *apocalypsis "to uncover"* (*Oxford English Dictionary*). It is closely related to the word "revelation." My formulation of "post|apocalyptic" is a discursive formation. Post|apocalyptic narratives often employ secular themes but at the same time they appropriate metaphysical elements from the mythoi of diverse cultures. These discursive formations both represent the concerns of individual speakers while also acting rhetorically, giving shape to conjecture and shaping action. Motoko Tanaka argues that apocalyptic narratives in Japan particularly "function as a tool to stabilize the damaged identities of the nation and the modern individual after the country's humiliating and devastating defeat in

World War II" (3). Perhaps it should not come as a surprise, then, that post|apocalyptic narratives in anime so often fuse post|apocalyptic themes with either explicit or subtextual commentaries on the relationship between Japan's military and individual subjectivity. The sub-genre of mecha[6] anime meditates on the relationship among formerly imperial states and the changing conditions of world order.

<div align="center">Empire vs. Imperialism</div>

In contemporary civic discourse, empire is sometimes used as a pejorative term to refer to exploitative practices by hegemonic powers over subaltern subjects. The OED suggests that historically, imperialism can refer to "rule by an emperor or supreme leader," "the advocacy of holding political dominion over dependent territories," the "extension and maintenance of a country's power through trade, diplomacy, military or cultural dominance," or it can be used pejoratively as a catch-all term for the political action of the West. The violent means that various empires have used to control subordinate states has given the term negative connotations in America.

Cultural depictions that attempt to humanize or localize concepts of empire and imperialism also can drift toward depictions of what is sometimes termed new feudalism, where there is a high split in rights between common people and new nobilities. Post|apocalyptic discourse tends to present a Hobbesian worldview of stateless peoples engaged in all-against-all warfare, a competition that produces strongman leaders and new feudal lords with imperial ambitions, combining elite privilege with the expansion of state power over new territories. This

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[6] メカ is directly transliterated as "meka" and is an abbreviation of "mechanical." In Japanese, メカ refers to anything involving mechanical objects, and ロボット, robotto refers to giant robot narratives. "Mecha" is primarily a western shorthand phrase.

is particularly apparent in certain comics both in America and Japan, such as the *No Man's Land* series in the *Batman* franchise during 1999, where various criminals vie for control of Gotham City, or the second half of *AKIRA*, starting with *Kei* in 1987 and continuing through *Kaneda* in 1993. In the second half of the *AKIRA* manga, and not shown in the film, The Great Tokyo Empire declares the city sovereign from the dominion of the United Nations (and the United States). The Great Tokyo Empire is run by a strongman leader (Tetsuo, with Akira as the figurehead), protects itself as a sovereign state with military force, and exerts military force to expand its control over territory (fighting over parts of Tokyo against the cult of Lady Miyako). *AKIRA* demonstrates the perception that states in late capitalist societies are subject to decay, and political figures are factional, incompetent, and opportunistic. This incompetence results in no oversight for a branch of scientific research that perpetuates a catastrophe on the scale of Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

While the United Nations is often seen as ineffectual in the United States, the institution has served an important role in the re-emergence of Japan as a military power. Japan's relationship with the United Nations has grown over the last few decades. In 1975, it became part of the "Group of Seven," the G7[7], showing its emergence as an economic powerhouse that is highly involved in world affairs. Japan moreover has become the second highest financial contributor to the United Nations peacekeeping efforts, contributing 10.83% of the budget. Perhaps it should not be surprising that in tandem with the high national support for the United Nations, cultural depictions of the United Nations in Japan can be cynical, particularly in *shōjo* and *seinen* manga, which tend to feature depictions of honor and bravery. As can happen in

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[7] The G8 in years when Russia is included.

modern democracies, the more public support a democracy shows toward a public institution, the more cynical attitudes toward that institution can become.

Japanese support for the United Nations peacekeeping efforts—particularly the use of the Japanese Self-Defense Force overseas in Iraq—can sometimes seem to conflict with the tenets of the country's post-war constitution. Bolstered by president Obama's pivot to the East and desire for stronger allies against China, the Abe regime has enacted changes to Japan's constitution to move away from the peace-oriented limitations on the use of international force. Classical conceptions of empire are still extremely important to understanding contemporary Japan. Classical conceptions of empire are not the only thing that matters here, though. While Japan is militarizing, there is also a different sense of empire relevant to Japan. This form of empire is formulated by Hardt and Negri. This conception of empire can be a bit terminologically confusing, since it does not imagine a centralized, sovereign actor at the heart of an empire. Rather, what is presented as a means in conventional imperialism (the exertion of power through trade) is the end in Hardt and Negri's conception of empire. That is, rather than a centralized state wielding political power, in contemporary empire there are instead decentralized economic institutions exerting political influence over all aspects of human life. Transnational global capitalism, and major corporations, use states to exploit people. This concern with the power of the corporation to defy and surpass the power of the state is implicit in works like *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and its centerpiece corporation, *NERV*. While *AKIRA* showcases multivalent attitudes toward Japanese imperialism, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* showcases multivalent attitudes toward both the history of Japanese imperialism and capitalist empire.

Hardt and Negri link the classical conception of empire to modern globalization by emphasizing that "Empire presents its order as permanent, eternal, and necessary" (11). The

basis of the contemporary form of empire, then, is the "globalization of capitalist production and its world market" (8). Whereas previous forms of imperialism presented imperialist nation-states in competition with each other, the nation-state "has in important respects been replaced by the idea of a single power that overdetermines them all, structures them in a unitary way, and treats them under one common notion of right that is decidedly postcolonial and postimperialist" (9). The United Nations features heavily in Hardt and Negri's analysis, wherein the United Nations serves as a "hinge in the genealogy from international to global juridical structures" (4). That is, per Hardt and Negri, the United Nations is a sort of prelude to forms of world order that are on the cusp of forming among transnational corporations.

Suggesting that both forms of empire, both the militarized imperialism conjoined with asserting dominance over territory, and the neoliberal empire of transnational economic-political action are relevant is not to diminish the significance of either. What is important to recognize is that both forms of empire can emerge in tandem. Transnational capitalist empires do not seek wholly deregulated markets; rather, they fight for particular deregulations, while also fighting for regulations that protect their interests and moreover fight for a state having the power to protect their interests. Both nation states and corporations strive to compel the other to adapt their interests and desire.

<div align="center">Defining Manga and Anime</div>

Manga are Japanese comics and graphic novels; and the term also denotes the style developed in Japanese comics popularized in the 19th century. For Jolyon Thomas, they are "illustrated serial novels that comprise juxtaposed panels that combine artwork and text" (3). That being said, to speak of Japanese visual culture such as manga, is not necessarily to speak just of Japan. As Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi observe,

the primary constituency of manga is "global youth culture" (vii). That is, Japanese science fiction has a high level of interaction with the West. Much the same can be said of anime, which is Japanese animation, cel (celluloid) or digital.

Japanese animation is increasingly transnational not just in reception but also in origin. Thomas Lamarre in *The Anime Machine* (2009) argues that "The Japanese animations that are loosely grouped under the term *anime* entail an exceedingly vast range of media platforms, aesthetic conventions, and fan activities; they are today distributed or circulated transnationally and, with increasing frequency, are also produced transnationally" (xiv). Anime is a trans-medial, trans-national phenomenon, so presenting it as a nationally unified, medially coherent category would be misleading. Thus a generalized approach to visual culture is more appropriate to understanding anime and manga than a medium-specific approach.

This transnational dimension has been particularly developed since, and in part because of, the commercial success of *AKIRA*. It was with the 1988 release of *AKIRA* that the synthesis of Japanese and Western "postmodernist science fiction—the breakdown of ontological boundaries, pervasive virtualization, the political control of reality—as well as their artistic media" (Bolton ix) became much more apparent. Japanese art provides an elegant juncture from which to understand not only the transnational dimension of contemporary culture but also the interplay between Western imperialism in Japan and contemporary neoliberal empire.

That anime is best understood primarily as trans-medial, rather than as a television genre or a film medium, is particularly true when we consider how a single franchise, such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, changes shape over time. While it first emerged as a televised serial, it simultaneously was released with a manga adaptation, had computer game tie-ins, and then became a sequence of films. Dani Cavallaro's *The Art of Studio Gainax* (2009) shows how *Neon*

Genesis Evangelion is not just a single text, but can instead be understood as a cultural institution in Japan, emerging as a major text along a variety of media platforms.

Simply put it would be methodologically unsound to examine *AKIRA* exclusively as a film or as a manga, and it would be methodologically unsound to consider *Neon Genesis Evangelion* as exclusively a television serial. The significance of emphasizing visual forms is best put by W. J. T. Mitchell, who argues in *Picture Theory* (1994) that we need "a critique of visual culture that is alert to the power of images for good and evil and that is capable of discriminating the variety and historical specificity of their uses" (3); this calls for a methodology that can discuss visual art, film, and mass media.

<div align="center">On AKIRA: Exploding Neo-Tokyo</div>

AKIRA depicts Neo-Tokyo, a major metropolis built on the ruins of a site of massive destruction. With rampant political conspiracies, the narrative begins by focusing on two young boys: Tetsuo and Kaneda. After a territorial gang fight over the streets leading up to the impact site of a massive explosion in the past, Tetsuo is injured and then abducted by a military group (led by Col. Shikishima, who has the namesake of World War II imperial battleships) that begins experimenting on him. Kaneda meanwhile falls in with a young woman, Kei, who is part of the Resistance. The exact goals of the Resistance are at times nebulous, but they are actively opposed to the secret government experiments on Tetsuo and a group of mutated children known as the Espers. Unknown to most in the city, the devastation that wrecked the city decades ago was a result of these same experiments, with one subject, Akira, having the capacity to cause city-destroying explosions. In the opening frames of the manga, one of these explosions destroys Tokyo and instigates World War III.

The city strives to demonstrate it has recovered from this horror, and in fact uses the site of destruction as the base of a new Olympic Stadium. The allusion to the history of Japan becomes particularly pointed here, with the attempt to reassert the economic power of Japan after disaster mirroring that of the actual 1964 Summer Olympics. Despite this, of course, the veneer of the megacity in each background is contrasted with the decay and corruption when examined closely, and near the Olympic Stadium secret government experiments continue on the same technology that destroyed the city just decades before.

The second half of the manga focuses on a narrative arc revolving around the place of a resurrected Akira. Akira is resurrected by Tetsuo, but when the Resistance attempts an assassination, a child friend of Akira is killed (one of the Espers, Takashi). Resurrected Akira is still a child, and when he sees his friend die he unleashes another cataclysmic force, destroying Tokyo once more. In the aftermath of this destruction, Tetsuo joins with Akira and together they form the basis for the "Great Tokyo Empire," establishing a territorial claim over the ruins of Neo-Tokyo. The exact range of rhetorical subtexts to this depiction has lacked full attention in the West, since more critical attention focuses on the film. Michelle Le Blanc and Colin Odell are inclined to characterize it as a kind of parody, but it might be overstatement to say that the manga of *AKIRA* is wholly critical of the idea of a Tokyo Empire. In the final moments of the manga, Kaneda and others once again reassert the sovereignty of the Tokyo empire against the intervention of the United Nations and the United States.

The Great Tokyo Empire first expresses itself by requisitioning military vehicles used in relief efforts (*IV* 10). The empire exists primarily as survivors from the destruction of Neo-Tokyo, and many of its enforcers are the remains of military personnel. These survivors destroy the "Caretaker Robots" created by the modern Japanese state that were meant to be a safeguard

against invaders in the aftermath of a nuclear attack (18).[8] After taking control of some of these robots, the Great Tokyo Empire exerts control over the West part of Tokyo, with a clear border both to the East (controlled by Lady Miyako) and regions outside Tokyo (39). They see themselves as opposed to all outside forces, with leaders insisting they will "repel all attacks, whether from the United States, Russia… or even from Japan herself!" (71). The sentiment at the heart of the Great Tokyo Empire then is a rejection not just of international control of Japan's military and security capacities, but moreover against contemporary Japan. The imagery plays with Japanese mythical figures, such as the child-emperor Antoku, re-imagined in the child-emperor Akira. Of course, Otomo's attitude toward the Great Tokyo Empire is certainly not laudatory. Just as Otomo presents the existing military infrastructure of Japan as complicit in the development of weapons that have destroyed Tokyo, so does Otomo present the leaders of the Great Tokyo Empire as macho pariahs. Tetsuo in particular orders his lieutenants to collect groups of girls to serve initially as sex slaves (105). Not to overstate the coherence of Otomo's narrative position, the narrative seems openly cynical of the existing Japanese government, the stability and reliability of Japan's relationship with the United States, but also the prospects of neo-imperial political revolution. The Resistance, likewise, is corrupted by its connection to Mr. Nezu, and Nezu's strategies, including assassination, seem wholly incapable of ushering in anything resembling peaceful change. (Nezu himself may be just as culpable as Col. Shikishima for the assassination attempt which kills Takashi and initiates a new round of destruction).

The cynicism of the narrative is almost ever-present, whether it's individual civilians giving up hope or the anti-heroism of Colonel Shikishima. After the initial chaos begins, a group

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[8] They are designed to "fight off anyone who tries to invade" so that "even if everyone dies, the robots will be here to protect our land" (*II* 27).

of men in business suits cry "Smash it! Destroy everything!" and "Might as well! We're all gonna die anyway!" (*II* 17). Col. Shikishima, throughout the narrative, is the embodiment of the military strongman. Col. Shikishima observes during the political crises of both Lady Miyako's popularity and the re-emergence of Akira that "in times like these, unscrupulous individuals always try to manipulate the military into furthering their personal aims. We must guard against such abuses!" His subordinate remarks, "But, sir, *you* always use the army…" (37). The next frame cuts away from the vehicle while Shikishima replies "I'm going to overlook that remark…" Individual citizens in a time of crisis will turn to violence on a dime, and military leaders are just as corrupt as the politicians.

Amidst cynicism toward such a wide range of institutions--politicians, the military, resistance fighters, education systems, and scientists--there is simultaneous doubt about the past and historical culpability. Lady Miyako, one of the original test subjects, is unsure about the amount of government collusion and support for the experimental projects that created Akira (*III* 183). Individual consciousness is also sometimes unclear among such a wide range of characters. Does the average member of the Great Tokyo Empire know that Akira, the center of their movement, was at the heart of both previous catastrophes that had destroyed Tokyo? The extent of despondency in the ruins of Neo-Tokyo is put to a head as Kei and Tetsuo reflect. Kei, a former member of the Resistance, observes that "I used to belong to a pretty tough group myself, once… with things to fight for… goals we believed in… Now, nothing makes sense. It's like the disaster swept everyone's principles away. And everyone just keeps killing each other" (321). Despite this, Kei knows that "If I quit now… I betray everything my friends and I were fighting for" (324). As *AKIRA* progresses, idealistic fighters continue combat out of respect for fallen allies rather than any hope that their goals may ultimately be achieved.

The extent that a reader chooses to see *AKIRA* in the light of the atomic bombs shapes a system of interpretations of the text. Inferring allusion to nuclear holocaust has tended to shape the attitude of a number of critical studies of apocalyptic art. For instance, Jerome Shapiro's *Atomic Bomb Cinema* argues that atomic bomb cinema "focuses on the premise that oppressive conditions or suffering can be eased, yes, through political empowerment or changing social conditions, but especially through mystical experience. In other words, atomic bomb cinema is primarily about individual, and communal, survival and self-actualization under oppressive conditions" (35). This understanding seems highly relevant to the film of *AKIRA*, for instance, the relation of Kei to the Espers, particularly Kiyoko. The Espers are among the original group of children experimented on by the government, along with Akira. Kiyoko is one of the three survivors of Akira's first explosion. In the manga, Kei's decision to engage in a mystical experience, to channel Kiyoko's power to fight Tetsuo, involves an elaborate ritual. Even in the film, however, Kiyoko's psychic connection with the Espers shapes several major moments in the plot. Despite this, Shapiro argues that *AKIRA* is "more about the crises inherent in contemporary Japanese youth culture than what the bomb means; nevertheless, the film does hint at the core issues in Japanese bomb films" (258). As a result of positioning the atomic bomb at the center of exploring the post|apocalyptic genre, Shapiro is left to position *AKIRA* at the periphery, rather than the center, of the post|apocalyptic imagination.

Once one connects the psychic explosion of Akira and the atomic bomb, a number of resulting associations emerge that make much more of the narrative seem systematically engaged with the rhetorical history of atomic warfare. In particular, the Espers, such as Kiyoko, are mutated children, stunted due to the government experiments on them. As a consequence, they are living, breathing testaments both to government abuse and the horrific destruction caused by

the bomb. Just as the explosions of *AKIRA* are psychic and not nuclear, the Espers are not exactly *hibakusha*, or survivors of nuclear warfare. Most of all, actual *hibakusha* were not as mutated as the Espers. Yet, as Freda Freiberg observes, *AKIRA* is made "for a generation of Japanese who have no personal memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki" (92), so Otomo almost certainly did not want to represent hibakusha in a direct or clear manner. Nonetheless, the rhetorical power of the Espers seems inextricably linked to that of hibakusha experience. Freiberg argues that while *AKIRA* cannot be reduced to historical trauma, "the explosion of nuclear power figures as a catharsis, a solution to all those other issues, a consummation devoutly wished, and the ultimate experience of the sublime for the young generation of Japanese" (96). That *AKIRA* draws heavily on the imagery and cultural memory of the atomic bomb is not a radical claim, so likewise it should not be surprising that Otomo chose to explore the representation of the atomic bomb through human survivors; vis-à-vis proxy *hibakusha*.

Susan Napier argues that the film explicitly critiques the military-industrial complex, as she says that, "structured around a series of scientific experiments on telepathic children gone horribly wrong, *Akira* presented an unforgettable vision of a world in which the innocent were grotesquely sacrificed to the vicious machinations of what might be called the military-industrial complex" (104). Including *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998), Napier casts *AKIRA* in a continuum with *Neon Genesis Evangelion* based on their shared thematic concerns: an explicit obsession with apocalypse and the question of salvation; an ambivalent celebration of the spectacle; a notion of time in flux; and a shared vision of what Janet Staiger calls "'future noir,' in which dimly lit, labyrinthine cityscapes dominate the mise-en-scène" (107-8). Napier focuses in large part on each narrative's interrogation of the concept of the real.

Napier also refers to the transformations necessary for an imagined modernity like *AKIRA* to exist, insofar as prior to the economic boom of the 1960s "'industrialization,' 'progress,' and even 'science' itself were all indissolubly linked with 'Westernization' in the Japanese consciousness" and refers to a prewar Japanese sentiment that technology belonged to a Western Other. The hyper-modern metropolis of *AKIRA* then would have forty years earlier been perhaps regarded as a Western metropolis, foreign and untrustworthy. Yet technology and industrialization *qua* industrialization are not the subjects of scorn in *AKIRA*. The characters celebrate their motorcycles, and Tetsuo is openly opposed to paying for anything with money. Instead, the destruction of Neo-Tokyo by *AKIRA* does not just precipitate the rise of a new Japanese empire. The destruction of a Neo-Tokyo reflects a rejection of "the hierarchical, careerist, and consumerist ideology of the older generation" (Napier, *The Fantastic* 215).

The Neo-Tokyo of *AKIRA* serves as a surrogate for Japan after the devastation of World War II. Both anime film and manga focus on the high contrast between the veneer of the idyllic cityscape in the background and the rampant corruption and decay of the city the audience sees up close. *AKIRA* normalizes the sense that survivors will rally around a charismatic leader, even if the people are rallying around the very force (in this case, Akira himself) that has destroyed their city not once but twice. Suggesting that Akira himself is meant to be only a metaphor for Japanese empire is an oversimplification, but it is also undeniable that the characters of Akira and Tetsuo are imbricated in the concept of empire. From the allusions to nuclear warfare and the *hibakusha* to the interrogation of the military-industrial complex and neo-national imperialism, Otomo's text reflects cynicism toward social institutions across the board.

Mecha Anime and Commodification: *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

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Mecha anime has iterations in shōnen,[9] manga aimed at young boys, seinen[10], manga aimed at adolescents able to read kanji, and infrequently *shōjo[11]*, manga aimed at young girls. For example, the manga adaptation of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* was reprinted in *Young Ace*, a seinen manga magazine, in addition to its earlier run in *Shonen Ace*. One of the most divisive animated post|apocalyptic mecha franchises is that of studio Gainax's aforementioned *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Shin Seiki Evangerion / New Century Evangelion). Initially running from 1995 to 1996 on TV Tokyo, the series is credited with further popularizing Japanese animation in the West. The series describes the actions of Nerv, a paramilitary developer under the budgetary administration of the United Nations, tasked with maintaining Evangelion, or Eva, units: synthetic humanoid superweapons. The Eva units are tasked with protecting Neo Tokyo III from the angels, a series of mysterious extra-terrestrials[12] who seek to penetrate the protected sub-city of Tokyo and unite with Lillith, an event which would initiate Third Impact. There are multiple potential forms of third impact, including the possibility of either total annihilation for humanity, or the transformation of humanity. That is, some characters in the narrative want to avoid Third Impact at all cost, while others want to initiate it in a manner that will be favorable to them. The mythos and plot of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is alternatively rich, or convoluted, compared to other mecha anime, and clarity on the premise of the series is further occluded by some translation issues. For instance, what is translated as "angels" in the American release of the anime is "shito" which would usually mean "apostle" or "messenger" whereas "tenshi" would

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[9] 少年漫画, literally "boy's manga," other transliterations include shounen and shonen.
[10] 青年漫画, although literally translated as "youth" seinen manga is aimed at a wide audience of adult men.
[11] 少女漫画, literally "girl's manga." Other transliterations include shoujo and shojo.
[12] Most characters do not seem to understand the angels or their motivations, and many viewers are unlikely to know whether they are mystical or alien invaders. Most of the narrative then falls into Todorov's conventional conception of the fantastic, in terms of there being a high level of uncertainty whether the events are marvelous or uncanny.

usually be closer to "angel." Despite the translation issues, I am inclined to say that the audience is generally meant to be uncertain as to whether the angels are mystical or alien in origin for most of the series.

Although *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is mecha anime, Evangelion are not, technically, robots. They are living creatures capable of individual agency in particular situations. The narrative focuses primarily on Shinji Ikari, the pilot of Evangelion Unit 01. Shinji, unlike most characters in the mecha anime genre, is a reluctant hero, and suffers from severe anxiety about his role as pilot. His anxiety is intensified by his relationships with three people: his father, co-pilot Rei Ayanami, and co-pilot Asuka Langley Soryu / Shikinami (last name dependent on iteration of the series). The most significant issue is the alienation he feels from his father, Gendo, who commands Nerv thus making him Shinji's boss. The series began broadcast as 26 episodes, but those 26 episodes changed emphasis significantly from beginning to end. While the early episodes do foreground the psychological struggles of Shinji, as the series nears its end it begins to engage in protracted representations of Shinji's interior mental state. The final two episodes eschew any direct representation of the diegetic "real" world in favor of a sustained deconstruction of the principle cast of characters. The divisive response to these final episodes fueled a series of theatrical releases, culminating in the postmodern masterpiece *The End of Evangelion* in 1997.

Fig. 2.1 and fig. 2.2. Left: Evangelion characters used in a Schick promotional razor advertisement (from a television advertisement). Right: An Evangelion themed pachinko machine in Akihabara, photo credit Steven Holmes 2014.

    The Evangelion franchise is immensely successful in secondary markets, with a popular manga series, musical albums, a long-running series of pachinko machines, a section of the Fuji-Q Highland amusement park, video games, and an immense array of figurines and toys. Evangelion tie-ins are common in advertising with cell phone manufacturers and razors, as well as video-game tie-ins and crossovers. A Japanese bullet train even has an Evangelion theme. There is also an Evangelion store in Ikebukuro selling merchandise and paraphernalia related to the show. No doubt in close connection with the success of the franchise in secondary markets, a decade after *The End of Evangelion* the anime television series began to be remade into theatrical releases, beginning with *Evangelion: 1.0 You Are (Not) Alone* in 2007. The "rebuild" series began to move in a very different direction with *Evangelion: 2.0 You Can (Not) Advance* in 2009 and *Evangelion: 3.0 You Can (Not) Redo* in 2012. The next "end" of Evangelion is slated to be

Evangelion 3.0+1.0 which does not currently have a confirmed release date. Regardless of

Gainax's attitude toward Japanese imperialism, the company has no reservations with

commodifying its franchise on every available media platform. The Evangelion franchise is not

just a Japanese cultural institution, a prescient example of the conflict and collusion between

postmodern auteur cinema and mass culture, but also as a critical contact point between Japan

and the United States.

Kairos: Japan's Changing Relation to World Order

Earlier I discussed how the Abe cabinet has worked to change the Japanese constitution.

In particular, Article 9 of the Japanese constitution reads as follows:

> Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese
>
> people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of
>
> force as means of settling international disputes.
>
> (2) 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.

In the 1990s, political groups in Japan began to work toward moving away from Article 9 of the

Constitution and expanding the role of the military on the international stage. Japan's

government, despite the pacifist stance of its constitution, still has the 7th highest military

spending in the world, although that spending comes out of a comparably small percentage of its

GDP (International Institute). In particular, in 1997, the political party Nippon Kaigi ("Japan

Conference") formed, which seeks to redefine or reinterpret the constitution of Japan and build

patriotism and nationalism. Nippon Kaigi also takes certain positions on Japanese history, in

particular that, "the 1946-1948 Tokyo War Crimes tribunals were illegitimate, and that the killings by Imperial Japanese troops during the 1937 'Nanjing massacre' were exaggerated or fabricated" (Chanlett-Avery, Cooper, et. al). Nippon Kaigi has had incredible success in contemporary Japan. The current Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzo Abe, composed his cabinet primarily out of Nippon Kaigi affiliates, 15 out of the 19 total positions. Although Abe represents the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), he is also a "special adviser" to Nippon Kaigi. For Nippon Kaigi, conjecture about the nature of historical events goes hand-in-hand with nationalism and militaristic hawkishness.

The political goals of Nippon Kaigi and Abe have come most to the forefront with the re-interpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. In 2014, Abe's government ended the ban on "collective self-defense" and aiding friendly countries under attack. When Abe addressed a joint session of the United States congress in April of this year, he reiterated his support for, and leadership in, the Trans-Pacific Partnership as a prelude to announcing Japan's commitment to 2.8 billion dollars for bases in Guam. This goes hand in hand with "legislative foundations" to make Japan's Self Defense Forces a "credible deterrence" ("'Toward an alliance'"). What this has meant in Japan is a reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution to allow for participation in the United Nations collective security operations (Martin). This comes despite thousands of protestors against Abe's reinterpretation ("Pacifists Rally").

The argument of the United States, or at least the cabinet of President Obama, becomes clear in President Obama's remarks at Hiroshima. While calling for the end to nuclear weapons, President Obama also tacitly alludes to his support for the greater militarization of Japan (and perhaps the change of the constitution allowing for foreign intervention). President Obama's argument reads as follows:

We may not be able to eliminate man's capacity to do evil, so nations –- and the alliances

that we've formed -– must possess the means to defend ourselves. But among those

nations like my own that hold nuclear stockpiles, we must have the courage to escape the

logic of fear, and pursue a world without them. (Washington Post Staff)

That is, speaking at the place where the United States used nuclear weapons against the empire

of Japan, President Obama argues for further reduction in nuclear stockpiles, while also, in

reinforcing the kinship between the United States and Japan, that America's allies—like Japan—

"must possess the means to defend ourselves." This reflects how both Prime Minister Abe has

visited the United States to further reinforce reconciliation between American and Japanese

veterans, and now President Obama has visited Hiroshima to argue for a moral awakening.

Moving past the history of nuclear weapons means moving past the narrative, or metanarrative,

of Japanese victimhood and instead suggesting a counter-narrative: Japanese military might

capable of containing the growing power of China. This, at least, was President Obama's

apparent rhetorical goal.

Mecha Anime and the History of Imperialism

Although it is no doubt a coincidence that the formation of Nippon Kaigi happened to

occur the same year as the release of *The End of Evangelion*, it is certainly the case that mecha

narratives have a well-established history of re-imagining the empire of Japan and the destructive

capacities of weapons of war. The "Super Robot" sub-genre of mecha animation took shape in

large part from *Tetsujin 28-gō (Tetsujin Nijūhachi-gō /* Iron Man No. 28) originally serialized in

1956. Mitsuteru Yokoyama, the creator of Tetsujin, writes that "When I was a fifth grader, the

war ended and I returned home from Tottori Prefecture, where I had been evacuated. The city of

Kobe had been totally flattened, reduced to ashes. People said it was because of the B-29 bombers, the so-called 'Flying Fortresses' of the sky. As a child, I was astonished by their terrifying, destructive power" (Hornyaka 59). Yokoyama re-imagined the destructive power of the B-29 as a mechanized robot which could be operated by a simple controller. Yokoyama is far from the only creator of mecha narrative to place strong associations between fictitious mecha and weapons of real war.

In 1979, the long-running franchise Gundam began featuring "mobile suits" placed in a militaristic war setting. Instead of the extraordinary quality of mecha featured in Tetsujin (and *Mazinger Z*), the mobile suits in the Gundam universe could be produced in mass and piloted by soldiers. The Gundam franchise is quite immense. The contemporaneous iteration of the franchise, broadcast on TV Asahi in 1995 to 1996 (the same year as Evangelion), was *Mobile Suit Gundam Wing*. In *Gundam Wing*, the narrative revolves around colonialism, the struggle to retain hegemony, and the difficulty of maintaining a pacifist political platform. The political framework of Earth transforms such that there is a singular United Earth Sphere alliance which attempts to exert Earth's control over colonies in outer space. Expositional voice-over narration in the series makes it seem as though the Earth Sphere alliance is a conjectural future vision of the United Nations. As the narrator emphasizes, "The Earth Sphere alliance was initially formed to handle disputes among the countries, however with its expansion in military power, the alliance soon took over governments with military control" ("Portrait of a Ruined Country"). Gundam Wing then depicts a world where a United Nations-like political structure eventually transforms into an imperialist, colonial, hegemonic force.

The second half of *Gundam Wing* focuses heavily on critiquing the pacifist intentions of Relena Peacecraft[13], particularly when her country is betrayed by the global institution that was supposed to protect it. As her ideals are interrogated by Dorothy Catalonia, who emphasizes that "You can assemble people with your sweet talk about peace, but when an emergency arises, you don't even do a thing" and continues on that Relena cannot do anything because she's "chasing the impossible dream of total pacifism" ("Sanc Kingdom's Collapse"), the Sanc Kingdom is invaded and Relena surrenders. It may be reductive to suggest that the Sanc Kingdom is supposed to be a stand-in for Japan.[14] Yet characters cynical toward the ideals of pacifism are generally characterized as evil, and the subjugation of pacifists and the betrayal of protective global institutions reflects the development of concerns with the ideal of pacifism as a guiding philosophy.

As indicated earlier, critical attention toward *Neon Genesis Evangelion* has tended to foreground its psychological exploration of individual characters, often eschewing attention to the fairly convoluted mythos and the oblique political superstructure of the narrative. Due to the antagonistic relationship between director Hideaki Anno and some members of his audience[15], it is well not to over-value any individual element of the narrative. That being said, it is hard to ignore the naming schema among the principal cast. Almost all major characters are named after ships from Japan's Navy. Some notable examples include Ritsuko Akagi, the chief scientist of Nerv. The Akagi was the flagship among the aircraft carriers that attacked the United States at

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[13] Or "Relena Darlian" depending on translation.
[14] The Sanc Kingdom seems to be in Northern Europe.
[15] *The End of Evangelion* briefly flashes images of death threats the director received following the ending of the animated series, which has led some to speculate that the franchise since the end of the original run in 95-96, or at least *The End of Evangelion*, has been produced in a way intended to be antagonistic toward audience desire.

Pearl Harbor. Another particular example is that of Rei Ayanami[16]. Both her surname and given

name are allusions to different branches of the Japanese military. Her costume also visually

mirrors that of the zero fighter. Ayanami refers to destroyers in World Wars I and II.

Furthermore, "Rei," while ostensibly named after a Sailor Moon character, is a pun on the

concept of Zero, which also alludes to the Japanese Zero fighters. Rei pilots the Evangelion unit

00. It is undeniable that the characters of Evangelion are named after Japanese naval vessels. Is

this homage to the glory days of Japanese military might? Or did Anno simply choose a group of

names he thought sounded distinctive?

There are echoes of Japanese imperialism throughout *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, both

through the naming principle, and in the association with the mecha genre generally. Of central

concern in this regard are the opening two episodes of the televised anime, which serve as the

first half hour of the film *Evangelion: 1.0 You Can (Not) Advance*. In these moments, Anno

presents the idea of military service as an ethical mandate.

Critical Perspectives on Evangelion

In her examination of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* Napier accepts that "the opening episode

is constructed around all the conventions of the classic 'saving the world' narrative, only to

undermine them by showing IKARI Shinji, its fourteen-year-old ostensible hero, in a far from

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[16] Rei Ayanami's name is presented in written texts as: 綾波レイ (Ayanami Rei). "Rei" here is in
kana, the Japanese alphabet, while Ayanami is in kanji. The Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter uses
the kanji 零式艦上戦闘機, which is all in kanji, so the "rei" of the "rei" (zero) fighter is textually
different. The kanji for the navy destroyer Ayanami is 綾波, which is identical to Rei's family
name. Simply put, Rei's name phonetically is identical to the name of the plane, but is both
phonetically identical to the destroyer and uses the same kanji, so the connection to the destroyer
is much more direct. Anno, the director, says the personal name is a reference to Rei Hino (Sailor
Mars) from the anime series *Sailor Moon* (Anno).

heroic light" (424). The lack of heroism of Shinji in the opening episode is perhaps the centerpiece of divisive attitudes toward *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Of course, Campbell notes in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* that characters often refuse the call of adventure in myths and popular tales, but that this usually turns the narrative into an anti-heroic victim narrative, a tone wholly at odds with the power fantasy of mecha anime. Shinji's hesitation is also what most differentiates the series from what Napier refers to as "a more conventional anime sf narrative" where "Shinji would climb into the EVA with gusto and proceed to save the world" (425). Shinji does actually save the world in the opening episodes, but only after a "display of temper, fear, and vulnerability that seems less than conventionally heroic" (425). Much of the criticism about the anime in turn centers around understanding and explaining Shinji's psychological state in Freudian and post-Freudian terms.

The sequence wherein Shinji is introduced to the Evangelion unit visually communicates the rhetorical and cultural pressures on the character. Framed on his left by Ritsuko Akagi and on his right by Misato Katsuragi, Shinji is directly opposite the massive head of the purple Evangelion Unit-01. Having never seen or heard of an Evangelion unit before, Shinji is almost immediately confronted by his father, who stands high above him in a separate shaft, with backlighting preventing a clear view of his face, emotions, or expressions for Shinji. This creates dramatic irony as the audience witnesses the manipulative smile of Gendo throughout the sequence. Gendo tells Shinji he must pilot the Evangelion, but Shinji insists he cannot. Gendo calls for the alternative pilot, Rei Ayanami. Shinji initially feels that his longstanding thoughts are confirmed: his father does not need him, and he is worthless. When Rei arrives on the scene, Shinji discovers that she is on a hospital stretcher, her arms bandaged. After an angel attack causes a tremor to run through the complex, Rei falls from the stretcher. Shinji rushes to her aid,

and finds that his hand comes away with blood. At this point he resolves that he must not run

away. He therefore must pilot the Evangelion and fight the angel.

Fig. 2.7 – Shinji flanked by the scientist on his left, and the military Captain on his right. From

Evangelion 1.0, You Are (Not) Alone.

Fig. 2.8, Shinji looks down at the blood on his hand (from Rei Ayanami) while he holds her in his arm, realizing that his refusal to fight will cause her suffering. From *Evangelion 1.0, You Are (Not) Alone*.

The realization communicated in the sequence is that if Shinji is unwilling to fight, the blood of his would-be fellow soldiers is literally on his hands. This changes the frame of Shinji's internal debate; it is not a matter of whether he is likely to succeed or fail, his preparation for combat is largely immaterial. The *stases* of the issue is shifted. It is not that he is saving Rei Ayanami in the usual sense of heroism. Rather, Shinji's heroism is more banal and commonplace but therefore all the more generalizable. When framed in this manner, who could deny the ethical imperative of military service? Certainly Shinji cannot. Rei's pain is as overwhelming as it is self-evident.

The mythos of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is obviously Freudian in orientation. As the series progresses, it becomes clear that Yui Ikari, Shinji's mother, was the creator of Eva-01, but in the process of doing so at some point "her soul and body were merged into it" (Tanaka 116). Individuals enter the Evangelion units in entry plugs, capsule-shaped objects that serve as cockpits. After immersing pilots in a fluidic base, pilots are "synchronized" which in this case means that the pilot and the Eva unit are neurally linked, so that the pilot's psyche can control the actions of the Eva unit. Somehow as a consequence of this neural link, in certain extreme circumstances the Eva unit can actually absorb the physical, material body of the pilot. This is what happened to Shinji's mother, Yui Ikari. As a consequence, whenever Shinji is entering an Eva unit, he is also entering the only remaining physical vessel of his mother. Moreover, Gendo has attempted to reconstitute Yui by cloning her in the form of Rei Ayanami. Shinji's decision to protect the unknown Rei Ayanami simultaneously is to protect the mass produced form of his mother. By choosing to protect Rei, by piloting the Eva, he is in turn uniting with the *spirit* of his mother. While critical analyses tend to isolate the Freudian elements of the narrative, it is not hard to emphasize the rhetorical subtext at play here: in choosing to be a combatant, Shinji is literally reunited with the spirit of his ancestors, and of his mother. The Freudian elements of the narrative reinforce and reiterate the imperial and militaristic elements of the narrative.

Motoko Tanaka (2014) foregrounds *Neon Genesis Evangelion* as the pivotal narrative of Japanese Science Fiction since 1995, contributing to the development of the *sekaikei* (world-type) sub-genre. While *AKIRA* reflects the possibility "that Japanese society may have a chance to confront the meanings of the apocalyptic catastrophe and defeat objectively for the first time since the war" (105), Tanaka further argues that the rhetorical multivalence at play in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* hinges on its development as not only a different type of mecha anime, but

also as presenting a "very different, difficult, innovative style of new apocalypse" (119). Tanaka claims that "In *Evangelion*, it becomes difficult to judge what relationship the opposing values have, for communal spaces such as local communities, societies, and the state, where values are created, are not a significant part of the story" (119). Although Tanaka emphasizes both the mythos of the narrative and the psychological development of the characters, in a slight departure from Napier, his argument here nevertheless serves as a strong point that the oblique world order of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is at times taken as incomprehensible and therefore irrelevant. Yet the world system of Eva informs the underlying nature of the psychological character struggles.

The relationship of Nerv to world order is primarily revealed in conversations Gendo Ikari has with Seele.[17] Seele is a secretive cabal within the United Nations, which unsurprisingly seems to consist of European colonial powers, such as representatives from the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. The general world structure can be inferred from this point. As is indicated in the opening sequence of the series, the U.N. is the dominant military force in the world. When conventional weapons fail to destroy the angels and protect Neo Tokyo III, the U.N. seems to turn over command to Nerv. Although Gendo Ikari, as the head of Nerv, has operational control over the Eva units, his budget is supported by the United Nations. In the interludes where Gendo defends his leadership to Seele, it becomes clear that Seele itself controls Nerv's budget. So, in the world of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the United Nations is officially in charge of Nerv, while the United Nations itself is unofficially controlled by Seele. Seele's explicit goal is to initiate "third impact," an often mysterious form of apocalypse that several characters have different interpretations for. The viewer of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

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[17] Seele is a German word. All forms of the anime consistently mispronounce it.

knows more than Shinji; the viewer knows that Nerv's stated goals are not the actual goals of those funding the program, or for that matter the goals of Gendo Ikari, Shinji's father. Shinji's angst is in part exacerbated because Gendo is manipulating him, and part of his agenda revolves around keeping Shinji at a distance about his actual goals. Put another way, the Japanese high school student who is ethically compelled to serve as a combatant (Shinji) is nonetheless being manipulated by conspirators, including his father, working within the United Nations. Many visual texts use Apocalyptic Irony—a melodramatic effect where the viewer knows more about the nature of the apocalypse than the characters.

It is certainly the case that Shinji, and the audience, are not prompted to identify with the United Nations or their goals over the course of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Shinji has to be taught first that he is fighting on behalf of soldiers such as Rei, as discussed earlier, but further has to be taught that he is fighting to defend Neo Tokyo III. In one scene, Misato takes Shinji to a point where they can look on as Neo Tokyo III, safely hidden in the geo-front during angel attacks, rises from the chaos and destruction in a celebration of modernity and the capacity to restore and maintain Tokyo. Shinji never seems to understand Nerv or its goals. He does not identify with Nerv. He does not identify as a soldier. The nationalistic elements of military service are also wholly stripped. Nerv is not part of the Japanese Self-Defense Force. Instead, Misato's pathetic proof in favor of Shinji maintaining his service as a combatant hinges on a celebration of modernity. Shinji fights because it is imperative to protect the modern city. Shinji's motivation rests on a sense of the innate beauty of skyscrapers on a cityscape.

Tanaka is right that Gainax does much to undermine the sense that Shinji is experiencing conventional military life. Misato Katsuragi, in addition to being his commanding officer, is his roommate. Asuka Langley Soryu/Shikinami, when she arrives after the first fourth of the series,

moves in and oscillates between romantic feelings and competitiveness as she attempts to assert herself as the best pilot of the group. All of Shinji's fellow pilots attend his same class in high school as well, so that Shinji interacts with the rest of the cast of characters in social, academic, and military contexts. The range of romantic subtexts, particularly with Rei Ayanami, provides additional material for psychoanalytic readings of the series. There is little resembling the military structure or hierarchy visible in "real robot" narratives. His motivations, and the rewards for piloting Eva, are more abstract: there is no evidence that he is paid. (To this extent, both Kaneda in *AKIRA* and Shinji in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* are non-paid combatants). Shinji is neither a soldier nor a professional in this sense. His services in saving the world and piloting Eva are provided pro bono.

The oblique political structure, of course, hinges on oblique political history. A case-in-point on this matter revolves around the concept of an "impact." Viewers are expected to accept the idea that world order in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* has changed since "second impact," although the exact definition of an "impact" is confusing for some viewers. To clarify: the "first impact" is an allusion to the (real) giant-impact hypothesis of Reginald Daly, and later William Hartmann and Donald Davis, that the moon was formed by the impact of a planet on the surface of the Earth. Evangelion avoids the scientific speculation here, suggesting that instead of a meteor, first impact was the result of something more supernatural: Lillith, the second angel, collided with earth. This initial designation is rarely discussed in the narrative, but the subtext of characterizing this as the "first impact" suggests an ambivalent tone to what the west usually refers to as an apocalypse. That is, focusing on the theory that revolves around the creation of the moon connotes that an "impact" does not have to have the same negative connotation as "disaster" or "catastrophe." It is also the case, however, that within the narrative of *Neon Genesis*

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Evangelion, much more emphasis is placed on "second impact." Unlike "first impact," "second impact," which happened on September 13th, 2000, is explicitly negative: it resulted in the destruction of half the world's population, destroyed ecosystems, and flooded many parts of the world, including metropolitan areas of Japan, whose flooded remains are shown in early sequences of the series. It is this disaster that predicates the dramatic transformation in world order, such that the United Nations becomes the dominant military power rather than any individual nation-state. Of course, there are two histories of second impact: the public narrative, which is that it was the result of an asteroid impact, and the secret truth, which is that it was caused by attempting to manipulate the "first angel" Adam.

Since so much of the political structure of the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* world is left to subtext, when the nature of that political structure changes, the central characters cannot easily explicate the transformations as they happen. In *The End of Evangelion*, Shinji participates in "third impact"—but since he never had a full understanding of the events of second impact, there is no coherent explication as to what this specifically means. Consequently, the final sequence of *The End of Evangelion* revolves around a narrative position I define as the apocalyptic fantastic. The apocalypse is happening, and while the characters understand that this is a dramatic transformation in world order, the characters and the audience are unsure what exactly this transformation will mean.

The Apocalyptic Fantastic

Todorov's conception of the fantastic hinges on a question of what, exactly, in a narrative, is "possible" or "impossible" (Todorov 24). If a character ever is unsure of what is possible or impossible, then they reach a moment of hesitation. When encountering something

that appears to be supernatural, a narrative will tend to resolve this either into the uncanny or the marvelous. If a character, and a narrative, accept an apparently supernatural phenomenon as actually supernatural, then Todorov would call this the marvelous. Likewise, if an apparently supernatural phenomenon is shown to abide by natural laws, then Todorov would characterize this as the uncanny. Yet, in narratives that confront the apparently supernatural, there is often a moment of uncertainty both on part of the characters of the story, and on the part of the reader of that story. The duration of this uncertainty Todorov characterizes as the fantastic.

Post|apocalyptic narratives almost always dwell on this sensation of uncertainty since the fantastic can produce sensations of horror, unease, fear, and speculation on the part of the audience. Often, the nature of an apocalyptic event is itself open to doubt. Are the zombies of Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) explicitly the product of natural causes such as a viral outbreak, or is it that "when there's no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth" (*Dawn of the Dead*)? Particularly when post|apocalyptic narratives dwell on the moment of catastrophe and confusion as the conditions of life are changing, the fantastic can run the duration of the narrative.

Some artists engage the indeterminate nature of events to explore rhetorical and aesthetic concerns. Sakyo Komatsu's short story "Take Your Choice" critiques fatalistic apathy by exploring a shop purporting to sell travel to a world in which the future is certain. While the first door offers a techno-utopia and the second a pastoral idyll, the third door makes it certain that the future will end in nuclear annihilation. A surprising number of people choose door number three. The reader learns that the store is a sham, and none of the futures were certain after all, yet they wonder about the implications of living in a world where so many people have already chosen door number three—that is, where so many people have already accepted they would rather live

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in a world that is hopelessly doomed than try to keep up with the vicissitudes, however beneficent, of modernity.

Indeterminacy about the future shape of society is the predicate of much post|apocalyptic fiction. Claire Curtis focuses her exploration of postapocalyptic fiction on narratives that depict "how humans start over after the end of life on earth as we understand it. The apocalyptic event or events cause a radical shift in the basic conditions of human life" (5). Whereas Todorov's emphasis on the fantastic was regarding the reality or illusion of the apparently supernatural, the apocalyptic fantastic reflects an indeterminate sense of the future of social structures, roles, and culture. The spectacle of *The Walking Dead* (2003-) rests in part on determining not just which survivors will live or die, but whether society or culture could be reconstituted after collapse, and what it would look like as a consequence. In William Brinkley's novel *The Last Ship* (1988) the narrative rests on whether the last remaining survivors of the United States military, the crew of missile destroyer the *Nathan James*, can reconcile their feelings for the crew of a Russian submarine after a Russo-American nuclear war annihilates the majority of humanity—would a world after nuclear holocaust between Russia and the United States necessitate an alliance between the survivors of each country? "Starting over" in this case means putting the immediate past behind them, including conjecture as to the cause of the war.

According to Todorov's definition of the fantastic, *The End of Evangelion* is explicitly marvelous. Yet, the film is one of the most condensed representations of the apocalyptic fantastic, since the apocalypse in question is one which has the capacity to either destroy or redefine humanity. The duration of uncertainty over whether a narrative will depict destruction or transformation is a central facet of the apocalyptic fantastic. As the film begins, Seele believes, rightly, that Gendo Ikari plans to initiate third impact. The exact prerequisites of third

impact are a bit convoluted. Seele uses the Japanese Strategic Self-Defense Force, a futuristic

expansion of the contemporary Japanese Self Defense Force, to betray Nerv so that they can

prevent Gendo from initiating third impact on his terms. Gendo attempts to unite Adam and

Lilith, but Gendo is betrayed. Instead, the consequence of third impact is put on the shoulders of

Shinji Ikari. The next twenty-four minutes of the film are devoted to juxtaposing Shinji's

individual psychological world with the consequences of his thoughts on the world around him,

since Third Impact means that Shinji's subjectivity will become literalized in the world around

him. This sequence is the epitome of the apocalyptic fantastic, as the audience is left in a state of

indeterminacy about the future of humanity.

The sequence begins by showing a child-like Shinji in a metaphorically constructed

playground. Mountains in the background and other features of the terrain resemble human

anatomy. Spotlights around the sandbox reinforce the staged aesthetic of the world. Doll-like

children initially invite him to build a sand castle, but soon have to depart. Shinji has constructed

a sand-pyramid, with sharp contours and a clear, definite shape, but as the doll-like children

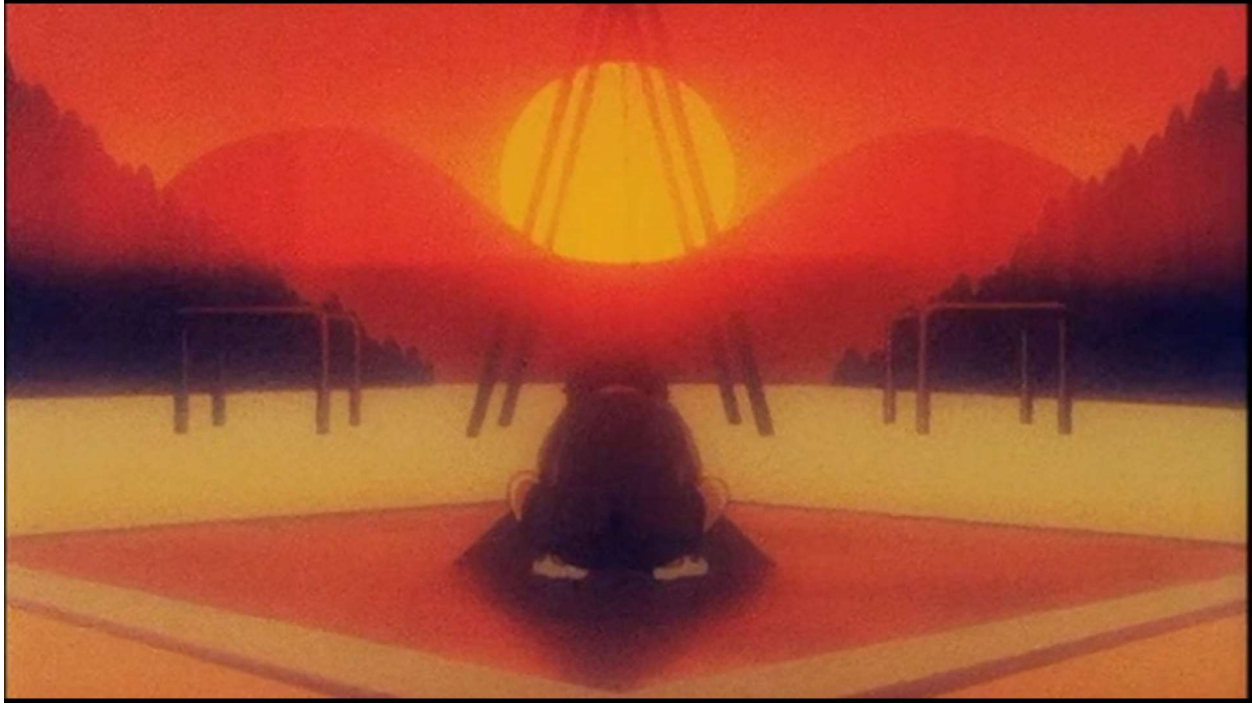depart his sense of isolation prompts him to destroy the sand-pyramid.

Fig. 2.9. Shinji builds his sand-pyramid alone in the foreground in *The End of Evangelion*.

Although usual analysis would primarily foreground the sexual connotations of the imagery in

this scene, with the phallic swing and the sexualized mountains, it is also important to consider

here the central figure of the sun. The rising sun is the central figure of the Japanese imperial

flag, and the sun remains the primary icon of the contemporary flag of Japan. Here, the sun is in

a state of decay. The emasculation of Shinji (in transforming him into a young boy) is coupled

with the setting sun being penetrated by the phallus of modernity. Despite my initial inclinations

to treat this imagery as a rejection of the fusion of hyper-masculine imperialism and modernism,

the next sequence casts doubt on seeing the destruction of the pyramid as anti-masculine; or at

least it suggests the text as a whole is not coherent in its rejection.

   After the destruction of the sand-pyramid, the next sequence depicts Shinji becoming

cognizant of the sexuality of Misato, which segues into contemplating his antagonistic

relationship with Asuka. This phantasmal Asuka accuses him of failing to understand her, as well

as only wanting to initiate a romantic relationship to fill his own emotional needs. Shinji begins to generalize his failed relationship with Asuka to a point that he will never be able to be certain about his relationship with any other person. In conjunction with this, he begins to feel an extreme sense of isolation. As the sequence continues, Shinji becomes increasingly aware that in becoming close to others he inevitably hurts them, with the locus of this concern being his relationship with Asuka. Their confrontation becomes violent. The next sequence shows a montage of child-like drawings of death and violence as Shinji rejects the continued existence of humanity.

So while the destruction of the pyramid could be seen as a rejection of modernity, hyper-masculinity, and imperialism, the culmination of this sequence negates each of these readings. Shinji's destruction of the pyramid does not prevent him from becoming violent in his demand for sexual gratification from Asuka. Contrary to this, it precipitates him turning to violence to exert physical dominance over Asuka and their home. The existential crisis of Shinji culminates in a celebration of modernity in juxtaposition and partly in contrast to a meditation on postmodern aesthetics. Shinji's rejection of humanity vis-à-vis Asuka initiates a form of third impact where all humans are reduced to a liquid state, briefly experiencing the fulfillment of their latent desires. Visual chaos reinforces the sense that human consciousness has been conflated. The next sequence shifts from animation to film, representing visual analogues to Neo Tokyo III. Finally, a short sequence of hate mail Hideaki Anno received flashes by. In terms of dialogue, Shinji feels as though a world without existence, without other people, feels wrong, and so he wills humanity back into existence. Yet visually, the resolution of Shinji's inability to feel close to other people is most realized by the shift from animation to film, in focusing on the reality and materiality of contemporary Japan, the electrical grid, buildings at a distance,

crowded city streets, and the cinema theater. In reconstituting the human race, Shinji realizes that

he will have to re-enable the capacity to cause others pain. The implicit logic is that the modern

world of contemporary Japan is innately beautiful and must be preserved. Part of its beauty,

though, is intrinsically linked to physical dominance, if not ownership, over the land.

The incomplete and irresolute nature of Shinji's decision to reconstitute humanity comes

to a head as he materializes on a beach beside a wounded Asuka. As he awakens, he slides on top

of her and begins to once again strangle her. She reaches up and caresses his face. As he stops

attacking her, he cries with his tears falling on her face, and she ends the film by whispering,

"kimochi warui." The exact translation of this line is open to debate, although most variations

alternate between "disgusting" or "how disgusting." As in Komatsu's "Take Your Choice,"

Shinji has entered a post|apocalyptic world of his own choosing. The final scene is a

renunciation, in many ways, of the opening sequences of the televised anime series. Whereas his

initial motivation for piloting Eva was so that Rei would not have to go in his place, in asserting

his own desires he reaches a point of seeking to destroy the only other apparent human in

existence, Asuka. The consequence of this seems to be the acceptance that violence is an innate

feature of human existence; Asuka's caress of his face is an acceptance of the intrinsic necessity

of his non-pacifism while an acceptance that this facet of his, and humanity's, nature, is

disgusting.

At a glance, the quasi-solipsist nature of the twenty-four minute psychological

exploration of Shinji's misanthropy could seem to make the hour of preceding film simply

prologue. Yet, in a different sense, the ultimate conclusion only reinforces the ongoing cynicism

toward world order latent throughout. Shinji is betrayed by Gendo. Nerv is attacked by the

JSSDF, making the final film essentially one of civil war instigated by the United Nations, which

itself is manipulated by Seele. On the one hand, it is tempting to see the convoluted politics as a reaffirmation of Shinji's latent concerns articulated in his psychological deconstruction: life is full of betrayal and mistrust, where you can never fully understand the motivations or desires of those you need to trust. Yet, this sense can also be flipped. Shinji's rejection of instrumentality, of manipulation, is in turn a rejection of his father, of Nerv's compliance with the United Nations. The emotional tone of the film seems to apologize for the inclination of young men to assert physical dominance over land in the course of seeking control over women's bodies.

The Celebration of Modernity

As indicated so far, Shinji's motivation for piloting Eva, and his ultimate decision to reconstitute humanity, both rely on visualizing the material infrastructure of modern Japan. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* ultimately is too cynical about the role of any sort of governmental superstructure to truly advocate for a return to imperialist Japan, although its simultaneous cynicism toward pacifism also lays the groundwork for nationalist impulses. When the opening animation cajoles the audience to "rise up, young boy, and make yourself a legend," the only framework it provides in which to do so is military service.

Both *AKIRA* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* demonstrate variations of the apocalyptic fantastic. Both narratives create apocalyptic scenarios which for the characters and the audience can cause great destruction, but can also offer new avenues for rebirth and regrowth. The apocalypse can serve as a way of burning away the corruption and subordinated consciousness of modern subjects. In doing so, the narratives at times normalize the visual rhetoric that young men inevitably can fight for territorial control, their desire for territory comingled with their desire for control over women's bodies. To this extent, while both narratives are deeply cynical

of almost all social institutions and any form of world order, with both showing express disdain

for the role of the United Nations, they at times can quietly apologize for neo-imperial impulses.

They are not celebrations of imperialism, but they make imperial desires seem inescapable in the

aftermath of disaster.

Chapter Three: *The Road* and McCarthy's Postmodern Nostalgia for the Present

The Road (2006) is one of the most celebrated post|apocalyptic literary masterpieces, having won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 2006. Cormac McCarthy's masterpiece tells the story of a man and a boy on their journey across a ruined America in hopes of making a new life. The novel, following its critical success, has become immensely influential on post|apocalyptic literature. By emphasizing humans as the principle antagonists and focusing on the familial, pragmatic ethics of a parent and child, it can seem at times to be the urtext of many post-2006 post|apocalyptic texts. Its mark is strong on novels like *The Islands at the End of the World* (2014), television shows like *The Walking Dead* (2010-), and computer games such as *The Last of Us* (2013). Yet, *The Road* is also distinctive in McCarthy's oeuvre. Unlike *Blood Meridian*, which some critics take to be a critique of American imperialism, *The Road* celebrates the material commodities of neoliberal empire through postmodern nostalgia for the reader's living present. Simultaneous with this acceptance of commodity fetishism, the novel teaches a pragmatic ethics predicated on ignoring injustice in the conditions of scarcity. So while the overwhelming emotive force of the novel is resilience and hope in the face of environmental collapse, its ideology is enmeshed and nearly inseparable from the conditions of postmodernism and neoliberalism. Yet the close connection and understanding between the man and the boy also suggests the capacity for an emergent public sphere even in the worst conditions of scarcity. To this extent, it celebrates consumerism and the United States' form of democratic liberalism simultaneously rather than in opposition to each other.

Caren Irr, in *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) argues that the fiction of 21st century authors like McCarthy (and others, including Atwood) is "not especially interested in assigning blame for the apocalypse or detailing its

causes" (170). Irr takes the ambiguity of the cause as a sign that the "total social situation and all positions on it bear responsibility for catastrophic collapse" (170). So while there may be some generalized critique of postmodernity, some novels cannot articulate this critique in political terms. Irr argues "Political revolution becomes impossible in novels that imagine a catastrophe without causality" (172), and in such fiction "we find a self-consciously restricted social sphere that is detached from the traces of political action, yet still containing within itself important symbols of continuity with dissenting and literate traditions" (172). Irr implies *The Road* is detached politically. For instance, she argues that *The Road*'s violence is so pervasive because of the scarcity it posits, not because of its ability to imagine conflict with real political institutions or as a way of imagining social change.

Irr's claims evoke a long tradition of critique toward post|apocalyptic literature. The most common critique of post|apocalyptic narrative has become clichéd. This is how it goes: rather than spurring people on to be proactive in combating contemporary exigencies, the preponderance of disastrous imagery makes people apathetic; makes them learn hopelessness; and reifies a survivalist mentality that is detrimental to society in times of crisis. In Brad Bird's *Tomorrowland* (2015), for instance, the narrative centers on a tachyon machine that can see the future. In doing so, it sees a version of the future that will result in apocalyptic destruction, and this fatalistic imagery is actually the force that almost enables such a future to occur (the apocalyptic future is avoided by stopping the machine in time). It is literally a self-fulfilling prophecy. Critiquing survivalist rhetoric has become especially prevalent in contemporary post|apocalyptic discourse. The narrative of Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2015) focuses on a cult leader whose turn toward authoritarianism is inspired by the spectacle of post-apocalyptic comic books. In M. R. Carey's *The Girl With All the Gifts* (2014), hyper-militarized

survivalists interrupt the attempts of scientists to find a cure for the zombie pandemic. Presenting survivalists as deranged has become so commonplace that Dan Trachtenberg's *10 Cloverfield Lane* (2016) almost entirely hinges on the audience's familiarities with the cliché.

Narrative critiques of survivalism go back much further, as well. The fear that paranoia about nuclear conflict would help instigate such a conflict also featured in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). In David Brin's *The Postman* (1985), a misogynist, hypersurvivalist militia guided by a demagogue named Nathan Holn hinders the reconstitution of the United States after nuclear war. More generally, confrontations with survivalists who form sects or paramilitary groups is commonplace in post|apocalyptic narratives, such as in *Survivors* (1975) and *AKIRA* (1982-1990). That said, just because the critique has become a cliché does not mean it lacks merit in some cases.

The idea that post|apocalyptic narratives inhibit healthy social discourse, instead reinforcing a survivalist ideology that is counter-productive to reestablishing communities after catastrophes, is no less common in theoretical discussions. The failure of cultural production to effectively inform audiences or produce meaningful political action is a commonplace of critical theory. Such critiques go back to Horkheimer and Adorno's Critique of the culture industry (1944). This critique has been articulated specifically in regard to post|apocalyptic narrative by Susan Sontag in "The Imagination of Disaster," (1965) where she argues the apocalyptic imagination allays global anxieties about nuclear weapons. It creates a sense of apathy toward radiation, contamination, and destruction. The science fiction films she describes are "in complicity with the abhorrent. They neutralize it" (131) and through this process of neutralization, inculcate audiences toward apathy in regard to the issues involved. Science fiction

films about disaster inhibit social action, in large part because they have "absolutely no social criticism, of even the most implicit kind" (129).

In contrast to this, Jerome Shapiro (2001) argues that post|apocalyptic narrative is a repository of the ways that people can act in the midst of oppressive social conditions. Shapiro most succinctly describes the primary characteristic of atomic bomb cinema as being "about *individual, and communal, survival and self-actualization under oppressive conditions*" (35). This survival and self-actualization occur "through political empowerment or changing social conditions, but especially through mystical experience" (35). At least, this is what the best of such narratives *can* be. Shapiro, in part, agrees with Sontag's conclusions specifically in regard to some Cold War era films, arguing that they are specific to that particular era rather than endemic to all narrative depictions of catastrophe.

The political dimensions of apocalyptic narrative are explicated by Claire Curtis in *Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract* (2010)*.* Curtis argues that "For political philosophy postapocalyptic fiction provides a window into a particular understanding of the social contract" (6-7). Curtis sees Hobbesian themes playing out in her conception of the genre: "The violence and destruction of the end creates a state of nature" (7). This state of nature is the one epitomized by Hobbes' sense of *bellum omnium contra omnes* – the war of all against all, which is the predicate for social contract theory and the need for the state to intervene in the relations of human life. Although Curtis argues that post|apocalyptic narratives generally explore political consciousness, Curtis argues that the *Road* does not present a "state of nature" analogous to Hobbes' presentation of the idea, and therefore cannot present a new social contract. *The Road* is a special case because "a social contract cannot emerge from a dead world" (37). Consequently, "It is not simply the case that government is absent from the world of *The Road*, the very idea of

government is impossible" (25). Curtis argues that the implied reference to Hobbes in the novel is misleading because Hobbes "simply takes for granted the literal fruits of the world as something that must exist for human life to exist" (39). For Curtis, the total destruction of the environment is a flaw in the immersion and realism of McCarthy's novel. She argues that "McCarthy describes a world wholly dead—unrealistically dead" (34). Curtis struggles to identify a coherent or meaningful message to take away from *The Road* and seems to discuss it primarily to serve as a counterpoint to other narratives, like that those of Octavia Butler.

Both Irr and Curtis imply that since there is no political structure to be overthrown, *The Road* escapes easy discussions of politics or political structures. While *The Road* may lack structured depictions of political institutions, it does embody the postmodernism that Jameson describes as nostalgia for the present. Narratives that indulge nostalgia for the audience's living present are symptoms of a failure to understand the postmodern subject's situation: "they show a collective unconscious in the process of trying to identify its own present at the same time that they illuminate the failure of this attempt, which seems to reduce itself to the recombination of various stereotypes of the past" (Jameson 296). Like Sontag, Jameson writes about the capacity of "yesterday's terror" to "just as easily be read as a pretext for complacency with our own historical present, in which we do not yet have to live like that" (286). The fear in nostalgia films is a fear of "losing a comfort and set of privileges" embodied in our living present. Yet Jameson argues such narratives can have another powerful function: they can offer us "an experience of our present as past and as history" (286). So while postmodern nostalgia for the present can elicit complacency, it can also reflect the struggle to historicize the living present.

Irr is right that *The Road* is not a novel of political revolution, and Curtis may be correct that it is not the best vehicle for teaching concepts of political contract theory. Instead, the

novel's rhetorical work is focused, not on particular political institutions, but rather on the precepts of Western culture. Dana Phillips in "History and the Ugly Facts" argues that readers of McCarthy tend to either view him as a Southern author, "the heir of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor," or as a Western author, moving toward "addressing not just the Wild West but also Western culture as a whole, especially its philosophical heritage" (20). In *The Road*, McCarthy is making his exploration of Western culture and human mortality more immediate by avoiding the chance that the reader may be afflicted by a complacency with the present; he is avoiding depicting "yesterday's terror." In *The Road*, the past is our living present. Historicizing the present is intrinsically a political act.

McCarthy historicizes the present to meditate on the prospect of hope and pragmatic ethics in the conditions of scarcity. The novel begins with a literal imagination of disaster, the man dreaming of a horrific beast, "a creature that raised its dripping mouth from the rimstone pool and stared into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders" (3-4). While readers can play with the meaning of this beast—Alex Hunt and Martin Jacobsen take it as part of a reversal of Plato's Allegory of the Cave—it is not just a clear metaphorical frame for the novel, but also a representation of the man's (that is, the viewpoint character's) worldview. As a representation of the man's psyche, his valence, perhaps the most important facet of the dream is the ending, wherein the creature "swung its head from side to side and then gave out a low moan and turned and lurched away and loped soundlessly into the dark" (4). While Hunt and Jacobsen characterize the creature as a despondent embodiment of the dimming of the world and the loss of knowledge, the fact that the creature lurches away suggests an enemy that is if not beatable at least avoidable, an enemy that can be kept at bay. Although it may not be inspiring, there is a kind of resilient optimism in this frame.

Conversely, the complacency-producing affect described by Jameson plays out in one episode early in McCarthy's novel. On their journey to the ocean, the man and the boy reach an older supermarket. There, they find a gutted vending machine and eventually discover a can of Coca Cola. The man presents it as a treat for the boy. After the boy drinks some and enjoys it, he insists the father try some, so the man "took the can and sipped it and handed it back. You drink it, he said" (23). The boy, interrogating the father's insistence on the boy's consumption, asks, "It's because I wont ever get to drink another one, isn't it?" (24). Although the man refutes the boy's question by arguing that "Ever's a long time" (24), the behavior of the father suggests the boy's sense of the situation is generally correct. Brian Donnelly argues that "the scene also adumbrates, in its delineation of the desolate and defunct supermarket, the gross excesses of consumer culture which the novel as a whole seems to critique" (6-7). Donnelly's assertion is curious. The scene's representation of the supermarket does not seem at odds with or particularly excessive compared to the other scenes of decay throughout the novel. Rather than serving as a locus of critique toward consumer culture, McCarthy's representation of the can of Coke is a nostalgic look at the consumerist pleasures of the reader's living present—a beacon of the privileges and comforts of 21st century American life. This scene does not interrogate or antagonize the consumption of Coca Cola or the advertising that enables its brand-name recognition. The man's unwillingness to drink it, to save it for the boy, reinforces the sense that it is a memento of the comfort of modern America.

The Road is not a critique of neoliberal empire. This is in sharp contrast to McCarthy's depiction of conventional state-based imperialism elsewhere. Blood Meridian (1985), a historically informed Western, presents the brutality of the doctrine of manifest destiny in bleak and unforgiving terms. In Blood Meridian, Captain White enlists the viewpoint character, the

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kid, on a cross-border raid on behalf of American hegemony. Captain White reasons that "unless

we act, Mexico—I mean the whole of the country—will one day fly a European flag. Monroe

Doctrine or no" (35). Captain White's expedition, explicitly and without equivocation is

designed to enforce American hegemony over Mexico. The expedition results in the decapitation

of Captain White and the rejection of his ideology on the part of the kid. So McCarthy's larger

body of work is not particularly favorable toward conventional representations of state-based

imperialism. But when it comes to the concept of consumerism and the appeal of convenience

items like Coca Cola, McCarthy fetishizes the brand name and the concept of security it evokes

as an unironic bastion of the real and knowable.

The concept of security and its relation to pragmatic ethics is at the heart of McCarthy's

ideology. The novel considers Hobbesian conceptions of human nature directly, and the greatest

threat of a stateless Hobbesian world is lack of security. This is articulated in the flashback to the

mother's decision to commit suicide. In explaining her reasoning behind her choice, the mother

argues: "Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape

him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you wont face it" (56). Many narratives

focus on rape as a sign of the breakdown of civilized order (or to disparage specific groups, such

as survivalists or malicious soldiers), as in David Brin's *The Postman* (1985), David Mitchell's

Cloud Atlas (2004), and the game *This War of Mine* (2014). Of course the "they" in McCarthy's

novel is indeterminate, but it is certainly the case that the mother cannot envisage any sort of

network of allies, or any sort of state, to protect her from this "they." The mother cannot imagine

a futurity that is not one of constant strife, struggle, and inevitable death. Her perspective is

perhaps objectively worse than even that world imagined by Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651) of a

world outside political community:

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.

It was only through the power of a common power over them that this perpetual war could be avoided and peaceful life begin. The mother kills herself because of the fear of a Hobbesian, stateless world of no safety and no hope. The man offers little rebuttal to the mother, emotionally or logically. He continues to operate from the primary belief that they should help no one, take no allies, and gain no friends. He gives no indication that he is willing to actually participate in the formation of a state, a higher power, or any form of collective agency. That is to say, while he rejects the mother's suicidal impulse, he seems to agree with her assessment of the world and their situation.

The fears of the mother and the man are most evocatively reinforced through the threat of cannibalism. The threat of cannibalism is ever-present in *The Road*, and some of the mother's estimations of their plight are accurate. The evidence for cannibalism eventually precipitates the first great confrontation on the concept of hope and interrogation of the sense that the man and boy "carry the flame." The man and boy come across a "once grand house sited on a rise above

the road" (105) and break into the basement. There they discover "a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt" (110). This house, apparently owned by four bearded men and two women (111) forces the protagonist to abandon the still-living cannibalized slave-victims they discovered. Eventually the man has to justify his decision to leave these victims behind to the boy, although the boy rationalizes that "we couldnt help them because then they'd eat us too" (127). This sequence reinforces the pragmatic ethics of the man and habituates the boy and the reader to an ethics predicated on ignoring the victims of injustice when there is no clear means of helping them.

The pragmatic ethics of the man and the boy directly confront the categorical imperative of the mother. The mother argues that the ethical choice in a world bereft of production or safety from violence is to commit suicide. Certainly her argument has never had a major refutation, considering some of the oldest arguments against suicide are predicated on the productivity of the natural world and an innate sense of order and structure. For instance, Christian philosopher Gilbert Chesterton's argument against suicide is predicated on a basically good world:

> Not only is suicide a sin, it is the sin. It is the ultimate and absolute evil, the refusal to take an interest in existence; the refusal to take the oath of loyalty to life. The man who kills a man, kills a man. The man who kills himself, kills all men; as far as he is concerned he wipes out the world. His act is worse (symbolically considered) than any rape or dynamite outrage. (*Orthodoxy*)

For the mother, though, the world itself is already destroyed; she is a mere part of a world that is already in the process of being wiped out. If God has rejected existence, who would not accept that rejection? The mother's reasoning is instead wholly Kantian. She presents her argument as a categorical imperative: in a stateless world without safety or hope, all people should kill

themselves. In McCarthy's world, the options are between abject nihilism and a set of pragmatic ethics that reinforce nostalgia for the present, in part through the centering of the man and the boy as victims.

The man and the boy are potential victims when they encounter the cannibalized slave-victims; they lack the ammunition to confront all of the cannibals and hope to prevail. David Higgins draws on the work of Diana Enns (in a book from 2012 called *The Violence of Victimhood*) to argue that to "occupy the position of the victim is often to be absolved of guilt and invested with the moral authority of righteous retributive agency, and science fiction frequently offers agents of privilege a masochistic invitation to occupy the position of victims" (53). While the man and the boy are not actually victimized by the cannibals, their potential victimhood renders their decision to flee uncontestable. A consequence of this silencing of criticism is that the audience may also take a kind of pleasure in their complicity with the man and the boy in abandoning victims of horrific violence. Higgins argues that the celebration of victimhood in post-apocalyptic narratives is a source of pleasure in the audience because it frees them from the guilt of recognizing current problems but refusing to act. Learned indifference and pragmatic ethics are foundational necessities to the neoliberal rejection of public life and civic action in neoliberal states.

One of the primary character arcs is a learned indifference for injustice toward others when the characters lack the agency to rectify that injustice. It is not that the reader must simply accept the choice of the man and the boy to abandon the cannibalized slave-victims. The reader must accept that this is the cognitive-emotional arc of development for the man and the boy, to accept and ignore these instances of injustice. Learning to ignore injustice in the world is coupled with a developed rejection of public life and communal action. In post|apocalyptic narratives

following from the lead of *The Road*, the emphasis becomes: I must prepare for the needs of myself and my family. Since the conditions of scarcity are immanent, charitable actions and state support for a social safety net seem absurd. The fear of scarcity being perpetually immanent is necessary for a neoliberal state predicated on perpetual consumer action. You must buy now because who knows when the goods you want will no longer be available? In *The Road*, this focus on the needs of the individual family manifest as a rejection of all other social bonds. Whereas Hobbes argues that the state of nature latent in man, *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the war of all against all, can be subdued by the awe of a greater power such as the state, the mother and man both seem skeptical of the notion that a new social contract can form in a godless world of cannibals and rapists. Here the man's latent dilemma seems most pronounced despite how subdued it remains throughout the novel. Early on in the novel, a short solitary paragraph takes on the voice of the man to say "On this road there are no godspoke men. They are gone and I am left and they have taken with them the world" (32). The presupposition of the man then is that they live in a godless world where no individual they meet can be counted on to "carry the flame" or to engage with through the joint confines of a social contract. The creation of a new state does not simply not occur, it is impossible. In this sense, there is a nostalgia not just for contemporary capital, but also for any force capable of producing safety, be it a state, church, or some other institution.

The strongest counter-argument to the man's claim that "On this road there are no godspoke men" (32) is in his relationship with the boy. "Okay" is the constant refrain of man and boy, a single word that signifies the ability of two individuals to reach accord. Finally, it is not McCarthy's argument that familial blood ties are the only force that can overcome the latent state of man's nature. At one point, the boy spots "A boy, about his age, wrapped in an out-sized wool

coat with the sleeves turned back" (84). The man does not believe there was ever a visible little boy, and never searches for this second child living in this wasteland. At this point, the mother's argument and the man's beliefs come to be self-fulfilling prophecies. In their unwillingness to believe that there are "godspoke men" along the road, they do not reach out or try to connect with other survivors who may offer skills, community, and joint safety. The belief that the social contract cannot be restored is itself a powerful force in inhibiting that contract from even being attempted to be formed. This point becomes more forceful in the conclusion of the novel, when the boy reconnects with the family of this little boy when the man is no longer able to protect him. At this point it is clear that the Hobbesian nihilism of the man has actually served to preclude the formation of interpersonal sociality or political action.

It is tempting to argue that this self-destructive impulse is what could make *The Road* a rejection of the neoliberal order ironically celebrated in the consumption of the can of Coke. For Evan Calder Williams, narratives like *The Road* where all human activity is reduced to that of scavenging the remains of an earlier civilization are characterized as "salvagepunk," a way of "rejecting the immediate past and the hard work of the living to bring around a new world order" so that "one is left instead with the long dead and a pale writing of the *now* in their language" (16). Williams further argues that this is a characteristic way of "witnessing the slow self-dismantling of what can broadly be called a neoliberal order (the twin forces of financial deregulation and imperialism under the guise of 'globalization')" (17). It is to "cut against current trendlines of nostalgia, the melancholia of buried history, and static mourning for radical antagonistic pasts seemingly absent from contemporary resistance to capitalism" (20). To read *The Road* then is to experience contemporary life not historically, as Jameson argues, but in an anti-historical realism that interrogates the precepts of neoliberal empire. If there is irony in the

scene with the can of Coke—an "if" that is far from certain—then it is in the fact that once the

can of Coke is consumed it is gone, and in its emptiness the emptiness of a neoliberal future

becomes apparent. To nostalgically look back on contemporary life as a fatalistically doomed,

finite historical blip in the decline of the human race is to indict the domineering metanarrative

of neoliberalism of Fukuyama's "end of history."

Yet, the opposite reading can just as easily be made, that just as McCarthy's depiction of

the can of Coke is a wholly un-ironic celebration of modern consumerist convenience, so is the

man's unwillingness to even hope for a restored social contract a tacit acceptance of neoliberal

ideology. While Irr and Curtis both seem concerned that there is no room for political agency in

a deadened world, Fukuyama argues in "The End of History?" (1989) that the "triumph of the

West, of the Western idea, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic

alternatives to Western liberalism" and moreover that modern America (or at least Reagan-era

America) embodies the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of

Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." The man's reticence to

engage in any sort of public sphere, to even imagine a public, is itself an acceptance that after the

fall of Western-style democracy in the United States, there is no alternative, and humanity in

total will revert to Hobbesian endless war. It is not, then, that *The Road* does not imagine a new

political system. It is rather that *The Road* suggests that no political system, no public sphere, no

society can be created following the decline of the current empire and the transformation in the

conditions of life. Is this not, then, the greatest celebration of modern America—the implication

that, without it, there is nothing?

McCarthy does not celebrate neoliberal empire *qua* neoliberal empire. Instead, the text

suggests that conceptualizations of hope in conditions of scarcity are hardly the contract-devoid

non-political mess that Curtis presents them as. It is in the novel's final moments of hope, then, that the novel suggests, not that there is no alternative to neoliberal empire, but rather that the man's beliefs—and the mother's—were mistaken all along. After the man dies, the boy is discovered by a new man, one with "a nylon bandolier filled with shells" (281) for his shotgun. This man asserts he is "one of the good guys" (282), agrees he is "carrying the fire," (283), and finally emphasizes that "No. We dont eat people" (284). Of course, there is no way to be certain that this is the same family the boy saw hundreds of pages earlier in the narrative, although the narrative does at least imply this in the boy evoking his recollection of "the little boy" as the father dies. If it is the case that the vast majority of *The Road* takes places not through the necessary isolation of the man and boy but instead through their tragic self-isolation due to the man's unwillingness to attempt to contact other individuals, then the final scenes serve not to glorify the sacrifices of the man but instead to condemn him for his unwillingness or inability to foster connections with others while he still lived.

There is one moment where the man does voluntarily interact with another traveler along the road. This is with the man who identifies initially as Ely, only to later say this name was a lie. The man and Ely engage in a prolonged conversation. During the course of this conversation, Ely emphasizes several points that directly contradict the preconceptions of the man: "There is no God" (170) for one, followed by the contradiction "There is no God and we are his prophets" (170). Ely takes a point of the mother's book and argues that "Things will be better when everybody's gone" (172). Ely is a natural counterpoint for the ideology of the man and the boy. As the embodiment of the postmodern, Ely totally rejects the value of identity (and therefore the value of identity politics in a high-scarcity world), the idea of progress, and any sort of clear distinction between truth and falsehood. He is nihilistic.

It may be the case that McCarthy wanted to contrast the nihilism of Ely with the resilience and hope of the man and the boy. Paul D. Knox argues in regard to the use of "Okay" when the man and boy encounter Ely that:

> On one hand, the repeated okays indicate agreement about both how the two will care for the old man they have found and about the process by which the man and the boy decide how to act. On the other, the repetition reveals an underlying anxiety about the decisions the man and the boy make. In particular, the man's tautology—"okay means okay"—calls attention to the counterintuitive ambiguity that results from the attempt to pin down what okay means. (97-98)

Knox demonstrates that McCarthy interrogates the concept of "okay" and the man and the boy's reliance on it. Yet Knox does not articulate the extent that "Okay" serves, until this point, as a basis for micro-communal action between the man and boy. In the early sections of the novel, the refrain between the man and boy is not "okay" but rather "I know," (5, 8), an assertion of shared knowledge. It is in regard to the threat of existential dread that the refrain shifts from "I know" to "Okay:"

> Are we going to die?
>
> Sometime. Not now.
>
> And we're still going south.
>
> Yes.
>
> So we'll be warm.
>
> Yes.
>
> Okay.
>
> Okay what?

Nothing. Just okay. (10)

The boy's "Okay" then is an acceptance of the man's decisions, a form of supplication but also a form of acceptance of communal action. The refrain of "okay" is framed as a reaction to and rejection of the inevitability of death, a way of moving beyond hopelessness. It is in the refrain of "Okay" that the man's belief that communal action cannot be formed through consent is most challenged. He does it every day with the boy, in almost every conversation. Knox is right to point to the conversation of the boy and Ely as a point where McCarthy interrogates the concept of "Okay" when the man argues that "Okay means okay. It doesnt mean we negotiate another deal tomorrow" (165). Yet, the tautology here is only effective insofar as it relies on the already established accord between the boy and the man. Moreover, while this sentence may indicate tension between the man and the boy's sense of this accord, this is a point where the use of "Okay" literalizes the social contract between the man and the boy. Moments like this reify the extent to which even in the desolate wasteland discourse can produce social action, even if the outcome of that social action is an agreement to exclude Ely from their group. The tragicomic irony of the novel is the man's inability to replicate his social community with the boy to other individuals.

It is wrong to blame McCarthy's aesthetics for his ideology. The bleakness of the wasteland of *The Road* is not an indictment of the realism of the novel but rather an indictment of McCarthy's nostalgic celebration of modern consumerism. The foundation of neoliberal empire is the yoking of state institutions and social structure to disinterested consumerism and asocial familial tribalism. Empire flourishes when people are exclusively focused on buying goods that they need for their comfort that they simultaneously fear will soon be unavailable, while believing conditions are so scarce that social institutions and sociality hold minimal value

and instead are risks—politically disinterested consumers are the ideal consumers necessary for the flourishing of neoliberal empire. People are not totally disinterested, of course—they remain focused on family as the locus of social identity; seeing the family as the locus of all social behavior, individuals become asocial and families become tribal units. Yet McCarthy, despite this, also presents the private relationship of the man and boy as one of deep kinship and innate understanding. In this regard, McCarthy demonstrates the necessary preconditions for a public sphere to emerge even in the conditions of scarcity: resilience, shared determination, and unbending hope.

Chapter Four: Post-colonial Post|apocalypse in Novels after 2001

In a 2015 lecture at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, Naomi Klein built on arguments in *This Changes Everything* (2014) and *The Shock Doctrine* (2007) to advocate for radical changes to capitalism in the name of an environmentalist response to the threat of climate change. As part of her broader argument, she presented popular culture as an obstacle rather than a boon to this endeavor. In particular, Klein argued that science fiction films reinforce the ideology of capitalism. Klein claims that most science fiction narratives convey the same thing: the future is post-apocalyptic[18], and ecological disaster has produced a hyper-stratified world. According to Klein, the preponderance of these narratives makes this sort of future seem inevitable. Certainly Klein's critique encapsulates many films, such as the entire *Mad Max* franchise (1979-), *12 Monkeys* (1995), *Tank Girl* (1995), *Water World* (1995), *Children of Men* (2006), *The Book of Eli* (2010), *Cloud Atlas* (2012), *Elysium* (2013), and *Snowpiercer* (2013). Klein argues that post-apocalyptic speculative fiction works in concordance with neoliberal ideology, that we "can't imagine another future for ourselves, and that ultimately is the triumph of market fundamentalism—it has convinced us that we are incapable or unworthy of being saved, or saving ourselves" ("This Changes Everything").

This chapter addresses Klein's argument in the context of two post|apocalyptic novels which directly address the issues of sustainability, environmentalism, and colonialism: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Austin Aslan's *The Islands at the End of the World* (2014). Both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Islands at the End of the World* undermine conventional colonialist frameworks while coupling their rhetorical trajectories with environmentalist

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[18] Klein's argument is specific to post-apocalyptic narratives, not the larger discursive formation of the post|apocalyptic.

concerns. *Oryx and Crake* was critically acclaimed, being shortlisted for the Man Booker prize, and is currently being developed by Darren Aronofksy as a television series for HBO. These novels advocate for greater sustainability through the use of *enargeia*, while they reflect multivalence about Western culture and Western institutions.

1: Atwood's Rhetoric – "Everything Change" and "Aliens"

As a Canadian poet, novelist, activist, and public intellectual, Margaret Atwood focuses on issues of identity, survival, and the environment. Lorraine York observes that "her interventions into the daily workings of the state have stretched over several decades" (198). For instance, York points toward one incident between 2011 and 2012 where she entered a fracas with the Ford brothers, including the mayor of Toronto at the time, Rob Ford, over the reduction of the Toronto city library budget. For Atwood, political activism begins locally, but expands into the digital sphere and her artistic production as well.

In her online writing, Atwood is a master of capturing *enargeia*. Cultivating audience investment is difficult when it comes to writing in the hyper-mediated landscape of the digital public sphere. Readers and viewers are immersed in a sea of competing multimodal discourses that circulate in real time across social media platforms and mainstream journalism outlets. Aristotle's concept of *enargeia* is thus more relevant today than it has ever been. Characterized as clearness, distinctness, or vividness, *enargeia* is a pictorial depiction of the "actuality" of a scene or event for an audience to understand and become engaged with an argument. Paul Julian Smith argues that *enargeia* enables "a rhetoric not of communication (relative and determinate) but of presence (absolute and integral)" (46). Gerard Sharpling argues that in *enargeia* there can be "an accumulation of often grotesque, comic detail which takes the scene beyond mere description, to enable the reader to recreate the scene fully in his or her mind's eye" (176). Anne

Sheppard argues that "In ancient literary criticism, this 'vividness' is associated with successful realistic representation or mimesis" (36), and moreover that mimetic immersion is essential in building empathy among readers, since "if we can imagine what it was like to be an ancient Athenian or an eighteenth-century Venetian, we will not only gain in historical understanding but will also find it easier to imagine what it is like to be our contemporary neighbors" (38).

Enargeia reflects the relationship between narrative technologies and rhetoric. Understanding *enargeia* requires fusing different senses of rhetoric. In writing about non-didactic fiction in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), Wayne Booth argues for a rhetoric of immersion. In particular, he focuses on how an author might "impose his fictional world upon the reader" (xiii). Booth's sense of rhetoric may seem distinct from that of other rhetoricians of the 20th century, but it is not as different as it may seem. For instance, Kenneth Burke defines the basic function of rhetoric in *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950) as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (41). Burke would be the first to agree that mimetic representation and rhetoric go hand-in-hand. In *Counter-Statement* (1931), Burke describes the ritualistic form of literature primarily within the terms of ideology. Repetitive form, ritual, and ideology are enmeshed in each other; forms are predicated on ideology. Burke defines ideology as "an aggregate of beliefs sufficiently at odds with one another to justify opposite kinds of conduct" (163) and as such "It is by aligning of assumptions that poetry contributes to the formation of attitudes, and thus to the determining of conduct" (163). Understanding *enargeia* means understanding that the imposition of fictional worlds upon readers is intrinsically linked to the formation of attitudes and the induction of action. Poetry, literature, and narratives shape attitudes, determine conduct, and shape ideology. The rhetoric of immersing readers into narrative worlds, then, is closely linked to the rhetoric of cultural works.

Exploring this connection is one area where genre theory has excelled. John Frow, in *Genre* (2005), focuses on three interrelated dimensions of genre formation: formal organization, rhetorical structure, and thematic content. The fluidity and complexity of genre discussions is precisely because genres tend to expand across each of these formal dimensions in discrete ways. In considering the rhetoric of genres, Frow argues that "To speak is to make statements which are not only declarative but evaluative: my words express not only a state of affairs in the world but an indication of the degree of my commitment to its obligatoriness, desirability, likelihood, or reality" (75). Mimetic representation, fully immersive through *enargeia*, is intrinsically evaluative and interlaced with rhetorical agency and ideology.

Atwood fully recognizes the rhetorical power of mimesis and *enargeia* in her non-fictional argumentative prose. On Medium.com, Atwood confronts the conflict between capitalism and environmentalism in "It's Not Climate Change, It's Everything Change." Atwood employs different forms of *enargeia* to advance her argument. That is, as part of a prose essay, Atwood heavily relies on mimetic representation, in addition to antithesis and metaphor through prolonged, antithetical narrative descriptions. Atwood's essay begins by reproducing an earlier form of the essay, "The Future Without Oil" published in *Die Zeit*. She begins with "Picture One," a quasi-utopic vision of the future where mankind embraces the ideology of sustainability whole-heartedly, and peacefully transitions off oil. Even here, Atwood is not wholly utopian, instead laying on some dark humor. In regard to nuclear power, she imagines a future where "we're using almost foolproof nuclear power. Even when there are accidents it isn't all bad news, because instant wildlife refuges are created as Nature invades those high-radiation zones where Man now fears to tread." The occasional nuclear disaster aside, Atwood finds the overall depiction of "Picture One" comforting, with an emphasis on hemp clothing, bicycles, and long

underwear. She relishes in lists of the technologies that people will use as they adjust to a no-oil future, but is decidedly ambivalent whether such a future is probable or even possible, remarking that "it might even come true. Sort of. More or less." She reinforces the overall immersion of the digital article using animations by Carl Burton, a white background for "Picture One," and stock photos of solar-powered boats and retro pictures of bicycles.

The utopic "Picture One" is visually antithetical to the post|apocalyptic "Picture Two." The background shifts to black, and the stock images of solar-powered boats are replaced with stock photos of Haitians ducking as the United States military fire warning shots to break up looters at a food store, an image that reflects not just scarcity-based violence but apparently colonial forms of scarcity-based violence. "Picture Two," where "the future without oil arrives very quickly," lists not odd technologies, but rather institutions that fail as scarcity causes growing chaos. Atwood acknowledges a Hobbesian understanding of the world when she argues that in such a world, the first thing to change would be "the disappearance of the word 'we': except in areas with exceptional organization and leadership, the word 'I' would replace it, as the war of all against all sets in." Atwood immerses the reader in the depravity of this situation: "Open a can of dog food, eat it, then eat the dog, then wait for the authorities to restore order. But the authorities—lacking transport—would be unable to do this." Despite this, Atwood sees this future as perhaps more probable than that of "Picture One" because "unless there are laws mandating conservation of energy, most won't do it, because why make sacrifices if others don't?" The antithesis continues in "Picture Three," where "some countries plan for the future of diminished oil, some don't." What results is a world of environmental destruction mixed with a highly inegalitarian social structure, not wholly unlike the one of today. It is in this regard, as she

shows images of the tar sands project in Canada, that Atwood's rhetoric becomes most direct and pointed.

Just as Atwood's argumentative writing heavily relies on mimetic representation, so do her novels use mimetic representation to advance her agenda. In "Aliens Have Taken the Place of Angels," Atwood explicates the rhetorical work her novels are capable of. First, Atwood argues speculative fiction can "explore the consequences of new and proposed technologies in graphic ways." Speculative fiction can critique emerging technologies. She further argues that "They can explore the nature and limits of what it means to be human," and "they can explore the relationship of man to the universe, an exploration that often takes us in the direction of religion and can meld easily with mythology." While she also suggests "they can explore the realms of the imagination by taking us boldly where no man has gone before," her highest *pathos* point is that:

> They can explore proposed changes in social organization, by showing what they might actually be like for those living within them. Thus, the utopia and the dystopia, which have proven over and over again that we have a better idea about how to make hell on earth than we do about how to make heaven. The history of the 20th century, where a couple of societies took a crack at utopia on a large scale and ended up with the inferno, would bear this out. Think of Cambodia under Pol Pot.

Exploring different changes in social organization is precisely the narrative strategy Atwood uses in her earlier speculative fiction work, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). There, she imagines Christian theocracy in a United States, now named the Republic of Gilead reformed after terrorist attack, where women like the main character, Offred, have lost autonomy. Offred's perspective allows Atwood to explore multiple manifestations of misogyny and the subjugation

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of women in this society. Exploring changes in social organization, and denouncing manifestations that reflect patterns in contemporary culture, are operative strategies in Atwood's fiction.

2: Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

Whereas *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is fairly direct in its denunciation of the Christian theocracy of Gilead, the overall world of *Oryx and Crake* is more multivalent. *Oryx and Crake* is limited to the perspective of Snowman; the narrative alternates between representations of Snowman's struggle for survival in a post|apocalyptic world following a biological catastrophe, and his recollections of the pre-catastrophe world. The novel's structure is Proustian; echoing Marcel's madeline in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Snowman remembers his past vividly while eating mangoes on the beach. In the pre-catastrophe world, Snowman is Jimmy. Jimmy, as a younger and more naïve man, is fairly oblivious to many of the subtexts and patterns emerging around him. *Oryx and Crake* became the first part of the *MaddAddam* trilogy when Atwood released a sequel, *The Year of the Flood* (2009). Although now part of a trilogy, *Oryx and Crake* was initially published as a stand-alone novel and structurally can be understood independently of the sequels. Moreover, the most important themes of *Oryx and Crake* are limited to it as a novel—namely, Atwood's critique of three patterns of neoliberal subjectivity: indifference, erasure, and cynicism. These patterns are embodied in the characters of Jimmy, Oryx, and Crake.

Atwood depicts a future where neoliberal ideals have triumphed over all others; states cease to exist and corporations dominate all social structures. The epitome of neoliberal structures is the "compound." Atwood's world is composed of "compounds" and "pleeblands," where compounds are company-run walled cities. Scientists in the compounds are protected by the CorpSeCorps (Corporate Security Corporation, or morbidly, Corpse Corporation), whereas

the pleeblands are sprawling urban jungles. Atwood frames the depiction of compounds around the imagery of a huge bonfire, roasting infected animals. Jimmy's father, initially a genographer for OrganInc Farms, serves as a kind of basis for the compound mentality: the destruction of these animals is a sign that they need to protect their borders even more, and bring in all services the compound relies on under the corporate umbrella (19). Those who live in the compound feel they are threatened by an outside world at risk of destruction from bioweapons. The compounds are shown to be growing, since "there was always a risk when you went through the cities" (27). "Pleeblands" is the nickname the compound people give the cities; plebian lands (with "bland" assonance), a concept reflecting the elitism and classism of the compound people. Jimmy's mother (Sharon) and father disagree on the appeal of the compounds; Jimmy's mother feels they are artificial, but Jimmy's father emphasizes the safety (27). Later, Jimmy's father is hired by NooSkins at the HelthWyzer Compound, and they live at a nicer house with a bigger pool, but also have tighter security with regular strip searches (53). Jimmy's father emphasizes that tight security is reasonable because the compounds are threatened by deadly pathogens. For those valued by corporations, compounds offer safety, so long as no one asks too many questions.

Atwood displays multivalence toward the compounds and the pleeblands, interrogating the precepts and ideology of not only those who support each respective zone, but also those who critique the opposing zone. While Atwood certainly implies there is a dystopian quality to the Compounds and their complete lack of egalitarianism, she also offers no character who can reasonably critique them. Moreover, Atwood imagines no serious public sphere where such a critique could or would take place. Jimmy's parents at times read like caricatures of neoliberal and liberal (or perhaps neo-luddite) ideologies. Jimmy's father believes there should be no legal or moral restrictions on the development of new technologies, but strongly favors an

authoritarian, private defense force. There is no evidence that there is a working federal

government, nor is there a reference to a state or local police force. While these institutions may

exist in the Pleeblands, Jimmy seems unaware of their existence or of any authoritative

alternative to the CorpSeCorps. Jimmy's mother, Sharon, is skeptical of some of the compound's

genetic engineering and the prices the compound charges, but is not able to convince her

husband that any of her critiques have merit. The inability of critics to offer viable alternatives to

the conditions of neoliberal empire emerges as a refrain of the novel.

While Jimmy's father and mother can read like caricatures of different ideological

perspectives, their debates do highlight how the neoliberal ideology of the compounds is

connected to Atwood's concerns about bioengineering. Sharon (almost always referred to as

"Jimmy's mother") articulates a reactionary response to the news that Jimmy's father has helped

develop "human neocortex tissue growing in a pigoon" (56). Pigoons are genetically engineered

pigs. Sharon argues, "What you're doing – this pig brain thing. You're interfering with the

building blocks of life. It's immoral. It's . . . sacrilegious" (57). Sharon is not particularly

religious; Jimmy's father responds that "It's just proteins, you know that! There's nothing sacred

about cells and tissue, it's just . . ."; Sharon cuts him off by retorting that "I'm familiar with the

theory" (57). Sharon's ability to finish the sentences of Jimmy's father suggests their arguments

rely on well-established commonplace arguments, the benchmarks of each respective ideology.

At this point, Jimmy's father moves away from Sharon's ethical critique with a *tu quoque* fallacy

that nonetheless succeeds, "it's been paying for your room and board, it's been putting the food

on your table. You're hardly in a position to take the high ground" (57). Although Sharon has

quit her job in part because of her ethical concerns, since she remains financially dependent on

Jimmy's father, she is unable to move past this *tu quoque* and escape her own complicity in this

system. The success of Jimmy's father, and the lack of alternatives for Jimmy's mother, is possible in part because there seem to be no outside institutions, governmental or otherwise, that regulate or would regulate the bioengineering of HelthWyzer. HelthWyzer is primarily autonomous, with its own military/police force in the CorpSeCorps. In a world where neo-liberal ideals are taken to their end, with no regulatory government and individual corporations only responsible to the force of the free market, what force can critique the corporation and be heard? Just as there is no government force for individual citizens to take recourse to, so is there no public sphere that seems to matter for the compounds. There is a public sphere in the pleeblands, but this seems unable to impact the compounds or those living in it. Sharon's only recourse, to avoid complicity in the experiments of Jimmy's father, is to leave the family altogether, which she shortly does.

In the pleeblands, the range of the public sphere is more mixed, the government remains non-existent, and the capacity of individuals to formulate coherent critiques of the existing system remain underdeveloped. The pleeblands are more diffuse and less consistent than the compounds, and consequently there are some uneven forms of discourse and political resistance. People do watch the news, both comical variations and broadcast professional journalism. During his youth, Jimmy becomes friends with an introverted scientist named Glenn, who goes by the nickname Crake throughout the novel. Jimmy spends parts of his youth watching the "Noodie News" with Crake, and later as an adult occasionally watches professional journalism with him (181). It is through televised broadcast journalism that Jimmy learns of protests against the company Happicuppa. Happicuppa is a coffee company that seems perhaps modeled on Starbucks. These protests are the result of genetically modified plants that cause small growers and laborers to go out of business. Although Jimmy and Crake are not wholly aware of how this

occurs, there is a global resistance movement to the company (179). Despite this, Jimmy and Crake feel that there "aren't any sides" and initially change the channel when learning about the protests. In the pleeblands, the internet allows for some amount of freedom of speech. There is a public sphere capable of functioning to some extent, and this sphere is able to participate in forms of resistance to transnational global empires through likewise globalized resistance movements.

So while the Happicuppa protests show first that bioengineering amplifies the conflicts latent in neoliberalism, Atwood does seem to imply that some form of organized resistance is possible. Why, then, does Jimmy not follow in the footsteps of his mother and take part in this resistance? This of course would not be in keeping with his character, but it also makes the obliviousness and indifference of Jimmy central to the narrative's rhetorical arc. Jimmy does not actively lie to the reader, but he is oblivious to many subtexts. When Crake's father dies because he "went off a pleebland overpass" (182) Jimmy never asks about or imagines the possibility that Crake's father was murdered by the CorpSeCorps, as Crake suspects. As Jimmy reflects, "He'd grown up in walled spaces, and then he had become one" (184). Jimmy's complacency continues through much of the novel; he initially finds ChickieNobs (a genetically modified chicken variant) disgusting, but later eats them with some regularity. In the same way, he is aware of the violent means the CorpSeCorps uses to achieve its goals, but sees the Happicuppa resistance movement as futile. Jimmy is aware of the corruption and violence of the neoliberal state, but feels helpless to change it and thus reverts to indifference.

Jimmy and Oryx embody different shades of hopelessness and pessimism that characterize one form of postmodern subjectivity that is the root of Klein's critique of science fiction narratives. Jimmy embodies indifference, whereas Oryx embodies complicity in cultural

and historical erasure. Jameson's first and "safest" characterization of the postmodern is "an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place" (ix). Jimmy is unable to imagine a future that is meaningfully changed by his actions or the actions of those around him. Time and history advance, but he is detached from it. The subject of his erotic fixation is Oryx, a former sex slave hired by Crake at his research laboratory. Oryx actively rejects the past as a way of hardening herself against her traumas so that she can gain financial and emotional security. Whereas Jimmy reflects a western subjectivity that is apathetic at the apparent immensity of neoliberal empire—whether it be in the form of Happicuppa or the CorpSeCorps—Oryx embodies a postcolonial subjectivity that attempts to erase the past in order to adapt to western modernity.

It is tempting to see Oryx not as the complement to Jimmy but as his counterpart. Oryx certainly challenges Jimmy's worldview, but this does not mean that Atwood is advocating for the reader to accept Oryx's strategy of historical erasure as a method of avoiding emotional hardship. Oryx grew up wherever her patrons or owners would take her. When Jimmy asks her about where she was born, Oryx is evasive. Jimmy asks:

> A village in Indonesia, or else Myanmar? Not those, said Oryx, though she couldn't be
> sure. It wasn't India though. Vietnam? Jimmy guessed. Cambodia? Oryx looked down at
> her hands, examining her nails. It didn't matter. (115)

After her father dies, Oryx is sold by her family because without the father's work to sustain them, they will starve. Whereas Jimmy is indifferent throughout the novel to larger political actions, when it comes to personal acts of exploitation toward Oryx, Jimmy wants revenge. In regard to the man that bought Oryx from her family, Jimmy emphasizes that "I'd like to kill this guy" (119). In response to this, Oryx asks if "[Jimmy] would like it better if we all starved to

death?" (119). If we look at this exchange as a kind of representative example of Oryx's ideology, Oryx is simply taking the principles that Jimmy has lived by his entire life and applying them to her less fortunate situation. She accepts that life is not fair, and moves on, trying to better her own situation in life. For this reason, many readers (at least, many of my students in the past) tend to identify with Oryx and empathize with her. She embodies realist pragmatics that rejects a sense of self-victimization. She understands that she is wholly complicit in an exploitative system and refuses to let this undermine her psyche or impede her goals of personal fulfillment and professional success. All of these elements make Oryx an appealing character for western individuals living in the conditions of postmodernity. She is hardened by learned indifference. She refuses to resent the injustice done to her, and in turn this gives her permission to ignore all other injustices in the world. Readers who also feel helpless to change the conditions of neoliberal empire might look to Oryx and see an example of how to continue accepting the benefits of neoliberalism while also accepting they cannot change the underlying system.

These elements, then, which make Oryx a compelling character, are also what constitute her fatal flaw. Oryx is a tragic character; she is killed in the final scenes of the novel, betrayed by Crake. She is blinded by the nihilism and violence of Crake precisely because she has intentionally blinded herself to all forms of injustice. She rejects her ethnic and cultural heritage, which is not difficult because she is as an adult totally detached from her cultural roots due to globalized diaspora and human trafficking. In the World Health Organization's four principles characterizing neo-liberal ideology, their second principle is that "free trade benefits all nations – rich or poor – because every nation has a comparative advantage," and their fourth principle is that in "the distribution of economic goods, individual responsibility replaces the concepts of

public goods and community" ("Neo-Liberal Ideas"). Oryx's responses to Jimmy's questions reflects both of these ideals. First, Oryx believes that the institutions and cultural practices that resulted in her joining the slave trade and being transplanted from her home country to the West are basically justified because there was no other alternative—she practically paraphrases Margaret Thatcher. Second, Oryx never considers the possibility that state intervention would have been preferable in her life narrative, because she believes that it is her individual responsibility to pull herself up by the bootstraps (although she never uses those exact words). Atwood presents Oryx as a kind of neoliberal fantasy—a colonized subject who believes in personal responsibility and accepts that she pulled herself up by the bootstraps (although she is undoubtedly aware of her boss's erotic fixation). She is uninterested in the consequences of colonization, indeed refuses to consider which nation she originally came from, because thinking of her identity in the context of the history of colonization would reject her principles of self-determination. Thus, Crake's betrayal of Oryx is an indication of Atwood's rejection of the embodiment of neoliberal ideology *par excellence*.

Whereas Jimmy embodies complicity with empire, and Oryx embodies cultural erasure, Crake embodies unbridled cynicism. Crake grew up not simply believing that the systems at large cannot be changed, but rather being actively confronted by the violence elicited by even minor acts of speaking up. Crake believes that both of his parents were killed by the CorpSeCorps for doubts about the system, albeit not particularly vocal ones. Crake is aware of terrorists who work against the CorpSeCorp and the compounds, and believes "They're after the whole system, they want to shut it down" (217). Compared to the compounds, their actions seem reasonable to Crake after he learns the basic mercantile interests of Helthwyzer in perpetuating diseases. Since Helthwyzer's revenue comes from diseases, it's advantageous to them if they

spread diseases themselves that they will have the cure ready for. They achieve this through vitamin pills spiked with pathogens that they have developed cures for (210-211). Crake combines the methods of Helthwyzer with the goals of the terrorists. Instead of releasing a disease where the cure is already prepared, Crake simply releases a disease where there is no cure. While Crake falls into the conventions of a mad scientist, his character simply acts following the only available means he sees. Since there is "no alternative" to the global system in place, a point implicitly believed by both Jimmy and Oryx, he creates one—genetically engineered humans, the "Crakers." If neo-liberal capitalist empire is biologically determined by human nature, then Crake sees the annihilation of humanity as the only alternative to that system. When any meaningful intervention results in assassination by the CorpSeCorps, and small-scale terrorism is insufficient, Crake sees a global pandemic as the only way to disrupt the capitalist empire that has controlled his life.

Crake's pandemic is a framing device for the rhetorical trajectory of the narrative, and the true counterpart to the postmodern subjectivity latent in both Oryx and Jimmy. The Happicuppa protests, the other forms of resistance and activism that various characters imagine or participate in throughout the novel, are retroactively presented as the most reasonable form of resistance to the issues the novel confronts. Crake's pandemic is a logical extreme, a demonstration of the repercussions not just of the assassinations and authoritarianism of the CorpSeCorps but of the indifference and complicity of Jimmy and Oryx. Atwood's novel argues for a robust, active, and engaged environmental movement. She continues to explore the challenges and weaknesses of such a movement through the "God's Gardeners" movement in *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013). The rhetorical weakness of Atwood's novel, if it could be called that, is that it is at times too subtle. It is too easy to identify both with Jimmy and with Oryx without seeing

their ideologies as both subject to critique and interrogation. Atwood's novel critiques the

indifference of postmodern subjectivity, embodied in Jimmy, and homogeneity-induced erasure,

embodied in Oryx. The future needs difference, needs memory, needs awareness. In

deconstructing the ideology of two embodiments of neoliberal subjectivity, Atwood establishes

the importance in finding a meaningful response to the conditions of neoliberal empire.

3: Aslan's *The Islands at the End of the World*

Austin Aslan's *The Islands at the End of the World* explores multiple contours of

neoliberal empire, including the role of the United States military, issues of sustainability in

Hawaiʻi, and the role of the United States in Hawaiʻi. Whereas Atwood consciously evades a

direct commentary on colonialism when considering the character of Oryx, Aslan uses Hawaiʻi

as a key landscape in considering contemporary postcolonial representations. Aslan's novel in

particular critiques metanarratives of the United States military's omnipotence and

omnibenevolence and the precariousness of life in Hawaiʻi as a tourist state. In particular, Aslan

explores the idea of kamaʻaina subjectivity in modern Hawaiʻi through the character of Lei.

The majority of the narrative revolves around the hapa girl Lei and her *haole* (Lei's

characterization, here meaning white) father Mike on their quest to return from Oʻahu to Hawaiʻi

(The Big Island) after an astronomical event, "The Emerald Orchid," disrupts all electrical

devices with internal circuitry in the world (motors and gas-powered engines remain functional).

Lei and Mike live on the Big Island, but travel to Oʻahu for epilepsy treatments for Lei. While

they are there, the Emerald Orchid arrives unexpectedly, cutting off air travel and creating a

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crisis on Oʻahu. Shipments of food stop arriving, and thousands of tourists are cut off from their homes. As the crisis escalates, Lei and Mike make their way to Marine Corps Base at Kāneʻohe Bay, which begins as a transit camp, but begins to resemble a concentration camp when the crisis is not resolved. Lei and Mike escape and steal a boat to make their way to Molokaʻi, where they find a religiously-led commune. This commune helps them get to Maui, where they encounter a sheriff that is taking heavy fines from all travelers. After a series of hostile encounters with the sheriff, Lei and Mike finally reach the Big Island. There, Lei ascends to the top of Mauna Kea so that she can use the telescopes to communicate with the Emerald Orchid, which is an extraterrestrial being. There is a systematic nature to Lei and Mike's journey, as each different island highlights different responses to the issues of sustainability and the challenges when neoliberal order breaks down. Moreover, each of the different islands gives a sense of how different groups of people have responded to and continue to respond to the history of colonialism in Hawaiʻi.

The history of colonialism is latent in all representations of Hawaiʻi. The Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown in 1893 by citizens of the United States with help from US marines. In 1898, Hawaiʻi was annexed by the United States of America. As Noenoe Silva observes in *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (2004), there was strong resistance to these actions. Indeed, Silva argues that "Hawaiʻi is not a postcolonial but a (neo?) colonial state" (9). Neocolonialism, at least as defined by Sartre, is characterized by the ongoing economic dominance of a state by an external power. Hawaiʻi is not simply neocolonial,

postcolonial, or colonial. It is a site of struggle situated within neocolonial control by the United States of America, and economic determination by the forces of neoliberal empire, which is diffuse and not based on a single nation state. Indeed, much of Hawaii's history is predicated on resistance to colonization, as Silva argues that the formation of the Hawaiian nation-state modeling of European-style aristocracy was "a necessary strategy of resistance to colonization because there was a chance that the nineteenth-century Mana Nui, or 'Great Powers' might recognize national sovereignty" (9) and "Resistance and nationalism have been intertwined throughout the last two hundred years of the history of Hawai'i" (9).

Representing Hawaiian peoples in times of crisis intrinsically comments on the legacy of the overthrow and the hegemony of the United States. Yet, representing Hawai'i also speaks to a longer tradition of representing Hawaii for other reasons—as part of the tourist industry. As Cristina Bacchilega argues, Hawaii has been constructed as "*legendary Hawai'i*" which is "a space constructed for non-Hawaiians (and especially Americans) to experience, via Hawaiian legends, a Hawai'i that is exotic and primitive while beautiful and welcoming" (5). Indeed, there has been a century of corporate tourism displacing Native Hawaiian storied places in the name of constructing an artifice of Hawai'i that appears as exotic, beautiful, and welcoming (60-61). Modern narratives that confront the stereotypes of corporate tourism, then, implicitly undermine the work of neoliberal empire. As Walter Hixson observes, Hawai'i (and Alaska) were "settler colonies in which the United States took control of noncontiguous colonial space while severely marginalizing the indigenous populations" (145). Even through World War II, Beth Bailey and David Farber argue that "Hawaii was a distant territory of the U.S., the fruit of one of the

nation's relatively few successful imperial ventures in the late nineteenth century" (16) and that it was "a colonial possession" (17). The colonial history of Hawaii was not erased with statehood in 1959.

This history is elicited the first time the military is mentioned in *The Islands at the End of the World* when Lei's grandfather observes that "the seizure of Hawaii by the military was a despicable act" (22). While Lei's grandfather feels that the land was taken, he adds on that this should not be a pretext to kick out hapa and haole individuals living in Hawaii today, setting the rhetorical tone of the novel as a whole—that Hawaii and Hawaiians suffer from a history of injustice, but that rejecting the settler colonists is not tenable. Lei, as the hapa daughter of haole and Hawaiian peoples, embodies the contemporary challenges of living with this history. The consequence on Lei's consciousness of this split in identities, between haole settler colonialism and Hawaiian culture, is that she is left epileptic. While Lei's epilepsy is not purely metaphorical, it does reinforce the themes surrounding Lei's divided consciousness. These divides are intensified during Lei's confrontation with the military.

Representations of the military hinge on a key element of modern neoliberal empire, the believed exceptionalism of the United States. First, there is the common claim that the United States military is exceptional in being the strongest in the world—it unquestionably is the most expensive. But US exceptionalism extends beyond this. As Hardt and Negri observe, "the United States has from its inception claimed to be *an exception from the corruption* of the European forms of sovereignty, and in this sense it has served as the beacon of republican virtue in the world" (*Multitude* 8). This belief in exception from corruption is also used to justify the second form of US exceptionalism, "exception from the law" (8). This belief that the United States military does not "have to obey the rules to which others are subject" (8) has been reiterated by

American presidential candidates during the 2016 election, particularly Donald Trump who has argued that the United States military should be willing to use torture (Diamond). I have discussed the Trump candidacy more in chapter one, and the primary point I am making here is that claims of US exceptionalism are still alive and well in contemporary political discourse. Hardt and Negri are not "being for or against the United States" (9), rather, the exceptionalism of the United States is being used to justify what they characterize as war becoming a "permanent social relation" (12) which hinders movements toward international democratic action. Conversely, as Naomi Klein argues in *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), the "permanent social relation" of war reifies neoliberal empire, as Thatcher managed in the Falklands, Bolivia, and as was one of the apparent goals of the United States in Iraq following its "Shock and Awe" campaign.

Hawaiʻi remains a crucial juncture in understanding the modern United States military. The significance of Hawaiʻi to the United States' military has grown since World War II. Since the 1970s, Hawaiʻi has been the seat of the RIMPAC conference, the "Rim of the Pacific Exercise," and Hawaiʻi is the seat of the United States Pacific Command, which "encompasses about half the earth's surface" ("Headquarters"). The novel's first consideration of the military is a slight over-statement, with Lei-as-narrator saying that Oʻahu is "swarming with military—at least ten percent of the islanders work in the armed forces" (29), which is more than is the case, but only slightly so. About the time the novel was written, it was 776 armed forces workers per 10,000 (Thomas). Additionally, Hawaiʻi is full of military bases, including the Marine Corps

Base at Kāneʻohe Bay. In the aftermath of the arrival of the Emerald Orchid, the army drafts a plan to "send some tourists to Marine Corps Base Hawaiʻi" as part of the goal to "eventually put them on navy ships headed for the West Coast" (84). Mike's reaction to this plan is that they are going to "set up concentration camps for fifty thousand fat rednecks in Hawaiian shirts" (84). When talking to strangers at an airport, Mike and Lei hear one man characterize the base as a refugee camp, adding that no one is supposed to leave the camp once they enter (90). Ultimately, Lei and Mike begin to run out of options, and after hitting a military checkpoint, are forced to go to this camp.

Aslan's characterization of Lei reinforces the concept of American exceptionalism. After hearing her father, Mike, express fear that the military remove all rights, Lei believes that "the military is filled with normal people, in the end. People like Grandpa. They're *Americans*, after all. They're not going to be monsters. / Right?" (94). Initially, the army takes all of Lei and Mike's supplies, claiming they will return it to them when they leave the camp. The army's treatment of the camp seems to go through three phases, although the changes are not always clear. It is initially designed as a transit camp, a way to return tourists and other people from off-island to their homes once electronics are repaired. By the time Lei and Mike arrive, it is functioning more as an internment camp, protecting the tourists and others from the sectarian violence on the rest of the island. As the supplies on the island are squeezed thinner, it becomes a hopeless place where people wait to die, closer to representations of concentration camps, albeit without the menace.

During the internment phase, the appeal of military protection becomes more pointed as Lei learns about race-based sectarian violence in the rest of Oʻahu. While interned at the camp,

Lei befriends one of the guards, Aukina. Aukina warns that the rest of Oʻahu has become

dangerous, as he says, "The Sovereign Nationers see a chance to secede from the States.

Hawaiians are ganging up. The haoles are ganging up. The Asians are sticking together. The

Filipinos . . . You and your dad are better off staying out of it" (163) and he continues to

emphasize, "It's about *ʻohana*, yeah?" (163). On the one hand, the military serves to protect

some people—people who do not live on Oahu—from sectarian violence in times of crisis. On

the other hand, the military is not capable of handling a displaced population as large as the off-

island population on island. In *Oryx and Crake* the federal government has largely dissipated

before the novel even begins; there is never any reason to think it would be effective or

productive to consider whether FEMA or the CDC would be able to help against Crake's plague.

The nature of the catastrophe in *The Islands at the End of the World* is quite different from that

of *Oryx and Crake*, but so are the political circumstances. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward

Said argues that "the rhetoric of power all too easily produces an illusion of benevolence when

deployed in an imperial setting" (xvii). Aslan's purpose is not to critique the hegemony of the

United States in Hawaii. If it was, then the narrative likely would present the military as

maleficent. Instead, Aslan interrogates the precepts of American exceptionalism. It is not that the

army is evil, it is that it is unable to handle the challenges caused by a global blackout. Finally,

the military fails to recognize its own limitations, and in failing to recognize its inability to

handle the crisis, loses its sense of beneficence.

While Aslan does not mean to critique US hegemony in Hawaii, it is not the case that the

novel reinforces a Hawkish, neoconservative ideology. Neoconservative ideology often goes

hand-in-hand with post|apocalyptic literature, because neoconservative ideology is predicated on

the fear of suddenly emerging threats. For instance, Tom Clancy's novels often are predicated on suddenly emerging disasters, as is the case in *The Sum of All Fears* (1991), *Debt of Honor* (1994), and *Rainbow Six* (1998), which advocate for American military spending and a willingness to intervene militarily in global theaters. Neoconservative ideology is largely related to the set of practices and beliefs that went into the administration of George W. Bush, which favored the "Bush doctrine" of unilateral, pre-emptive strikes against perceived threats. Robert Kagan and William Kristol present a framework for neoconservative ideology in *Present Dangers* (2000). There, they argue that "the world *can* grow perilous with astonishing speed' (9) and consequently, the United States needs to reverse its "gradual but steady moral and strategic disarmament" (7) and reassert itself as a global superpower. Yet just as an anti-imperial reading of *The Islands at the End of the World* does not hold up because the narrative suggests that the military protects travelers from sectarian violence, so does a neo-conservative reading also fail for the opposite reason. While it may be the case that the presentation of the military as being in a state of decline or decay is meant to implicitly reinforce a call for greater military spending, the military would also have to be presented as beneficent for that to be convincing. Instead, the beneficence of the military is in severe doubt. While the military may protect the populace from sectarian violence, it also refuses to let people leave.

So the depiction of the military and the overall ideological position of the text is decidedly mixed. The bottom line is that conventional forms of American hegemony, as represented in military institutions, are unable to manage the crisis of the Emerald Orchid. Instead, alternatives not only can exist, they must. In this way, the failure of the military to resolve the situation intensifies the focus on the novel's advocacy for environmental sustainability and alternatives to neoliberal empire. In direct contrast to Klein's arguments,

Aslan's novel presents a direct critique of the precariousness of life on Oʻahu in its current form, and presents a commune on Molokaʻi as an alternative to capitalism. In July of 2016, I interviewed Aslan[19] to explore this facet of the novel in particular.

Aslan did not write *The Islands at the End of the World* as an "eco-thriller" although he feels it can "loosely be defined this way." "Loosely" because the "story and the disaster that sets the plot in motion aren't caused by, or motivated by, nature per se. Geography and poor human planning are the culprits." That is, while the Emerald Orchid is an extra-terrestrial alien, its arrival only constitutes a crisis in Hawaiʻi because of the latent precariousness of Hawaiʻi to any major disruption. Aslan reiterates a point that the character Mike makes in the novel. In my interview, Aslan argues that "95% of Hawaii's food is imported every day. Ninety-five percent! The islands are home to 1.5 million people. If things got tough there, what would they eat? Where would they flee?" In *The Islands at the End of the World* the character Mike argues that "There are a million people on O`ahu. Ninety-five percent of the food is imported every day. If the planes and boats with the food really have stopped trickling in, well, do the math. Not to mention gas …" (71). That is, Aslan puts his critique of the precariousness of O`ahu's dependence on imported foods directly into the novel. It is this precariousness that in turn undermines the military's ability to cope with the crisis and the dystopian tone of everything that happens on O`ahu.

Aslan does reject the term "Cli-Fi" in its applicability to the novel. Aslan argues that "Climate and weather and global warming and climate change have nothing to do with this story" and that instead the novel is "a cautionary tale about human hubris and too much reliance

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[19] The full text of this interview can be found in the appendix.

on technology and globalization to make our world work, and it begs for a new vision for a Hawai`i that is much more self-sustaining and locally-operated than it currently is." He does feel that the themes of interdependency and sustainability "undergird the entire story." So while Aslan's novel does not neatly fall into the argumentative agenda of Klein, for instance, it does couple environmentalist concerns with a consideration of both neoliberal empire and conventional state-based imperialism vis-à-vis the United States. Klein, Atwood, and Aslan are all part of an environmentalist movement that, as Thomas Jundt puts it, maintains that "the only hope for securing a future for themselves, democracy, and the planet was to stop thinking of humans as living outside nature" (3). That being said, Aslan emphasizes that his narrative comes first, as the "quickest way to kill a good plot and deaden great characters is to start using them as bullhorns for specific agendas."

Whereas McCarthy's *The Road* presents a totally dead world where there is little hope of moving beyond a salvagepunk future, *The Islands at the End of the World* allows for characters to see different social arrangements and ways of reconstituting society following disaster. On Molokaʻi, Lei and Mike encounter a commune run by theocrat Uncle Akoni. Lei is hopeful for this community, and imagines "a glimpse of Hawaiʻi's future," "at least for Molokaʻi" (233). Lei feels that a bumper sticker, "SUST ʻĀINA BILITY" with its reference to "ʻĀina" connects the concept of sustainability to being kamaʻāina, "child of the land." The commune on Molokaʻi allows Lei to see a future that couples a future oriented toward sustainability with an immersion in Hawaiian culture.

While the circumstances on Molokaʻi are still challenging, they are nowhere near as dire as on Oʻahu. In this sense, the structure of *The Islands at the End of the World* mirrors Atwood's multiple futures in "It's Not Climate Change, It's Everything Change." Each island represents a different ideological response to disaster. Oʻahu reflects the failure of United States hegemony, as it breaks down into sectarian violence, and the increasing depravity of the military base. Molokai offers a utopic, religiously based commune. The utopic quality of Molokaʻi nevertheless makes the commune seem impermanent. Lei ponders how long Uncle Akoni's "experiment" will last, but accepts that in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, the people of Molokaʻi are "protected in a new world by a new set of rules" (232). Part of the new social contract of Molokaʻi involves Hawaiian chants in addition to Christian sermons, but most particularly Uncle Akoni indicates that "This place doesn't operate on a capitalist system" (226) and does not demand any payment for medical care. Reinforcing the transient nature of the commune, even Uncle Akoni accepts that the "'commune' has shallow roots. If people think you have something they'll need, you'll be a target" (227). The communities of the novel feel like they can descend into the conditions of *The Road* at a moment's notice.

Lei's epilepsy mirrors the psychological divide she faces throughout the novel due to the cultural conflict between her haole and Hawaiian heritages. In this regard, her experiences on Molokaʻi become even more important. Lei's capacity to identify with the people of Molokaʻi reinforces her sense of belonging, and moreover suggests a different response to the divisions latent in her psyche. "I've felt more accepted than I ever have before. I could stay here. I could

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be Hawaiian here. My misfit self could belong" (231). David Ketterer, in *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature* (1974), defines apocalyptic literature as narratives where "an apocalyptic transformation results from the creation of a new condition, based upon a process of extrapolation and analogy, whereby man's horizons—temporary, spatial, scientific, and ultimately philosophic—are abruptly expanded" (148). One of these philosophic expansions may be in Lei's changing understanding of personal identity. Edward Said argues that:

> If you know in advance that the African or Iranian or Chinese or Jewish or German experience is fundamentally integral, coherent, separate, and therefore comprehensible only to Africans, Iranians, Chinese, Jews, or Germans, you first of all posit as essential something which, I believe, is both historically created and the result of interpretation. (31-32).

In Lei's case, she feels "I could be Hawaiian here" (231). While this reflects the particular circumstances of Molokai and the community there, it also reflects how Lei's understanding of her own subjectivity has rapidly and essentially transformed. Lei recognizes that as historical circumstances change, the interpretation of self-identity can change as well. Moreover, the disruption of the hegemony of the United States over Hawai'i does not disrupt her self-identity—rather, it creates a solution. Moreover, Uncle Akoni offers another view of her epilepsy. Instead of purely being a disability, it may be a way for her to contact the Emerald Orchid.

Lei's connection to the Emerald Orchid, via her seizures, is the focus of the most abstract evaluation of the role of United States hegemony in the novel. In his interview, Aslan argues that "novelists have a disproportionate share of the burden in calling attention to issues, whether they

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be environmental or social or cultural or whatever. The key is for our ideas to infiltrate critical minds in the smoothest possible way," an argument not essentially different from Atwood's use of *enargeia*. So it is not in the most direct arguments of characters in the novel, but in the experiences and themes that Aslan sees the most important rhetorical work of a novel taking place. The second half of *The Islands at the End of the World* interrogates the idea of United States hegemony, first through a villain on Maui, the sheriff, and second through the reliance on the telescopes on top of Mauna Kea. Whereas Lei's experiences on Moloka'i leave her embracing her Hawaiian identity and feeling as though her cultural disruptions have been resolved, they do not rectify the underlying political issues. On Maui, the sheriff believes in retributive justice toward all haoles, and this includes her father, Mike. Mike argues:

> this is only the beginning, Lei. Hunters and gatherers. Tribal serfdoms. Survival of the
> fittest. We're not going to be at the top of the food chain. We don't have what it takes to
> be powerful. Mean. It's groups like that sheriff's posse that will be in charge. Shoot first,
> questions never. (272).

Lei rebuts: "Moloka'i was working. Starting fresh. What if all this technology and braininess got in the way, and now we can finally be back in touch with reality? What if it's an *opportunity*?" (272). If it is an opportunity, Lei does not believe it is an opportunity that should involve retributive justice against haoles like her father or involve a total rejection of the United States following her violent encounters with the sheriff.

So Lei is left with a political divide, even if she sees a path toward cultural reconciliation. As it so happens, one conflict enveloped Hawaii near the same time that Aslan's novel was published: the prospect of additional telescopes on top of Mauna Kea. The proposed Thirty

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Meter Telescope (TMT) attracted international attention in 2015 when protests halted production of the telescope (Herman). In my interview with Aslan, I asked him about the TMT controversy. He responded:

> I'm familiar with this controversy and I'm saddened by it. My thoughts are many and complex and don't fit into a box. I'll just say that I wouldn't change a word of ISLANDS in reaction to this controversy which grew heated after its publication. My perspective and Leilani's perspective on science and spirituality and culture inform the debate in their own way, regardless of current events or context, and that will always change over time no matter what.

Aslan does not want to endorse one side or the other, which reflects the ambivalence the novel shows in its treatment of the telescopes.

Lei emphasizes that ascending the mountain to the telescope will be the culmination of her family reunification and her connection with her Hawaiian ancestry. On Maui, Lei imagines her future plans: "Once I'm home—once our family is whole again—I *will* go up on Mauna Kea. I will make the pilgrimage of my ancestral *ali'i,* pay my respects to the most sacred of places in Hawai'i, and talk to the gods" (282). This reinforces a few key connections: Lei does not just see the Emerald Orchid as an alien entity, but as an embodiment of the Hawaiian pantheon. This same juxtaposition is reinforced earlier in the novel when Lei (while high) thinks: "I *am* Pele: goddess of fire and volcanoes and lightning and all things that 'rock.' I *am* the Emerald Orchid. Leilani. The Flower of Heaven" (269). Not only does Lei feel that the Emerald Orchid "is Pele" as well as herself, the Emerald Orchid also is "greater still than Pele" (269). Of course, many readers take the Emerald Orchid to be a kind of Rorschach test; Lei feels connected to Pele, so

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she projects Pele onto this clearly alien phenomenon. Yet, to dismiss the connections Lei makes is to dismiss the thematic subtexts of the narrative.

The connection of the Emerald Orchid to Pele is further reinforced when Lei ascends to the top of Mauna Kea. There, Lei decides that "I will never again run from who I am, or from where I belong" and decides to throw her medical bracelet and her epilepsy pills into the water—pills she can no longer gain access to. Lei, at least, sees her epilepsy as a product of divided identity. In the sequel, *The Girl at the Center of the World* (2015), Lei's epilepsy goes into remission as a result of her connection to the Emerald Orchid. So her connection to the emerald orchid provides psychological healing. While cajoling the Emerald Orchid to stay, they speak together that "We are *aliʻi nui*" (346). Lei and the Orchid, mediated through the connection of the telescopes, form a new kind of sovereignty.

While the connections of the Orchid to the Hawaiian pantheon are sustained throughout the novel, it is also the case that the Orchid has some thematic connections to United States hegemony. Going back to the opening sections of the novel, when Lei's grandfather argues that Lei and her father should not be "kicked out" (22) despite the history of United States colonization, he frames the narrative subtext as a consideration of why the United States, or at least haole individuals, should stay in Hawaiʻi. The Emerald Orchid is a colonist. When the Emerald Orchid arrives, it disrupts conventional power structures, against the will of the people. It does so indifferent to the current inhabitants of the planet; it is simply coming to colonize the planet, to lay its eggs. While the Emerald Orchid is initially quite disruptive to the current residents, once it has come, it needs to stay. In the narrative, this is because once the Emerald Orchid arrives, it causes all nuclear power plants to melt down; however, while it remains in the

atmosphere, it absorbs the fallout. So Lei needs to ask the Emerald Orchid to stay, she must reconcile with it despite the disruption it has caused to her life. What better way to do this than through one of the beacons of the West, the telescopes on top of Mauna Kea? In this way, connecting with the Emerald Orchid is a way of reconciling the two sides of her identity, both revitalizing her connection to her Hawaiian ancestry, while accepting the West despite the historical trauma of colonization.

Ultimately, Lei's climb to the top of Mauna Kea reifies the sense that she is capable and willing to save herself. Whereas Jimmy and Oryx embodied indifference and cultural erasure, and Crake embodies pessimistic nihilism, Lei remembers all facets of her cultural past, from the trauma of colonialism to the legends of Pele. While she is suspicious of new systems, such as Akoni's commune, she sees that in some communities, alternatives to the predominant forms of capitalism can exist. Atwood is systematic in *Oryx and Crake* in deconstructing complicity with the formations of neoliberal empire. Aslan's novel is multivalent about how abrupt a break with empire can be, emphasizing the importance of psychological reconciliation with the conflicting forms of modernity. Both novels showcase the importance of breaking away from the postmodern condition, the inability to think of the present historically. The ideology of the future needs memory; it cannot erase the past, nor can it evade the traumas of colonial history.

Chapter Five: Abandoning the Public Sphere: From *Children of Men* to *Pacific Rim*

Post|apocalyptic narrative is closely related to dystopia and utopia. One of the deepest questions all three of these discursive formations explore is: what should be the shape and extent of governance and governments? While many post|apocalyptic narratives depict the fall of governments, quite a few focus on the reconstitution of governments, or the perseverance of governments in times of strife. In the films *Children of Men* (2006) and *Pacific Rim* (2013) for instance, governments continue to function under exceptional hardship. Although the government of *Children of Men* is authoritarian and the government of *Pacific Rim* is at times inept, both narratives also explore an opposition in governmental style: isolationism and transnationalism. To that extent, they offer an important counterpart to the total lack of society in *The Road* (2006), the failure of the United States military in *The Islands at the End of the World* (2014), and the plutocracy of the pre-apocalypse *MaddAddam* series (2003-2014).

Post|apocalyptic states confront stress on material infrastructure and resources, and this can often result in the disruption of conventional broadcast structures. Private individuals understand their relationship to the state in large part mediated through major media infrastructures and technologies. Newspapers, radio, television, and the internet all play a part in an individual's understanding of the state, and the world at large. The public sphere today occupies a greater number of roles than was conceived under Habermas. It can reify hegemony, but also can provide venues for counter-hegemonic productions. As such, it (or they, if we imagine a multiplicity of public spheres) is the territory in which the past is historicized and the future is imagined. Yet the preponderance of media forms also means that it can often be a struggle to comprehend the volume of information people interpret on a daily basis. At the heart of the relationship between the state and the people there is one central question: how can we engage in

a public sphere if we are too distracted, too preoccupied, to engage with it substantively? *Children of Men* and *Pacific Rim* attempt to answer this question in very different ways.

Children of Men is a film directed by Alfonso Cuarón based on the novel by PD James, *The Children of Men* (1992), about a world where universal infertility has set humanity up to go extinct. Theodore (Theo) Faron is the viewpoint character in both forms of the narrative. Due to the impending extinction, the United Kingdom has taken on a variety of questionable policies in the name of preserving order during humanity's last days. During the course of the narrative, Theo learns that a woman has become pregnant, and Theo takes it upon himself to protect her. This much of the skeleton of the narrative remains intact between novel and film, although the differences beyond this are significant.

Children of Men is indebted to the aesthetic and political history of the 1980s. PD James' novel interrogates the precepts of the political paradigm of Margaret Thatcher, the prime minister of United Kingdom from 1975 to 1990. While not all of the focus is on Thatcher in particular—there's some consideration of older authoritarian leaders, such as Cromwell—her policies are the central subtext. While the novel is remarkable, the film has been particularly well-praised by some critics. Slavoj Žižek argues that the backgrounds of the film allow the viewer to challenge hegemony, echoing the rhetorical tradition of Jean Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni. Despite Žižek's praise of *Children of Men*, this chapter, building on the philosophical tradition of Habermas, argues that imagery alone is insufficient to represent alternatives to the public sphere. So, while *Children of Men* offers compelling imagery, it reifies much of the ideology it seeks to deconstruct.

Like *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996), *Pacific Rim* is a response to Japanese animation of the 1980s. It is through-and-through a "save the world" heroic adventure, focusing

on individual pilots who are tasked with piloting giant robots named Jaegers (German for "hunters") to combat monstrous creatures called Kaiju (literally Japanese for "strange beast" although translated in the film as "giant beast"). The pilots are required to form telepathic connections to the robots in order to control them; two pilots must pilot one Jaeger, and while they form this telepathic bond to the robot, they also connect to each other. This telepathic connection relies on the latent psyche of the pilots, their valence, and while "drifting" (forming the psychic connection), the subconscious of the pilots can become manifest. The narrative arc of the film focuses on the psychological development of the two main pilots, Raleigh Becket (Charlie Hunnam) and Mako Mori (Rinko Kinkuchi).

Unlike *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, which explores the aesthetics of the medium while also offering a skeptical view of unified world governance, *Pacific Rim* is an homage to the genre and offers a softer critique of world governance. To this extent, *Pacific Rim* is politically closer to *AKIRA* (1988) and almost the political antithesis of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* despite the rampant narrative similarities between the two. Like *AKIRA* and many other action films, the development of political consciousness is coupled with a rejection of the state—which in this case is a world government rather than an individual nation. Finally, like *AKIRA* (here the manga rather than the film, where vehicle parts are harvested from wrecks), the narrative also focuses on the necrofuturistic elements of the narrative, in particular the harvesting of the kaiju after they have been killed for profit. To this extent, *Pacific Rim* is a nearly perfect embodiment of neoliberal consciousness.

The rejection of the state in both of these narratives is coupled with a rejection and a disaffection with the public sphere. Both narratives focus on the valence of the central characters, their psyche, mental state, and willingness to confront the challenges the threat of extinction

presents. Both Theo Faron and Raleigh Becket become mired in hopelessness and despair. Both are compelled to disregard collective political authority in favor of individual action. While apocalyptic film centers on the awakening of an individual's political consciousness, this political consciousness nonetheless parodies the paroxysms of collective action and eschews entirely the precept that the public sphere offers a viable venue for social change. The narrative's attitude toward the state, the inability to confront challenges through rational discourse in the public sphere, and the psychological development of the characters are all intrinsically linked. With this in mind, I would now like to clarify what specifically I mean by the public sphere and how it represents world order.

<div align="center">The Public Sphere and World Order</div>

Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) synthesizes historical and sociological methodologies (with some economics and law) to account for "the emergence, transformation, and disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere" (xi). Habermas's work from the onset was not just about presenting a historical understanding for the development of the public sphere, but also a way for understanding issues with the public sphere in Habermas's day, and with its possible decline. Theoretical understandings of the public sphere have tended to go hand in hand with considerations of its decline or preservation. For Habermas, the concept of the public sphere is predicated on understanding the ways that the bourgeois, rather than the "first estate" of the aristocrats, came to determine the rules that make up their lives. In particular, Habermas focuses on private people who come together "against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor" (27). More generally, to explore the public sphere is to explore how the rules governing our lives

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might be changed. The public sphere, as a space where people use reason to negotiate the rules of their commodity exchange and labor, is predicated on political and social independence and autonomy. It could not have existed in a meaningful sense while there was a ruling caste that took it as their role to make such decisions. Contrasted to earlier periods in history, it is egalitarian, almost idyllic.

At the inception of the public sphere, Habermas emphasizes that people were directly engaged, not passive recipients. The public sphere has changed: it "assumes the form of a consumer item" (164). Habermas accepts that to take part in the public sphere has always required some capital "to pay for books, theater, concert, and museum" but argues that "the conversation itself is administered" through professionals, particularly on the radio, television, and internet, and "consensus about the subject matter is made largely superfluous by that concerning form" (164). The commodification of the public sphere results in it becoming a "tranquilizing substitute for action" (164). In essence then, what Susan Sontag critiqued about the imagination of disaster (as I discuss in chapter two), Habermas presents as a more general concern with contemporary discourse: instead of precipitating action, it tranquilizes the citizens it otherwise would empower. Habermas laments the point at which debate, the nexus of rationality, loses agency. Habermas can be, and has been, critiqued for idealizing a nostalgic form of the public sphere while also, arguably, overstating its decay. He imagines debate and public discourse as the point at which "property-owning private people would meet as 'human beings' and only as such" (164). The notion that people could put aside differences in the context of the public sphere for discourse that relies purely on reason has been seen as overly optimistic by a number of critics. That being said, Habermas's framework remains a valuable tool in understanding the relationship between individuals and the state.

One of the most predominant representations of the public sphere in post|apocalyptic and dystopian narratives is the deformed form of the public sphere, where the institutions of the public sphere are overcome by the dystopian forces of propaganda. In Michael Radford's *1984* (1984), the face of the leader speaks to crowds of people, with no possibility for interaction. In Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* (1988), Lewis Prothero, as the voice of the government, is also a former concentration camp leader. Broadcast media generally challenges two of the most important facets of Habermas's formulation: the extent of access, and the rejection of hierarchy. The appeal of the public sphere, for Habermas, was the way that people could come together on even footing. In the case of televised broadcast media, it is almost never the case that all people have equal access to broadcasting infrastructure (cameras, channels, etc), and there is almost always heavy selection in who gets to be represented. Some recent post|apocalyptic texts seem more multivalent about the role of propaganda, as Susan Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010) revolves around counter-hegemonic propaganda, as Katniss Everdeen becomes a propaganda symbol for a resistance army.

Yet it is not the case that people will always have equal access or equal power in the public sphere, even in non-dystopian works. If the public sphere could only be understood when all of its conditions are perfectly met, then Habermas's formulation would be unusable. Sorting out just how far from the ideal of the public sphere actual discourse can stray and remain relevant to the model has been a source of ongoing debate. Fraser's "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" is a critique of Habermas's theory, but one which emphasizes the usefulness and necessity of his basic premises. Fraser sees the concept of the public sphere as essential for a number of reasons, and argues that conflating political activities and the public sphere leads to the autonomy of the public sphere

being eroded. This conflation tragically "provided ballast to processes whereby the socialist vision became institutionalized in an authoritarian statist form instead of in a participatory democratic form" (56). Subjecting the economy to control by a socialist state does not mean that the citizenry will actually be able to control that economy if there is no public sphere, and ignoring the relationship of the public sphere to the state means allowing the state to be authoritarian rather than egalitarian. Fraser's analysis raises the question: what should be the role of the state, when it comes to the public sphere?

Fraser presents four assumptions that she believes Habermas accepted that are not necessarily true: (1) the assumption that it is possible for interlocutors in a public sphere to bracket status differentials and to deliberate 'as if' they were social equals, (2) the assumption that the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, (3) the assumption that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and (4) the assumption that a democratic public sphere requires a separation between civil society and the state (62-63). There are several implications from Fraser's critique. First, the public sphere was never as predicated on truly rational-critical debate as Habermas makes it seem to be. It has always relied on rhetoric, not only logic, but ethical and pathetic appeals as well. In societies predicated on representative democracy, it may not be wise to so firmly differentiate between civic discourse in the state and the public sphere as composed of private individuals—that is, the state and the public sphere will necessarily interact and overlap, and understanding this interaction is important in avoiding authoritarian forms of the state. This is particularly helpful in avoiding needless conceptual hand-wringing when considering works of post|apocalyptic literature. In the novel *The Children of Men*, Theo, at this point a private citizen, speaks with Xan, the leader of England, in a meeting

with other officials on the public good—is this outside the domain of rational-critical debate simply because Xan is an official and so there is an intrinsic power differential? Fraser's emphasis that there will always be actual power differences and that there will often be intersections with actual states makes it clear that the public sphere is relevant outside the historical forms most favored by Habermas' analysis, such as coffee houses. It is also worth emphasizing that exploring the limits on Xan's public sphere also helps show how the dystopia of *The Children of Men* manifests itself.

In 2010, Fraser returned to Habermas to re-politicize theoretical understandings of the public sphere. She considered how Habermas's conception was additionally Westphalian [i.e., nationalistic] in conception, and thus the idea of a "transnational public sphere" sounds initially like an oxymoron (77) because the public sphere was intrinsically tied up with the nation state. However, since the public sphere is indispensable to those reconstructing critical theory in post-national politics, she finds it worthwhile to address the territorial nature of the public sphere. In particular, she notes how the public sphere presupposes a "state that was capable in principle of regulating its inhabitants' affairs and solving their problems" (79), conceived of participants as "fellow members of a bounded political community" and likewise presupposed the national economy as the primary topic (79). Fraser further argues Habermas "implicitly assumed a national communications infrastructure, contained by a Westphalian state" (79). Furthermore, Habermas presupposed the idea that the public sphere was "fully comprehensible and linguistically transparent" and finally "rounded the structure of public-sphere subjectivity in the very same vernacular literary forms that also gave rise to the imagined community of the nation" (80). Fraser recognizes that Habermas has since claimed that modern democratic states can dispense with national identity as the basis of social integration, but she reiterates that the subtext

of his work is explicitly nationalistic. To this extent, Fraser recognizes that her earlier critique too was complicit in reiterating the nationalistic Westphalian frame (83), and that this blindspot is now hard to miss since so many issues, from "global warming or immigration, women's rights or the terms of trade, unemployment or 'the war on terror,' current mobilizations of public opinion seldom stop at the borders of territorial states" (85). So, in conceptualizing the public sphere, it is important not just to consider the private citizens interacting with people in their own states in their own language. As transnational capitalism has spread certain cultural formulations globally, so do we need to change our understanding of the public sphere as having transnational dimensions.

Just as a national public sphere is the territory wherein state interests and private interests compete, so is a transnational public sphere the territory where transnational neoliberal empire competes with the interests of both conventional states, which may retain imperial tendencies, and human interests. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri consider the interaction and overlap between conventional state-based imperialism and transnational Empire:

> Other theorists are reluctant to recognize a major shift in global power relations because they see that the dominant capitalist nation states have continued to exercise imperialist domination over the other nations and regions of the globe. From this perspective, the contemporary tendencies toward Empire would represent not a fundamentally new phenomenon but simply a perfecting of imperialism. Without underestimating these real and important lines of continuity, however, we think it is important to note that what used to be conflict or competition among several imperialist powers has in important respects been replaced by the idea of a single power that over-determines them all, structures them in a unitary way, and treats them under one common notion of right that is decidedly

postcolonial and post-imperialist. This is really the point of departure for our study of

Empire: a new notion of right, or rather, a new inscription of authority and a new design

of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and

resolve conflicts. (9)

This emphasis on guaranteeing contracts and resolving contracts means that Hardt and Negri

look toward institutions like the United Nations as models for the emergence of neoliberal

empire, which emerges as groups of states come together in the interests of capitalist production,

i.e. the Trans-Pacific Partnership or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). For

Hardt and Negri, the United Nations reflects the limitations of "international order" and suggests

the strengths of "global order." The problem with international order, in essence, is that

sovereignty remains tied to the nation-state, and so only those with military power can act. In this

view, what the United Nations presents as one of its greatest achievements—the process of

decolonization wherein "750 million people have gained independence since the creation of the

United Nations" ("The United Nations and Decolonization"), effectively only did so in the

process of placing apparently sovereign states in a system of supranational global order.

Other scholars focus on the more fundamental issues of how citizens and individuals

remain engaged in the public sphere. In *Vernacular Voices* (1999), Gerard Hauser explores how

"public opinion" is represented in the media, and likewise how public figures and politicians

interact with the media. For instance, one of his first examples involves a case where CNN had

people tap their phones (i.e. with their hands hitting the speaker, not in the sense of a wiretap) to

indicate whether they liked or disliked parts of a political speech, and Hauser argues that in

doing so "CNN's model replaced discourse with raw response" (2). This is a symptom of how

the vision of the public conceived by the press and politicians is, "a faceless, anonymous body

whose members are reduced to the percentage having selected predetermined choices to a poller's questions and who enter our homes as media reports of data" (4). From this, he argues that CNN's tappers are like Baudrillard's simulacrum: they have no basis in reality; and they create "the impression of 'the public' as an anonymous assemblage given to volatile mood swings likely to dissipate into apathy and from which we are personally disengaged" (5). One of the appeals of post|apocalyptic fiction, then, is that the issues of community are so often stripped from the detached representation of an amorphous "public" to direct interaction with the interlocutors. Indeed, post|apocalyptic fiction often considers the reconstitution of new public spheres, as when the leader of one post-apocalyptic settlement meets with another to negotiate, as in *The Walking Dead* (2003-) when Rick Grimes, as leader of Alexandria meets with Gregory the leader of Hilltop. While this could be framed as a kind of international diplomacy, as alliances are formed, post|apocalyptic narratives allow public spheres to be seen in their inception.

Post|apocalyptic narratives also show the limits of rational-critical debate, and so emphasize a realist sense of the public sphere, in contrast to Habermas's more idyllic formation. Barry Brummett argues in *The Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture* (1991) that:

> today the dominance of the extended text and the well-supported line of argument is fading. Public discourse may be embodied in as many words as it was in 1860, but the words take rather different forms. Presidential candidates speak more than they ever have, but campaigns depend increasingly on the twenty-second 'sound bite' targeted for the evening news (Hart, 1987). (xi-xii)

Post|apocalyptic narratives showcase how the public sphere is not merely undermined by the "soundbite" but how all rhetors need to be capable at capturing the energy and attention of the sphere. This is something that the Fishes understand in the film version of *Children of Men*.

The public sphere shows how the rules that govern our society can be changed through rhetorical practice. The nature of the public sphere is changing, and the idea of who or what constitutes a viable subject to be represented in the public sphere is a source of rightful and continuous contestation. Yet it also showcases the intersection between cultural production and rhetorical action, as seen in Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* and Guillermo Del Toro's *Pacific Rim*.

<div align="center">Children of Men</div>

Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*, based on the novel by P.D. James, represents a bourgeois individual immured in a sense of hopelessness and depression who discovers the possibility for new life which in turn re-awakens both his capacity for empathy and his sense of political awareness. The film has further been praised because of the ways in which its political agenda is mediated by its *mise-en-scène*. The argument that it is on the level of imagery, not text or narrative, that challenges to hegemonic ideology can appear, has been around for decades; as Jean Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni argued in "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" in *Cahiers du Cinema* in the 1950s. The emphasis on transforming all rhetorical acts to pure imagery means that no narrative can ever present a meaningful avenue for a critique of hegemony while simultaneously presenting a meaningful form of positive social or political action. We can critique empire, or we can represent the ability of the public sphere to mediate change, but not both.

Children of Men is uniquely suited to exploring the transformations in political valence over the last three decades. P.D. James' novel, written in 1992, imagined a post/apocalyptic narrative in the near aftermath of the apparent end of the cold war; but, even more than this apparent political climate, it is much more imminently a post-Thatcher, post-Reagan narrative. The novel considers the struggle of Theo to work on behalf of a group of humanist terrorists, the Fishes, as he attempts to convince Xan and his council on the merit of their ideas. Xan and his council embody neoliberal ideals, rejecting arguments to change vicious treatment of prisoners, refugees, or quell a euthanasia program known as the Quietus. Whereas James' novel explores the rhetoric of post-Thatcher England, Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 film mediates the rhetorical landscape of England after the invasion of Iraq and 9/11.

The plot of James' novel is predicated on the rhetorical struggle over a mother and child in the wake of decades of global infertility. In Cuarón's film, the central character, Theo, is a sort of bumbling every-man. Although he was politically active in his youth, his sense of his failures as a husband and father eroded his willingness to participate in any form of the public sphere. In James' novel, Theo's convoluted relationship with power structures is far more explicit. The "Warden" of England is Xan, who in the crisis of infertility, has seized power. Xan wants Theo to be part of his council, part of the leadership of the nation, something which Theo resists.

In James' novel, political change ultimately relies on violence, and this is the strongest sign that the public sphere has failed. Theo joins the Fishes, a resistance group advocating for human rights. The Fishes initially use bombs to disrupt the "Quietus," a program of voluntary, state-based euthanasia. Despite this domestic terrorism, the Fishes avoid harming people. When Theo learns that Julian, one of the Fishes, is pregnant, the group attempts to flee the country, hunted by Xan. In the climax of the novel, Xan catches Theo and Julian after Julian has given

birth. After Xan demands the child, Theo shoots Xan. Theo takes Xan's ring, a signifier that he is assuming authority over the UK. Over the course of the novel, Theo moves from his initial state of total political indifference, to a state of nascent political advocacy on behalf of the Fishes, to finally political control over England. Theo's realization of political awareness, then, seems only realizable through violence. The public sphere simply cannot affect meaningful change in times of crisis.

Although James' novel presents Xan as the clear antagonist, and the novel is characterized as dystopian, the character of Theo recognizes Xan's reign is not the worst form of dystopia. Theo reflects back on "those early years before Xan took power" when "the great fear was of a total breakdown of order" (45) where people plan their future as escapes from the city to reclusive country estates where they could fend for themselves off-grid. Despite this, Theo offers few rebuttals to Rolf and the Fishes that Xan, as Warden, is a "despot and a tyrant" with a private army (57). Theo emphasizes that the reason he resigned was because he does not think "there's anything I can do to influence either the council or the Warden of England" (56), which is to say there is no one that can. Moreover, the role of the "sojourners" as immigrants are called in the novel is connected with labor and class. Julian argues that "We import Omegas and others from less affluent countries to do our dirty work, clean the sewers, clear away the rubbish, look after the incontinent, the aged" (58) but when they age they are sent back to other countries. Theo emphasizes that Julian and the Fishes will not be able to start a revolution because "People don't care enough" (58). Moreover, Theo argues that Xan's government is basically sound, since there is "Good public order, no corruption in high places, freedom from fear of war and crime, a reasonably equitable distribution of wealth and resources, concern for individual life" (64). It is

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only violence at a Quietus—the ostensibly voluntary euthanasia of the elderly—that convinces Theo to even talk to Xan in the first place.

It is the dystopic treatment of the elderly during a Quietus that instigates Theo's political and ethical awakening. During this process, whereby dozens of people are taken out on boats to die, "One of the women being helped on to the nearer boat gave a cry and began a violent thrashing of her arms. The nurse with her was taken by surprise and, before she could move, the woman had leapt from the jetty into the water and was struggling ashore" (74). He recognizes her as Hilda Palmer-Smith, the wife of his friend. While she was swimming toward Theo to be taken away from the Quietus, one of the soldiers at the event "struck her viciously on the side of the head" (75). Theo too is struck as he tries to help her. Theo is not detained, but he realizes that the state has overstepped its bounds in running the Quietus program, and so when he returns to London he agrees with the Fishes that he will argue on their behalf with Xan and the council. In the novel, then, Theo's politico-ethical consciousness is awakened due to witnessing injustice, the recognition of which seems to rely on innate ethical values. He begins this awakening with the belief that he could achieve change through rational-critical debate, a premise which ends up being unfounded.

James' *The Children of Men* dramatizes rational-critical debate. Despite Theo's unwillingness to join the leadership of Xan's council, he nonetheless attempts to instigate reforms on behalf of the Fishes. In regard to immigrants seeking to flee an anarchic world to the political structure of England, Theo attempts to use reasoned debate in a council meeting to influence policy: "We've no shortage of resources, no shortage of jobs, no shortage of houses. Restricting immigration in a dying and underpopulated world isn't a particularly generous policy" (97). Xan responds that "Generosity is a virtue for individuals, not governments. When

governments are generous it is with other people's money, other people's safety" (97). This is a

paraphrase of a famous quote by Margaret Thatcher. Although the bumper-sticker variety of the

quote is that "The trouble with Socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money"

the direct quote is from a 1976 interview where Thatcher argues that Socialist governments

"always run out of other people's money" ("TV Interview"). That quote was in support of

Thatcher's neo-liberal reading of the argument that "economic and political freedom go

together." Thatcher and neo-liberal ideology take this to mean that major economic sectors

should have practically no regulation. Theo's optimistic and liberal approach to domestic affairs

simply cannot compete with the pat post-Thatcher rhetoric of Xan and the council. Xan

effectively serves as a synecdoche for neoliberal ideology. Whether it is immigration or the care

of criminal inmates, Theo's "generous" approaches are dismissed, as are his concerns with

institutional violence. A kind of public sphere exists, but Theo is incapable of negotiating the

rhetorical pitfalls of the conversation. Moreover, Theo cannot articulate a rational-critical debate

to the ideologically-driven maxims that hold up Xan's institutions.

Xan's paraphrases and quotes of Margaret Thatcher continue to the issue of prison

conditions. Xan argues that "other freedoms are pointless without freedom from fear" (96) to

justify the Man penal colony, where Xan sends all people with repeated convictions for theft.

The novel's Man penal colony is likely an indirect approximation of the Maze prison that

Thatcher created during the Troubles, although specifying the level of analogy is difficult since

Theo only learns of conditions at the prison indirectly. Xan quotes Margaret Thatcher's argument

that "people want freedom from fear" ("Speech to Conservative Women's Conference"). To be

clear, the concept of "freedom from fear" is also one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's four

essential human freedoms ("The Four Freedoms"), however, Thatcher specifically connected it

to freedom from crime. James is effectively using the tropes and slogans of Margaret Thatcher, rephrased in Xan. Xan embodies the Thatcher-esque neoliberal ideology of stringent reactionary police action against political dissidence, harsh punishment for crime, isolationist international policy, and indifference to refugees. Theo's belief in the value of rational-critical debate is undercut by the power of Xan and the council's ideological precepts.

The ideology of Xan and Thatcher is alive and well in England today. The United Kingdom opted to leave the European Union in June of 2016 in the Brexit ("British exit") vote. The primary arguments in favor of leaving the EU were echoes of Thatcher's arguments decades earlier. In a speech to American conservatives, Thatcher argued that immigration posed a threat to national identity. Although Thatcher had a long and complex history with the politics of the European continent, in the 1990s[20] Thatcher argued that British identity was threatened by "European federalism" and was opposed to the Euro as a single currency for England. In particular, Thatcher was opposed to "a new artificially-created supra-national identity" ("Speech to the First International Conservative Congress"). Yet the Brexit vote also raises questions about Hardt and Negri's conception of responses to empire. For while the Brexit vote was a vote in favor of isolationism and nationalism, it also was a rejection of institutions and policies that would have been more in line with a move toward global empire—such as the Euro, which embodies a movement of national governments to strive for fewer regulations and differences that would interfere with business. Brexit and Xan's policies are a push toward nationalism, and in this sense do not wholly support the institutions of neoliberal Empire, but rather run at a tangent.

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[20] To be clear, this speech came after *The Children of Men* was published. This paragraph is discussing the continued relevance of James' novel, not implying James was commenting on this speech in the novel.

While James' novel focuses on authoritarian nationalism and in doing so identifies reactionary neoliberal sentiments that persist in England through today, Cuarón's film focuses more on the complacency of individuals in such a state. In this adaptation, the government loses its synecdochal representative in the form of Xan. The conflict is presented as intra-revolutionary. Instead of Theo realizing his political investment in the world independently (through witnessing a Quietus), Julian must first coerce Theo to join his cause for financial reasons. The politics of scarcity, not innate ethics, determine Theo's initial behavior. Julian is killed in an orchestrated attack by another member of the Fishes, Luke, who wants to dispatch of Julian to assume control over the Fishes. This is because the Fishes 'possess' an immigrant named Kee who is pregnant. Luke recognizes that Kee, as a rhetorical beacon that will unify anyone around her, will give the Fishes the political capital necessary to assume control over England. Cuarón's film constantly emphasizes the rhetorical power of imagery. Only when Theo discovers that Kee is pregnant, by looking at her pregnant body in a barn, does the self-evident nature of their quest override the politics of scarcity.

The emphasis on imagery reflects the sense of aesthetic power understood by Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni in "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" that:

> if he [the film-maker] sees his film simply as a blow in favour of liberalism, it will be recuperated instantly by the ideology; if on the other hand, he conceives and realizes it on the deeper level of imagery, there is a chance that it will turn out to be more disruptive. Not, of course, that he will be able to break the ideology itself, but simply its reflection in his film. (199)

While Comolli and Narboni are skeptical that any film can "break the ideology itself," imagery represents the "deeper level" of film wherein artists can at least resist the influence of hegemony

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on their form. Žižek, for instance, echoes Comolli and Narboni's argument in regard to *Children of Men*, emphasizing that it is primarily the *mise-en-scène* that gives the film power. That is, Žižek believes it is not the plot of the film, but the images of oppression against immigrants and the dispossessed that appear throughout the film, juxtaposed with the heroic narrative of Theo that makes the film disruptive.

Throughout the film, the camera sometimes drifts to refugees idly, or records almost in emulation of a documentary. This documentary style is most evident at the refugee camp at Bexhill, where refugees are detained with bags over their heads in a visual reference to the way America detained prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. As Theo tries to shield Kee from the abuses suffered both by refugees and their friends, such as Miriam, the camera wanders to these acts of violence and oppression. This wandering camera is important to build tension in the film; if the camera remained focused entirely on Theo and his interactions with Julian, then there would be no warning or anticipation for one of the most celebrated scenes of the film. In this long, single take, Theo, Julian, Miriam, Kee, and Luke are driving to a Fishes farmhouse when a flaming car rolls down from the forest and blocks the road. An un-identified mob runs down, apparently intent on destruction. When they try to drive away, a pair of motorcyclists drive up and shoot Julian. In this sense, the film seems to be suggesting that the background, lurking at the corners of the film in the representation of refugees abused, has risen up. Yet the plot of the film undermines this suggestion. Instead, the narrative's emphasis that Luke orchestrated this assault indicates that this violent confrontation, resulting in the death of Julian, was not a spontaneous act of resistance, but rather a planned attack by the Fishes. The novel has a similar event occur, but it is the result not of the refugees, but rather of Omegas, the youngest generation that embraces a mixture of nihilism and new-age spirituality.

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The plot of *Children of Men* at times undermines its emphasis on the refugees. While the treatment of refugees remains abhorrent throughout the film, and seems intended to generate empathy, there is no sustained indication of what ethical treatment of refugees would look like. There is no alternative—at least, not one shown in the film. Theo abandons the public sphere altogether: it is only through individual action that he can preserve humanity. Neither novel nor film suggests that informed participation in a public sphere can effect actual or meaningful political change, without violence. The climax of the film reifies the rejection of hope that political action can result in change; Kee simply must leave England for any hope in the future to exist, and Theo dies.

Cuarón's visual style does not draw from other apocalyptic films, but instead from the representation of the Iraq War in television news, photographs of Abu Ghraib prison, and the legacy of Guantanamo Bay. England is punished in Cuarón's film by the loss of Kee to the "Human Project." England, in the implicit judgment of the film, is unfit for the future of life: if it wants a future, it needs to make real political changes to its relationship with dispossessed peoples. Far from being devoid of social criticism a la Sontag, Cuarón's film blends political allegory with apocalyptic meta-narratives to spur his audience toward increased political awareness and action. Despite this, the means to enacting these political changes remains as mysterious and opaque as Kee's pregnancy. Whereas the novel separates the Fishes' focus on several different issues, including prisons at the Isle of Man, refugees from the continent, and the Quietus, Cuarón's film puts its sole emphasis on dispossessed refugees. In this sense, Cuarón's film has become more timely, as the criticisms it implies against England have been realized following the Syrian refugee crisis, when, according to Oxfam, the UK in the first months of 2016 took less than one third of its "fair share" ("UK is failing").

The apocalyptic imagination hinges upon nuanced aesthetic representations which are predicated on multivalence, between audience and text, and between the characters in texts and easy, objective explanations for the systems of oppression under which they find themselves. Apocalyptic narratives represent the ways that people attempt—and sometimes fail—to understand themselves in political contexts, and how they come to understand the ways in which they can gain agency in their own lives. In both film and novel of *Children of Men*, the public sphere is not a venue through which one can gain agency in the conditions of neoliberal empire. Yet, the decay of the public sphere is not, as Habermas feared, due to its commodification. It is the encroachment of the state on the public sphere that undermines the capacity of any individual to effect change.

Pacific Rim

"Once you spend more than $100 million on a movie, you have to save the world." Damon Lindelorf's argument reflects how, in the world of big-budget Hollywood blockbusters, larger-than- life heroes have traditionally needed to save the world—which means that the status quo of Hollywood film is to present narratives wherein the entire world or the future of humanity is in peril. The first 3 minutes and 30 seconds of Guillermo del Toro's *Pacific Rim* consists of an expository montage that establishes these stakes by alternating between found footage, allusion, and pastiche. One of the opening images of this montage presents an empty police cruiser in the foreground with a Kaiju destroying the Golden Gate Bridge in the background. The film's frame is predicated on the inability of conventional state structures to negotiate the trials of catastrophe. Yet, the film also offers a few moments that suggest the failure of these state structures is due to the public sphere. It does so in such a way that puts its narrative thematically in line with arguments in favor of the neoliberal free trade agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Del Toro's film focuses on the Pan Pacific Defense Corps, the Jaeger program, led by Stacker Pentecost (played by Idris Elba), and the pilots of a giant robot (Jaegers), Raleigh Becket (played by Charlie Hunnam) and Mako Mori (played by Rinko Kikuchi). The threat of the Kaiju ("strange beasts") prompts "us" to create the "Pan Pacific Defense Corps." This Pan Pacific Defense Corps then creates the Jaeger program, massive robots meant to combat the Kaiju. Although *Pacific Rim* was released in 2013, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was drafted in 2015, it nonetheless serves as a relevant analogue. The film is most certainly not an intentional comment on this trade agreement. That being said, although the fictitious "Pan Pacific Defense Corps" includes more countries than those in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, several key member states remain the same: The United States, Canada, Japan, and Peru. In the same way that the film normalizes the idea of unified "pan pacific" policies, it further normalizes the commercialized products—shoes—that have been associated with pan-pacific free trade. To further hone the point, the "Pan Pacific Defense Corps" includes colonial powers that are not in the Pacific Rim, such as Great Britain, as one of the most visible countries. Once "we" start winning, the pilots become celebrities, and the phenomenon of Kaiju conflict becomes commercialized. Del Toro's film also alludes to contemporary environmental disasters, analogizing the blood spilled by the Kaiju to oil spills.

The film does not celebrate this Pan Pacific defense force for long. In an early scene, the Jaeger program, led by Stacker Pentecost, meets with the Pan Pacific Defense Corps and are informed that they are losing support. The Jaeger program then becomes less the arm of an international coalition, and more like a corporation. The Pan Pacific nations instead opt for isolationism and embargoes, embodied in a great wall, attempting to protect themselves from the catastrophic new force of the Kaiju. This decision seems like a parody of national isolationism,

but simultaneously critiques international coalitions (such as the United Nations) while reifying arguments that likewise have been used by TPP supporters.

The narrative unintentionally employs pro-TPP subtexts. President Obama, the TPP's chief advocate, argues that "The world has changed. The rules are changing with it. The United States, not countries like China, should write them." Several different studies have conflicting estimations on what the TPP's impact on the United States' economy would actually be. Other proponents recognize that "if the TPP failed, it would certainly have been a blow to U.S. credibility" (Perlez). In geo-political terms, several former secretaries of defense, including Harold Brown, Robert Gates, Colin Powell, Chuck Hagel, and Donald Rumsfeld, argue that failure to pass the TPP would mean that "Asian economies will almost certainly develop along a China-centric model" (Brown 2, "Voices"). Michael Froman, the U.S. Trade representative, argues that failing to pass the TPP would hand China "the keys to the castle" (Taj). Proponents of the TPP consistently argue that the threat of failure to pass the TPP is a loss of U.S. hegemony and prestige in the Pacific to China. In *Pacific Rim*, the Jaeger program moves to Hong Kong after it is dismissed by the Pan Pacific Defense Corps. While *Pacific Rim* predates the debates over the TPP, it reflects nascent concerns over the loss of U.S. hegemony and the emergence of China. It does so while simultaneously critiquing the bureaucracy of transnational institutions like the United Nations.

Pacific Rim aestheticizes neoliberal, globalized responses to catastrophe by celebrating salvagepunk. Stacker Pentecost can continue to lead the world with the support of the black market and the Russians. Stacker Pentecost sells the rights to all Kaiju parts to Hannibal Chau (Ron Perlman), a black market collector who sells the parts of each kaiju corpse.   When the Jaeger program is abandoned by international organizations, humanity must be saved by the

buying power of the free market. When two Kaiju attack Hong Kong, Chau emphasizes that he only once went to a public bunker—instead, he has created his own private Kaiju bunker. To emphasize the point, he takes off his glasses and shows a scarred eye. At every turn, the movie emphasizes the failure of public institutions, and the willingness of the private sector to pick up the slack. Public bunkers are a joke. The coastal wall program, the promising option that the Pan Pacific Defense Corps relies on instead of the Jaegers, is a disaster—a Kaiju breaks through the coastal wall in Australia in less than an hour.

Of course fans of *Pacific Rim* might argue that it is "mindless fun," that the primary appeal of the film is in the violent confrontation between giant robots and giant monsters. Additionally, there are moments in the film where the subtexts are greenwashed; the emergence of the kaijus is blamed on carbon emissions in one scene. Moreover, like many other alien invasion narratives, the film takes states that were conventionally colonizing forces, and presents them instead as fighting to avoid colonization. The kaiju are colonists, as a scientist in the film discovers after drifting with them. The fact that *Pacific Rim* is not alone in taking for granted the failure of public institutions reinforces my point. While there certainly are some films which emphasize the failure of private corporations (such as *Jurassic World* (2015) and *Avatar* (2009)), many "save-the-world" narratives in the past decade have focused on corporate-backed heroes that come in and save the day. This is particularly true in the recent surge of comic book adaptations, such as the *Iron Man* franchise films (Marvel films 2008-) and the *Dark Knight* trilogy (2005-2012), where the super-rich become night-fighting superheroes through the power of immense wealth and technological gadgets. If most post-apocalyptic narratives focus on the fall of governments and the failure of institutions, then the wider post|apocalyptic discursive

formation imagines save-the-world narratives where the only way to maintain freedom and hope for the future is through personal action, and private support.

A further point of clarification is needed in the ideas of coalitions and working together. There are people from Russia, China, Australia, Japan, and America who pilot different Jaeger robots. In this sense, the Jaeger program from its inception among the Pan Pacific Defense Corps is a kind of international coalition. Moreover, the entire film *Pacific Rim* has the concept of "working together" as one of its central themes, as each of the Jaegers needs pilots that can drift together. In this sense, the failure of the international coalition of the Pan Pacific Defense Corps leaders to support the Jaeger program is simply a foil for the Jaeger program pilots, something to strengthen their bonds and heighten the narrative tension. In this reading, the connotation of the film is quite simple: you don't need governments in order to work together. The social contract that unites people in their collective need for self-preservation is deeper than that. Moreover, the emphasis on an American pilot and a Japanese pilot working together to save the day ensures that the film avoids strong nationalistic tones. Yes, the film avoids advancing an imperialistic, nationalistic ideology—and in doing so, opts for supporting a different kind of empire; the state-based imperialism has been replaced by camaraderie based on neoliberal ideals and salvagepunk heroes. The neoliberal subtexts are all the more remarkable considering the film's initial emphasis on the world coming together, with old rivalries set aside.

Whether through malice or incompetence, contemporary film tends to present the public sphere as incapable of confronting the challenges, the exigent threats, of contemporary life. In James' novel, *The Children of Men*, vestiges of government exist through an authoritarian council. Despite this, individuals cannot break through the wall of ideology through rational-critical debate alone. Violence is the only means of achieving political change. Like James'

novel, Cuaron's film focuses on the ethical-political awakening of Theo Faron. While this ethical awakening elicits personal action to protect Kee, there is never any apparent hope that anything other than violence will achieve political goals, whether for Theo in protecting Kee, or the Fishes in their goals of helping the refugees. Whereas both versions of *Children of Men* focus on authoritarian governments that go too far, the converse is a celebration of neoliberal empire and the free/black market in *Pacific Rim*, where international coalitions ineptly support naïve projects, while the private sector of salvagepunk heroes must save the day without state support. The two narrative patterns go hand-in-hand. In these stories, the individual awakens to the importance of an active political life only to find the public sphere and communal action mired in unreasonable ideologies. Theo Faron is the reluctant hero, the politically indifferent stand-in for the reader; but he can't effect change through voting, reasonable discourse, or non-violent political action. The Jaeger team are founded by a politically unified Pacific Rim, but to "save the day" they have to accept the indifference of the political world and embrace the black market world of Hannibal Chau. The political antipathy and indifference of *Pacific Rim* reflects the sentiment that rational-critical debate, even when public institutions exist, cannot penetrate the walls of ideology. Habermas may have believed that the public sphere was most threatened when it is commodified, but post|apocalyptic narratives tend to suggest that the public sphere can only be preserved by ignoring it—that is, the defenders of political autonomy need to be capable of rejecting that autonomy. In imagining the future role of government, like dystopian narrative, post|apocalyptic discourse tends to be skeptical and cynical towards not only state-based authoritarianism, but international coalitions as well. When the state has no place in a save-the-day narrative, the only heroes left are the black market merchants and the military fighters they pay for.

Chapter Six: Raising Clementine: Forming Ethical Subjectivity in Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead*

In the 1980s and 1990s, Octavia Butler's fiction explored the importance of security in understanding the ideology of the state. Since the 1990s, the rate of incarceration in the United States has dramatically increased, and simultaneously with this, the attitudes toward incarceration, security, and justice have shifted as well. In contemporary post|apocalyptic discourse, the conflict between ethics of justice and security continue to take center stage. This is particularly the case in *The Walking Dead* (2003-) franchise, particularly the game series from Telltale Games, *The Walking Dead* (2012-).

Robert Kirkman's comic series *The Walking Dead* (2003-) serves as the basis for AMC's television series *The Walking Dead* (2010-). In turn, AMC's television series *The Walking Dead* serves as the basis for Telltale Games' computer game series *The Walking Dead* (2012-). The games are predicated on emulating the television format. As part of this emulation, each iteration of the game is presented as a season, with each episode downloaded individually. This episodic structure allows the studio to release episodes incrementally, with seasons released annually, composed of five episodes each. At the time of this writing, Telltale Games has released two seasons, a lead-in episode to Season Two called "400 Days," and a spin-off season focusing on the character of Michonne; a third season is announced. The primary emphasis in each game is interacting with the characters and making choices in dialogue. While Telltale Games' series has received some critical attention for its innovations in the adventure genre, there are few discussions of the game that address its political and rhetorical subtexts. Interactive digital media offers a procedural rhetoric that, in reifying the subjectivity of the player, produces an ethical

gaze that challenges the precepts of postmodernism. Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* produces reflexivity with the player, explores the conflict between ethics of security and discipline, and considers the discourse surrounding racism in the United States.

This chapter will first address the cultural climate surrounding the figure of the zombie in games. After this, it will address critical discussions of the rhetorical capacities of games generally and the relationship of games to postmodernism. Next, it will explore the aesthetic representation of African-American families in the first episode of the Telltale Games series. Finally, it will consider the presentation of power structures and the relationship between authoritarian leaders, delinquency, and stealing in the series collectively.

Post|apocalyptic games reflect and articulate ideological divides. While they can offer long-term, strategy-driven forms of play that allow players to experiment with articulating ethical precepts, they can also produce subjectivities immersed in consumer structures that rely on stereotypes of masculinity and race. *The Walking Dead* presents a didactic structure that utilizes the panoptic capacities of the gaming medium to produce a subjectivity capable of translating ethics into praxis by emulating praxis. That is, while playing the game is not translating ethical premises about the ethics of justice (such as attitudes toward theft), playing the game helps habituate players into making this translation.

1. Apocalypse Games

The post|apocalyptic has been the dominant narrative structure in interactive digital media since the 1990s. Major gaming genres have tended to rely on hordes of enemies which the player must kill, as in the case of major gaming franchises like *DOOM* (1993-present) and *Half-Life* (1998-present). Zombies in particular have been a staple enemy of games, and as a staple enemy,

give several game franchises a coherent sense of identity that allows for frequent sequels and derivations. This is the case in the franchises of *Resident Evil* (1996-2016), *Left 4 Dead* (2008-2009), *Plants vs. Zombies* (2009-), *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010-2015), *Dead Rising* (2006-2013), and *The Walking Dead* (2012-). Many game franchises release zombie games on an annual basis. Killing zombies fulfills a power fantasy, destroying hordes of unquestionably evil enemies. A consequence of this fantasy is that many gaming worlds rely on post|apocalyptic narrative premises. Zombies have become *the* stereotypical antagonist of computer games, and the "zombie apocalypse" can sometimes feel like the default setting of the gaming medium. For example, see fig. 6.1, which shows the exponential growth of games that use the "zombie" tag in the online game platform "Steam" in the last decade. While these numbers are shaped in part by the growing use of Steam as a sales platform generally, the increasing market of "indie" games, and the addition of some film and downloadable content, the increasing preponderance of zombies in gaming simply cannot be denied. Post|apocalyptic games are also often some of the most critically celebrated games, with *Half-Life 2* (2004), *Resident Evil 4* (2005) *Fallout 3* (2008), *Portal 2* (2011), *The Walking Dead* (2012), and *The Last of Us* (2013) each having won multiple "Game of the Year" awards from a variety of publications.

Fig. 6.1: Number Games with the "Zombie" Tag in Steam by Year
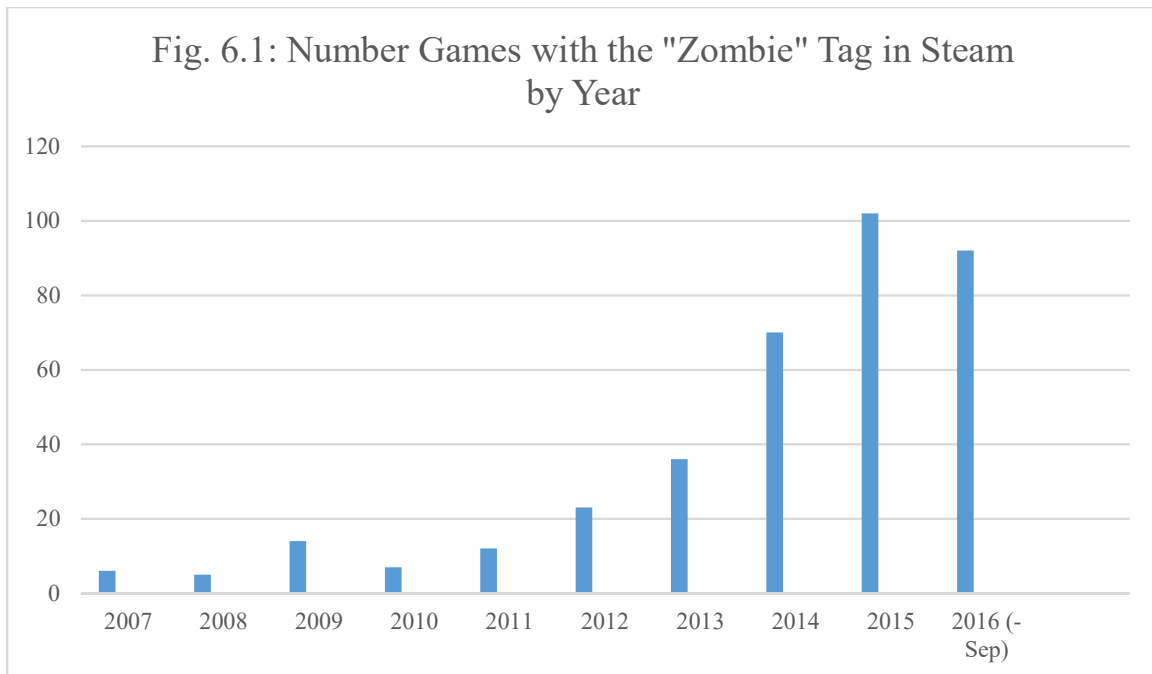
Whereas Kyle Bishop establishes that the "Renaissance Peak" of the zombie in films was around 2007 (14), the current upswing for the zombie in games is the naissance rather than the Re-naissance. With the emerging preponderance of post|apocalyptic settings and the growing use of hackneyed concepts and clichés, some recent games have focused less on the zombies and instead on the relationship of characters to post|apocalyptic settings. As is to be expected with such an immense interest in this narrative premise, there are a wide range of senses of why the zombie and the apocalypse has been such a dominant form in the medium of computer games.

I interviewed two game developers,[21] which you can read the full text of in my appendixes, to see how they see the post|apocalypse in gaming. Mark Yohalem is the creator of *Primordia* (2012), a point-and-click adventure game that depicts a humanoid robot and his robotic companion in a post-humanity, salvagepunk future. Yohalem argues that the appeal of the

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[21] The full text of these interviews can be found in the appendix.

post|apocalyptic in computer games is linked to larger cultural preoccupations with achieving purity through destruction, namely:

Apocalypse stories have been with us from the very beginning -- Noah and the Flood, Ragnarok, etc. These stories often offer the comfort of believing that the result of an obliterating event is a purging of what is bad and a rebirth of what is good. That notion is not unique to story-telling; it's how we view the apocalyptic destruction of the "terrible lizards" in order that our kind of creatures could ascend, we talk about "creative destruction" in the marketplace, and there are forests that can only rejuvenate by burning to the ground.

("Interview 3: Mark Yohalem" 223)

While Yohalem's games are not particularly violent, rather being puzzle-oriented, and do not include zombies, his characterization of the appeal of post|apocalyptic games is accurate for many of those franchises described earlier. For many violent post|apocalyptic games, whether fighting zombies or alien invaders, the innate appeal is the protection of modern infrastructure and reclaiming streets that otherwise would be lost to the forces of evil. Yet Yohalem's argument is especially prescient considering the increasing preponderance of post|apocalyptic games following the 2007-2008 financial crisis in the United States and the Great Recession. Audiences may have been viscerally reminded that, in capitalist systems in particular, there are cycles of destruction and rebirth. Moreover, there is an appeal in feeling as though you are part of the force instigating the renewal.

According to Yohalem, post|apocalyptic representations, gaming included (or perhaps in particular), go hand-in-hand with epideictic rhetoric. He argues that:

In some ways, apocalypse stories don't just offer a silver lining to destruction, they let us

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imagine the obliteration of things we don't like (albeit with some collateral damage) while still imagining ourselves as morally innocent of that obliteration. Usually the apocalypse is the fault of those we despise (or those parts of ourselves we despise), and those who prosper in its aftermath embody the things we like: whether it's pastoral conservatism surviving the death of urban modernity in *Earth Abides* or liberal feminism surviving the annihilation of brutish men in *Y: The Last Man*.

While it certainly is the case that many post|apocalyptic stories focus on characters pressed to their limits, with their ethical codes challenged, these stories often emphasize heroic characters and qualities. It is certainly the case that The Man in McCarthy's *The Road* is heroic in a way unlike most of McCarthy's other characters. Yohalem also foregrounds the importance of narrative. In the resurgent "adventure game" genre, story is often one of the most important elements of game design; to over-emphasize the ludic elements of games is to ignore how many game designers see their games.

While Yohalem in my interview focused on the qualities that he saw bridging games and other literary forms, another storyteller and game designer recognized the limits that the preponderance of post|apocalyptic games has imposed. James Silva is the creator of Ska Studios, which have released several games, including *Survival Crisis Z* (2004), *I MAED A GAM3 W1TH Z0MB1ES 1NIT!!1* (2009) and *Salt and Sanctuary* (2016). As may be inferred from the ironic name of *I MAED A GAM3 W1TH Z0MB1ES 1NIT!!1*, Silva is keenly aware of the meta-ludological concerns with using zombies in a game. Silva argues that:

We're at a point in history where pop culture memes and tropes are evolving more rapidly than before, and producers are quicker than ever to capitalize on them. Zombies went from exotic horror to subversive cultural statement to mainstream to *Warm Bodies* and *iZombie*

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(disclaimer: I actually like *iZombie* despite its poppy appropriation of the genre) ("Interview

4: James Silva" 230).

Silva emphasizes that the preponderance of zombies has reshaped how we view them in every

medium. Silva recognizes that zombies alone are not enough to drive players to a game, so he

emphasizes the humor and absurdity of the genre in *I MAED A GAM3 W1TH Z0MB1ES 1NIT!!1*,

with bizarre music and the spectacle of bizarre weapons, massive explosions, and a retro design

aesthetic. When it comes to game design, zombies have to be just the beginning.

While Silva and Yohalem have moved on to other projects (Silva's *Salt and Sanctuary*

was not as explicitly post|apocalyptic, and Yohalem has joined the team working on *Planescape*

Torment: Tides of Numenera, a fantasy game), the large gaming franchises continue to maintain

the massive output of zombies. *Call of Duty* continues to be a military-themed first-person-

shooter, but has begun to increasingly focus on zombies in its games. Likewise, the *Metal Gear*

series, which previously tended to be a "stealth" franchise, now is going to release *Metal Gear:*

Survive, which bears many similarities to zombie games. As Silva emphasizes, zombies have

gone from mainstream in gaming to something beyond mainstream—many corporate figures, at

least, must see them as a "safe choice" in game development. The modern zombie can

sometimes seem to be the perfect embodiment of Jameson's sense of postmodernism; players not

only have forgotten that the zombie was ever used as a subversive cultural symbol, they are no

longer able to think of the zombie historically.

Game Rhetoric and Postmodernism

Interactive digital narratives seem initially like they should reinforce the precepts of

postmodernism. For instance, Richard Rorty, in arguing for pragmatic philosophy based on

solidarity rather than absolute truth, suggests that pragmatic philosophy takes away the "metaphysical comfort" that "our community cannot wholly die," (177), that is, in abandoning absolute truth people also abandon the hope that the apparently innate characteristics of humanity will continue regardless of disruptions in human life, such as war or the emergence of dystopian governments. The belief in objective truth "assures us that even if the Orwellian bureaucrats of terror rule for a thousand years the achievements of the Western democracies will someday be duplicated by our remote descendants" (177). Many games struggle with moral absolutism, as their aesthetic form is intrinsically predicated on producing different experiences for different players. For example, in the game *This War of Mine* (2014), inspired by the siege of Sarajevo, one player may choose to steal crucial supplies from an elderly family out of desperation, while another never even enters that house—how can you characterize the essential ethical dilemmas of a game when some dilemmas may not appear at all in a given player's experience? When the aesthetic experience is determined by the individual player, games may seem to intrinsically reject values like absolute truth. The opposite argument can also be made. In relying on procedurally-determined pre-set rules, games can also offer an explicit, live form of feedback to each player action. Different players may make different choices, but the game's responses to these choices are based on consistent (and absolute) values. One notorious example is that of *Fallout 3* (2008), where player actions are judged on a Karma system, which is communicated to players by an in-game menu. Players can achieve "good points" by doing actions deemed good by the in-game engine, and players can achieve "evil points" by doing actions deemed evil. Games do not intrinsically maintain postmodern values, or reject absolute truth in favor of pragmatic ethics or moral relativism.

Like other speculative fiction, post|apocalyptic games are representations of imagined

futures. Systems of representation can intersect with systems of power. Foucault's *Discipline and*

Punish (1977) explores the machinations of power, and in doing so describes how systems of

justice and power are interrelated with systems of representation. Of the major rules that power

and justice depend upon, one is "The rule of perfect certainty" (95) wherein "no crime

committed must escape the gaze of those whose task it is to dispense justice" and "Hence the

idea that the machinery of justice must be duplicated by an organ of surveillance that would

work side by side with it, and which would make it possible either to prevent crimes, or, if

committed, to arrest their authors" (96). One of the clearest representations of how discipline was

enforced was, for Foucault, Bentham's Panopticon. Bentham's Panopticon was a design for a

prison wherein all prisoners would have cells open to a centralized tower, while the tower would

have blinded windows, so that prisoners would never know if they were being observed. The

premise of the Panopticon was to create a system wherein prisoners would learn to internalize

the sensation that they were always being observed. It is in the Panopticon where, rather than

punishing each individual offender, the system of power "induce(s) in the inmate a state of

conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201).

Whereas Foucault's analysis focused on prisons, hospitals, schools, and other public

institutions as employing the paradigm of Bentham and the panopticon—that is, in creating the

sense of constant surveillance in order to make the function of power automatic—the procedural

elements of Foucault's analysis are also used in computer games. Foucault argues that the result

of a panopticon is that "A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation" (202).

The intended result is that subjects believe that they are being observed and that their actions are

being evaluated, whether or not this is the case or the disciplinary mechanisms are being

consistently exacted (games are still structurally similar to a panopticon even if they only present the illusion that player choices are being evaluated ethically). Moreover, results are imbued in the prisoner, patient, worker, or in this case, player, without the use of force. Foucault's characterization of systems of power is meant to be generalizable, and they can be somewhat consensual in nature, as in the case of the worker in a factory or soldier in a barracks. Foucault's work suggests that the way we interpret watching, and being watched, is a defining element of individual subjectivity in modernity. What system is more panoptic than a game, where all player actions are seen by the system of the game, all choices possible to be weighed and remembered by the memory of the computer system? When the player plays a computer game, the computer is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-remembering. That the player might not know or understand the value system in place only reinforces the one-directional nature of the arrangement. In regard to *Fallout 3* Karen Schrier argues that because "players can never know, in the collapsed societies, what good or evil means," the game "creates a moral universe that has to be interpreted by the player" (11). Schrier is misleading—the player can know what good or evil means. All they have to do is play the game more than once, which is an innate possibility of most computer games. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that the moral universes of games are not "interpreted" but rather taught, and enforced, by the game engine. Players can choose in such games to go against the ethical codes of the world, but most game engines do make it clear what those ethical codes entail.

In computer games, players do not simply believe their actions are being observed; they know that the computer is recording their actions and providing feedback on their actions. It is not simply a panopticon; it is a hyper-panopticon. Janet Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1998) defines several of the key characteristics of interactive digital environments. Murray

defines four essential properties of digital environments: they are procedural, participatory, spatial, and encyclopedic (71-83). Digital narratives are procedural; they are able to execute a series of rules consistently. Computers operate on the basis of algorithms and heuristics that rely on being able to identify "the exact or general rules of behavior that describe any process" (72). Murray argues that "Procedural environments are appealing to us not just because they exhibit rule-generated behavior but because we can induce the behavior" (74). Additionally, the encyclopedic quality of computers, with the capacity to access a wide variety of information, "is a realm in which we easily imagine ourselves to be omniscient" (84). Computer games' capacity to categorize and catalog all player actions in games, combined with their capacity to execute procedural rules based on player input, allows for cyclical feedback.

Computer games couple the awareness that all player actions are observed by the computer with the impetus and necessity of formulating plans of action. James Paul Gee argues that "good games" are characterized by several traits: they "offer players strong identities," "make players think like scientists," and they "lower the consequences of failure" (216). Of course, audiences identify with characters in a range of media—when we watch a film, or read a novel, we also identify with characters. This is not exactly what Gee means. Pilar Lacasa explicates the difference: whereas novels and films do produce identification, games compel players to *produce strategies*. So their identification with characters tends to be coupled with strategic reasoning in a way that is largely devoid from other media forms. This is not to suggest that the identification present in games is "better" or "worse" than the identification in other media, rather games simply produce a different kind of reasoning. While the game rules determine the route to advance past challenges, strategies "are the paths the player follows to solve problems. They are linked to the game rules but cannot be identified with them" (Lacasa

98). While other media forms also involve identification, games shape player desires to produce plans of action.

It is games' capacity to shape strategies that Jane McGonigal latches on to when considering how games can help confront issues facing the world. For McGonigal, games have the potential to help change commonplace thinking on large, complicated issues like climate change. McGonigal argues that games elicit "three skills that are critical for real planet craft: taking a long view, ecosystems thinking, and pilot experimentation" (297). Games suggest a narrative world beyond the immediate challenges, and so many require taking a long view beyond day-to-day issues. Games also tend to emphasize how the world can be seen as "a complex web of interconnected, interdependent parts" (297), and so games reinforce how changes in one part of a system can impact other parts of that system. Finally, games allow players to explore many small strategies and individual experiments in the process of negotiating how and why a system may act the way it does. McGonigal argues that "We can break free of the cognitive chains of short-term isolated thinking, with games that direct our collective attention to the future and challenge us to take a global perspective" (301). Gee and McGonigal in particular argue that the way games shape player identifications allows for new political and rhetorical avenues to combat the major issues facing humanity today.

Other critics argue that games tend to favor certain subject positions, but not ones conducive to greater political awareness. Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter build on the work of Hardt and Negri to argue that software production usually is designed to appeal to the "Hard Core" of gamers, which are predominantly males ages 16-26. These players "identify with a specific subject position: *the man of action*" (81), and the majority of games therefore tend to reinforce this subject position. When looking at specific consoles, such as the Xbox, Dyer-

Witheford and de Peuter argue that the "Xbox configured who would play it, and how: the console's design, the games made for it, and the social networks that surrounded it all denominated it as a machine for game-literate young men, inviting and amplifying this 'major' gaming subjectivity, ignoring or actively repelling possible 'minority' participants" (84). That is, capitalist production, and neoliberal distribution, produces and reproduces presuppositions about "youth, masculinity, and digital play" (84). Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter draw on a series of arguments from Hardt and Negri to present games as a component part to the formation of Empire and imperial subjectivity. In *Empire* Hardt and Negri characterize how the multitude "not only uses machines to produce, but also becomes increasingly machinic itself, as the means of production are increasingly integrated into the minds and bodies of the multitude" (406). While Hardt and Negri emphasize that this reflects how the multitude—individuals living within Empire—need free access to and "control over knowledge, information, communication, and affects" (407), Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter suggest that the mechanization of individual subjects can be a product of (literally) buying into the commodity web of computer games. Whereas Foucault focuses on schools, barracks, and asylums, the commodity web of computer games is a part of a "society of control" (94).

So there are two highly divided ways of looking at computer games and their potential. For Gee and McGonigal, games offer a long-view, strategy-driven subjectivity that elicits a willingness to think of global systems. For Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, games are the product of a commodity structure that rewards stereotypical depictions of masculine identity and works to produce subjectivities that are immersed in consumer structures. Of course, gaming has become such an immense field that both can be true simultaneously. Some games can elicit strategy-driven responses to global concerns, while others are dominated by consumer-driven

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procedural logic. Post|apocalyptic games are a perfect representative of this divide, as is their most highly-visible icon, the zombie.

The undead have been vehicles for understanding capitalism since Marx himself, who argues in Chapter 10 of *Capital* that "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him." That is, capitalism is entirely predicated on a draining the life of the living work force to produce the "undead"—capital and material products that emerge from labor. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff have further connected the concept of the zombie to neoliberal capitalism at the end of the twentieth century. In South Africa, they build on the larger history of the zombie and its connection to Voodoo (see Bishop, *American Zombie Gothic*), to demonstrate that the fear of the zombie became a factor in labor disputes. In South African folklore, zombies are not the result of viral outbreaks, but instead are created intentionally to be transformed into an instrument of production, a form of perpetual labor. For Comaroff and Comaroff, fear of the "illicit zombie" is linked to fears of the immigrant labor forces brought across national borders through the processes of neoliberalism. As Gerry Canavan puts it: "Remorselessly consuming everything in their path, zombies leave nothing in their wake besides endless copies of themselves, making the zombie the perfect metaphor not only for how capitalism transforms its subjects but also for its relentless and devastating virologic march across the globe" (432).

Zombies have dominated the gaming industry in the first decades of the 21st century. In *American Zombie Gothic*, Kyle Bishop argues that one reason that the zombie has re-emerged as a commanding figure in cinema in the first decades of the twenty-first century is because of the predominance of images of crisis, as in September 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina, but also the

common threat of pandemic from avian influenza. Despite these commonplaces, he sees the primary metaphor as "terrorism itself" (29). If we accept this facet of Bishop's argument, then zombie games (unlike films), are predicated on routinizing the destruction of the disruptive force of the zombies, and therefore are intrinsically conservative. Killing the zombie (the proxy terrorist) is a way for players to maintain whatever the current hegemony happens to be. So, if we live in a neoliberal state, then the destruction of zombies in games is a routine way of maintaining the order of such a state. Certainly some game franchises, such as the *Call of Duty* series, have recently come to alternate freely between games focusing on one or the other—*Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) being a game with several sections devoted to killing terrorists, and the "Zombies" mode has become a staple of the franchise, appearing in *Call of Duty: World at War* (2008), *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010), *Call of Duty: Black Ops II* (2012), and *Call of Duty: Black Ops III* (2015). Killing zombies is a way games can let players protect the established social order.

Yet, zombie narratives can also be critical of capitalism generally, let alone neoliberal capitalism. As Bishop observes, Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) is predicated on a critique of capitalist society, wherein

> the progressive dialectic of society will ultimately stall and fail because humans only consume—they cannot do anything else. When given the chance to transcend the framework of a late-capitalist society in an environment that provides them with all their needs, the surviving humans of *Dawn of the Dead* only seem able to attempt a recreation of the lost structures of society, and they ultimately become fatally overwhelmed by the perceived need to *own* rather than *produce*. (131)

Romero's zombie films include latent critiques of capitalism generally, particularly *Dawn of the Dead*. Bishop further develops the point by arguing that the congregation of the zombies at the mall in *Dawn of the Dead* "functions as an exaggeration of the late capitalist bourgeoisie: blind consumption without any productive contribution, the 'colonization' of humanity by their own consumerism" (139).

Games and zombies share the same kind of dialectical tension. Put one way, a zombie|game ("zombie|game" to refer to one or the other or both at once) can seem to serve the interests of corporate consumerism: players buy in to a franchise, consume the aesthetic object over the course of a few weeks or months, and then buy a new iteration the next year. All the while, they routinely massacre zombies in defense of hegemony and what they regard as normative human experience. Alternatively, a zombie|game *can* be a way in which players adapt strategies to look at global issues that transcend the day-to-day, all the while engaging in elaborate anti-consumerist metaphors. Is it just then a matter of there being some "good" games and some "bad" games? What is certain from the work of Gee and others is that players identify with the protagonists in games in a way that is distinct from other media forms, in part because of the sensation of knowing that the avatar is being observed by the game system. Understanding the rhetoric of zombie games, then, means starting with thinking about the processes of identification in such a game.

The African-American Family in *The Walking Dead*

Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* franchise reflects the processes of mechanization that Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter critique. The game is episodic in nature, with each section of the game presented as an individual unit of sale. From 2012 when the game was released to 2016,

Telltale has sold more than 28 million "episodes" (with each season having five "episodes," so this means something like 5.6 million players bought all of seasons one and two). Additionally, the game is critically acclaimed, having won the "Game of the Year" award from *USA Today, Wired,* and the *Official Xbox Magazine*, as well as several others. One of the most celebrated aspects of the game is the characterization, particularly the relationship between the character Lee Everett (voiced by Dave Fennoy) and the young, African American girl Clementine (voiced by Melissa Hutchison).[22]

Season one of this franchise consists of five episodes, and primarily represents the game-space through a limited third person point of view, centered on Lee Everett. Lee Everett is an African-American convicted murderer who gains his freedom when the police officer escorting him to prison crashes. After he escapes, the player-as-Lee forms a relationship with a young girl discovered alone at a suburban house, named Clementine. In doing so, Lee becomes a proxy father figure for this young girl. The five episodes are designed to emulate a television series, but also allow for other elements that clearly would not be possible in a television format: players receive feedback about how their actions differ or conform with the majority of player actions. In each chapter, five major decisions are presented to the player; when the chapter ends, how other players responded to those choices is displayed to the player, based on data uploaded to the Telltale servers. This is the first of many ways in which the game meta-ludologically interrogates narrative patterns in the gaming medium.

The relationship between camera, character/avatar, and player presents a didactic visual structure which reifies an ethical gaze predicated on panopticism. The procedural rhetoric of

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[22] Hutchison presents as white. If Telltale sought to make a serious comment about African American life, it is a point against their *ethos* that they would cast in this manner. Their casting choice here seems at odds to me with their narrative design and thematic choices.

digital media can build empathetic structures in a distinct manner. In previous chapters, I explored how post|apocalyptic narratives tend to be skeptical of governmental actions, whether it be a transnational coalition or a national state. Instead, the primary emphasis tends to be on the ethical-political awakening of a single individual. The gaming medium allows authors to not simply depict this ethical-political awakening, but reify this awakening in the audience through play.

In choosing to represent the post|apocalyptic world through the eyes of an African-American man convicted of murder and on his way to prison, the game frames the narrative in opposition to more nostalgic narrative patterns. In doing so, it also touches on issues that have been entrenched in American political discourse for decades, but all the more so since the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Being released in 2012, Telltale Games' Season One of this series predates the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the game in no way is a direct comment on that movement. It does, however, touch on the same underlying issues that have been prevalent in American civil discourse for decades: the skyrocketing rates of incarceration in the United States. The National Research Council observes that "The growth in incarceration rates in the United States over the past 40 years is historically unprecedented and internationally unique" (2) and that "More than half the prison population is black or Hispanic. In 2010, blacks were incarcerated at six times and Hispanics at three times the rate for non-Hispanic whites" (2). The widespread incarceration in the United States has resulted in what Angela Davis characterizes as a "prison-industrial complex." Davis argues that as "prisons proliferate in U.S. society, private capital has become enmeshed in the punishment industry. And precisely because of their profit potential, prisons are becoming increasingly important to the U.S. economy." Eric Schlosser further characterizes the prison-industrial

complex as "a set of bureaucratic, political, and economic interests that encourage increased spending on imprisonment, regardless of the actual need."

The Walking Dead franchise across media forms frequently focuses on the carceral state. The comic has several issues devoted to a group of survivors that take refuge at a prison, and the television series devotes multiple seasons to this group's encounters at this same prison. For Lee Everett in the game, the prison is primarily a framing device. Lee is riding to prison after his conviction when the police cruiser driving him crashes because a zombie (in the game and the larger *Walking Dead* universe referred to as "Walkers") walks onto the highway. The police officer escorting him dies in the crash, and Lee is faced with the exigence of the zombie apocalypse. He never considers the prospect of returning to prison. In this sense, the apocalypse is an opportunity for Lee, a chance to reclaim his life. This is most forcefully characterized in the early framing of the game. Although the player has many choices throughout the game, one choice they have no control over is in removing the handcuffs from Lee. To advance, the player must remove their handcuffs, and leave them behind. The first episode is titled "A New Day," reinforcing the sense that the zombie apocalypse offers a different experience, not wholly worse for each character involved.

Fig. 6.2 – The player's first introduction to Lee in "A New Day" frames Lee within the rearview mirror of a police car, being watched by the white sheriff.

Life in the post|apocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead* offers a chance for Lee to break free of the racist self-gaze the player experiences in the narrative frame. The opening sequence of the game occurs while the zombie outbreak has only just begun. It is in these moments that Lee's sense of self is most clearly controlled by the gaze of American white hegemony. In this sequence, Lee and a deputy sheriff are driving to a prison; Lee is still in civilian clothing since he has not yet been imprisoned, but has only just been sentenced. The game camera focuses on Lee's face not directly, but rather through the rear-view mirror of the car, so that the player's

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view of Lee is juxtaposed with the view of the white sheriff. As the camera pulls back, over

Lee's shoulder, Lee's face cannot be seen at all, and instead Lee and the player can only see the

eyes of the white sheriff. Although the camera moves around during this sequence, and

sometimes changes position to show Lee's face, the opening shots foreground the extent to

which the player is forced to see Lee through the existing "rearview mirror" of the recent history

of racism in America. It is notable that this is almost the only time in the entire series where

Lee's face is presented to the player indirectly, through a mirror. After Lee escapes, the camera

almost exclusively either follows Lee from a limited third person, over-the-shoulder perspective

or shows his face unobstructed. In this sense, the player's camera literally sees Lee as "more

complete" after his escape.

The themes of the first episode explore the disruption of Lee's family by imprisonment

and criminality, and in doing so contribute to the longstanding history of family as one locus of

understanding racism in America. Even though Lee has removed his handcuffs, he is still

theoretically on the run from his conviction. Despite this apparent urgency, when Lee enters a

house and discovers that Clementine is on her own during the zombie outbreak, Lee does not

hesitate in taking her under his wing—just moments after breaking out of prison. From this point

on in the game, Clementine becomes Lee's ward, if not his adopted daughter. Both Lee and

Clementine are effectively cut off from their families; Lee because his conviction has alienated

him from his parents, and Clementine because her parents were on a trip to Savannah when the

outbreak began. Due to the disruption in public services, there is no way to tell if Clementine's

parents are alive or dead. On the one hand, it is without question that many players of *The

Walking Dead* will accept this as a way to create tension in the narrative and a story arc for

Clementine in the game. Yet, the game's bookends both focus on the unification of the family.

The first episode focuses on Lee and his alienation from his family. The final episode in the first episode focuses on Clementine, her desire to be reunited with her family, and the validity of Lee's relationship with Clementine. In this sense, the first season of the game explores the myths and realities of family unity in America.

Representing disrupted family structures follows from a long history of racially charged discourse surrounding African American families. In 2008, for instance, President Obama argued that "We need fathers to realize that responsibility does not end at conception" and that "Too many fathers are M.I.A., too many fathers are AWOL, missing from too many lives and too many homes" (Bosman). Of course, President Obama is in part speaking from personal experience, since his father divorced from his mother in 1964 and died in 1984. While this may be the case, President Obama was not speaking on this occasion about his life story, but making a general argument that builds on a decades-long conversation about the relationship between race and family, in part initiated by a report from Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965, called *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Moynihan's report argued that "the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling" and that for working-class African Americans, "the fabric of conventional social relationships has all but disintegrated" (Geary). Moynihan's report has been highly controversial as it has been reinterpreted over the decades. For instance, Bill Moyers released a CBS special report on "The Vanishing Black Family: Crisis in Black America" in 1986, which won a Peabody award. The lack of a clear plan of action or body of proposals reinforced the contentious nature of both works. Patricia Collins argues that both the Moynihan report and the Moyers documentary share the assumption that "white economic privilege is due, in large part, to the superior attitudes and values of white Americans" (876). The conversation continues as various authors either view the Moynihan report as a prophetic work that was

silenced unjustly (for example, Robert Ehrlich's "A Permanent Family Crisis"), and those who

see it as the start of a larger pattern of scapegoating the problems of racism and racial injustice

on black families (for example, Dani McClain's "What Can Stop the Ongoing Assault on Black

Families?"). Lee's adoption of Clementine counter-acts the myth of black father absenteeism.

Fig. 6.3 – Lee tears himself out of the picture of his unified family in "A New Day"

While Lee's adoption of Clementine may reject some stereotypical myths of black

families, he struggles with the alienation from his family that results from his conviction. At a

farm, Lee falls in love with (or befriends, depending on player action) the white Florida-based

fisherman Kenny, his wife Katjaa, and Kenny Jr. who commonly goes by the name "Duck." Lee,

Clementine, and this group make their way to Macon, Georgia, where Lee grew up. When they

are surrounded by zombies, Lee and Kenny's group take shelter in a drugstore owned by Lee's family. While exploring this drugstore, Lee finds a picture of his family. Since Lee is a convicted killer theoretically on the run from the police, Lee tears the picture, literally removing himself from the picture of the unified family. Lee's rationale on why he keeps his past hidden from the group is never fully explained, although it seems likely that he thinks Kenny or Katjaa would either reject him from the group or antagonize his relationship with Clementine. While Lee may have escaped prison and started a new life, he remains alienated from his old family. Lee must not simply survive zombie attacks; he must hide his legal past to survive in the new conditions of his life. Despite his continued alienation from his family, and his attempts to hide the past from most of the group, Lee's conviction is known by two additional characters that join Lee's group in the drugstore. These two characters, Carley and Larry, highlight two attitudes towards criminality. Carley, a reporter, recognizes Lee and makes the connection that he is a convicted murderer. Despite this, Carley was skeptical of the original conviction, suggesting that "Maybe you're a murderer," but contends that she "doesn't really care. Frankly, that's a skill that might come in handy." Larry, however, tries to use the conviction of Lee as a form of control, insisting that if he attempts to flirt or interact with his daughter Lilly that he will tell the whole group Lee's secret. While Lee may feel that "The world is ending out there. Who cares who I am?" it seems that survivors in the post|apocalypse are still quite concerned with Lee's criminality or lack of criminality.

While the post|apocalypse allows Lee to briefly return to his childhood home, the game emphasizes that this return does not constitute a reunification with the family or Lee's family legacy. While this is obvious in that Lee is forced to execute his brother-turned zombie, it is thematically reinforced throughout the episode as well. While exploring the drugstore, Lee

discovers his father's cane. Lee sometimes saw his father "whoop shoplifters with it." While the cane, for Lee, is obviously a memento of his father, it is a particular kind of memento: it does not just signify the father (even putting aside the phallic imagery), it also is a synecdoche for the protection of 20th century capitalism. Lee grew up to be a university professor, moving away from Macon, whereas his brother stayed behind with his family in continued support of the family business, the drugstore. When Lee is arrested, he loses his job, which reflects the extent that Lee has not simply ended his own social life, but also broken the narrative of upward mobility for his family. Yet, for a few brief moments, Lee holds the cane, now the only protector of this drugstore. In the final moments of the first episode, Lee and Kenny's group defend the drugstore from a group of hungry zombies. In an effort to hold the door, Lee tells Clementine that he needs "something real strong" to help hold the door shut. Clementine returns with the cane, and Lee uses it to seal the door. While the cane holds the door long enough for Lee to escape, it breaks as they are departing. Lee's family business is overrun. The recent history of Lee's family seems tied to this business, the small, family owned-and-operated drugstore. While the zombie apocalypse has granted Lee unexpected freedom, it cannot change the larger transformations: the alienation of Lee from his family (and Clementine from hers), or the destruction of Lee's family business. The tools that worked for Lee's parents cannot work for Lee.

The second episode, "Starved for Help," shifts the emphasis from Lee's family to ethics in conditions of scarcity, and shapes what the game presents as the season's primary ethical concern. The episode begins by emphasizing the difficulties of planning an economy in conditions of scarcity that antagonize existing biases, systems of power, and surveillance. In the drugstore, Lee's group added several members, two of which hinge on player choice (the player

must choose to either save the tech-savvy Doug or the reporter-with-a-gun Carley). Two who cannot be avoided going into "Starved for Help" are Lilly and Larry. Lilly, who was previously stationed at Robins Air Force Base, effectively takes control of the group after they flee the drugstore and take up residence at a nearby motel. Lilly rations the food, but when her command is questioned by Kenny, Lilly delegates the rationing to Lee (and the player). For the day's rations, the entire group has two packs of crackers, some beef jerky, and half an apple. Lee has to decide out of the entire group, including Kenny's entire family, Clementine, (Doug or Carley, depending on player choice), Larry, and Lilly, who gets food—in addition to recent additions to the group, Ben and Mark. There are five food items for nine people. If Lee refuses to give to Larry, Larry accuses him of refusing him for political reasons. Kenny and Katjaa both insist that Duck be fed first. So for instance, if Lee is to feed their only member with medical experience (Katjaa) or one of the best hunters (Kenny), then Lee has to give one family half of the daily rations. Lee finds the task so emotionally exhausting that he may sympathize with Lilly as leader of the group.

The desperation of the food situation motivates the group to explore an alliance with a local farm owned by Andrew and Danny St. John, to consider a more sustainable form of living than the salvagepunk style they have been subsisting off thus far. While the St. John dairy offers the façade of sustainable living and a way to transition off salvagepunk, the game's narrative nonetheless interrogates the non-renewable commodities apparently sustainable communities rely on, namely oil. The St. John brothers initially contact Lee's group because they are, in fact, looking to salvage or trade for gasoline to power their generator. To negotiate this exchange, Lee's group visits the dairy. Once there, many of the characters comment on how this rural estate seems untouched by the pandemic. Some of these comments go beyond the zombie outbreak of

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course, as Clementine's observation that "It's pretty. It reminds me of how things used to look before," as she is pushed by Lee in a rehabilitated swing-set, is not simply a comment on the contrast of this place to the zombie pandemic afflicting the surrounding region but also alludes to the contrast between the rustic appeal of this agrarian landscape with the urban settings of the drugstore and motel where the previous sections of the game have taken place.[23] Despite the apparent sustainability of the St. John's farm, however, the entire system relies on one generator to power the electric fence which keeps the Walkers at bay. This one generator is run on gasoline. Despite the apparent threat of this generator failing or running out of gas, the idea of living on a farm seems appealing to several members of the group. Unfortunately, the St. John's dairy merely presents the pretense of sustainability. The St. John family ultimately plans to murder Lee's group and eat them. Lee's group fights back, and the final images of the farm focus on the generator, failing, and the place being overrun by zombies. The St. John episode is overcome by the depravity of cannibalism, including the possibility that Clementine will accidentally eat a cooked section of one of their group members, and the violent confrontation among Lee and the St. John family. In addition to the exploration of cannibalism and the reiteration of the depravity people will sink to in the search for food, the episode does also highlight the extent that a greenwashed, apparently sustainable future that nonetheless depends on non-renewable energy sources is hardly a sustainable solution at all.

The desperation of the food situation, coupled with the fallout from the St. John's dairy (having lost the dairy and all food there to the Walkers after the generator fails) serves to set up

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[23] The dairy is also the host of some of the most visibly racist statements from Kenny, who presumes that Lee knows how to break into a locked room in the barn because he's black. Kenny excuses himself by arguing that "I'm from Florida! Crazy shit just comes out of my mouth sometimes."

the final conflict of "Starved for Help." On their way back to the motel, Lee's group discovers a parked car, still-running, filled with food. Kenny insists to his family that they will take the food, even as his child, Duck, offers some concern. Kenny explains to his son, "Don't worry about that [that they are stealing the food], it's ours now." Like Duck, Clementine also offers concern, asking "What if it's not abandoned? What if it IS someone's?" Ultimately, though, the decision to take the food is not left up to the player. Kenny insists that "we don't have time for this shit. Like it or not, we NEED this food." Lee's group has generally subsisted off scavenging and hunting, so taking property that is unattended (scavenging) is already one of the core bases of their survival. Despite this, the possibility that this is theft, not scavenging, is apparent from the car still being running and the fact they traveled through this area earlier and they know this car has been here less than a day. This theft is the primary motivation for "The Stranger" who serves as the final enemy of the game.

"We NEED this food": Theft, Delinquency, and Power in *The Walking Dead* franchise

Fig. 6.4 – Kenny, center, orders Lee to help take the food, while Lilly, left, looks out.

Ultimately the player has no option of preventing the group from taking the Stranger's food, they only choose their level of complicity. Depending on options in the game's interface (accessed through the menu), the game can also let the player know how it is interpreting decisions in key moments, by displaying text messages in the upper left-hand corner (here "You chose to take the car from the food anyway.")

Kenny's argument that "We NEED this food" is an ethical argument, and it is this ethical argument that the game interrogates over the course of the season. In what circumstances, if any, should there be exceptions to the juridical claim "do not steal"? The control of property, and the

capacity of states to protect property, are two of the most fundamental domains where neoliberal ideology and libertarian ideology come into conflict. Neoliberal ideology, in favoring free trade, necessitates the strict discipline and division of workforces. Neoliberal ideology argues for a lack of government oversight in some areas. As Harvey puts it, neoliberal ideals feel threatened by "all forms of state intervention that substituted collective judgements for those of individuals free to choose" (5). This emphasis on deregulation puts more weight on other facets of social infrastructure. For example, when neoliberalism rejects the institution of the psychiatric hospital, this relegates the needs of psychiatric patients often to the police, as happened with Reagan's deinstitutionalization of psychiatric hospitals in California while governor in the 1960s (see Abramson 1972). Neoliberal ideology requires a state that is tasked with protecting the material goods of workers so that it is profitable for them to spend their time and labor in a factory. Effectively, neoliberal ideology requires a strong police force; yet this can seem to conflict with libertarian ideology that emphasizes that the state should perform its functions using as few resources as possible, and should as much as possible not own or administrate public resources. This conflict results in schizophrenic states that are tasked with protecting all goods while having no resources. Theft, then, is one way in which narratives interrogate the contradictory notions of the correct role of the state in juridical and practical terms. *The Walking Dead* further explores the concept of theft to emphasize the necessity of internalized ethical codes, and the capacity of individuals to explicate those ethical codes in conditions of scarcity.

Theft is a major plot point in four of the five episodes of season one; every episode other than the first. In episode three, "Long Road Ahead," Ben Paul steals supplies from the group at the motor inn to maintain a truce with nearby bandits, without informing the rest of the group. This arrangement leads Lilly to become highly suspicious, and she kills either Carley or Doug

(depending on which the player saved in episode one) in a violent confrontation while trying to find the thief. Despite Ben's thefts, the bandits attack, and Lee's group is forced to flee the motor inn. Ben is so full of self-loathing over this string of events, that he asks Lee to let him die in a desperate situation (whether Lee does or not depends on player choice). In episode four, "Around Every Corner," Lee learns that the survivor community of "Crawford" was killed due to the fallout of its policy on healthcare and theft. Oberson, the leader of Crawford, has an authoritarian set of policies that deny the right to life to anyone with advanced medical conditions. One survivor, Molly, has a sister with diabetes, so she begins stealing insulin in an arrangement with Dr. Logan. When Crawford begins cracking down on the mysterious thefts, Molly kills Dr. Logan; when Dr. Logan reanimates as a zombie, he starts the outbreak and the community is destroyed. Thefts then are frequently taken in Season One of *The Walking Dead* in response to what characters see as unreasonable policies: Ben feels their small group has little chance against the bandits, and Molly is unwilling to accept the banishment or death of her sister due to the need to preserve insulin supplies.

Theft or apparent theft serves as the primary motivation for several characters in the rest of Telltale Games' series as well. In "400 Days," a separate episode meant to lead in to season two, a group of survivors from Crawford recount that they fell apart after stealing a boat from Lee's group. In Season Two of *The Walking Dead*, the authoritarian leader William Carver is characterized by his violent treatment of theft, beating anyone close to death that steals from his group. In particular, Carver nearly beats Kenny to death when he takes responsibility for stealing a flashlight. In Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead: Michonne*, a woman named Norma leads a community called Monroe and her antagonistic relationship with Michonne begins because of Michonne's apparent relationship with two thieves, Samantha and Greg Fairbanks. The leader of

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each community, whether it be Lilly, Carver, Oberson, or anyone else, tends to retain their position due to a high reliance on the control of personal and group property. Almost every community in Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* falls apart directly or indirectly due to acts of theft.

Through this systematic representation of theft, the games explore arguments in favor of libertarian principles, and critiques of libertarian ideals. One economist whose ideals helped shape the modern libertarian movement is Murray Rothbard. Rothbard argues that "there are no human rights that are separable from property rights" (52), a point which is intrinsically connected to Rothbard's critique of government ownership. Rothbard further argues that "It is only the universal fact of government ownership and control of the streets that makes this problem [the arbitrary nature of government decisions] insoluble and cloaks the true solution to it. The point is that *whoever* owns a resource will decide on how that resource is to be used" (119). Under a strictly libertarian view, the problem of many of these communities is the initial drive to collectively pool resources. The problem of Lee's group (which leads to Ben stealing some medical supplies), Crawford (where Molly steals medical supplies), and Carver's group (where Kenny claims to have stolen a flashlight) is that in each case the community has pooled certain resources, at which point the distribution of those resources falls to an individual: Lilly, Crawford, and Carver are all frequently critiqued for their handling of the distribution of limited resources, and the thefts that occur result in total social breakdown. In this sense, the game series is open to a reading in favor of libertarian ideals.

Yet, a pro-libertarian reading fails in two major regards. First, a libertarian reading fails to recognize why the communities voluntarily pool resources in the first place. Second, a libertarian reading provides no framework for the restitution of grievances. First, in regard to the

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decision to pool resources collectively: in conditions of scarcity, security becomes a primary

concern. The post|apocalyptic setting of *The Walking Dead*, with its roaming hordes of undead

walkers, allows for the creation of micro-states of small communities. These small communities

need a distribution of work and resources, much of which requires immaterial labor in a shared

living space. In Lee's group, some group members scavenge or hunt (Lee and Kenny), some

provide medical care (Katjaa), and some provide a system of surveillance to protect material

goods while group members are scavenging (Lilly). When they are scavenging, Lee and Kenny

cannot reasonably carry all of their possessions with them. For this reason, essential resources

are pooled with the group under the surveillance of Lilly. Communal possession occurs precisely

in the pursuit of greater security of properties. It is important to emphasize here that the

communal ownership of some properties does not deny the basic human right of property

ownership (except, perhaps, in the case of Carver in Season 2). People can and do own personal

property in each of these communities. The libertarian argument that communal ownership is

disruptive to human life, in this sense, is simply untenable. Communities pool resources in the

name of security; this is one of the foundations on which communities are built.

So libertarian readings, which may seem meretriciously appealing at first glance, miss the

essential conflict here. It is not between communal ownership and private ownership; privatizing

the medical stores in each case would not resolve all conflict. Rather, the conflict is between the

systems of security and the systems of discipline, as neither is able to reach a juridical system

that is satisfactory to all parties and internally consistent. Foucault characterizes the juridical

system as "laying down a law and fixing a punishment for the person who breaks it" with a

"binary division between the permitted and the prohibited" (20). The disciplinary system

includes the "detective, medical, and psychological techniques" that appear "within the domain

of surveillance, diagnosis, and the possible transformation of individuals" (20). A system of security, in contrast, "inserts the phenomenon in question, namely theft, within a series of probable events" which leads to "an average considered as optimal on the one hand, and, on the other a bandwidth of the acceptable that must not be exceeded" (20-21). An ethic of security, as maintained by Lilly, Obserson, and Carver, reflects the extent that authoritarian leaders feel their community is based on the protection of communal and private property. With this in mind, each leader advances a transformed juridical code that, at least in the case of Lilly, is not clearly articulated. Of course, capital punishment for theft is not unheard of, as in the year 1124, forty-four thieves were hung in a mass execution (McGyll 56); theft remained a capital crime in England into the eighteenth century. While security is the basis of each of these communities, each leader fails to recognize the extent that scarcity and deprivation has precipitated theft as a commonplace behavior. Authoritarian leaders fail to recognize the extent that only considering an ethic of security, with no regard for disciplinary systems (instead generally resorting to capital punishment first and foremost) ignores the material reality of the conditions they live in, and moreover, the *history* therein.

The concept of "history" is a subtext in Season One of Telltale Games' series, which is developed slightly more in Season Two. First, there are minor points: Lee, before his conviction, was a history professor at the University of Georgia. This point is reiterated in episode 3, "Long Road Ahead," when Christa (another survivor, voiced by Mara Junot) explains why she has come to be in Georgia. Christa and her boyfriend Omid were traveling from California on "the great American road trip," and they were in Georgia because Omid loves civil war history. Christa asks, "Who the hell is into Civil War history anyway? Other than old white guys." To which Lee, as a former history professor, raises his hand. In season one, civil war history is

primarily a way of characterizing Lee, but it becomes more prominent in the second season. In Season Two, Episode 4, "Amid the Ruins," Clementine makes her way to "Parker's Run," a civil war museum, based on the actual Parker's Crossroads, and the site of the "Battle of Parker's Run" in Tennessee. Rebecca, a black woman whose pregnancy may be the result of rape by the authoritarian (white) leader Carver, is going into labor and needs supplies. Clementine, while scavenging at the civil war museum, finds a Confederate coat which she uses as a blanket for Rebecca. Civil War history matters to this series. This is clear both from the in-game references, and paratextual references as in the title of Episode Seven, "A House Divided," a reference to Abraham Lincoln's speech where he argues that "this government cannot endure, half *slave* and half *free*."

In considering the *history* of the Civil War, it could be alternatively phrased that the game considers the legacy of the Civil War, and with it, the legacy of Jim Crow. Richard Wright characterized his "Jim Crow education" as "no longer brutally cruel, but subtly cruel. Here I learned to lie, to steal, to dissemble. I learned to play that dual role which every Negro must play if he wants to eat and live." Segregation and Jim Crow laws that relied on systems of surveillance, discipline, and punishment, like the apparent failure of prison systems, worked to produce delinquency. Foucault characterizes the ways that complaints about the prison system have remained unchanged for hundreds of years: that "prison cannot fail to produce delinquents" (266) since they are trained in no skills with which they will find work; that the "conditions to which the free inmates are subjected necessarily condemn them to recidivism" (267), and likewise that reducing the family to destitution further creates a system of delinquency and crime (268).

In meditating on the role of theft in the conditions of scarcity produced by the zombie apocalypse, *The Walking Dead* tends to interrogate relativist justifications for theft. On the one hand, sometimes theft, may seem to come more from a sense of differing ideology and different attitudes in responding to disparities in power. Ben, in stealing medical supplies from the group to pay off the local gangs, is not wholly wrong—the gang does attack Lee's group when he stops offering payments. In effect, there are two different narratives at play—Lee's group operates more in the vein of Rick's group from the comic *The Walking Dead*. Rick, with his cowboy aesthetic, might have confronted the local gang directly. Ben's choice reflects how the game rejects the ideology of *The Walking Dead* comic and the hero-through-violence dialectic it often presents. Lee, Kenny, and Clementine are not the swaggering heroes of the rest of *The Walking Dead*. Yet, it is unlikely players will identify with Ben. In the times I have taught this game, most of my students' initial impression is to blame Ben for the disintegration of the group. This is an ideological standpoint that is supported throughout the game: whatever ideological beliefs are at play, acts of theft destroy social cohesion (in Molly's case, literally contributing to the zombie outbreak).

The game's principal rhetorical structure demands that players articulate their reasoning in support of ethical crises. Throughout the series, players interact with the game world through dialogue choices. In this sense, the primary mechanism of the game is to articulate arguments (or, to remain silent, as is always an option). Yet, in what effectively is the most crucial ethical decision, Lee is unable to articulate a counter-argument to Kenny's ethic of expediency. This ethic of expediency is one which Steven Katz characterizes as "*phronesis* (practical wisdom or prudence) as an end in itself" (260). The player is presented with no choice that rebuts Kenny's argument that, "we don't have time for this shit. Like it or not, we NEED this food" when

considering the food at the station wagon. The player thus is presented with a failure, on the part of Lee, to explicate moral reasoning that would rebut Kenny's claims that their moral claim to this property outweighs the conventional wisdom that stealing is wrong. The final conflict of the game, between Lee and the stranger, compels Lee to explicate a defense of the group's choice, one which he largely fails to do. In this sense, the didactic structure of the game is meant to compel players to articulate ethical reasoning in the times of greatest scarcity, and in doing so reject the systems that reinforce delinquency.

<center>"We Can Be a Family": The Stranger's Confrontation</center>

Individuals need to be able to express their ethical precepts in times of crisis. *The Walking Dead* is a way for players to explore the transformation of ethical principles into practical situations requiring consequential choices. Yet, there are also holes, moments and choices where Lee does not have an option to counter-act unethical or apparently unethical actions taking place. In these moments, the player is compelled to reflect, through juxtaposition, thematic reiteration, and finally direct reevaluation. The game's structure, viewing and remembering each player action, not only contrasts the player's choices to other players (at the end of each chapter), but also interrogates the player's choices by the game's own internal reasoning, articulated by the Stranger.

The Stranger takes the themes of family and theft and juxtaposes them to produce a moment of reflection. In the final episode of Season One, Clementine is lured to a hotel in Savannah by the Stranger on the promise of seeing her parents. Lee follows her, and with Clementine trapped in a bathroom, Lee confronts the Stranger. The Stranger knows about each of Lee's (and the player's) decisions in the game through Clementine, who has spoken to him over

a walkie talkie hoping to learn more about her parents. The Stranger recounts how his son went missing on a hunting trip, and while he and his wife were out looking for him, Lee's group stole the supplies from his station wagon. This broke apart the Stranger's family. As a kind of revenge, but also as a judgment on Lee and the player's actions, the Stranger believes that he should be the surrogate father for Clementine instead of Lee. Even though Lee has by this point been infected and is likely near death, Lee finds the idea of the Stranger supplanting him unthinkable.

This conflict varies wildly depending on the player's actions, although certain features of the conversation remain the same. The game presents no scenario, for instance, where the player ultimately does not feel rewarded for combatting the Stranger and preventing him from taking Clemetine. This is because the Stranger's speech, and his accusations against Lee, are undermined by the fact that he seems mentally unstable. He sometimes speaks to a bag, which holds the decapitated head of his wife. It is improbable that the player would ever feel that the Stranger is an appropriate surrogate for Lee, no matter how maliciously they have played Lee or how distant they are to Clementine. That being said, the fact that the Stranger's rhetorical position is undermined should not in itself change the initial impact of the player's choices being interrogated. Yet this too can vary wildly from player to player. Some players may have objected to taking the supplies from the station wagon (despite the heavy emphasis on the scarcity of food in Episode 2), in which case Lee himself (and the player) are not as clearly culpable. The player never really had a choice in whether the food was taken or not; Kenny takes it regardless of Lee's decision. While Lee is forced to make some hard decisions, the player may feel they have made the most ethically sound decisions throughout the game based on the given information. In this case, many of the Stranger's criticisms may seem hollow or weak. Yet it may be slightly

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more likely that, at least on the initial play-through, players may make some choices that are not wholly in line with their sense of ethics. In this case, the player's confrontation with the Stranger may be a stark reminder of the choices they made at their harshest or most severe.

The Stranger's attack on Lee is an attack on Lee as a father. The Stranger argues, "I can take care of her. We can be a family. I bet you don't even know when her birthday is." The Stranger's focus is on Lee's criminality, but also on the ways in which the harsh conditions of their group have put Clementine in danger. Some of the Stranger's critiques are simply that Clementine was threatened, as when Lee took her to the St. John dairy. Yet this critique of Lee's family again echoes the criticisms of many families living in the conditions of scarcity. As William Evans argues, "in the twenty-first century, the families of the poor are often shattered, their isolated members left in a chaotic 'now' world where yesterday is shadow and tomorrow a black hole" (240). Different systems of dispossession work in tandem. The unstated logic goes: people living in conditions of scarcity are seen as unable to protect their children and create safe environments; therefore, they cannot be trusted to raise those families. The unobserved reality follows: as families are disrupted, it is harder to build the skills necessary to advance economically. As McKee emphasizes, "Traditionally, families have been mutual self-help teams who over the generations help each other to acquire the skills, education, and social ties for getting ahead" (240).

Lee's confrontation with the Stranger does not directly address the fact that he is infected with the zombie virus by the time he reaches the Marsh House. Many characters in zombie narratives, for some amount of time, are bitten or infected. This transitory state, between when they are infected and when they "turn" highlights the contrast between human bodies, applicable to juridical and ethical law, and zombie bodies, which are defined by the absence of juridical

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laws. The greatest argument the Stranger could have made to Lee, but one which he does not and could not, is that Lee is infected and therefore is intrinsically incapable of protecting Clementine. The Stranger cannot make this argument because he might not know, and Clementine does not know, that this is with certainty the case. Lee, for instance, may have cut off his arm above where he was cut in the futile hope to avoid infection. A recurring situation in zombie narratives is the moment of indeterminacy in infection—the zombie fantastic.

Immediately before Lee enters into this confrontation with the Stranger, Lee has to enter the Marsh House through a mass of walkers. When all other options fail, Lee hacks his way through with a knife. This brutal sequence highlights the total violence used on zombie bodies. Canavan argues that "we find the zombies allegorizing the racial forms of exclusion and extermination that already surround us. Zombie narratives are ultimately about the motivation for and unleashing of total violence" (442) and that "Zombie films depict total, unrestrained violence against absolute Others whose very existence is seen as anathema to our own, Others who are in essence living death. In our time, when this sort of unrestrained racial violence is officially suspect but nonetheless *unofficially* still a foundation for the basic operation of technological civilization, zombie narratives serve as the motivating license for confrontation with these sorts of genocidal technologies and power fantasies" (439-440). Just as Lee must destroy zombies to reach Clementine by hacking into heads and severing limbs, so must he kill the Stranger—or allow him to be killed, instead, by Clementine.

Lee's story ends in handcuffs. As Lee feels the onset of death, aware he will become a Walker, he orders Clementine to handcuff him to a radiator, arguing, "No matter what happens, you'll be safe then." Certainly a wide variety of narratives present self-sacrificial characters. This version of self-sacrifice couples the sacrifice of the self with an ethic of security and the theme of

personal responsibility. Lee's choice to order Clementine to put him in handcuffs reflects the extent to which he has internalized ethical values and the ethic of security that undergirds the narrative. Like Lee, the player is meant to internalize the values of the game, to reject the malleability of postmodernism, and translate ethics into praxis. The primary mechanic of the game is to choose what to say, and then to say it. To speak out. Yet there are moments that the game recognizes individuals struggle to speak out, to articulate their ethics. The moral of the game—and its didactic structure does have morals—is that if you fail to speak out against injustice, you too will be held responsible.

In conveying this moral, the game struggles to reject the structure of delinquency while accepting the reasoning behind an ethic of security. It is unlikely that players will identify with Ben and his decision to steal from the group to pay off the local gang. Yet Carver, Oberson, and many of the authoritarian leaders are characterized as tyrannical. So, while the game accepts that the tyrannical, unjust systems established by Carver, Oberson, and others produce delinquents (like Molly), it nevertheless still emphasizes that stealing—regardless of anti-tyrannical justification—is traumatizing to communities and antithetical to group cohesion. In this sense, the game struggles between the libertarian rejection of statist authority, but nevertheless is skeptical of the utopian liberal idea that rejects communal action or the pooling of resources. Just how much control over property should the state have? When exactly does an ethic of security transform into tyranny? While the game rejects the idea that individual leaders should have all power or that the state as a whole should have none, it struggles to articulate what a happy balance could or should look like. If anything, the arrangement of Kenny, Lilly, and Lee at the motor home is the best example in the series. When the relationship between the state and citizens is best, it seems, there is constant conflict, constant argument over who gets what and

what is a just distribution of resources. Perhaps, after all, the best state is one that embraces the

fact that healthy states have lively public spheres and contentious, sometimes highly divided,

public discourse.

Conclusion: Teaching Post|Apocalyptic Discourse

"The faith in Utopia, which killed so many in the centuries following the French Revolution, is dead." John Gray, *Black Mass*.

Post|apocalyptic discourse can be seen as perhaps intrinsically pedagogical in nature, which goes hand in hand with the tendency of post|apocalyptic narratives to be highly rhetorical or didactic in nature. Consider Gagné's nine events of instruction. Gagné's first event is to gain attention. Storytellers and teachers both want to gain attention, and one way to do that is to present a problem to be solved. In Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, for instance, the novel is framed around Jimmy's attempt to understand how humanity came to nearly go extinct. The world has ended—the problem in and of itself elicits attention. Gagné's second event is to provide a learning objective. The pedagogue, then, can frame Jimmy's exploration with that of the class. Like Jimmy, the class struggles to understand the primary causes, which in turn becomes a challenge in understanding Crake's rationale and his life. Unlike other discursive formations, one appeal of post|apocalyptic discourse pertains to Gagné's third event: stimulating recall of prior knowledge. The tendency of post|apocalyptic narratives to be rooted in the conditions of modern life allows readers and the class to feel familiar with the challenges and circumstances of the characters. Post|apocalyptic disourse often provides scaffolding, building on the already existing world that readers are already familiar with and then adding more detail about how that world has changed given specific circumstances over time.

In presenting material, Gagné's fourth event, post|apocalyptic discourse often succeeds with chunking topics around specific characters who metonymically signify the larger topics of the narrative project. In *The Islands at the End of the World*, each island represents different

responses to suddenly emerging scarcity. Even *The Road*, which almost seems to deliberately avoid chunking by avoiding conventional novelistic techniques such as chapter breaks, has developed concerns rooted in specific locales and characters: the cannibals enslaving people under the house and the man's inability to help, the confrontation with Eli and his nihilism, and the confrontation with an inhabitable ocean. Each chapter of Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* showcases a different scenario dealing with theft and the issues of security.

Contemporary post|apocalyptic discourse has a further appeal when considering Gagné's fifth event, providing guidance for learning. Learning guidance often relies on examples and non-examples—this is precisely the strategy that Margaret Atwood employs in "It's Not Climate Change—It's Everything Change." In arguing for a sustainable transition away from fossil fuels, Atwood imagines a utopia and a dystopia. Narrative worlds are domains of exploration. In Butler's *Parable of the Talents* and *Parable of the Sower*, Butler explores the ideology of Earthseed as a positive example while showcasing the horrors both of the slavery at "Camp Christian" and the depravity of the drug-addict attack at Robledo to highlight different negative examples of authoritarianism and anarchy. Games like *The Walking Dead* further allow an exploration of different complex examples to further interrogate institutional models and ethical precepts.

Post|apocalyptic discourse further elicits performance, Gagné's sixth event. One of the most common facets of eliciting performance is in eliciting elaborations. Almost by definition, post|apocalyptic discourse can never fully represent all social and societal transformations or the challenges of each individual undergoing these changes. Instead, they tend to elicit elaborations, encouraging the audience to hypothesize about the specific circumstances that precipitated the post-apocalyptic world. In *Children of Men*, for example, the Omegas appear in the forest in both

versions already chaotic and antagonistic. While Theo speculates about why they act the way they do, the narrative offers no total explanation. As characters confront unusual phenomena and ways of living, the reader is compelled to consider why people would choose to live in such a manner and what social behaviors prompted them to do so.

Working with living authors further allows for an additional form of feedback, Gagné's seventh event. While concerns with the "intentional fallacy" can help us de-emphasize the totality of authorial intention in their work, it is undeniable that artists imagine their work engaging with social commentary, and their comments can help incentivize further consideration. As Austin Aslan observes in my interview with him, many politically active groups "don't have loud enough voices or strong enough followings to gain critical momentum on issues. This is where popular entertainers like novelists or movie directors and their ilk can step in and carry weight" ("Interview 2: Austin Aslan" 217). Conversely, Mark Yohalem argues that the key to creating well-received art is to "not treat ideas with contempt" ("Interview 3: Mark Yohalem" 222). There is a pernicious temptation for many artists to "create caricatures of the things their creators dislike and then use those as straw men." Living artists and contemporary works can help build interest in causes that otherwise might not have traction, while also demonstrating the complexity and nuance of broad concerns to avoid oversimplification.

New digital texts are particularly adept at assessing performance. This occurs through a variety of forms; of course, most nominally, there is the indication that some rhetorical strategies and some choices result in death, which then requires the player to explore different strategies. Yet there are other forms of feedback that assess performance as well. In recording player actions and displaying the ratio of different player actions (how many players choose to commit

a mercy kill for someone infected, for instance), Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* creates a sense of normative responses to ethical scenarios. New media forms are making some attempt at measuring "assessment" while keeping it far away from seeming like a "quiz." Likewise, new media can make it easier than ever to share artistic productions and receive feedback.

The goal of post|apocalyptic discourse is to enhance the retention of key concepts and to in turn internalize new knowledge. In thinking about individual political action, people engaging with James' *The Children of Men* can consider how and why Theo fails to convince the council and Xan to implement policies to support the immigrant sojourners, care for the elderly aside from the Quietus, or reform the penal system. We can consider the limits of rational-critical debate and the challenges of rhetorical strategy when facing an ideological wall. In doing so, post|apocalyptic discourse helps push us further away from a purely decorative understanding of narrative representation and confront the broader issues at hand. As Jeff Gillette argues:

> What I think creates over-saturation of apocalyptical content is real life. Real world events: devastating earthquakes, horrific typhoons, refugee crises, wars, and recently and most harrowing, the atrocities being executed by the religious fanatics in the unstable regions of the Middle East, and Africa – this is the stuff that makes the art about the horror superfluous. Like insult onto injury. As long as there is some buffer between the audience and real-life threats, then the art about worst case scenarios [can] be seen and enjoyed vicariously. ("Interview 1: Jeff Gillette" 208)

The world is always changing, and there are catastrophes that occur that change the way we imagine disaster. The climate is changing. The nature of the American economy is changing. The faith of individuals in political institutions, in 2016 when I am writing this, perhaps has not been lower since the Civil War. Partisanship and vitriol have corroded the public sphere. When it

seems so difficult for people to engage in civil discourse, it has never been more useful to consider post|apocalyptic discourse and look at its examples of how imperial sentiments can rise again, why we struggle to imagine alternatives to the extremes of anarchy and authoritarianism, and the limits of rational-critical debate to effect social change. There are real challenges not just in the future ahead, but in how we will think of and imagine that future.
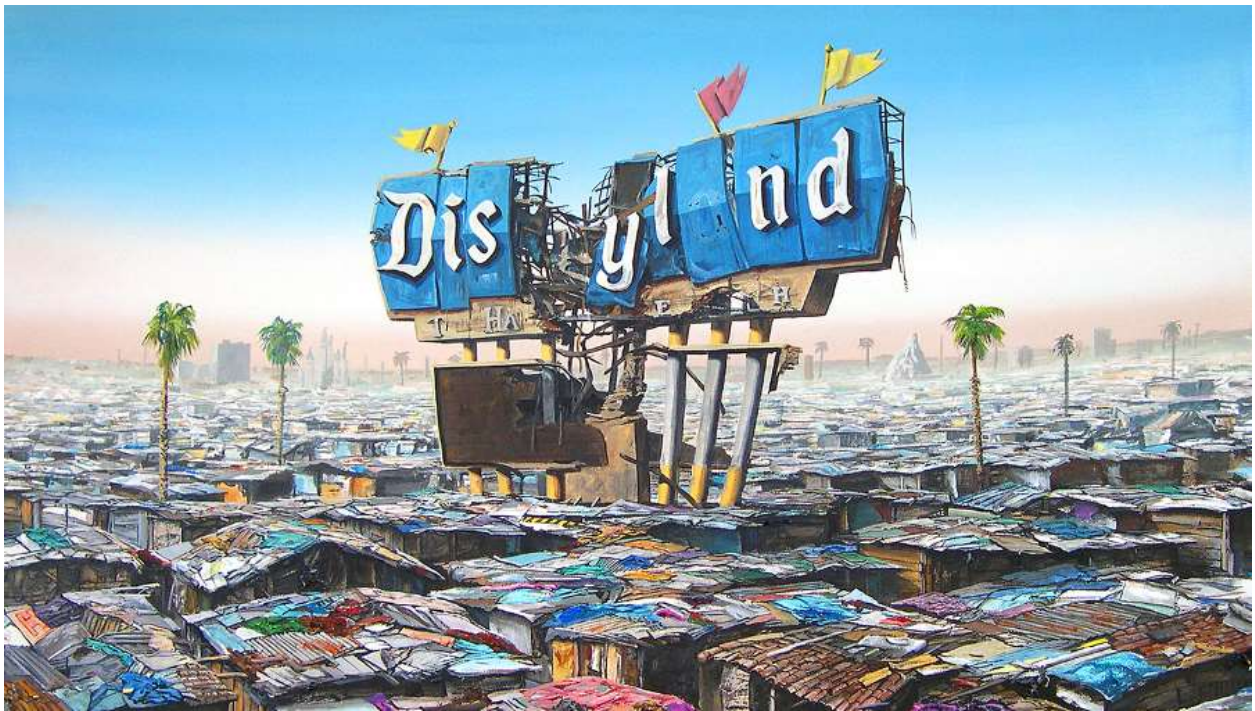

Fig 7.1, Jeff Gillette, "DISYLND"

APPENDIX: INTERVIEWS

Interview 1: Jeff Gillette

Jeff Gillette is a California-based painter whose "Dismayland" series drew international

attention when it was featured as part of Banksy's "Dismaland" installation in the UK.

Examples of his work can be found at http://www.bertgreenfineart.com/artists/gillette/index.html

Group 1: Producing the Post-Apocalypse: Inspirations & Influences

1: *Goldner's account* (http://bgfa.us/Resources/gillette_press.pdf) *mentions your distaste*

for the "utopian artificiality" of Disneyland when you first visited. Can you expand on this

experience?

My first visit to Disneyland was my last. I didn't go as a kid to really appreciate it, but

instead while baby-sitting my wife's niece. We took her to Disneyland. My preference for

vacations and visiting places is India. I can't help but to juxtapose the one time I've been

to Disneyland's 'Main Street USA to the 20+ times I've been to Indian Megacities. Visiting a

developing country's urban areas is as real and intense as you can get. Disneyland is so far away

from that, that its aura becomes one of a façade: everything orderly, no trash in the streets, no

traffic jams of un-muffled cars…etc.,the Magic Kingdom becomes more of an aberration than a

fantasy…

2: *What other artists (if any) did you work with in creating your Dismayland series?*

My Dismayland (not Dismaland) series was done by myself with inspiration garnered

from travelling and living in third world areas, especially urban areas and the slums of the big

cities, most notably: Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Manila, Cairo, Nairobi, Jakarta and Detroit.

3: *What artworks, movies, stories, or games have most influenced the design of your Dismayland series?*

My favorite influence was the parody comics and comix I've read as a teenager and young adult. I loved Mad Magazine, (the old Reprints of Mad featuring Wally Wood were the best!), National Lampoon and the underground comics of Crumb, Spiegelman, Williams… I made hundreds of comix and as I matured, these evolved into collages, often featuring Disney characters and fun juxtapositions: Mickey Mouse being crucified, the Magic Kingdom Castle in the slums…etc. Later, these hundreds of collages that I used to practically give-away, have become the fodder for ideas in my paintings.

Group 2: Producing the Post-Apocalypse: Reception & Audience

4&5: *What were your expectations for how the Dismayland series would be received? How did the actual reception differ from your expectations?*

My focus in my paintings has been third world blight, like a worst-case domestic/urban scenario. When I create landscapes full of just slums, to the viewer they are often claustrophobic, oppressive and distressing. Just like in real life, not many people want to see slums or think about them. It is when I add something from the first world into these third world shanty-towns that the visual gains a whole new content. The Juxtaposition gives the landscapes (what I call 'Slumscapes") an 'anchor' or a 'hook' to connect to the audience a meaning beyond the two elements in isolation. In my slumscape paintings, I've inserted Billboards, Disney stuff (signs, characters and castles), The Emerald City, Highway overpasses, squatting fashion Models and Cartoon Characters, Art Museums, Big Satellite Dishes, Fine Art paintings and other cultural icons. All of these interventions create intense conversations with the surprise they bring to the environment. I feel I can do this and have an arm"s-length distance between me and the subjects.

After all, maybe I'm not Anti-Disney, but just find it fun to pique the emotions of those that are, or better, those that hold Disney as sacred and beloved. The result is somehow I caught the attention of one of the biggest artists in the world and found a spot for my work at Banksy's Dismaland.

6: *Do you feel like we have been in the midst of an "apocalyptic Renaissance" or conversely are you worried your audience will get "burnt out" on over-saturation of apocalyptic texts (films, games, etc.)?*

Besides content is 'form.' People may get accustomed to content of the apocalypse, but since it involves fear and survival, it will always perk interest. The form is the 'hook' to give the content its life. Making a movie that is spellbinding or a painting that is beautiful no longer is just about the content, but more about an aesthetic experiencing of art. What I think creates over-saturation of apocalyptical content is real life. Real world events: devastating earthquakes,, horrific typhoons, refugee crises, wars, and recently and most harrowing, the atrocities being executed by the religious fanatics in the unstable regions of the Middle East, and Africa – this is the stuff that makes the art about the horror superfluous. Like insult onto injury. As long as there is some buffer between the audience and real-life threats, then the art about worst case scenarios be seen and enjoyed vicariously.

Group 3: Social Commentary

7: *To what extent do you see your Dismayland series as participating in social commentary on climate change?*

 Climate change seems to be the fashionable, celebrity cause of the hour. The REAL issue that is pressing our planet is overpopulation. Everybody consuming, using energy that burns fossil

fuels, everybody creating waste, most of it not recycled. Everybody has a phone, Everybody wants a car and a big house. Most of these 'everybodies' make babies, sometimes several, that perpetuate and compound the problem. That is more about what my work is about. In the light of insufficient allocation of resources due to politics, religion or metaphysics (I lean towards the latter: it is nature, not just 'human' nature that is dooming us to failure…) the problem of too many people is what is most pressing for our survival. I feel it every day, whether I am thinking about my slogging through a slum in Mumbai, Manila, Peru, Cairo, or Detroit or sitting in the midst of gridlock of 18 lanes of freeway in Southern California traffic on the way to work.

8: *To what extent do you see your Dismayland series as participating in a social commentary on consumerism?*

I love this aspect of my work! I enjoy it when I use a trapping of our consumerist culture as building material for impromptu slum housing: like putting an 'X box" on the roof of the shack, or having a Coca-Cola or Apple logo poster as part of the architecture of a slum wall, a priceless, draped and tattered Lichtenstein painting hanging as a door. Probably the most significant issue this presents is our apparent wealth of surrounding ourselves with things, compared to those that have very little, not even proper housing. I've seen the scant belongings inside hovels. I'm no longer surprised by seeing television sets and refrigerators, because I know that more times than not, electricity isn't available in the slum. Most the times I see very very little in the way of 'stuff.' Our having all this consumer stuff and comfort and prosperity is not a pathway to happiness. I see the people that live in slums, they have little, they suffer, but what they do have, religion, family, a sense of community goes a long way. I see many more smiles and happy people in a Dharavi slum alleyway than I do in a huge, top-end shopping mall in the heart of Orange County California, one of the most wealthy areas in the world…

9: *What other topics of social commentary do you see your work of art as commenting on?*

The thing I want to most present for thought in my work is tied to my study of philosophy. When I was in the Peace Corps in Nepal, right next to India from 1987-1989, I spent a lot of time without my cultural cocoon- without TV, without English spoken radio, nor a car (there were no personal computers or cell phones then to speak of). I spent a lot of time reading. The books I took with me were primers on philosophy, epistemology and metaphysics. My favorite was reading about the aesthetic theory of the depressing pessimistic German Philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer. He professed that life was a meaningless flailing of pain and the only way out was through art and music. His ideas made me start to appreciate as much of the world as possible, to experience it as an aesthetic journey, and the more intense subtle the experience the more aesthetic pleasure and awe would be gleaned from it. So for the same reason, I want to portray the beauty of our inevitable demise via necessity and decay. The best vehicle for this for me has been found in the architecture of the slum. The experiencing of it, apart from any other issues of economics, politics etc. can become mere aesthetic wonderment with the color and form, shadow and texture of dilapidation and scaffolding of debris to create modicums of privacy and shelter. It is nature in its crudest form. To accompany these depictions in art, I've also been working on a series of Disney Billboards hovering over Hiroshima charred landscapes. I guess I'm losing my sense of humor….

Interview 2: Austin Aslan

Austin Aslan is the author of The Islands at the End of the World *and* The Girl at the Center of the World. *More of his bio can be found at* https://laustinspace.wordpress.com/about/

Group 1: Producing the Post-Apocalypse: Inspirations & Influences

1: What artworks, movies, stories, or games have most influenced or inspired you?

I lived in Hilo, on the Big Island, when I was getting my masters degree in Tropical Conservation Biology. My field sites were high up on the forested slopes of Mauna Loa Volcano. I was coming home from a rainy day of doing pollination experiments with rare Hawaiian flowers and I drove down through the clouds and suddenly had a great, clear view of the ocean surrounding the island. I was struck by how alone and isolated the Hawaiian Islands were (this is something that people in Hawaii think about frequently, and it wasn't a new thought for me, either). At that time, I happened to be thinking about a haunting post-apocalyptic book by Cormac McCarthy called THE ROAD. The idea popped into my head that it would be really interesting to set a post-apocalyptic story on the isolated Hawaiian Islands, and the story and characters just started flowing out of me like lava!

As for the works that most inspire my writing? Well, I grew up reading Stephen King and Douglas Adams and Michael Crichton. Almost exclusively. Not the greatest variety, unfortunately. But I caught up with reading all those books I was supposed to read in high school when I entered the Peace Corps. I read the 100 most influential English-language books of the 20th Century during those years. And it was important for my development as a writer to do so.

2: What other artists (if any) did you work with in creating your Islands series? What was the editing process like?

The Big Island of Hawaii itself inspired me! The Hawaiian Islands are so profoundly material and sensuous and concrete that in spite of my own instinct to write a story about sustainability and the dangers of nuclear materials and how great the mysteries of the universe are, the raw, material power of Hawaii kept pushing up through all of it and pushing *me* out of the way. If you've ever stepped foot on the Hawaiian Islands, you know what I'm talking about. That place assaults the five senses like no other place on earth. Sights, sounds, smells, textures, tastes. It made my job as a storyteller simple.

For a story with so many big ideas, it would have been very easy to get lost in geo-politics and science fiction tropes and the struggles of a cast of dozens of characters. I very easily could have succumbed to the temptation to try and pull off some Hawaiian version of Stephen King's THE STAND. But those islands really held me in check. There is so much of interest happening right in front of Leilani and her dad that I couldn't afford to get bogged down with all that other stuff.

The editing process helped me polish the novel and tighten the language. The story hasn't really changed much since before I started sending it out to agents. I feel very fortunate to have found an agent and an editor who are very enthusiastic about the book as it is and who understand my vision, and who get what a complex house of cards I've built. Truly, one little change could send the whole framework crashing down. We've all been very conscious of that as we've worked to tighten and focus the manuscript.

3: What were your strategies or goals for depicting the different cultures and ethnic groups of Hawaii? In particular, how did you approach the depiction of Hawaiian Creole English (pidgin)?

The biggest challenge for me was feeling comfortable and legitimate in writing about a Hawaiian main character and crafting a story deeply-rooted in Hawaiian cultures and traditions, even though I'm *haole* and don't come from the islands. I'm not Hawaiian, and there's two problems with that. The obvious problem is that I don't "know" the culture. There's a lot to learn and I'm sure I've only scratched the surface. I'll never be an expert, though the book has to feel authentic not only to general readers, but to islanders, as well. The more complex problem is that, as an outsider, I struggle with claiming the *right* to tell a story set in Hawaii. I'm not only writing as a half Hawaiian when I'm not one. I'm also writing about thorny scenarios involving "sovereign nation" perspectives, and one of my bad guys is pure Hawaiian (though most of my Hawaiian characters are very noble, and I try to make *all* of my characters, regardless of race, as three-dimensional as possible). This issue has a lot of complexity around it, and I'm most comfortable approaching it with a great deal of humility. Ultimately, I think that any author has the right to tell any story they want to. The question is: can you get away with it? Will your effort be respected? Will the people whose voice you're trying to assume authenticate your attempt or not? I'll have to wait to see how the book is received in different circles. But at the very least I feel that I've approached this dynamic with awareness, humility, honesty, and good faith.

The book doesn't have much pidgin, and that was an editorial decision, as much as it was a product of the reality that I have no command of the dialect! My editor also works with Graham Salisbury, and they both long ago came to the conclusion that sales to general audiences

dwindle as a direct function of how much pidgin appears in the text. Mainland readers just don't have the patience to wade through too many unfamiliar words and phrases.

Group 2: Producing the Post-Apocalypse: Reception & Audience

4: What were your expectations for how the Islands series would be received? How did the actual reception differ from your expectations?

I always dreamed of movie deals! Fame! Fortune! A villa on the Mediterranean! Politics! Power! Aside from some book tours, nothing changed much, though. Family life stayed the same, schelpping kids to events and activities, travel, hiking, writing, etc….

Circumstances don't change who people are. Change in one's life comes from within; it's rarely external. The good fortune I've had so far hasn't changed who I am or how I act or who I hang out with. The biggest difference for me is that I'm now able to make writing my job. But I don't actually feel that I'm writing more often than I used to. I'm just getting paid to do it now. So, it has freed me up somewhat, but that just means I have more time to attend to the thousand other responsibilities of raising a family!

As far as the novel itself is concerned? I never dared to expect anything from it. So everything that happens is all a bonus. It has received more critical acclaim than popular success, but these things build momentum over time, especially for first books, so we'll see where things end up!

5: Do you feel like we have been in the midst of an "apocalyptic Renaissance" or conversely are you worried your audience will get "burnt out" on over-saturation of apocalyptic texts (films, games, etc.)?

Our cultural interest in the end of the world is a curious thing. I don't think our appetite for it will go away, but audiences are learning to be more discerning and selective with how they feed the hunger. There is a risk of burn out, for sure. Too much of the literature is too similar, especially in the YA genre. Telling a cataclysmic disaster story from the perspective of lost and forgotten islanders provides a nice twist, I hope, as well as the father-daughter dynamic, as opposed to the more popular teen love-triangle trope.

But our compulsion to explore "what if" stories that revolve around a fraying fabric of society is only made stronger by the events that surround us in real life and in real time.

6: There has been a lot of political discussion surrounding the observatories on Mauna Kea since your novel was released. Would you have changed your depiction of the observatories that feature at the end of the first novel, or do you feel like audience reactions to the end of your novel have changed since the Thirty Meter Telescope controversy?

I'm familiar with this controversy and I'm saddened by it. My thoughts are many and complex and don't fit into a box. I'll just say that I wouldn't change a word of ISLANDS in reaction to this controversy which grew heated after its publication. My perspective and Leilani's perspective on science and spirituality and culture inform the debate in their own way, regardless of current events or context, and that will always change over time no matter what.

<div align="center">Group 3: Social Commentary</div>

7: To what extent do you see your Islands series as participating in social commentary on climate change?

ISLANDS has been described as an "eco-thriller." I wasn't sure of this label at first, but I quickly embraced it nonetheless. I had never heard this term when I wrote the novel, so I

certainly wasn't writing with this designation in mind. I'm still not 100% sure what the label

means, actually, but to the extent that it might entail a plotline that is driven by, or affected by, a

problem or crisis involving the natural world, I suppose ISLANDS can loosely be defined this

way. The Hawaiian Islands are more of a character than they are a set of places in this book. And

the islands are innately imbued with such a great natural presence that any crisis involving them

will evoke "eco-thriller" sentiments. In many ways, this book channels a "Human vs Nature"

dynamic, but I balk just a little bit with the "eco" aspect because this story and the disaster that

sets the plot in motion aren't caused by, or motivated by, nature per se. Geography and poor

human planning are the culprits.

When I set out to write ISLANDS, I thought to myself, "Everybody knows what happens

at the end of the world in New York and LA, but what would a global disaster mean for

Islanders?" 95% of Hawaii's food is imported every day. *Ninety-five percent!* The islands are

home to 1.5 million people. If things got tough there, what would they eat? Where would they

flee?

I have an even harder time with co-opting the term "Cli-Fi" for this novel. Climate and

weather and global warming and climate change have nothing to do with this story. However, at

its heart, ISLANDS is a cautionary tale about human hubris and too much reliance on technology

and globalization to make our world work, and it begs for a new vision for a Hawai`i that is

much more self-sustaining and locally-operated than it currently is.

My master's program and my background in science helped me immensely in the writing

of my book, mostly in terms of identifying the powerful themes of interdependency and

sustainability, which undergird the entire story. While my background helped to steer the book in

certain thematic directions, I didn't allow the scientist in me to overpower the story that I was

telling. I wanted to keep my training out of the way of the narrative that was unfolding as best I could. The quickest way to kill a good plot and deaden great characters is to start using them as bullhorns for specific agendas. My main character is a 16-year-old girl. It wouldn't make sense for her to feel and sound like a scientist. I was able to use Leilani's father (who is a professor of ecology at UH-Hilo) as my nearest proxy for letting my science background show through. However, I was still intentionally careful not to abuse that conduit. I'm lucky, because I think the general "scientist" can't de-couple his/her training from their voice, and that's why there are so few successful scientist-novelists. I hope I can be one.

8: To what extent do you see your Islands series as participating in a social commentary on consumerism?

      See above and below.

9: What other topics of social commentary do you see your work of art as commenting on?

      Fiction writers have a GINORMOUS role in calling attention to environmental issues.

      Here's the deal: most scientists are actually very uncomfortable taking a stand on any issue. Most scientists want to generate data and conduct experiments and solve mysteries and answer questions—and they want to stop right there. The moment they're asked to place a value judgment on a finding, or take sides in a political debate, they get very squeamish. Most scientists (too many, in my view) abdicate their responsibility to call for action when their findings demand attention. They'll leave that work to others, to "boundary organizations" and "advocates" and "non-profits" and "activists." But many of these groups don't have loud enough voices or strong enough followings to gain critical momentum on issues. This is where popular

entertainers like novelists or movie directors and their ilk can step in and carry weight that would otherwise be very heavy lifting for grassroots advocates. Stories are POWERFUL. Story telling is how people listen and learn new things. Data and facts and figures go in one ear and right out the other. These days, we're all so hardwired to reinforce things we already "know" and to ignore anyone saying something that contradicts our "knowledge" and our personal experiences. But here's the key: story telling *adds to our personal experiences!* Without knowing it, we absorb and assimilate what other people and characters are going through. So novelists have a disproportionate share of the burden in calling attention to issues, whether they be environmental or social or cultural or whatever. The key is for our ideas to infiltrate critical minds in the smoothest possible way. As I mentioned above, I think that's best done not by proclaiming the facts and the truth as we know them, but by getting out of the way of our own training and allowing our stories to speak for themselves, out of the vast array of experiences that our readers already carry with them when they turn to a story.

Interview 3: Mark Yohalem

Mark Yohalem is the founder of Wormwood Studios, a small independent game company that released Primordia*, and is working with inXile on* Torment: Tides of Numenera*. He is also a lawyer. More about Wormwood Studios can be found at* http://www.primordia-game.com/index.html

Group 1: Producing the Post-Apocalypse

1: What led you to get into game design?

For me, it was always an extension of story-telling. I loved telling stories as a kid, and playing a kind of free-form RPG we called the "narration game" (the GM was the "narrator"). When I was five or so, my grandfather, who was a NASA engineer, got us an Apple II/c that ran through a black and white television. He showed me how to halt the start-up process, which let you code in BASIC. So I started trying to figure out how to make a "narration game" in BASIC.

Over the years, as different kinds of games came to the fore, I'd always imagine making my own: in fourth grade, a friend and I designed a Megaman 3 after playing Megaman 2; in sixth grade I made a rudimentary R-type game in LogoWriter; and in seventh grade, a friend and I made a couple of adventure games in Turbo Pascal after being inspired by Hugo Whodunnit. (We called them Quentin Quester, a name that gets a quick Easter Egg reference in Primordia.) The same friend and I then set out to make a game like Final Fantasy II, and that consumed us from eighth grade to the first year in college. In college, I got my first paid game work in game design, writing the story for a never-completed GameBoy RPG called Infinity. Over the next few years, I worked as a writer for TimeGate, Nikitova, Bioware, and S2 Games.

I'd just wrapped up work for S2 Games when Victor Pflug came looking for a writer, and that's how Primordia came to be.

I guess that's less a "why" answer than a "how" answer, though. To me, almost all acts of creation are a desire to teach someone why you love something. Every game I've made is part bricolage, part homage, but in any event, a composite of all the things that I've read, and watched, and played and loved since I was a kid. I want people to play them and say, "Yes, I see why that is something worth loving." One of my great joys in making games is when someone says, for example, "I could never get into adventure games until I played Primordia. Now I just played Loom, and it's AMAZING!" Also, my games are not just about other games I've loved, but ideas I've loved, so when Primordia gets people to engage with those ideas -- probably more deeply and thoughtfully than I can -- that makes me happy, too. If I can nudge someone else forward, I can trust them to do all the things I can't.

2: What was it like working with the Wormwood Studios team? How much direction did you give to Victor Pflug and Nathaniel Chambers?

It was great! A true collaboration, and not just among the "creatives" -- James Spanos, the coder, was a core collaborator, too. We all gave each other direction. From my standpoint, the direction I got was sometimes direct (e.g., "Mark, that line of dialogue is stupid.") but often indirect. Just seeing Vic's art fills me up with ideas. Nathaniel's music is the same way. With James, he was probably my closest collaborator in terms of day-to-day communication. He would constantly tell me what lines were funny, what lines fell flat, which puzzles were working, and which ones weren't. He's the unsung hero of the project.

3: You have written about game design under the pen name Marty O'Hale--what led you to write under a pseudonym when publishing at The Escapist?

By day, I'm a lawyer. At the time I wrote those articles, I didn't want to have Google hits associated with my game work. Eventually, that kind of separation proved impractical.

Group 2: Influences and Inspirations

4: What movies, stories, or games have most influenced the design of Primordia?

My understanding is that Beneath A Steel Sky, Moebius, and Gieger were Vic's main inspirations, and Nathaniel's main inspiration was Vangelis.

Speaking for myself, different things inspired different parts. Planescape: Torment inspired the characters, though Horatio drew a fair bit from the protagonists of The Road and Gran Torino. Fallout the setting. Clifford Simak's The City (which is not very good, but was nevertheless a big inspiration) inspired the focus on the notion of a city and the man-as-god. I guess maybe the most fundamental inspiration was a poem called "The Inheritors," by my great aunt Virginia Hardman. Here's some stuff I've said about that before.

Also, probably there are hundreds or thousands of other inspirations, great and small. For example, the idea of having some items you used over and over again came from the game Broken Sword. The idea of puzzles that were variations on prior puzzles came from Monkey Island 2. Crispin is kind of an amalgam of Morte, Orko, Zyzzyx, and other floating companions.

5: Primordia is the highest-rated game with the post-apocalyptic tag on Steam (it recently overtook Planetarian). What do you think most contributed to the incredible user response to Primordia?

To be honest, I don't entirely know. I think a big part of it is that I've always tried to make myself available to fans, to answer their questions and help them with technical support

and so on. I think that encourages them to be generous and gentle in their reviews. At one point, Primordia was in the top 15 user-rated games on Steam. That can't possibly be right. I think it's a nice game, but it's not that good. (Partly, it's a quirk of how Steam ranks games.)

I hope that part of it is also that Primordia is a game that does not treat ideas with contempt. Way too often, games -- and books, and movies, and every other form of art -- create caricatures of the things their creators dislike, and then use those as straw men. It makes me happy that religious as non-religious players, very conservative and very progressive players, men and women, soldiers and pacifists, people from dozens of countries, have all found in Primordia something that speaks to them. I don't think Primordia is perfect -- I'm sure there are people to whom it didn't speak, or who felt they were being condemned by it in some way. I think that's unavoidable. But I think it does a pretty good job in that respect.

As a creator, my goal is always to give more to the players, and I know that Vic, and James, and Nathaniel felt the same way. To give a few concrete examples, there are the dozens of frames of animation Vic drew for the animation when you melt the doorway; there's the fact that Nathaniel recruited a singer friend of his to record the "Dream of Green" song; and James put in hundreds of hours to keep patching the game after release.

It makes me queasy when I see developers think of their audience primarily as revenue sources. Obviously, I have a real luxury in not needing to support a company or a family by my game work, and I don't begrudge people for working within the marketplace. But when, for example, F2P developers or Kickstarter projects refer to their biggest fans as "whales" -- a term of contempt coined by casinos for rich suckers -- or developers craft games to trigger and monetize impulsive behavior, I can't help but feel they are repaying love with exploitation. That sounds really corny, but to me, it remains a glorious fluke that people are willing to spend their

limited time and energy on things I've created, let alone pay me to engage in something I love to do. I think when developers -- whether they're indie or giant -- treat their customers with respect and generosity, the players respond in kind and you wind up with generous and respectful reviews.

6: Do you feel like we have been in the midst of an "apocalyptic Renaissance" or conversely are you worried your audience will get "burnt out" on over-saturation of apocalyptic texts (films, games, etc.)?

Apocalypse stories have been with us from the very beginning -- Noah and the Flood, Ragnarok, etc. These stories often offer the comfort of believing that the result of an obliterating event is a purging of what is bad and a rebirth of what is good. That notion is not unique to story-telling; it's how we view the apocalyptic destruction of the "terrible lizards" in order that our kind of creatures could ascend, we talk about "creative destruction" in the marketplace, and there are forests that can only rejuvenate by burning to the ground.

Most post-apocalyptic stories contain that fantasy in them, particularly the ones from the 1950s (like Earth Abides, Alas, Babylon, and Day of the Triffids) but also games like Fallout or comics like Y: The Last Man. In some ways, apocalypse stories don't just offer a silver lining to destruction, they let us imagine the obliteration of things we don't like (albeit with some collateral damage) while still imagining ourselves as morally innocent of that obliteration. Usually the apocalypse is the fault of those we despise (or those parts of ourselves we despise), and those who prosper in its aftermath embody the things we like: whether it's pastoral conservatism surviving the death of urban modernity in Earth Abides or liberal feminism surviving the annihilation of brutish men in Y: The Last Man.

That fantasy is probably at its most appealing when the world seems most precarious ("Even if it all goes to hell, we'll wind up in heaven"). If changes in the world made people lose interest in post-apocalyptic stories, that would certainly make me happy. But I suspect we'll be seeing those stories for a good while. The contours may change (e.g., Planet of the Apes, The Walking Dead, and Y: The Last Man in lieu of nuclear armageddon stories), but I think the basics will probably stick around.

Group 3: Cultural Contexts and Implications

7: A major component of Primordia is salvaging existing objects for reuse, and there are a few jokes about personal property. Do you feel the game was shaped by your attitudes toward capitalism and/or consumerism?

Of course. I don't think it's possible to create anything without it being influenced by the creator's views about important things like that. But I don't want people to play Primordia and say, "Got it, private property good, collectivism stupid, let's all move to Galt's Gulch." I guess to the extent I was trying to preach any particular creed in Primordia, it's moderation and respect. By the end of the game, Horatio is no longer particularly concerned with property ownership and self-sufficiency. Not because those things are wrong but because they are inadequate or, put otherwise, they are partial means to an end (a good, full life).

8: Primordia depicts a world of robots, but of course the voice actors are human. Did you always intend for most characters to have explicit male and female voices? How did you approach the gender of the robots?

Yes, because ultimately Primordia isn't about robots, it's about people. It just uses robots to talk about people because sometimes it's easier to think about ourselves when we believe we're thinking about someone else. If they were all cubes on tractor treads, no one would be able to relate to them, and the whole point would be lost.

I've written (http://tap-repeatedly.com/2012/11/a-preview-of-gender-and-diversity-in-primordia/) and said a fair bit about the gender issues in the game, so maybe the easiest thing is to link to that (and attach the audio file from the game where I talk about it), and then I can answer any follow ups.

9: What was your strategy for approaching the subject of religion in Primordia?

Because I was married young, I spent almost all my time in law school with other married people, rather than going out to bars or whatever with my single classmates. Generally speaking, marrying young seems to correlate with religion, and my closest law school friends were deeply religious: one was a member of the Church of Latter-Day Saints, another was Evangelical, and two were mainline Protestants. I'm myself a secular Jew, and for most of my life all of my friends had been very irreligious. Spending so much time with religious people -- and seeing the goodness that flowed from their faith -- was an enlightening experience.

Later, when I traveled around the world for a few months, I had the opportunity to spend time with religious Muslims, Catholics, and Buddhists, and observed the same thing. I was deeply moved by their experience of religious sites, and by the way those sites tied them to history. One night, my wife and I had the wonderful fortune of being invited to vespers at a convent that had operated for centuries in Granada. When I listened to the nuns singing hymns, for the first time it seemed to me that lyrics I'd heard all my life -- about God being a rock, or

about loving God with all your heart, and so on -- were actually being sung by people for whom it was true.

All of that helped me to understand the ways in which people who had been important mentors to me -- my fourth grade English teacher and a Spanish professor in college, for example -- had been shaped by their faith. Previously, their religion had always seemed to me some kind of atavism or fluke. But as I had some more perspective, I realized it was fundamental to why they were such generous teachers and kind people. I'm not at all saying that religion is a necessity for kindness, generosity, or teaching -- I certainly hope not, since I am not religious myself. But it was the foundation or at least a buttress of those traits in these people.

Anyway, none of that made me a religious person, and I'm not blind to or ignorant of the things that can be put in the debits column of every religion (both organized and individual). But I think there has been a real disservice done to people like me by the depiction of religion in much of contemporary media -- it is either exotic, or insincere, or terrifying, or superficial. It robbed me, for many years, of the ability to see one kind of good found in many people.

With Primordia, I wanted to take a religion that was both demonstrably true and demonstrably false and show how it could be a source of strength and goodness for a character. I wanted it to be familiar -- Humanism is pretty clearly pseudo-Christian -- because I didn't want to say, "Religion can be good . . . provided it's a kind of religion that doesn't exist in any way around you." Ultimately, Horatio's faith becomes for him not primarily a question of cosmology but a wellspring of strength to do the right thing.

Anyway, I wanted Primordia to be a game that a religious person could play and feel both challenged and welcomed, and that a nonreligious person could play and also feel challenged and

welcomed. It seems like it has mostly succeeded in that regard -- atheists and religious people of

many creeds have responded well to it.

Interview 4: James Silva

James Silva founded Ska Studios, an independent game company, in 2009. Some of the titles Ska

Studios has released include I MAED A GAM3 W1TH Z0MB13S 1N IT!!!1 (2009), The

Dishwasher: Dead Samurai (2009), *Charlie Murder* (2013), and Salt and Sanctuary (2016). *More*

information on Ska Studios can be found at http://ska-studios.com/about/

<center>Group 1: Post-apocalyptic Games & Zombie Games</center>

#1: Which all of your games do you regard as post-apocalyptic?

I think of our recent games, Charlie Murder is the most qualified for that description; it's

themed in part after the Return of the Living Dead punk rock delinquents vs zombies. Survival

Crisis Z was probably my truest zombie survival horror game. The Dishwasher games are more

dystopian, and Salt and Sanctuary is medieval fantasy horror.

#2: Why zombies? From a design perspective, do you feel zombies offered a particular appeal

over other enemy types?

I loved zombie movies in high school. My hands down favorite was Cemetery Man, but

Return of the Living Dead, Night of the Living Dead, Dawn of the Dead, Day of the Dead, and

Dead Alive are all up there. A couple of years later I read a Penny Arcade comic about the joyful

abandon of killing zombies, and it presented the whole zombie movie genre in this really

appealing new light, where zombie killing against a ruined urban backdrop became some sort of

glee-filled bloodsport for battle-hardened gamers. Using that setting -- buckets of viscera,

splatterhouse violence, bloodstained rooms full of shattered glass, eviscerated corpses, and gore -

- not only makes the whole thing feel more exciting and dangerous, but it makes us gamers feel

like cool, calm, and battle-tested masters of the apocalypse.

#3: I MAED A GAM3 W1TH Z0MB13S 1N IT!!!1 (2009) was 2009's most popular Xbox Live Indie Game. What do you think most accounts for the success of this game?

Virality, and it kind of hit all the right notes for XBLIG at the time -- amateurishness, silliness, brevity, and cost. It became an illustration of what could work on XBLIG, as nothing had really taken off like IMAGWZII before it. There have been a bunch of successes since, though most of them are Minecraft clones.

Group 2: Influences and Inspirations

#4: What movies, novels, or games have most influenced your design style?

I've been making games for fifteen years, and one of the more interesting thing about them is how they kind of reflect whatever it is I was into at the time.

The other night, I was going through the horror library on HBO and came across 13 Ghosts. I saw it in theaters way back when, so I gave it a rewatch. That's how I realized that a mechanic that I used in Survival Crisis Z and Charlie Murder--one where the world randomly transitions to and from a sort of "ghost view" amidst flashes and horrible noises, where ghostly foes are only visible in ghost view--came straight from 13 Ghosts.

Survival Crisis Z took a bit from 28 Days Later remake. Halfway through working on that I was exposed to the infected. Fast zombies! Move over, shamblers. And I get that you lose the slow dread and social commentary of slow zombies, that fast zombies sacrifice meaning and authenticity in the name of cheap thrills, but I still think they're fantastic.

#5: Do you feel like your major influences changed since you first began Survival Crisis Z?

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Everything is influences, and influences are always changing. Survival Crisis Z was Silent Hill, Dawn of the Dead, 28 Days Later and evidently 13 Ghosts. The Dishwasher: Dead Samurai was The Matrix, Versus, Max Payne. The Dishwasher: Vampire Smile was Machine Girl and Event Horizon. Charlie Murder was River City Ransom, Metalocalypse and Return of the Living Dead. Salt and Sanctuary is Dark Souls, A Game of Thrones, and Black Death.

#6: Do you feel like we have been in the midst of an "apocalyptic Renaissance" or conversely are you worried your audience will get "burnt out" on over-saturation of apocalyptic texts (films, games, etc.)?

I think the bigger issue is "burnout burnout." We're at a point in history where pop culture memes and tropes are evolving more rapidly than before, and producers are quicker than ever to capitalize on them. Zombies went from exotic horror to subversive cultural statement to mainstream to Warm Bodies and iZombie (disclaimer: I actually like iZombie despite its poppy appropriation of the genre).

Group 3: Design Decisions

#7: In I MAED A GAM3 W1TH Z0MB13S 1N IT!!!1 (2009) you opted for the usage of 1337 in the title, which appears in the game itself in conjunction with a song based on the title. At what point in the design process did you decide on the title and commission the song?

I wrote and performed the song. The whole thing was meant to be deliberately amateur. "A new dev downloads some tools and makes a video game about his favorite thing: zombies." Zombies are such fantastic creatures for game development: slow, witless, single-minded bullet

sponges. A zombie trapped in an AI loop won't raise eyebrows. A zombie that doesn't cleverly strategize against the player isn't going to break any amount of immersion.

But I guess the theme resonated. It was meant as a joke.

#8: You have made games that approach survival in a zombie apocalypse from the perspective of a top-down shooter (I MAED A GAM3 - 2008), from an isometric perspective (Survival Crisis Z - Year ???), and also from the perspective of a 2-D side-scroller (ZP2K9 - 2009). Were you using the frame of a zombie apocalypse to explore different modalities in game design?

And Charlie Murder was 2.5D. The perspectives were more about exploring 2D formats I grew up on -- say, Diablo, River City Ransom, Smash TV, Street Fighter 2010. There's something really exciting about wielding all of the systems from 2D games I grew up with, transitioning from fan to creator.

#9: In many survival games, the characters explore the world becoming stronger by collecting more "stuff" -- physical objects, supplies, ammunition, and weapons. Do you view your games as a celebration of consumerism? I.E. the pleasure of killing zombies goes hand in hand with the pleasure of acquiring more "stuff"?

It's really just survival and nothing more. Not really to the point of the question, but that's a difficult balance to strike -- hoarding and preparation and readiness versus the weathering effects of the game universe, be they zombies, hunger, injuries, cold. The tricky part is balancing the loot availability with the universe's danger, striking the balance between too comfortable and hopelessly unsurvivable.

Interview 5: Vitaly S. Alexius

Vitaly S. Alexius is the creator of the ongoing webcomic Romantically Apocalyptic, *and a Toronto-based freelance illustrator. More about Vitaly S. Alexius can be found at his Darkfolio,* http://vs.darkfolio.com/about/ *and Romantically Apocalyptic can be found at* http://romanticallyapocalyptic.com/

Group 1: Dreaminism & the Post-Apocalyptic

#1: In your darkfolio, you characterize your style as "Dreaminism." Can you expand on how "dreaminism" works with the post-apocalyptic themes in Romantically Apocalyptic?

Dreaminism served as the foundation for my art style. My paintings were very high contrast, initially, but as I progressed and developed my style broke free from my simple landscape art or still life art and began to incorporate more futuristic and fantasy elements.

My style is influenced by Romantic and Surrealistic artists and defined itself as "Dreaminism"- a realistic, often "romantically-apocalyptic", easily recognized style- "a sense of shifted reality realized in the split second before the waking, when the mind cannot define what's real and what's not."

Romantic seascape painter Ivan Aivazovsky painted the struggle of man against the ocean. In my comic, I paint the struggle of men against technological singularity and the nuclear holocaust.

#2: Do you feel like the post-apocalyptic themes of Romantically Apocalyptic helped contribute to the success of your indiegogo campaign?

I think it is possible, but I did not investigate that idea. I personally enjoy romanticizing the end of the world, and it may be something that has struck a chord with many.

#3: Not directly connected to Romantically Apocalyptic, but your combinations of art and poetry, such as "Downfall" and "Neurotic Indisposition" are some of the most popular works on DeviantArt.com. Why do you think those works connected so well with the audience of sites such as DeviantArt.com?

Many talented artists struggle to find audiences. The key to finding mine was statistical probability calculation. I used a mathematical system to get my work in front of as many people as possible.

The mathematical formula I used pushed my works to the top of DeviantArt. Once there, the work was seen by millions of viewers, many of which fell in love with it.

My girlfriend says it is much less complex than that. She says she fell in love with my art because it was different and unique from a lot of what she was seeing on DeviantArt, and because it was dark but with a soft, gentle side that she had not seen anyone else do and suspects this may be the same for other people -- it filled a niche.

Group 2: Influences and Inspirations

#4: Do you feel like you have been particularly influenced by Canadian art or literature?

When I first started painting, my earlier works were eerily similar to works of art from Lauren Harris, a Group of 7 painter. I used to paint in oils for years in Russia, and then one day I visited the Art Gallery of Ontario and saw his work, it was a shock to me how two artists separated by an ocean and 40 years can paint exactly alike. It prompted me to develop in to the style I have today. So in a way, I have been influenced by a Canadian artist.

#5: Romantically Apocalyptic is based on the web and is episodic in structure. Do you feel like your influences or inspirations have changed in the years it has been in production? That is, do you feel like you have more influence from games, webcomics, film, etc. today than when you first started?

When I started, the comic relied more on cultural references and memes. These days, as the story line of the comic grew more complex, I try to integrate more original concepts into it based on the technological singularity theory.

#6: Do you feel like we have been in the midst of an "apocalyptic Renaissance" or conversely are you worried your audience will get "burnt out" on over-saturation of apocalyptic texts (films, games, etc.)?

The theme of my comic is not just apocalypse, it is also a dark comedy. I feel such combination isn't often seen, therefor it stands out from the dark, post-apocalyptic works. This was the reason why a short film based on my comic which I directed won 1st place at a small Toronto film festival: all of the other post-apocalyptic films were incredibly depressing, and serious; while mine made the viewers laugh.

Group 3: Cultural Issues

#7: The gender of Zee Captain comes up frequently on the forums. I believe when you have Zee Captain in youtube videos, the character is played by male actors (including yourself?). Do you see the post-apocalyptic world of Romantically Apocalyptic as a place to explore gender identity and representation? Or are some readers overthinking the presentation of a male character?

Zee Captain is all genders. Therefor anyone can put themselves in to Captain's shoes.

Many readers assume that Zee Captain is a girl. Gender and cultural identity are hidden behind Captain's mask, they are a mystery.

As a result, it is difficult to explore identity and representation when you can't see it. I prefer to keep it this way, to allow my readers to insert and immerse themselves in the story.

#8: The "USER" page of Romantically Apocalyptic says that the creation of the Dead Zone was due to the "lack of planning and need for instant entertainment." The world To what extent do you see the world of Romantically Apocalyptic as a critique of capitalism or consumerism?

I grew up in the Soviet Utopia, a science town built for scientists, by scientists. When the Soviet Union fell, capitalism has destroyed this amazing place, replacing it with a series of highways crammed with billboard signs. It is a real world example how uncontrolled capitalism and consumerism can destroy idealism, positivism, and completely ruin the environment. My comic is 100% a critique of corporate greed, consumerism, over production, pollution, etc.

#9: In your page on production process, you indicate the works of the Strugatsky brothers as an influence. In the youtube video for the Romantically Apocalyptic Q&A you indicate your childhood in the Soviet Union as a major influence, in particular your learned cynicism (or skepticism?) toward utopian ideology. To what extent is Romantically Apocalyptic a critique of the Soviet Union, authoritarianism, or Marxism?

It isn't, it is a critique of capitalism. Romantically Apocalyptic takes place in a world ruled by mega corporations, stemming from a future in which all socialist ideas are destroyed and forgotten. A place in which basic concepts such as dreams, memories, sleep, love, talking, breathing, etc are copyrighted.

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A post singularity civilization ruled by corporate ideology that relies solely on profit will create massive unemployment in which robots take all human jobs without providing social services. The automation of jobs itself is not the bad thing, but it could go one of two ways: if you automate all of this work, you need to find a way to allow people to create something meaningful. If you fail to do so, the wealth gap becomes irreparably large, and people suffer. Ironically enough, things begin to look the same -- when people applaud capitalism, they are standing by the ideology that consolidates power and wealth in to the hands of a few, driven by profit increase at all costs, even human and environment. The free market itself is not a bad thing; but combined with ulterior motivations and corporate greed, it begins to benefit only the top percentile, only providing the "hope" to those below it that one day maybe they will be there, too. You can't feed your family on "hope".

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