Drawing Upon Memory:

A study in to the depiction of The Bomb and nuclear apocalypse in post-World War II anime.

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Introduction

‘Perhaps one of the most striking features of anime is its fascination with the theme of apocalypse.’
- Susan J. Napier

When “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively in 1945, Japan entered a unique and disturbing era of their history. The world saw an entire nation reeling from an atrocity that they were entirely unprepared for, clambering for a way through which to channel their confusion and grief. In the wake of the attacks, popular culture became a ‘memory shaping medium’ with regards to the Asia-Pacific War. The Bomb became a prevalent theme in Japanese cinema in such seminal films as Akira Kurasawa’s I Live in Fear (1955) and Shôhei Imamura’s Black Rain (1989). However, this phenomenon was by no means exclusive to the live-action film genre and much like the unnatural blooming of flowers in Alan Resnais’ film Hiroshima Mon Amour (1959), a-bomb animation began to bloom in the wake of the fallout of the nuclear attacks.

Firstly, it is important to define anime as a medium. Gilles Poitras gives two definitions of anime: ‘(1) anime is simply the word used by the Japanese for all animation, without regard to its nation of origin’ and ‘(2) outside of Japan, the common use of the word anime is to refer specifically to Japanese animation’. For the purposes of this dissertation, the second of these definitions will be used. Through the analysis of this medium, this dissertation

will explore three very distinctive themes which have appeared in a-bomb anime: the theme of “cuteness” in post-war Japanese animation, the role of female and child characters in post-war anime, and the importance of the themes of apocalypse, fantasy and technology in more modern anime. These themes will be explored in a somewhat chronological order, from the immediate post-war period starting from the early 1950s up until present day. Through the exploration of these motifs this dissertation will seek to examine how animation in Japan can be used as a mirror for the changing social attitudes towards the atrocity of The Bomb within Japan, from attitudes of grief and denial to those of guilt and fear. These themes will also enable a critical analysis to be performed of how effective the medium of animation is at tackling the emotional and sociological implications of a tragedy as significant as the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Chapter one will focus on the theme of “cuteness” in anime, using Pauline Moore’s definition for cuteness which she outlines in her essay ‘When Velvet Gloves Meet Iron Fists: Cuteness in Japanese Animation’. Moore states that the specific type of cuteness in anime can be defined in the same way as traditional cuteness, in that it is: ‘to denote persons animals or things that are attractive, pretty and/or charming to us in some way.’\(^4\) The difference, according to Moore, between this traditional definition and its application in anime is that it can be seen to be ‘exerting a covert, unacknowledged and troubling influence on our relation to such objects.’\(^5\) With this definition in mind, the first chapter will concentrate on the way in which the “cuteness” of post-war anime acted as a way to tentatively explore the impact of the bomb, as well as provide a distinction between Moore’s three “generations of cute”\(^6\) which will be used throughout this dissertation. Moore’s criticism undeniably provides a useful analysis of the progression of the animation style in post-war Japan, taking in to consideration the cross-cultural influence with

\(^4\) Pauline Moore, ‘When Velvet Gloves Meet Iron Fists: Cuteness in Japanese Animation’ in *The Illusion of Life II*, Alan Cholodenko (ed.) (Sydney: Power publication, 2007) pp. 119-152, p. 120.
\(^5\) Ibid, p. 120.
\(^6\) Ibid, p. 127.
America, illuminating how this style reveals underlying residual feelings towards The Bomb. However, Moore’s argument fails to come to a definitive conclusion as to what the nature of this repression is, an oversight that this study will attempt to delve into more deeply to come to a more conclusive theory concerning the role that each style plays within post-war anime as a whole.

Chapter two will explore the argument of victim versus villain with regards to Japan’s role in WWII as one that has been tentatively explored through the use of the “vulnerable” figures such as women and children in the films Grave of the Fireflies (1988) and Barefoot Gen (1983). This chapter will also examine how the adolescents, children and mothers in these films separate The Bomb from the actions that led towards it, and assess whether or not scholars of Japanese animation have over-emphasised the blame and victimhood represented in post-war anime. In her essay in Anime: From Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle, Susan Napier provides an in depth comparison between the two films listed above both thematically and stylistically. Through this comparison she is also able to consider the differences in either film’s representation of the nuclear attacks, a comparison that proved to be an important source with regards to their differing characterisations of women and children. However, Napier also makes the somewhat brash argument that the representation of the attacks in both films reflected a denial of culpability on Japan’s part regarding their role in World War II in an attempt to ‘free the Japanese from an inescapable fascist and militarist past’.⁷ To provide balance to this argument this thesis provides a more rounded interpretation of the depiction of the attacks in either film, taking into account the role which the Japanese feelings of unresolved grief and shock play in them.

Masashi Ichiki’s essay on the ‘History of A-Bomb Manga in Japan’ proved to be a useful source in both chapters one and two, particularly with concerns to his study of the role of women in a-bomb Manga. His text enabled a link to be made between manga, which refers to comics written in Japan, and anime

⁷ Napier, p. 218.
and illuminated the relationship between the representations of women in both mediums. This cross-disciplinary link means that an additional layer of evidence regarding the post-war representation of women can be used to fortify the argument made in this dissertation concerning the role of women and children in anime. Ichiki also gives examples of real women whose legacy supported an argument about the wider implications of the way in which Japan represented women in real-life situations, not just in its popular culture. This study of the romanticised depiction of Bomb victims also blended well with Moore’s theories regarding the role of cuteness in post-war anime. Ichiki’s essay provides useful insight into the way in which the medium of animation in Japan became a way to preserve and process difficult memories within the safety of imagination. However, the essay focuses solely on the medium of manga and would perhaps have been a more comprehensive study if a comparison had been made between women in various art forms in the post-war period.

Finally, chapter three will explore the impact that the technological boom of modern Japan has had on the depiction of apocalypse, gore and The Bomb itself in anime. This chapter will also look at the more modern depiction of women in contemporary films and television shows such as Akira (1988), Appleseed (2005) and Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995-96) in contrast to the depiction shown in chapter two. Philip Brophy performs an in-depth analysis of the complicated portrayal of apocalypse in various modern anime films and television shows in his essay ‘Sonic – Atomic – Neumonic: Apocalyptic Echoes in Anime’. Brophy’s exploration of energy as a tangible force in modern anime proved to be quite revealing with regards to the fear of technology that inhabits most contemporary anime. Brophy’s essay was also an indispensable source through which an analysis of the characters of modern anime could be performed, enabling a comprehensive comparison between the earlier style of animation explored in Chapter 1 and modern styles to be performed. Although Brophy’s theory regarding the way which technology and energy are represented in contemporary anime gives a valuable insight into the way which technology is regarded in modern Japanese culture, he is unable to move past the audio-visual aspects of
representations of apocalypse. This focus on the ways in which ‘the sonic [can be] visualized and the visual ‘auralized’ meant that it became necessary to develop new theories as to the wider implications of the depiction of technology in modern anime.

This dissertation will aim to illuminate the synergy between the three themes of cuteness in post-war anime, the role of women and children in anime, and the depiction of apocalypse, technology and fantasy in modern anime. By extending the limited chronology found in existing academia and studying themes in conjunction to each other which are otherwise looked at independently in existing material, this study is able to draw broader conclusions within the context of Japan as a whole rather than within each era of animation individually. Through the combination of these otherwise independent themes, this study will also examine how the medium of animation as a whole is an effective medium through which the social attitude in Japan concerning its troubled past can be reflected and tracked.

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Chapter 1:

‘MADE IN JAPAN’ – The Role of Cuteness in Post-War Anime

Almost immediately after The Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively, a strange phenomenon began occurring in Japanese Animation - that of the increased popularisation of the “cute” in anime. Before studying this rise of the “cute” in anime, one must first look the phenomenon’s origins in 1950s manga. Strangely, the reaction to the nuclear fallout after WWII was largely romanticised in manga illustrations, with the effects of the bomb mostly being represented in ‘shōjo manga’, translated to mean “little girl” manga. Since its conception in the early 20th century with the founding of Shōjo Kai (Girls’ World), a very popular weekly-serialised novel, it has been widely used to appeal to an adolescent female audience. Paul Gravett speculates that ‘Shōjo novels were loaded with the ideological policies of the period, emphasising that a girl, no longer a child but not yet a grown-up either, should aspire only to refinement, romance, marriage and motherhood.’ Instilling these familial and traditional female roles within a seemingly ever-changing post-war world, this Shōjo manga suggests a nostalgia and longing for what came before. “Cuteness” was a forceful suggestion to younger generations that nuclear attack should not define or scare the course of the future.

This being said, post WWII anime can consequently be seen as ‘an acknowledgement and performance of The Bomb and of the effects that had on traditional Japanese culture [...] It lives out – animates – questions and problems that are difficult, if not impossible to explore directly.’ Animation was an important medium through which Japan could express and explore its grief, guilt and confusion over the nuclear attacks whilst being far enough removed from reality that they could still maintain a certain level of denial about the extent of the atrocity, and this allowed the people of a defeated

nation a 'transitory moment of dignity.' However, Pauline Moore argues that the rise of cute figures during this period meant that they became intimately linked to images of apocalypse and suffering. In fact, she states that: 'In the wake of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the comforting qualities of the cute figure are inextricably linked to the discomforting qualities of horror and grief associated with The Bomb' and that these cute figures 'offer comfort, and yet they continually deny such a possibility. Their eyes, moist and welcoming, are pools that mirror the nuclear explosion just as clearly as the camera flash.'

The fact that these cute figures were repeatedly used to subliminally represent scenes of disaster and tragedy meant that the cute figures themselves became synonymous with apocalypse.

During what Professor Masashi Ichiki defines as the 'golden years of the A-bomb manga' (1954-1973), manga in the style of shōjo made up 39% of A-bomb manga making it not only one of the most prevalent styles of manga at the time, but also one of the most influential. Shōjo manga, which translates as 'little girl manga', generally followed the same plotline: a romance unfolds between two young protagonists, only to be ripped apart by some consequence of nuclear war. For example, in Chieko Hosokawa's Ai no Hitomi (Gaze of Love) a young couple fall in love and plan to wed only to find out that the young and beautiful female protagonist Yokko has contracted an unspecified disease related to nuclear exposure. These melodramatic, romance-fuelled story lines were typical of the genre and dominated shōjo manga of the 1950s-70s. Shōjo manga was therefore infused with a preoccupation with the effects of The Bomb, rather than focussing on the social and historical context of the attacks.

This romanticised version of The Bomb and its fallout started to manifest itself in anime through the development of a brand of animation that Pauline Moore

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11 Napier, p. 229.
12 Moore, p. 123.
13 Ichiki, p. 38.
characterises as ‘hypercute’\textsuperscript{15}. Moore theorises that there are three distinct generations of cuteness in post-war anime: ‘cute’, ‘hypercute’ and ‘acute’\textsuperscript{16}. For the purposes of this study, most attention will be given to the two latter categories of animation, as they serve as the most interesting reflections of the post-war climate in Japan. Perhaps the most prominent example of hypercute, or in the Japanese terminology ‘kawaii’, animation is the “God of Manga” Osamu Tezuka’s \textit{Astro Boy} (originally \textit{Mighty Atom} in Japan). \textit{Astro Boy} is a particularly apt example of kawaii animation, with his large round eyes and childish innocence. (see fig. 1) Astro Boy was originally a manga series beginning in 1952, and became a televised anime series which ran from 1963 until 1966 and told the story of a young atomic-powered robot in a futuristic world where robots and humans co-exist. The original Japanese name may be a nod to The Bomb itself and the newly found atomic power, made especially obvious by the opening title theme which included the line “Astro Boy, bombs away, on your mission today!” Moore suggests that the creation and popularisation of kawaii animation arose due to the remarkable cross-cultural transference of imagery between Japanese and American animation.

The Japanese had long admired the animation produced by Disney and sought to recreate this incredibly popular style of animation. This fascination with Disney animation can be best seen through Tezuka, who adapted Disney stories such as \textit{Bambi} (1942) and \textit{The Jungle Book} (1967) into works of anime and manga. Tezuka was vocal about his admiration of Walt Disney’s work, famously saying that he had ‘seen \textit{Snow White} [1937] 50 times and \textit{Bambi} 80 times’\textsuperscript{17}. Moore suggests that the figure that emerged from the exchange ‘is a figure that looks in two directions at once – both East and West – mirroring the fraught history of cultural exchange between Japan and the United States’.\textsuperscript{18} The post-war relationship between Japan and America was

\textsuperscript{15} Moore, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{17} Aviad E. Raz, \textit{Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland} (Harvard: University Press, 1999) p. 163.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 121.
a complicated and fragile one, with the American occupation lasting until 1951. With Japan reliant on American aid for reconstruction, a symbiotic relationship developed between the former combatants, with Japan becoming 'protected by the nuclear umbrella of the very nation that dropped the bomb'.\(^{19}\) Meanwhile America began to see Japan increasingly more as an exotic land to be tamed and imitated, a relationship that would far outlive the San Francisco Treaty.

Given this unlikely marriage, a cross-cultural exchange was inevitable between animators on both sides of the Pacific. This is clearly illustrated in the Japanese adaptation of Western animation, and vice-versa. Of course the most famous example of Japanese influence in Western animation is that of *Kimba the White Lion*, a 1965 Tezuko film which was used as one of the many inspirations for one of Disney’s most successful films, *The Lion King* (1994) (see fig. 2). However, the image that is returned to America is one that is both strange and familiar. As Moore describes it, it is ‘a face that simultaneously comforts and disturbs, that at once comforts in its disturbing and disturbs in its comforting. It is a cross-cultural image – neither Japanese nor American, and yet both at the same time’.\(^{20}\) This cross-cultural exchange can be seen to reflect the role which animation, particularly kawaii animation, played in what could be referred to as Japan’s “post-traumatic denial”.

It is contemporary anime such as *Akira*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Appleseed* which best exemplify Moore’s “acute” generation of cute animation. It is in this generation that we truly start to see the merging of apocalyptic themes with the stereotypically innocent medium of animation. Moore conjectures that this type of cuteness is far more self-aware and more directly addresses the topic of The Bomb and the mental state of Japan in its aftermath due to its inversion of the hopeful and naïve world presented in earlier anime. She suggests that, as opposed to the “utopian innocence” of the kawaii anime, ‘the acute figure of contemporary anime shows itself as at once utopian and dystopian; and it fights back ‘in the

\(^{19}\) Ichiki, p. 47.

\(^{20}\) Moore, p. 122.
name of an always already lost utopianism and innocence.\textsuperscript{21} Perhaps at its most basic level, what separates the characters of acute anime from those of the earlier hypercute anime is that they are no longer children, but have progressed into adolescence. Though this is a significant progression in characterisation, it is not an entirely positive one. Though these characters have progressed beyond their childhood states, they are perpetually suspended in a teenage state between childhood and adulthood. The characters of acute anime have not yet lost their roundness and cuteness completely (see fig. 3 and 4), but are moving towards a more realistic and adult-like state. This characterisation can be seen to be representative of Japan as a nation, as the adolescent figures distance the scenes enough from the adult characters of war to provide a psychological buffer between the very real world of trauma, or adulthood, in the films and the idyllic pre-war, or adolescent, period in Japan. It is made obvious through acute anime that although Japan made major technological leaps that put them ahead of the Western world, the collective consciousness of the nation had not yet moved on nor fully acknowledged the trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and was not yet “grown-up” enough to deal with the suffering.

In all of the anime mentioned in the paragraph above we can see the development in the representation of science and technology as a thing to be simultaneously feared and revered in contemporary Japan. While the earlier hypercute animation such as Astro Boy served to popularise science, films such as Akira showed the dangers presented by such advances. Traditionally in Japanese anime, an emphasis was put on the complex sacrosanct and dangerous force of nature, and in contemporary anime science is consistently elevated to the status of super-natural. This emphasis on nature is most noticeable in Hayao Miyazaki’s immensely popular works such as Princess Mononoke (1997) and My Neighbour Totoro (1988), the type of films which have earned him such titles as “The Disney of Japanese Animation” and “the Kurosawa of animation”\textsuperscript{22}. By presenting technology as something that goes

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\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{22} Helen McCarthy, Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999) p. 10.
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beyond the almighty force of nature, acute anime is yet again presenting technology as being both awesome and terrifying in its potential, a force to be both feared and respected. Comparatively in such films as *Princess Mononoke* technology is there to highlight the ‘resilient powers of nature in the face of human lunacy and destructiveness.’ As Moore puts it, contemporary animators have taken the “velvet glove” which was Tezuko and other animators of the kawaii’s approach to the representation of technology, and made it in to an “iron fist”, an approach far more suited to contemporary consumer culture.

The enduring and seminal cute figure in Japanese animation is a complex one that serves both as an escape from and a reminder of the devastation caused by The Bomb. This figure is very much representative of the times in which it was born, and when given close attention it can be seen almost as a timeline for Japanese post-war mentality. Moore expresses its function by saying that: ‘Japan’s cute figure has lived through, and risen from, the ashes of The Bomb. Through this figure, there has been an attempt to speak the unspeakable, bridge the abyssal and defuse the fatal.’ The importance of the cute figure in both anime and manga alike is expressed in this quote, and though the representation of this figure differs and progresses from kawaii and acute animation, its function remains the same: to remind a devastated nation of their past and emphasise the dangers of ignoring this past through the dystopian imagery of acute anime, while offering some form of comfort and escapism. These escapist qualities of animation meant that ‘scenes that even with contemporary special effects and contemporary values would be difficult to present and watch in live-action film became, in the non-realistic space of animation, enduring evocations of a genuine hell on earth.’ This psychological buffer created by animation was only reinforced further by the unrealistic imagery of cute animation and helped post-war anime to become

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24 Moore, p. 145.
25 Napier, p. 222.
the perfect medium through which Japan’s collective mentality could be expressed.
Chapter 2:

Women and Children First – A “Victim’s History”

Much like the emphasis on the role of cuteness in post-war anime, a similar emphasis was put on the role of women and children. As explored in the previous chapter, anime protagonists rarely progress beyond adolescence, and generally adult characters are there are in functional roles such as parents and figures of authority. However, there is a recurring strong bond between mother and child in these post-war anime films. It is thought that the importance of this role comes from the Japanese tradition of ‘amae’, a term referring to the almost sacred bond between a mother and child in Japan. This relationship was held in an almost religious reverence, with an emphasis put on the interdependence between mother and child. According to the psychoanalyst Takeo Doi: ‘The psychological prototype of ‘amae’ lies in the psychology of the infant in its relationship to its mother; not a new-born infant, but an infant who has already realised that its mother exists independently of itself ... [A]s its mind develops it gradually realises that itself and its mother are independent existences, and comes to feel the mother as something indispensable to itself, it is the craving for close contact thus developed that constitutes, one might say, amae.’26 Perhaps a fitting example of how highly respected the role of a Mother was in Japan is the Japanese soldiers during WWII, ‘trained to go to their deaths with the phrase “Long Live the Emperor” on their lips, they instead called out, “Mother!”27

Firstly, this chapter will focus on the role of women in post-war anime. It will focus mainly on two seminal A-bomb anime works as examples: Isao Takahata’s Grave of the Fireflies and Mori Masaki’s Barefoot Gen. In both of

these films there are weak female characters who become the dependents of their respective male protagonists. In *Grave of the Fireflies* the male protagonist, Seita, is put in charge of his younger sister Setsuko due to the death of their parents. In *Barefoot Gen* our male protagonist, Gen, is forced to take charge of his traumatised mother after the rest of his family perish in a fire. In the words of Susan Napier, ‘Both films privilege the masculine as the dominant force in the family structures by showing two young boys taking care of their respective female relatives.’

Some scholars such as Marie Thorsten Morimoto argue that Japanese culture has entered a de-masculinised state due to the overwhelming saturation of feminine cuteness in Japanese society, but is ‘still haunted by the images of a dead, absent, or inadequate father and a problematic masculinity’. This absent father figure is shown in both *Barefoot Gen* and *Grave of the Fireflies* as both boys must assume the role of father and, in the case of *Grave of the Fireflies*, the mother as well. The idea of the absent or dead father is a powerful one in any post-war country, especially in the ‘highly gendered’ nature of Japanese culture where a huge emphasis is put on the patriarchal role of men in society as the “pillars” of the household.

In these films women are generally shown to be weak and fragile; characterised to emphasise the heroic nature of their male counterparts and exploit the emotions of the audience. Although the female characters ‘remain an oasis of security, comfort, and strength in most prewar film and literature’ the female characters in both of these films ‘appear notably weak and tenuous.’ Largely, female characters are dependent on their male counterparts, but more specifically on young boys, further emphasises their fragility and vulnerability. In the immediate post-war period, a fascination

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28 Napier, p. 226.
31 Ibid, p.117.
32 Napier, p.227.
began to develop within the American media with a group of female victims of the nuclear fallout known as the Genbaku Otome. The Genbaku Otome, which translates as “A-bomb Maidens”, were a group of female victims of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, and fundraising rallies meant that these women were able to travel to America in order to receive treatment for their keloid burns and scars. In 1955, twenty-five of these women left for the United States, and due to the attention from the American Media, they became a cultural symbol for the destruction caused by the A-Bomb. These women became an important symbol of the effects of war, Todeschini suggests that they became such an important symbol because ‘they exemplify a larger tendency in Japanese fictional representations on The Bomb to focus on young, female victims and single them out as especially pathetic symbols of the horrors of the bomb and exposure’.\textsuperscript{34} It may be that this pre-existing association between women and vulnerability in the post-war climate meant that an emotional connection could be evoked in anime simply by including helpless female characters.

This preoccupation with the effects of The Bomb is seen by many scholars as a perfect example of Japan’s attempt to create what is generally characterised by such scholars as Carol Gluck and John Treat as a ‘Victim’s History’ in the wake of WWII. This idea of a victim’s history is an important factor in the increased representation of women and children as the protagonists in Japanese post-war animation. Gluck and Treat controversially imply that by representing themselves as a fragile and wronged nation in their media and literature, Japan was able to infect the general consciousness of the world with a collective sympathy in spite of Japan’s own grave wrong-doings during WWII. It can be seen that through the “pathetic symbols” of the Genbaku Ōtome, ‘the Japanese found an image of themselves, an image that they desired to embrace in the socio-political circumstances of post-war East Asia’.\textsuperscript{35} It can be argued that by presenting themselves to the general media as victims, Japan was able to draw focus away from the brutality shown towards Korea and China during WWII. Susan Napier suggests that the

\textsuperscript{34} Ichiki, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 47.
development of a victim’s history was partly due to the collaborative American-Japanese efforts under Occupation to create an image of a post-war democratic Japan that would free the Japanese from an ‘inescapable fascist and militarist past’. Napier suggests that this collaborative effort even extended in to history textbooks and writings from atomic bomb survivors, in which the blame was shifted away from the civilian involvement in the war and more focus was put on the period between Pearl Harbour and the nuclear bombings in order to infer that one cancelled the other out and create what Carol Gluck describes as a ‘balanced moral calculus’. Unlike much of the anime and manga at the time, these two films dealt directly with the attacks themselves, not just with the after-effects. Napier accurately observes that while the two films show strong anti-militant views, they also ‘show little inclination to delve into the issues of guilt or responsibility’. On this particular view, Napier’s argument appears to be slightly vague and flawed, specifically with regards to the implication that both films neglect to show the issue of the abdication of responsibility on the part of the emperor. Napier also gives little recognition to the possibility that this omission of the themes of guilt and responsibility were merely due to the crippling monetary loss, civilian fatalities and shame that came as a result of the Japanese surrender. It would perhaps be more accurate to postulate that the difference between the two films is the way in which they address their political and social views.

On the one hand *Barefoot Gen* unashamedly addresses this issue, particularly when Gen’s mother hears the news of Japan’s surrender and exclaims: “Tell me, why now? Why not before?!” This view on the actions of the emperor and his government concerning the proposed surrender from America reflects those of Gen’s original author, Keiji Nakazawa. He recalls a visit to his school from the Shōwa Emperor in an interview, saying: “Dad had told me all about the emperor system, so I thought, ‘This is the guy who

36 Napier, p. 218.
destroyed Dad and the whole family. "[...] I was hot as fire inside. "That guy caused us all this, killed Dad," and I wanted to fly at him." This resentment towards the Emperor was shared by many Japanese people, and in this sense conveyed a natural frustration at the futile act of going to war in the first place only to give up. As with any war, Barefoot Glen reflected a common anti-war sentiment when nations tallied their dead and looked at their empty coffers. The Emperor's obstinacy and lack of empathy was shown when he said in an interview, talking about the bombing of Hiroshima: "I believe it was regrettable, but a war was going on, and although it was a great pity for the people of Hiroshima, I believe it was unavoidable."

This quotation is reflective of the Emperor and the government's blind need to win the war and assert global dominance, even if it was at the cost of civilian lives. This mindset is reflective of the Imperialist assumption, much like that of Britain in the eighteenth century, that they could carry on expanding indefinitely without consequence. In this sense Napier’s argument with regards to a lack of guilt or responsibility being shown in *Barefoot Gen* falls short yet again. *Barefoot Gen*, more than any other A-bomb anime, expresses the resentment felt by many Japanese citizens at the time towards their military and civilian authorities for ‘having deceived the people and brought them to ruin, for not having prevented the bomb or even prepared the population for it, and particularly for failing to provide adequate help’. *Barefoot Gen* seems to be less about the Japanese denial of their guilt during WWII, as Napier suggests, but rather addresses the feelings of resentment in Japan towards the needless loss of lives and resources in the name of an Emperor who left his nation unprepared and vulnerable in the face of nuclear war.

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On the other hand, *Grave of the Fireflies* ‘could be seen as a metaphor for the entire country of Japan during the war: fighting a losing battle, yet too stubbornly proud to admit defeat or accept help’.\(^{42}\) All throughout the film we see the elder male sibling, Seita, in a state of denial about the situation in which he and his sister have found themselves. At first it appears as though he is merely simulating this state of constant positivity and denial for the sake of his sibling, but as the film progresses we begin to see his mental state deteriorate and he seems to start believing his own fabrications. His denial manifests itself in his constant belief that his father, a soldier, is alive and that his return is imminent. Whenever Seita speaks of his father it is to say hopeful things such as: “Dad will take revenge for us” and “If you don't eat, I'll be scolded by Dad!” While on the one hand this attitude shows the naivety of Seita and in turn of the state of ignorance which the Japanese people were put in by their government, it could also be used to show the resilience and sense of hope shown by the Japanese people in the face of the devastation of The Bomb. Seita can be seen as an embodiment of the conflicting international situation that Japan found itself in: a nation officially seen as a loser and vilified whilst still fighting for values which they had been raised to aspire to.

This can also be seen through the character of Gen, who constantly picks himself up from each new tragedy shown to him and who maintains a constant determination to help his mother when she has lost her sanity and will to survive. Even Gen’s name holds some weight of the meaning which Nakazawa, *Barefoot Gen’s* original author, intended his work to project. Gen literally means “Spring”, a season which in Japan signifies new beginnings, particularly shown through their symbol of the cherry blossom. The symbol of the cherry blossom is thought to be linked to Buddhist teaching of “Mono no aware”, which focuses on the ephemeral beauty of life, a concept held in high regard in Japan.\(^ {43}\) He says: ‘I named my main character Gen in the hope that

\(^{42}\) Cavallaro, p. 28.

he would become a root or source of strength for a new generation, one that can tread the charred soil of Hiroshima barefoot [...] have the strength to say NO to nuclear weapons’.

The children in both these films pose an odd paradox in that they can simultaneously represent the reality of Japan as a nation forced to re-invent itself as a result of a disaster, while also showing a more positive message of courage and resolve in the face of disaster.

**Grave of the Fireflies** can be seen to have a weaker message with regards to the political and militant elements of the war, particularly due it having no actual depiction or mention of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The film is instead set in a smaller town and the disaster which hits it is a smaller ‘fire bombing’. H. D Hartoonian, a professor of Japanese History, proposes that post-war Japan existed as an ‘endless present, more spatial than temporal.’

In **Grave of the Fireflies**, this focus on the spatial rather than the temporal is shown through the way the bombings are almost glossed over as well as the lack of any particular context of time passing throughout the film. The children, like the rest of the world, are living blissfully in denial about the severity of the situation in Japan until Setsuko falls fatally ill. This, of course, is in complete juxtaposition with the graphic scenes of mutilation and devastation seen in **Barefoot Gen**, a much more shocking visual representation of the effects of the war. Gen sees countless horrifying situations throughout the course of the film, from the victims suffering from the immediate effects of The Bomb, creatures akin to the ‘Jikininki’ or “walking ghosts” of Japanese Buddhist mythology (see fig. 5); to the victims of radiation poisoning such as the soldier he encounters; and finally the rotting man he and his adopted brother Ryuta care for in the weeks after The Bomb (see fig. 6). Despite the horrible things he encounters, Gen’s

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childlike optimism and resilience consistently allows him to carry on caring for his family.

While it could be easy to scold the makers of Grave of the Fireflies for their focus on emotion as a substitution for a strong anti-militant message, Gillies takes an opposing view on this tactic. He states that ‘the anti-war message is not overstated. There is no real mention of the fire-bombing in a political way, only in the grief experienced by the Japanese people. Takahata has created an anti-war epic without resorting to finger-pointing, a remarkable achievement. He accepts the consequences of the Second World War and is only showing the forgotten souls of the war, the innocents who are caught in the crossfire of destruction.’

This expression of grief from the perspective of the innocent civilians of Japan, who were given false hope from meaningless boasts and promises made by their government, can be seen to be perfectly conveyed by the use of child and female protagonists.

The use of these protagonists meant that emotions began to enter anime in a more human, rounded way and explore the complex feelings of guilt, frustration and sadness in Japan in a more intelligent way than the “hypercute” generation could. While on the one hand these innocent and vulnerable protagonists can be seen to be evoking a “victim’s history” for the Japanese and as an attempt to purge them of guilt with regards to the war, they can also be seen as an expression of the helplessness and resentment felt by the Japanese civilians as well as the resilience shown by them in the wake of the Second World War. The figure of the child protagonist is particularly significant in A-bomb anime as it allows the films to show ‘many powerful scenes of human-scale interaction’ while at the same time giving them an ‘innocent and childlike tone’ enabling the same balance of real emotional depth and escapism as is achieved by cuteness to occur. These characters allow these post-war films to express the deep and confusing vulnerability felt by the Japanese in the wake of the attacks while allowing a certain amount of pride to be taken in their resilience and strength.

46 Ibid, p. 28.
47 Napier, p. 218.
Chapter 3

The Apocalypse Allegory

As explored in Chapter one, the protagonists in contemporary A-bomb anime developed and matured in many ways, apart from in their attitude towards The Bomb itself. Such contemporary anime as 
*Akira* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* serve as reflections of how most of Japan dealt with its unresolved and repressed feelings towards its troubled past, by representing The Bomb as some alien force or as an uncontrollable futuristic military power. This meant that the Japanese could work through their complex feelings relating to The Bomb without directly addressing the problem. John Treat theorises that ‘when seeking the words to express what they wish to say, it is nearly rote for atomic bomb writers to tell us they despair of ever finding the words […] to convey the un-conveyable’\(^{48}\), and like these authors, contemporary writers of A-bomb anime encounter the same problem. The filmmakers of the “acute” generation combat this difficulty by adding a strong fantasy element to these modern anime works, making the political and social issues surrounding The Bomb less realistic and easier to deal with.

There is a far more reflective quality to these darker contemporary works since there is less sensitivity surrounding the topic of The Bomb given that as of 2011 ‘it is currently estimated that more than three-quarters of Japanese citizens do not have first hand experience of the Asia-Pacific War’.\(^{49}\) However, perhaps what is most intriguing about these works is the way in which The Bomb is never referred to by name but instead as such things as; the “N2 Bombs” in *Neon Genesis*; the “Vegatron Bombs” in *UFO Robo Grendizer* (1975); the “Reaction Weaponry” in *Super Dimension Fortress Macross* (1982-83); and the “Meteor Bombs” in *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974-75), to

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\(^{49}\) Ichiki, p. 35.
name a few. This nuclear taboo is what separates the “acute” generation from the “hypecute” and gives us an insight into the current Japanese attitude towards The Bomb. Phillip Brophy, who has written extensively on the subject of anime, suggests that ‘Despite the Western ignorance of the sub-textual scarring which lines the underbelly of popular Japanese imagery, anime remains remarkably attuned to the effect Japan’s past has on its current psyche.’ Brophy seems to be suggesting here that the subtext that anime writers have created to mask their exploration of the residual feelings towards nuclear warfare in modern Japan is just as apparent in this subtext as it is in direct references to The Bomb. The most telling theme in modern anime is the innate fear of technology shown in the majority of films and television shows. These works show a nightmarish vision of a future Japan as Frankenstein facing his monster, a world run by machines which humans created and have become inferior to. In Shinji Aramaki’s 2004 film Appleseed this fear comes in the form of an android race of soldiers, created by man but which has become more intelligent and so have revolted against the human race. In the 1992 film Giant Robo we see the bodies of scientists being used as clappers on church bells, representing the fear of scientists developing technology to the point where they lose control of it.

This fear of technology and its potential largely manifests itself in the form of tangible energy fields, which can be manipulated by the post-apocalyptic and often mutated beings which inhabit the baron lands of post-war anime. Brophy makes the argument in his essay ‘Sonic – Atomic – Neumonic: Apocalyptic Echoes in Anime’ that post 1980s anime is far more preoccupied with energy and the effects of energy than its predecessors. It would make sense that these post-apocalyptic stories would develop a preoccupation with the effects of nuclear warfare in the 80s given the context of both the number of second-generation survivors of nuclear fallout reaching maturity, as well as the shadowy context of the looming Cold War. For a nation still dealing with the fallout of a previous nuclear attack, the possibility of another was understandably terrifying. Typically, post 1980s anime characters are

50 Brophy, p. 200.
identified by the nature and power of their energy, and perhaps the best example of this is the 1988 anime *Akira*, written and directed by Katsuhiro Otomo.

*Akira*’s anti-hero protagonist, Tetsuo, is the ‘quintessential post-nuclear being – one born of conditions which both redefine our physical reality and allow for the re-invention of the human form’.\(^{51}\) This post-nuclear being is clearly representative of the second generation of nuclear fallout victims, and the simultaneously terrifying and exciting potential that Japan was reaching through its technological advances. When one speaks about the idea of energy as a visible and tangible force in modern anime, it is difficult not to think of such shows as *Yu Yu Hakusho* (1990-1994) or the earlier and far more popular *Dragon Ball Z* (1989-96), which earned cult-like followings and through which energy as a weapon was popularised. This same premise of tangible energy being used as a source of power is clearly seen in *Akira*. In this film believers of the return of the great God Akira abduct Tetsuo after his encounter with a mutant victim of the nuclear fallout of WWIII, who has gained psychic abilities as a result of his mutation. After this abduction he finds himself to have acquired immense psychokinetic abilities and soon discovers that he can manipulate and control energy fields in order to utilise them as a weapon. As is the case with most post-nuclear apocalyptic anime, ‘lines, rays, and beams of intense energy fall randomly across a metropolis, causing chaos and destruction, not unlike the infamous black rain of Hiroshima and Nagasaki’.\(^{52}\) (see figs. 7 and 8)

The characters of the young psychic children in *Akira* echo the role played by the child protagonists in earlier anime and manga. These characters are frozen in a state of childhood due to the effects of scientific experimentation. Like the eternal children of earlier anime, these characters are here as a reminder of the state of denial which Japan has been frozen in with regards to their past due to the effects of science and technology. Tetsuo, however, is the ultimate symbol for the dangers of science in *Akira*. In the film’s dramatic

\(^{51}\) Ibid, p. 194.

\(^{52}\) Ibid, p. 200.
denouement, we see Tetsuo undergo a multitude of horrifying physical mutations culminating in his final transformation into a grisly fusion of man and machine. (see fig. 9-11). Moore speculates that: ‘These themes of reanimation, rebirth and mutation predominate in Japanese manga and anime and are regularly linked to both the threat and promise of the science and technology in the wake of The Bomb’. The images of bodily mutilation become more extreme in the last fifteen minutes of the film, and this grotesque spectacle grows more and more graphic as the fight scene goes on, serving to exaggerate the hideous potential which technology in excess could lead to. This display of mutation is not unlike the painfully detailed images shown during the long, slow-motion scene of The Bomb dropping in *Barefoot Gen*. (see fig. 12-13) Though “Body Horror” has become a trend in contemporary horror cinema, it is used here to remind a nation that they are still suffering from the physical and psychological effects of the fallout.

Another huge difference that can be seen in this more contemporary anime is the role of women, and the differentiation between genders in general. Much like the traditional roles of Samurai and Geishas in that men were seen as strong and self-sacrificing whereas women were shown to be vulnerable and silent, the role of men and women were very much polarised in earlier anime. However, in this new style of the acute we can see a new kind of sexuality emerging in the women of anime. A good example of this new form of sexuality is the 2004 partly computer-animated *Appleseed*, directed by Shinji Aramaki. In this anime we can see a kind of cross-gender exchange of attributes that Pauline Moore describes as ‘the ability to mutate and animate one aspect of either the masculine or feminine and to as quickly mutate in to the other, a back and forth that conflates the sexes until there is no sexuality at all’. We see this mutating of genders through the film’s protagonist, Deunan Knute.

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53 Moore, p. 119.
55 Moore, p. 140.
In the opening scene, Deunan is seen in a soldier’s uniform, expertly battling a force of cyborg troops alongside male comrades. (see fig.14) As the film progresses we see her in more and more suggestive outfits, and sometimes even just in underwear (see fig. 15). Deunan is a perfect example of how the qualities which have become representative of masculine and feminine in earlier anime, such as masculine strength and feminine fragility, are now bleeding in to each other. Whilst this could be seen by some as a more rounded, empowered characterisation of female characters in Eastern cinema, it seems that this strength unfortunately now largely translates as sexuality. The sexualisation of anime characters has become a trend in the form of the resurgence of the somewhat questionable genre of Japanese animation known as ‘Hentai’. Hentai literally translates as “sexual perversion” and is used today to describe sexually explicit or pornographic Japanese comics and films, though the use of the term to mean a general interest in perverse sexuality can be traced back to the early 1900s. Hentai has arguably promoted a connection between women in anime and pornography in the Western world in recent years. While the change in the role of women in anime from the immediate post-war period to a more contemporary context could be seen as Japan finally coming to terms with their Victim’s History, it is more likely to be seen as representative of Japan’s ever-growing fetishisation of young women. Much like this recent renaissance of Hentai in popular Japanese culture, *Appleseed* caters to the strange fascination with sexuality and young girls in Japanese culture. Just as with the vulnerable damsels in distress of shōjo manga in the immediate post-war period, the increasingly explicit content of anime and manga and the intense focus on the female role in Japan could be seen as yet another distraction from the real issue of the past.

Much like live-action apocalyptic thrillers of the 1970s such as *Logan’s Run* (1976), *Genesis II* (1973), and *Deathsport* (1978), these modern anime films

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are set not only in the future, but often also in a world where the devastation is decades if not centuries old. This serves to further distance the viewer from the reflective qualities of the film. The simultaneous fascination with and fear of technology, shown through the preoccupation with energy as a source of power and weaponry in these films, shows how confused Japan remains as a nation within the context of their nuclear past. It is interesting that a country so scarred by its painful past is so absorbed by the prospect of nuclear apocalypse and the spectacle of bodily mutation, given that only half a century prior to the era of acute anime in the early 1980s, these were the very real possibilities and effects that plagued Japan.

Like the adolescent forms which the characters of modern anime take, the genre itself has not yet fully developed and remains 'suspended in the teenage realm between childhood and maturity'.\(^57\) As explored in this chapter, this is a sobering reflection of Japan’s residual denial with regards to its troubled past, and much like the stubborn teenage characters of acute anime Japan can be seen to be stubbornly descending further in to a state of denial with concerns to The Bomb. The progression from kawaii to acute animation is not, as Moore suggests, representative of the development of a self-aware and direct representation of the Japanese attitude towards The Bomb. While acute anime deals more directly with the ever-present danger posed by the increasingly rapid development of technology and science in Japan, the popular futuristic and fantastic setting of these films and TV shows throw up the same psychological barriers as are created by the medium of animation itself.

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\(^{57}\) Moore, p. 128.
Conclusion

‘Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging the pleasure of the original presentation, and repeating the production of a memory’.  

- John Ellis

As the above quote demonstrates, adaptation in to any medium is an effective way of preserving and reliving a memory, and as this dissertation shows, animation is a particularly apt example of this. Cavallaro argues that it is more effective to depict the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in an animated form as it would have been ‘“bogged down in realism”’ in a live-action film ‘and the final product would not, therefore, have been as “pure”’ and “abstract” as it actually is.’ She also notes that ‘In many cases, the fact that it is animated gives simple actions and scenes a beauty and innocence that would not have existed otherwise, creating all the more contrast with the harsh and painful realities experienced by the characters’. This contrast between the beauty of animation as a medium and the ugliness of the horrors they are depicting serves to support the validity of animation as a ‘memory shaping medium’. This contrast arguably emphasises the more gruesome aspects of such films as *Barefoot Gen* and *Grave of the Fireflies* as we are used to animation depicting princesses, far-off lands and happy endings, so when presented with something so horrific in such a childlike form it is natural for the viewer to feel uncomfortable. Though this dissertation does not come to the decisive conclusion that animation is by any means the most effective medium through which to express trauma, it is conclusive in that by using an otherwise apolitical medium to express heavily political and sociological issues, these films and television shows serve to remind us that the history that they explore permeates every facet of modern life, even the world of animation and imagination.

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59 Cavallaro, p. 30.
60 Cavallaro, p. 30.
61 Ichiki, p. 36.
By creating a synergy between the themes explored in this dissertation it was possible to create a dialogue between different eras of animation which span a significant timeline. Through this dialogue these themes become directly comparable in their treatment of The Bomb and nuclear war, whether it be through the differing characterisations such as that of women and children or through the divergent styles of each era. The fact that even given the differences in style and theme between each era, particularly in their representation of apocalypse, the topic of The Bomb is explored consistently throughout these eras proves how significant and important a medium animation is with concerns to representing memory and history.

Though this dissertation is able to bridge the gaps in chronology in previous writings, it would have been interesting to have compared how the animation in different countries, particularly America, dealt with the topic of The Bomb. Although the relationship between Disney and Tezuka is mentioned, it was not possible to examine this relationship in any amount of depth. Further research into whether or not other countries have anywhere near the same level of fascination with the topic of the atomic bomb would perhaps have benefited this study as it may have provided an idea as to how unusual this fascination is on a global scale. By performing a more in-depth analysis of the extent to which a-bomb manga influenced Japanese society, it may also have been possible to more accurately represent the scale of this fascination. It may also have been beneficial to have included statistics concerning how deeply these films permeated the Japanese social consciousness, such as in an academic context.
Appendix

Fig. 1

Fig. 2
**Left:** *Kimba the White Lion* dir. by Osamu Tezuka (TV Tokyo, 1965-67).

**Right:** *Lion King* dir. by Roger Allers & Rob Minkoff (Walt Disney Studios, 1994).
Fig. 3
*Akira* dir. by Katsuhiro Otomo (Toho Co. Ltd., 1988).

Fig. 4
*Neon Genesis Evangelion* dir. by Hideaki Anno (Gainax Co. Ltd., 1995-96).
Fig. 5
Barefoot Gen dir. by Mori Masaki (Streamline Pictures, 1983).

Fig. 6
Barefoot Gen dir. by Mori Masaki (Streamline Pictures, 1983).
Fig. 7
*Akira.*

Fig. 8
*Akira.*
Fig. 11
*Akira*.

Fig. 12
*Barefoot Gen*. 

Fig. 13
*Barefoot Gen.*

Fig. 14
*Appleseed* dir. by Shinji Aramaki (Toho Co. Ltd., 2005).
Fig 15.
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