Waiting for the Messiah: The Becoming-Myth of *Evangelion* and

Densha otoko

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Wednesday, October 4, 1995, 6:30 PM, on Tokyo Channel 12, a new robot animation begins, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (otherwise known as *EVA*).[1] The TV series will consist of twenty-six episodes (1995–96), several movies remaking the ending of the TV series (1997, 2008), and an undiminished flow of manga and videogame adaptations. Originally aiming at a public of hardcore local otaku, the series soon becomes a social phenomenon capturing the attention of cultural theorists inside and outside of Japan.

Almost ten years later, *EVA* returns as a parody in the "coming of age" story of a nerdy boy, "Densha otoko" (literally "Train Man"). The story of Densha, born in the online message board 2channel, is another unexpected social boom and commercial success. Published in book form in October 2004, it had sold 1,015,000 copies by June 2005, finding exceptional popularity among young office ladies as a "Pure Love" (*jun'ai*) story.[2] Following the book, Densha moves across media forms to become a movie (June 2005), a TV series (July–October, 2005), several manga (the first in March 2005), and a theatrical play (August–September, 2005).

EVA and *Densha otoko* are unexpected successes, both inside and outside of Japan. They are literally translocal and transmedia events that cannot be

understood simply in terms of a modern capitalist form of social collectivity grounded in a single national territory. Despite their differences in media form and content, I think that both texts explore in similar ways other forms of social collectivity at a historical moment when the everyday and war are no longer opposed and literally coexist in a singular temporality of *waiting*. This new situation forces us to rethink the definition of a social collectivity when it cannot be defined by the rhythmic alternation of war and peace. *EVA* and *Densha otoko* allow us to imagine another form of collectivity in what I call a Waiting-Room, a space of transit in which a collective subjectivity can recover a form of agency in a narrative becoming.

THE QUOTIDIANIZATION OF THE APOCALYPSE: *EVA*

On the 13 September 2000, a meteorite crashes on Mount Markham in Antarctica, melting the icecap. But in the narrative of *EVA,* this is only the official version. In reality, the "Second Impact" was provoked by Ikari Gendō and a secret organization named the SEELE[3] after their attempt to return Adam, the First Angel, to the state of an embryo. The melting of the icecap causes a rising of the water level, a change in the orbital axis of the Earth, numerous volcanic eruptions, and radical climate changes. In the disaster and civil disorder that ensue, half of the human population disappears. In a new post-apocalyptic world, the defense of peace has become the responsibility of the United Nations, which now controls both the East and the West military blocks. This state of peace is a constant negotiation of war and peace, Total Peace being another name for Total War. The new geopolitical order marks the end of a modern capitalist society, until then regulated by the alternation of war and peace, and reopens the question of the production of social collectivities.

A social collectivity in capitalist modernity can be understood as a social structure defined by a state of peace opposed to a state of war. The project of constructing a civil society would then aim at the disappearance of war. In this regard, it is not surprising that one of the most famous and controversial theories of civil society was elaborated in postwar Germany. I refer of course to Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, an artificial space of communication that through a variety of procedures aims at canceling out the possibility of conflict and war. What happens, then, when civil society can no longer be defined in opposition to war? How can it even exist as such? Or, put another way, is it even possible to conceive of a social collectivity as a social project? And if the social collectivity is not defined as a social project,

what form of agency can it allow its members? If there is no more alternation between war and peace, what can be posed against civil society to allow for any kind of critical distance? Or does the coexistence of the time of war and peace in the everyday call for another imagining of the social, where a different form of collectivity can recover some form of agency?

In *EVA*, the blurring of the boundary between the time of war and the time of peace is first expressed by the end of the cycle of seasons. The Second Impact has plunged humanity into an endless summer. Time has been arrested or, rather, suspended. It has been detached from the natural cycle of seasons to become the artificial creation of an integrated social structure that would have realized its dream of completeness and wholeness. The world of *EVA*, then, is truly a second nature, defined not by natural cyclic time or by the linear time of progress but by a state of suspension, an endless summer. What is interesting here is that it is never made clear whether this human creation is voluntary or the result of an accident (a failed experiment). Indeed *EVA* constantly oscillates between the idea of absolute control in the form of a totalizing structure, through Ikari Gendō's Instrumentality Project designed to bring about the completion of the human, and the idea of the accident as absolute contingency. And interestingly enough, both ideas are problematized in relation to the question of an oncoming apocalypse. The question then becomes one of the attitude adopted toward that apocalypse, a nihilist resignation or a willful embracing. And *EVA* suggests the possibility of a third attitude, a *pathic* waiting,[4] where the apocalypse is suspended and denied. This is a different form of temporality (yet still an apocalyptic one) that, as I will argue, allows for the constitution of a collective subjectivity that does not rely on the modern individual subject of action.

> IN *EVA*, THE BLURRING OF THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE TIME OF WAR AND THE TIME OF PEACE IS FIRST EXPRESSED BY THE END OF THE CYCLE OF SEASONS.

What is at stake here is the question of the apocalypse as a real event opening social reality to another horizon of experience. The world of *EVA* is caught between two apocalypses, suspended in an intermediary state. It is born out of the Second Impact, already removed from an originary First Impact about which nothing is ever told. And it is awaiting a third one. In this regard, *EVA* occupies a middle position between the two forms of apocalypse defined by sociologist Miyadai Shinji, the post-apocalyptic community and the endless repetition of the everyday.[5] It is a post-apocalyptic world, but the Second Impact never becomes the originary moment that can provide

> **BY REINTRODUCING WAR IN THE FORM OF A DESIRE FOR TRANSCENDENCE, *EVA* OPENS THE POSSIBILITY FOR ANOTHER FORM OF SOCIAL COLLECTIVITY IN WHAT I CALL THE WAITING-ROOM.**

a sense of unity and consistency necessary to the reproduction of a social collectivity. On the contrary, it realizes the abstraction of society from any origin, either natural or human. Time is no longer marked by the passage of seasons, nor even by the controlled alternation of war and peace. Natural time and social time (if we define the alternation of war and peace as the classical temporal regime of civil society) have been replaced by a continuous moment of waiting.

This continuous waiting is in a way close to Miyadai Shinji's notion of a *never-ending everyday*. In the never-ending everyday, the apocalypse does not open any new horizon of experience. It has become entirely immanent to the social collectivity and actually means the impossibility of a social project of any kind, because it has no exterior. The apocalypse has become the imperative to reproduce the social structure, at the very level of everyday life. The everyday is now the critical moment, "the minimal temporal unit of experience,"[6] at which the social structure faces its desire for eternity, and potentially the impossibility of its reproduction.

As Félix Guattari argues, "Structure implies feedback loops, it puts into play a concept of totalization that it itself masters. It is occupied by inputs and outputs whose purpose is to make the structure function according to a principle of eternal return. It is haunted by a desire for eternity."[7] The aim of the social structure is therefore the abolition of linear time and of any difference between an inside and an outside, and in fact between war and peace. In Miyadai's never-ending everyday, the social structure is no longer oriented by a social project such as the abolition of war. Linear time has turned on itself to become a continuous moment, and individual subjectivity is now caught between the structure and the dream of the structure, between the collectivity of individual subjects and their integration and fusion into a mythic community.

Those two faces of the social structure as never-ending everyday are the two fantasies of modern social collectivity: civil society composed of rational individuals bound by a contract, and the mythic community of the village based on empathic ties that subsume individual differences in a homogeneous social space. Both define the two sides of a modern social structure that relies on the production of individual subjects forced to occupy an agonistic position: that of having to navigate between the two dangers of a complete isolation of the self from the social collectivity in a movement of infinite

fragmentation and of both the fusion and dissolution of the self. In the end, the self is nothing but a fiction, an effect of the structure, and its agency is limited to an incessant oscillation between the two polarities of immanence and transcendence, two relative deaths that never really open onto another horizon of experience.

In *EVA* the social collectivity is still polarized by those two deaths, one in the form of the absent father (the dream of absolute control in a structure, a scenario) and the other in the form of the lost mother (the dream of a state of completion and wholeness). Yet the social collectivity never really functions as an integrated structure. This is not a question of realizing the dream of the structure: that is in fact impossible. What allows for the reproduction of the structure is precisely this oscillation between absolute fragmentation and plenitude, Big Brother and Mother Nature. And this is only possible by opening the social structure to the exterior as war. The social structure can only actualize itself against the irruption of war, but only one step removed from it, to preserve the imperative of social reproduction without falling into utter madness and destruction. In this regard, the never-ending everyday is only a social fantasy, the dream of a structure whose members have forgotten that their world can only exist against the possibility of war and destruction, that its survival relies on its opening to what Félix Guattari calls "domains of alterification."[8]

The interesting move of *EVA* is that it manages to reopen the question of the relation between war and the everyday in the formation of a social collectivity without falling back onto the model of modern civil society. By reintroducing war in the form of a desire for transcendence, *EVA* opens the possibility for another form of social collectivity in what I call the Waiting-Room.

ENTERING THE WAITING-ROOM

The opening of the structure to the world as exterior, to the possibility of "breakdown and catastrophe," allows for the emergence of an abstract machine, a Waiting-Room, as the incubator for a distinct form of social collectivity and a singular collective subjectivity. On the one hand, *EVA*'s everyday is fragmented into a multiplicity of segments that cannot constitute anymore a coherent and integrated whole. The sphere of power is as well exploded into a multiplicity of competing agencies (the United Nations, the Japanese government, NERV, SEELE, and so on). Civil society itself is completely dysfunctional, composed of autistic individuals that literally cannot hold themselves

together. What happened? No real explanation is given to explain this state of things, and it might well be because the origin of the problem is not exterior but internal to the social structure itself, the effect of a movement immanent to a social structure that can only be lived as a dream, endlessly repeating itself. It is indeed a question of repetition that is at the heart of the problem here, a return of the apocalypse in a movement of transcendence.

What opens the structure to its abstract machine is a movement of repetition, a repetition composed of two moments, suspension and denial.[9] Again, this is a question of time, and the first moment of the repetition is a suspension of time, as time becomes a continuous present. This continuous present is oriented. It is a present of arrival. There is no departure, no aim to reach or home to return to. There is no social project possible here, no individual agency, only a passive or rather pathic waiting. But waiting already implies an object of waiting. It already introduces a gap into the dream of the structure, and a temporal movement that is both linear, if reversed (there is no aim as such, but only arrivals), and cyclic (but it is a repetition in difference this time, not a repetition of the same). Waiting opens the everyday to the world as open, pure exteriority, and here, war.

Fifteen years after the Second Impact, the Angels (*shito*) start randomly attacking Shin-Tokyo3. We do not know who they are, where they come from, or the reason for their attacks. The Angels are polymorphous figures of destruction that mark the irruption of the world into the everyday, the opening of the social structure to alterity and death. This is the initial setting of *EVA* and it seems in the first episodes that this external menace, these incessant and random attacks of the Angels, would allow for a mobilization of a community of fighters, a team of children using giant robots to fight for the survival of humanity. This is the grand narrative of *EVA,* and Shinji is to be the Messiah, the savior and the redeemer of humanity. But *EVA* is not a spin-off of *Gundam*.[10] This continuous exposure of the everyday to the world does not end in a commitment to war and a subjection of the individual to the social collectivity— the sacrifice of the self for the survival of the community (Figure 1).

In *EVA,* there is no return home. There is no nature to come back to, no god to appeal to, no origin—as everything is a secondary product. War cannot be avoided; it does not become a temporary space of exception before the return to a peaceful community. There is no mediation possible between the everyday and the world as war, at least not in the modern understanding of technological mediation as "means to an end," which is really what the idea of the Public Sphere is about. "To ride or not to ride" is the existential question for Shinji, who never really questions the "why" of the war itself, nor the

FIGURE 1. Shinji in transit from *Neon Genesis Evangelion.*

motivations of other individuals. Shinji does not reject his situation, his role, his identity; he denies it. Riding the EVA is what defines his very identity as an individual subject of action, the very subject produced by the structure, and this is why he constantly defers his commitment to the grand narrative. The EVA-robot symbolizes this denial of individual subjectivity and instrumental technology as a temporal movement of delaying.

In contrast to *Gundam, EVA* completely blurs the distinction between the mechanical and the organic, the EVA-robot and the child-pilot. We learn at the end of the series that the soul of each pilot's mother has been transplanted in their respective EVAs, while the EVA units themselves have been made out of Adam, the first Angel (and Lilith in the case of EVA 01, piloted by Ikari Shinji). Humanity is the last generation of Angels, the end product of a long line of genetic experiments starting with Adam and Lilith. The line is definitively blurred between the pilot and the robot; they are cousins, different and not so different. The pilot and the EVA-robot are two distinct entities that must enter into a relation of co-penetration, as suggested by the imagery of the entry plug and the amniotic-like liquid (LCL) in which the pilot is immersed. The nature of the relation between the pilot and the EVA-robot forces the externalization and relocation of subjectivity into the interface

itself, thus opening the social structure to its abstract machine. Subjectivity is externalized as mediation between the heterogeneous segments of a machinic assemblage. The pilot and the robot are partial subjects, positions allowed by the interface of a social machine.

The relation between the pilot and the robot is analogical to the one between the subjects of *EVA*'s community of fighters. They only exist as partial subjects, segments of a social machine that exist in their own terms as autopoietic segments.[11] Each segment of the machine is a partial subject, a partial enunciation, with its own consistency, its own temporality of movement. How then is "machinic synchrony" possible without dissolving all its elements into a homogeneous whole? What holds the collectivity together if it cannot be a commitment to a common social project through the instrumental mediation of war?

WEAVING A STORY

EVA offers an interesting case for considering the formation of a social collectivity at a historical moment defined by the quotidianization of the apocalypse. This is first a question of technological mediation, but also very clearly one of temporality. When there is no more alternation between war and peace but literally an overexposure of the everyday to the world *as* war, when the quotidianization of the apocalypse has become the new social reality, how can a social collectivity find a form of consistency without falling back onto the modern social structure? What can allow for a synchronous movement of its members as heterogeneous segments of a machinic assemblage defined by a temporality of waiting? How can the Waiting-Room become a social machine that allows for such a community to emerge and hold?

This is where *EVA,* as well as the more recent *Densha otoko,* propose an interesting alternative to Azuma Hiroki's database theory.[12] What allows for the subversion of a totalizing social structure, of which the database would constitute the extreme incarnation, is here the collective production of a narrative. But the movement of the narrative in both *EVA* and *Densha otoko* is not based on a classical developmental model of narrativity (maturation, quest for origins, or simply realization of an objective) but rather follows a logic of repetition akin to the one analyzed by Gilles Deleuze in the case of masochism, a repetition that combines denial and suspension.[13] Denial is not a negation of the given (the world, society, the self). It is the opening of a critical space (what I call the Waiting-Room) through a movement of suspension and

delaying, where the given can be contested (but not rejected or destroyed). It is the space where the given social structure can be suspended and neutralized as a fact, so that a new horizon can be opened in the form of an ideal figure suspended in a fantasy. What is critical here is this continuous hovering at the limit that allows for a pathic relation with the world, in the everyday opening to the apocalypse. By a double process of abstraction and idealization, the Waiting-Room allows for a critical distance with the world that is not a separation from (this is not a question of alienation) nor a fusion with but rather an opening to the world as alterity in the liberation of a desire for transcendence that fuels the movement of the narrative.[14]

> THE MOVEMENT OF THE NARRATIVE IN BOTH *EVA* AND *DENSHA OTOKO* IS NOT BASED ON A CLASSICAL DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF NARRATIVITY, BUT RATHER FOLLOWS A LOGIC OF REPETITION AKIN TO THE ONE ANALYZED BY GILLES DELEUZE IN THE CASE OF MASOCHISM, A REPETITION THAT COMBINES DENIAL AND SUSPENSION.

In *EVA* the narrative structure should be considered at two distinct but parallel levels. On the one hand there is the belief in a grand narrative of salvation sustained by a singular external worldview. On the other hand, there is a multiplicity of serial narratives based on character figures. The narrative movement of *EVA* consists then in the mediation from one level to the other, and it is here that *EVA* becomes truly innovative. In the second part of the TV series, from episode 16, the grand narrative structure is literally destroyed in favor of a proliferation of character-based small narratives. And that is deployed through a liberation of a logic of quotation that gradually undermines the overarching narrative of salvation by producing a multitude of enigmas and an excess of information. The logic of quotation, no longer subjected to the narrative of salvation, takes on a life of its own and produces a saturated field of references, a sea of information (rather than Azuma's structured database of information), the LCL or "primordial soup of life" from which emerges a multiplicity of partial subjects.

What happens here is actually the exacerbation of the commercial logic of narrative marketing analyzed by Ōtsuka Eiji in his *Teibon monogatari shōhiron* (Standard theory of narrative consumption).[15] This marketing strategy, akin to detective fiction's structure of play, consists in producing the desire for an overarching grand narrative by randomly giving bits and pieces of information to the consumers (following a logic of quotation), so that they will attempt to rebuild the grand narrative by themselves through the purchase

of commercial goods. The goods here are the episodes of the TV series, and the grand narrative, the mecha genre's narrative of salvation. This particular form of narrative crystallizes the double bind of the structure, a narrative movement of progress and maturation and a totalizing and homogeneous social structure. In *EVA* the logic of quotation does not work anymore as a mediating technology giving access to the dream of the structure, the figure of completeness and wholeness, nor does it end up in a free-floating space of polymorphous subjectivity. However, the grand narrative is not exactly rejected; it is denied, by being abstracted from the movement of the narrative, the narratable,[16] and suspended in the form of an ideal figure, the mythical mother Rei of *The End of Evangelion*.

The case of Ayanami Rei is interesting to examine here as she becomes in *EVA* the central figure for this subversion of the narrative structure (Figure 2). She is an enigmatic character, embodying the two polarities of the modern social subject: the isolated, fragmented, and artificial self (Rei appears to have been created by Ikari Gendō, and there exists a multiplicity of dummies of her), and the all-encompassing, whole and natural self. Rei is an artificial double of Yui, Shinji's mother, and she becomes in *The End of Evangelion,* the ideal, primitive mother that absorbs all individual beings into
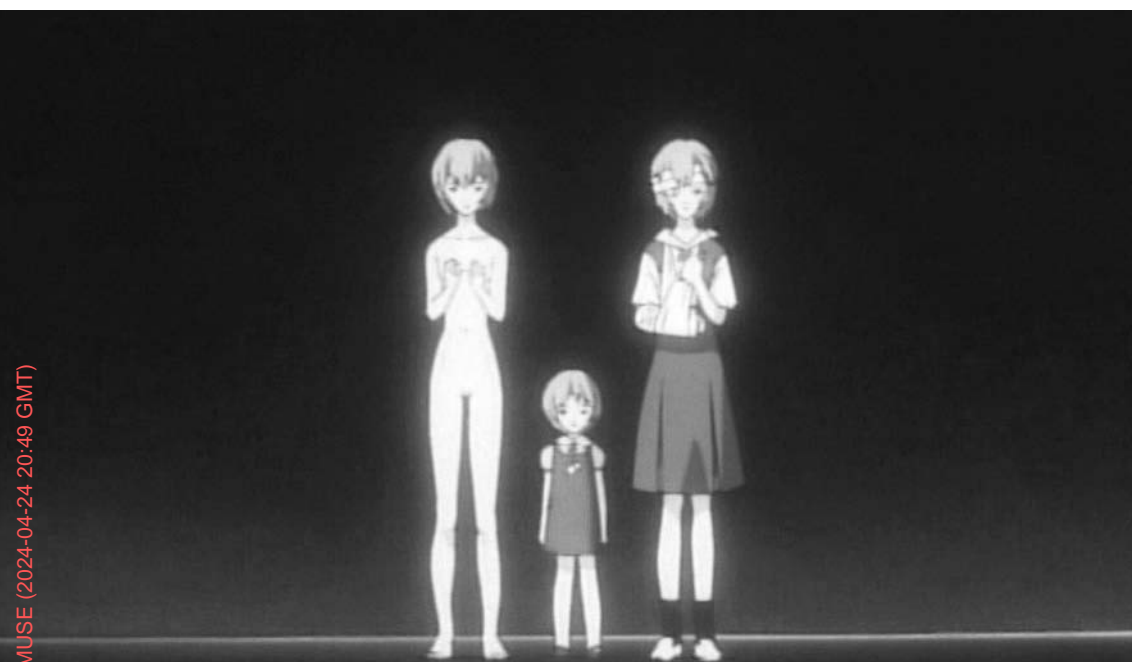

FIGURE 2. The three incarnations of Rei from *Neon Genesis Evangelion.*

a homogeneous undifferentiated whole.[17] Ayanami Rei only exists as a figure continuously moving along a line of becoming: from partial subject to partial subject.[18] She actualizes an image of life as narrative becoming in a continuous mediating movement allowed by the opening to death. This mediating movement is a repetition as suspension and denial of the apocalyptic arrival of the primitive mother, and it is realized through the figure of the Messiah, Ikari Shinji as EVA pilot. As I will argue in the last part of this paper, Densha plays a similar role in *Densha otoko* in relation to Hermes.

EVA thus actualizes a real movement of subversion of the structure. Mobilizing the expectations of its spectators-consumers, it elevates the mythical mother into the figure of an ideal, and thus liberates a collective process of narrative production. The adventure (the narratable) is no longer a detour on the way back home. It has become identified with the everyday itself, in its endless opening to the ideal figure of the primitive mother. The desire for the grand narrative produced by the marketing strategy has been displaced onto a desire for transcendence, incarnated in the figure of the Messiah. The suspension and delaying of the final arrival of the apocalypse is what opens the Waiting-Room as a space of collective narrative production. It allows a form of synchrony to emerge between the everyday and the world, through the mediation of the Messianic figure, by the opening of a gap, a critical space, in which a social collectivity can recreate itself in a collective narrative becoming.

BECOMING—MYTH

EVA thus stages the birth of the Waiting-Room as a spatial form that unifies the disparate fragments of the everyday into a collective narrative oriented by a desire for transcendence. This is neither a return to the dream of the structure nor really a departure from it. The Waiting-Room emerges through a repetition that combines a moment of suspension with a moment of delay—the denial of the end of the coming apocalypse and of the ideal of the primitive mother. The messiah becomes the figure that mediates between the everyday and the world, not to neutralize and incorporate the exterior (the world) into an everyday totalizing social structure but rather to allow for the emergence of the Waiting-Room through the manipulation of the axis of time, a liberation of the narrative as a movement of narrative becoming from which can emerge a collective subjectivity. This is not then, a question of proclaiming an absolute rupture and departure from a modern social collectivity (and the narrative form through which it reproduces itself) but rather of creating a

productive tension between an ideal figure actualizing the utopia of modernity and a never-ending everyday.

In *Densha otoko,* the emergence of the Waiting-Room and of a collective subjectivity is again realized through a singular process of narrativization. *Densha otoko* is a standard romantic fantasy, the dream of a heteronormative capitalist structure functioning as an imaginary law elevated to the status of a transcendental ideal. A young otaku, our typical introverted nerdy young man, takes up the defense of a young (but older) office lady in her twenties when she is harassed by a drunken old man in a Tokyo commuter train. The story then centers on the building relationship between the two over the conventional course of their dating (restaurant—first kiss—confession of love). There is no surprise in the story line. There might be accidental episodes, but the outcome is defined by a simple question: "Will Densha succeed in conquering the young woman, Hermes?" Here the question is not about "riding or not riding," as in *EVA,* but rather becomes one of committing to the community of 2channelers, "leaving or not leaving."[19] The grand narrative of *Densha otoko* is a parodic repetition of *EVA* in another media form. If it starts from the staging of a desire to escape from the closed world of the otaku to become part of a heteronormative consumerist social structure, the initial question remains the same, "should I stay or should I go?" Again the "why" is not an issue as such. Nobody questions the ideal fantasy figure in its multiple arrivals. *Densha otoko* is more directly concerned with the narratable, the process of narrativization itself, than with reaching the end and bringing the narrative to closure. The story starts in the space of transit par excellence, the commuter train that gives its name to Densha and brings the goddess Hermes, the messenger of the gods.[20]

However *Densha otoko* is first about an online community, a community of 2channelers that reproduces itself through the collective production of a heterogeneous narrative and a singular character, "Densha." In this regard, it is a parodic repetition of *EVA,* but one that further embraces the liberatory potential of Ōtsuka's narrative logic by staging the collective production of the narrative itself. This is why the denial of the final apocalypse is even more clearly associated here with a question of authorship, as it is impossible to really identify the "author" of the online story or even of the book on which I base my analysis. The book actually further intensifies the tension between

the individual subjectivity of the modern social structure and the collective subjectivity of the social machine by opening itself to a proliferation of character-based narratives across various media.

The narrative movement of *Densha otoko* can be defined by three vectors subscribing to the social machine's demand for self-referentiality and heteropoiesis:[21] a seriality of ordinal segments, ontological intensity (acceleration and condensation), and externalization of subjective memories. *Densha otoko* is a compilation of threads posted on 2channel, an anonymous online message board started in 1999, where each posting is minimally defined by the time of the posting and an ordinal number (Figure 3) but not necessarily a proper name pointing to a single individual (the title of each posting is by definition set as "Nanashi-san," or "Mr. No-name"). This makes for a sequential reading from posting to posting, from one voice to another, the only shifters appearing in the form of pointers to previous postings (">> 296"). Two series already run parallel here, an ordinal series and a temporal one (relative timing), the conjunction of both giving to the thread[22] a singular quality of duration. This duration is itself double, pointing simultaneously in two directions. On the one hand, it tends toward a maximum of immediacy that dissolves the mechanical succession of past, present, and future postings into a continuous moment of posting-arrivals, marked by an overflow of postings for the same moment t. On the other hand, a posting is itself already an archived trace of a past arrival on the board, and the totality of postings of a given thread from $t1$ to tx is always accessible for a retrospective

FIGURE 3. ASCII art from the "raw archive" of Densha Otoko's story on 2channel. http://f41.aaa. livedoor.jp/~outerdat/ (accessed July 4, 2008).

reading of the whole thread. Those two temporal series then allow for the emergence of a third one, constituted by the movements between individual postings, as direct answers, commentaries, or side musings, from posting to posting or groups of postings. Each posting is itself identified either by a proper name ("Densha otoko" being the only one here), a singular form of expression (writing and/or ASCII art) or content (pointing to an external individual state of things—a person). The text of *Densha otoko* is structured by a multiplicity of voices, a heterogeneous series of characters from which can emerge a collective enunciation.

Densha is a transcendental figure that comes from the exterior, from the world. Its appearance in 2channel is what brings about the constitution of the community of 2channelers. This community of anonymous but singular voices is always acting in reaction to Densha's postings, always waiting for the next posting, the next report. And the longer the waiting, the more intense the production of collective fantasies exploring the possible outcomes of Densha's adventures in the world, a proliferation of possible worlds brought to a momentary end by the arrival of the next report.[23]

"Transcendental" here does not refer to an a priori essence or form, pre-existing the constitution of the social collectivity. Following Bruno Latour, I suggest then that we understand transcendence as "the utterance, or the delegation, or the sending of a message or a messenger, [that] makes it possible to remain in presence—that is to exist."[24] Each report is a presenting of an ideal fantasy, a message from the world brought by the Messianic figure. The transcendental figure of the Messiah, Shinji in *EVA* and Densha in *Densha otoko,* mediates the catastrophic irruption of the world into the everyday, opening the Waiting-Room to a new horizon of experience. Densha's arrival is desired, and it is at the same time always a small death, a little apocalypse, but one that restarts the movement of the narrative. Densha's postings are described as a continuous series of attacks, successive bombings that expose the entrenched community of 2channelers (Figure 4). The quotidianization of the apocalypse has been internalized as a social condition of everyday life, a singular temporality and a form of expression not attached anymore to a theme of war.

Densha as Messiah, the ideal figure that activates the community of 2channelers, is thus actualized through the collective making of a narrative. And more importantly, it is a complete fabrication of a community that acts as a collective puppet master, devising the strategy of action for Densha (through advice, encouragement, critiques, and so on) and managing the flow of arrivals (Densha's reports) through the making of a narrative.
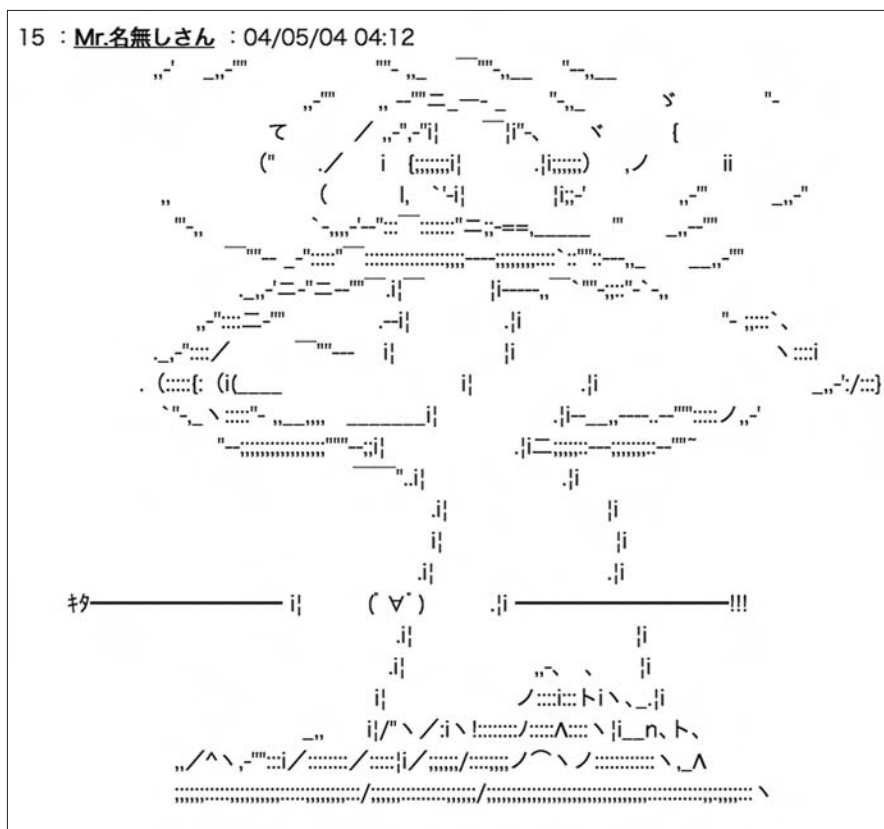
FIGURE 4. ASCII art from the "raw archive" of Densha Otoko's story on 2channel. http://f41.aaa.
livedoor.jp/~outerdat/ (accessed July 4, 2008).

This narrative is not so much based on a plot as on a politics of speed, one that through the operation of delaying, allows for the machinic synchrony of a collective subjectivity. As the narrative gets closer to the realization of Densha's desire (dating Hermes) the community intensifies the movement of denial and suspension by both marking its distance from Densha ("Who would have thought it would grow into such a monster?" "This is Densha and Hermes' story. Nobody can disturb them")[25] and delaying the final resolution. The multiplication of postings brings the emergence of a continuous present of arrivals, best expressed in the multiplication of "Kita"-based ASCII art (Figures 3 and 4).[26]

In the end, Densha returns to the Waiting-Room with Hermes, in preparation for the dissemination of their offspring in a transmedia world. Those successive versions of *Densha otoko* can look like degraded versions of the original online story that reground the narrative on individual life stories.

The movie is indeed nothing else but a tasteless Hollywood-style melodrama, which can make us wonder about the real potential of transmedia proliferation.[27] However, rather than a return to the individual subject, what we can see here is the proliferation across media of multiple series of character-based narratives that allow for the continuous emergence of collective subjectivities. This is what realizes the quotidianization of the apocalypse, as it prepares the Waiting-Room for the arrival of the new human, the Messiah. But the Messiah never comes as such in person, nor does it mark an objective to be reached. It can only be a suspended ideal, a becoming-myth.

IN TRANSIT

EVA and *Densha otoko* both can be read as possible answers to what I have called the quotidianization of the apocalypse, a singular temporality where the alternation between war and peace can no longer be the ground for defining a social collectivity. The overexposure of the everyday to the world calls for another form of community distinct from the model of the Public Sphere and closer to Guattari's concept of the machine. A new form of mediation is necessary, which implies a distinct narrative movement.

The Waiting-Room becomes this nonplace where a social collectivity can recreate itself through the mediation of the figure of the Messiah. A desire for transcendence emerges again, but this time associated with a singular temporality of waiting. This singular duration defined by an opening to a transcendental exterior, and the interruption of its passage by a double movement of suspension and denial allows for a synchronization of the everyday with the world, and of the multiple segments of the social collectivity with each other, in a continuous movement of passage. This is a real subversion of the social structure, and while the danger of falling back into fascism always exists, I think what keeps it at bay in these two texts is both the denial of a total departure from the modern structure and the resingularization of subjectivities in a collective narrative becoming. This allows for the emergence of a collectivity in transit, in the waiting for an apocalypse that never ceases to come, and pass.

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Notes

1. *Shinseiki evangerion,* dir. Anno Hideaki, TV series, twenty-six episodes (1995–96); translated as *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Perfect Collection,* six-DVD box set (ADV Films, 2005); *End of Evangelion,* dir. Anno Hideaki (1997), DVD (Manga Entertainment, 2002). From now on, I will use "*EVA*" to refer to the original Japanese TV series and the movies, but always as part of a larger paratext including the multiple endings, movies, manga, and parodies.

2. I will refer only to the book version, but as in the case of *EVA,* this is part of a larger paratext moving from the online forum 2channel to the multiple manga versions, TV series, theatrical play, and movie. In the novel, we never learn the "real" name of the hero who is called "Densha otoko," or simply "Densha." I will use "Densha" to designate the hero of the narrative. The author of the book version is given as Nakano Hitori, a made-up name for "individual people gathering on an internet message board," in other words 2channelers. Nakano Hitori, *Densha otoko* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2004); translated by Bonnie Elliot as *Train Man: The Novel* (New York: Del Rey/Ballantine Books, 2007). I have relied on the Japanese version for this article.

3. NERV is the United Nations' special agency directed by Ikari Gendō and in charge of the fight against the Angels. But it is in fact following the orders of a secret agency, SEELE.

4. The term "pathic" is central to a genealogy of thought on affectivity that goes back to Henri Maldiney and Erwin Strauss. Strauss distinguishes two modes of connecting with the world, the pathic mode and the gnostic mode, each respectively associated with sensing and perception, the *how* and the *what* of experience: "The gnostic moment merely develops the *what* of the given in its object character, the pathic the *how* of its being as given." Erwin Strauss, *Phenomenological Psychology: The Selected Papers of Erwin W. Strauss* (New York: Basic Books, 1966) 12, quoted in Renaud Barbaras, "Affectivity and Movement: The Sense of Sensing in Erwin Strauss," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3 (2004): 215–28 at 219. The pathic thus refers to a form of subjectivity grounded in sensation that does not rely on the distinction between the subject and the object (as in gnostic perception); it emerges in an active encounter with the world. In *EVA,* this encounter is best defined by a temporal form, a waiting that, as a pathic experience, suggests the possibility for another form of collective agency not based on the individual subject of action.

5. Miyadai Shinji, *Owarinaki nichijō o ikiro! Oum kanzen kokufuku manyuaru* (Live an endless everyday: A manual for completely overcoming Aum) (Tokyo: Tsikuma Shobō), 111.

6. Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 4.

7. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm,* trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 37.

8. Ibid, 45.

9. Those two moments of suspension and denial are not related in terms of prior/anterior or cause/effect. They are two logical moments of a single movement taking place simultaneously.

10. *Gundam* is a Japanese animation series created by Tomino Yoshiyuki and composed of TV series, movies, and OVAs (original video animations). The first TV series *Kidōsenshi Gandamu* aired in Tokyo from 1979 to 1980. Tomino Yoshiyuki has continued to produce *Gundam* series that take place either before or after the original series, or in

alternate universes. *Kidōsenshi Gandamu,* dir. Tomino Yoshiyuki, TV series, forty-three episodes (1979–1980); translated as *Mobile Suit Gundam,* ten DVDs (Bandai, 2001–2002).

11. The term "autopoietic" comes from cybernetics and neurology and is being used by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela to characterize the nature of living cells. Autopoietic machines are opposed to "allopoietic machines," which produce something other than themselves. In Félix Guattari's reappropriation of these terms, they are "auto-produced" autonomous entitites that maintain an internal level of consistency in their opening to external perturbations. Each segment of the machine is autopoietic because it manages to preserve a level of internal consistency while opening itself to and combining with other segments in the making of a machinic assemblage. In this sense, the social machine is actually a heteropoiesis. And each segment of the machine is in fact essentially a machinic heteropoiesis. Heteropoiesis thus means the necessary opening to an internal and external exteriority, to an absolute alterity, for the production of collective singularities. Humberto Marutana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1980).

12. Azuma Hiroki, *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita nihon shakai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha Gendai Shinsho, 2001); translated as *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals,* trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). Azuma claims that contemporary societies, and in particular Japanese society, have entered "The Age of Animals." This is the full realization of the postmodern, when the grand narrative as a system of social formation and control has been replaced by a database structure. For Azuma, the database becomes the imperative basis for the constitution of subjectivity through the consumption of images at the level of affects. Questions of subjectivity appear as "effects, not causes, of the movement of images" and subjectivity is thus opened to "the implementation of social control." And it is thus at the level of affect (hence his interest in otaku sexuality) that a possibility of critique and resistance to the database would be possible. See Thomas Lamarre's introduction to Azuma Hiroki, "The Animalization of Otaku Culture" *Mechademia* 2 (2007): 177.

13. Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher Masoch* (Paris: Minuit, 2007), 28–30; translated by Jean McNeil as *Sacher-Masoch: An Interpretation* (London: Faber, 1971), 30. This essay was first published by Minuit in 1967 in the collection *Arguments.*

14. The pathic subjectivity I evoked above is thus defined by a pathic relation with the world as exterior, allowing for a possibility of agency to emerge in the Waiting-Room, in the production of a collective narrative. Critical here should then be understood in its two senses of critical distance and critical moment in the delaying of the apocalypse.

15. Ōtsuka Eiji, *Teibon monogatari shōhiron* (Standard theory of narrative consumption) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1989).

16. The narrative movement I analyze in *EVA* and *Densha otoko* is akin to what Henry Miller calls "the narratable": "the instance of disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency from which a given narrative appears to arise." While longing for completeness and wholeness, "the narratable inherently lacks finality." Henry Miller, *Narrative and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), ix, xi.

17. For a provocative reading of the function of Rei in *The End of Evangelion,* see the article from Mariana Ortega in the second volume of *Mechademia.* Mariana Ortega, "My

Father, He Killed Me; My Mother, She Ate Me: Self, Desire, Engendering, and the Mother in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," *Mechademia* 2 (2007): 216–32.

18. EVA01 (in which the soul of Shinji's mother has been transplanted)—Ikari Yui (died in 2004)—Ayanami Rei (killed in 2010 by Akagi Naoko)—Ayanami Rei #2 (self-destruction in 2015, episode 23)—Ayanami Rei #3—the multiple clones of Rei immersed in the LCL (destroyed by Akagi Ritsuko)—The primitive mother. Rei is then a double of Shinji both in her connection to the ideal, transcendental mother and the mediating figure of the EVA-robot.

19. Azuma Hiroki and Kitada Akihiro have discussed the question of freedom in the Age of Animals as the one of "*oriru jiyū*." *Oriru* means to get off something like a train and, by extension, refusing to commit to a social imperative, as well as going offline. *Oriru jiyū* points at the possibility of choosing to unplug, of not committing, which can only be a form of social, if not physical, suicide. My problem with their discussion of freedom is that it remains a question of agency based on an individual subjectivity. If we are to address the question of freedom here, I would rather discuss it in terms of a strategy of denial, as there is no departure as such but only arrivals. Azuma Hiroki, ed., *Hajō genron S kai* (Net-shaped discourse S) (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2005), 227–37.

20. Interestingly, here Hermes has been feminized and turned into a goddess.

21. Heteropoiesis is literally a process of creation defined by the combination of heterogeneous elements. See note 11.

22. "Thread" (*sureddo*) is the term used in 2channel and other online forums to designate a series of postings on a given topic. After having reached the maximum number of postings for one single thread (1,000), a new one has to be created.

23. The most common forms taken by these fantasies are imaginary dialogues between Densha and Hermes, exploring all the possibilities of erotic interaction.

24. Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991); translated by Catherine Porter as *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 129.

25. Nakano Hitori, *Densha otoko,* 145, 329. These are my translations.

26. In Japanese *kita* can mean "it has arrived," "it is here," "it is coming." It becomes in *Densha otoko* a visual onomatopoeia, integrated into ASCII art as a pure visual explosion akin to a time-image. *Kita* is thus particularly representative of this continuous presence of arrival as it blurs the distinction between past, present, and future. The end never comes but never ceases to arrive.

27. But then there is no original even to *Densha otoko,* since the publication of Densha's story in book form, as well as its successive adaptations in other media, always feed back onto 2channel through the creation of new threads and the constitution of ever-expansive online archives. In that sense, I would argue that it is not so much 2channel as the translation of Densha's story in a book form that allows for the becoming-myth of Densha as a transmedia and translocal proliferation.