

# “YOU CANNOT SEE YOURSELF UNLESS THERE ARE OTHERS”: *SEKAIKEI* AS EXHORTATION OF SOCIETAL PARTICIPATION

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Among Japanese pop culture narratives, the so-called *sekaikei* genre experienced a boom in the 2000s after the success of the animated series *Shin Seiki Evangelion*; narratives of this type have accordingly also been described as having been influenced by “Post-*Evangelion* Syndrome.”<sup>2</sup> While the term *sekaikei* has transitioned into academic critical discourse, the concept remains vague. In the introduction to the Liminal Novel Research Society’s (*Genkai Shōsetsu Kenkyūkai*) book on the subject, *Shakai wa Sonzai Shinai: Sekaikei Bunkaron* (“Society Does Not Exist: Sekaikei Cultural Theory”), Kasai Kiyoshi attempts to organize the basic structure of such narratives into a definition as follows:

A group of works in which the small, everyday life problem of the relationship (*kimi to boku*) of the protagonist (*boku*, i.e. a male) and the heroine in his thoughts (*kimi*), and an abstract, extraordinary large problem such as ‘a world crisis’ or ‘the end of the world,’ are simplistically connected directly without a (midway) interposition of a completely concrete (social) context.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article relies heavily on Japanese primary and secondary sources. All translations are the author’s, unless otherwise specified. This includes dialogue lines from properties released in the American market featuring English dubs and subtitles – the only version taken into consideration for the purpose of this paper is the original Japanese version, which has been retranslated as literally as was feasible by the author. In accordance with common practice in East Asian studies, the names of authors of Japanese sources are given in the Japanese order of last name-first name, whereas Japanese authors of English written sources, primarily Motoko Tanaka, *infra*, will have their names cited Western-style (first name-last name) in the body text. In the bibliography, the names of Japanese creators will lack the comma between last name and first, once again in line with discipline practice, if the source is a Japanese release.

<sup>2</sup> *Sekaikei* literally translates to “world-type.” In Japanese, *sekai* is typically written in katakana within this compound to indicate the abstraction of the world concept inherent in this narrative type, which includes the characters’ “inner world” as well as the outer world; E.g. by Uno Tsunehiro, as quoted by Maejima (2010), *Sekaikei to wa nani ka: Posuto-Eva no otaku shi* (Tokyo: Softbank Creative, 2010), 28.

<sup>3</sup> Kasai Kiyoshi, “Jobun: ‘Sekaijō’ka suru sekai ni mukete.” In *Shakai wa sonzai shinai: Sekaikei bunkaron*, ed. Genkai Shōsetsu Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Nan’undō, 2009), 6.

However, this definition is still under dispute, in part since the anime regarded as the genre prototype and frequently discussed as a *seikaikei* work in its own right, *Shin Seiki Evangelion*, does not fit, and partly because other works labeled as exemplary of the genre likewise abandon one or more of the proposed defining elements, leading to claims of the same work being *seikaikei* and anti-*seikaikei*, and even to assertions that the term itself is a mere buzzword.<sup>4</sup>

Such narratives, situated firmly in the realm of popular culture and particularly otaku subculture, have been described as simplistic, and as one example of the postmodern degeneration of grand narratives. Maejima Satoshi, the author of *Sekaikei to wa Nani ka: Posuto-Eva no Otaku Shi* (“What Is Sekaikei? Post-Eva Otaku History”) quotes Okada Toshio, the co-founder of anime studio GAINAX, as considering the ability of otaku to understand an encrypted *weltanschauung* to have exceedingly diminished, which in Maejima’s view explains the success of “Post-Evangelion Syndrome” works such as *Hoshi no Koe*, *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, and *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*.<sup>5</sup> Cultural critic Azuma Hiroki similarly asserts that young otaku have displayed a degenerating interest in grand narratives since approximately 1995 in favor of adopting a “database consumption” model, preferring customizability by character attributes over narratives displaying shared societal values or ideologies.<sup>6</sup>

Why, then, do a number of critical works still seek to analyze a genre ostensibly lacking complexity and even a unifying definition? The answer to this question can be found in the term’s frequent mention in connection to Japanese societal problems which spread after the burst of the country’s “bubble economy,” namely the *hikikomori* (“shut-in”) phenomenon and the increase of NEETs (“Not in Education, Employment, or Training”) and freeters (underemployed people). Motoko Tanaka goes so far as to claim in this context,

According to Lacan, children mature as they learn that they are not omnipotent: in other words, one becomes gradually mature as one accepts one’s lack of power and experiences resignation and loss. *Sekaikei* works circumvent this process of becoming, and seem instead to affirm withdrawal and refusal of maturity. In this

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<sup>4</sup> For example by Kasai himself, Uno Tsunehiro, and Maejima Satoshi; for their discussion of this work, please see subsequent chapters; Released in English as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, lit. “Gospel of a New Century.” Frequently abbreviated to *EVA* or *Eva* in subcultural and critical discourse. Maejima Satoshi, *Sekaikei to wa nani ka: Posuto-Eva no otaku shi* (Tokyo: Softbank Creative, 2010), 9.

<sup>5</sup> Released in English as *Voices of a Distant Star*, lit. “Star’s Voice”; Released in English as *Saikano: The Last Love Song on this Little Planet*, lit. “Final Weapon Girlfriend”; Maejima (2010), 109, this work has not been released in English.

<sup>6</sup> Azuma Hiroki, *Gēmuteki riarizumu no tanjō: Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan 2* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2007), 16-7, 20.

regard, it is natural that *sekaikei* began to appear in conjunction with the *hikikomori* phenomenon and the rise of freeters and NEETs in late 1990s Japan.<sup>7</sup>

This proposed correlation between *sekaikei* and social withdrawal/lack of growth is echoed by Uno Tsunehiro's analysis of *Shin Seiki Evangelion* in his book *Zero Nendai no Sōzōryoku* ("Imagination of the 2000s"), as well as in articles by Kasai Kiyoshi and Komori Kentarō, to name just a few examples.<sup>8</sup>

In light of this pervasive criticism leveled at narratives considered *sekaikei*, this paper will reexamine representative works employing an alternate hermeneutical approach, based on factors which the existing interpretive discourse in Japan has neglected so far.

First of all, while books and articles on the subject have compared narrative elements of *sekaikei* works (such as character composition and situational background) in an attempt at definition, few comparisons of plot progression exist, particularly when it comes to the seemingly disparate resolutions of the so-called "definitive works." Secondly, the removal of a larger social context within the narrative is universally considered to intrinsically cause a lack of character growth in *sekaikei* works, likely in an attempt to link the genre to the concomitant historical background. In doing so in spite of available evidence to the contrary, sociocultural commentary is prioritized over meaningful exegesis.

As analytical framework, existentialist philosophy as posited by Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre will be utilized for the following reasons:

1. *Sekaikei* narratives are inherently concerned with the self-definition of one or more primary characters; not only does ample proof for this assertion exist in the works themselves, this fact is also utilized to criticize the genre by Uno Tsunehiro, who dubs this phenomenon *shinri shugi* (psychologism) and connects it to the *hikikomori* phenomenon.<sup>9</sup>
2. One of the basic tenets of existentialism is that of subjectivity, which is in evidence structurally in multiple defining characteristics of *sekaikei* narratives, e.g. the non-mediating social dimension as well as the employment of free indirect discourse (i.e. point-of-view narration, frequently including internal

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<sup>7</sup> Tanaka, Motoko, *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 124.

<sup>8</sup> See Uno Tsunehiro, *Zero nendai no sōzōryoku* (Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobō, 2008), 16-7; See Kasai Kiyoshi, "Sekaikei to reigai jōtai," in *Shakai wa sonzai shinai: Sekaikei bunkaron*, ed. Genkai Shōsetsu Kenkyūkai, (Tokyo: Nan'undō, 2009), 23; and Komori Kentarō, "'Sekaikei' sakuhi no shinkō to tairaku: 'Saishū Heiki Kanojo,' 'Shakugan no Shana,' 'Erufenrīto,'" in *Shakai wa sonzai shinai: Sekaikei bunkaron*, ed. Genkai Shōsetsu Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Nan'undō, 2009), 152. The critical works mentioned here will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

<sup>9</sup> Uno (2008), 17.

monologues/thoughts, as well as flashbacks and surrealist depictions of a character's "inner world").

3. The observable character development progresses according to existentialist thought as proposed by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. Furthermore, the narrative prototype *Shin Seiki Evangelion* explicitly quotes Kierkegaard in the title of episode 16 ("*Shi ni itaru yamai, soshite*"/"The Sickness Unto Death, And..."), and implicitly references existentialist concepts most elaborately described by Sartre in the final episode.

In utilizing an existentialist lens, this article will contest the assertion that character growth does not occur in *seikaikei*. Concurrently, it will show that, while a temporal correlation between the rise in popularity of *seikaikei* narratives on one hand and the increase of *hikikomori* and NEET/freeters on the other does exist, the critical treatment of the genre so far has refrained from commenting on aspects of these works which seem to actively reject social withdrawal.

In order to do so, this paper will shed a light on the sociohistorical and subcultural climate in which this form of narrative appeared and flourished. Thereafter, an overview of existing *seikaikei* genre definitions will be given.

Building upon this background information, it will examine the three *seikaikei* works mentioned as definitive in critical discourse, namely *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, *Iriya no Sora*, *UFO no Natsu*, and *Hoshi no Koe*, in addition to the narrative prototype *Shin Seiki Evangelion*, for commonalities in plot progression. Furthermore, it will apply the existentialist exegetical framework with particular interest in character development and its influence on narrative resolution.

## Historical Background of *Seikaikei* Genre Development

Since cultural criticism of the *seikaikei* genre is based on sociocultural history as well as changes in narrative consumption within otaku subculture, both of these aspects require clarification in order to understand the near-universal disparagement of these works.

*Seikaikei* narratives arose after *Shin Seiki Evangelion* was first broadcast on Japanese television from 4 October 1995 until 27 March 1996. In 1995, two tragic incidents on a massive scale occurred, namely the Great Hanshin Earthquake on 17 January, and the sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway system perpetrated by members of the Aum Shinrikyō cult on 20 March.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Tanaka (2014), 111.

According to Tanaka, these events “decisively made Japanese society as an imagined community insecure and unreliable.” Uno remarks in regard to the sarin attack in particular that it was perceived by society as “completely manga-like,” indicating the culmination of loss of a sense of reality.<sup>11</sup>

However, the deterioration of faith in society is not only related to these isolated catastrophic events; Uno describes a monumental shift in world view as the Cold War ended at the end of the ‘80s, and Japan experienced the Heisei recession caused by the burst of the ‘80s “bubble economy” in the beginning of the following decade after years of prosperity.<sup>12</sup> The change from the “unfree, but warm (easy to understand)” ‘80s to the “free, but cold (hard to understand)” ‘90s ultimately caused a spread of *hikikomori* tendencies in the latter half of the decade.<sup>13</sup> In addition, downsizing and a “hiring ice age” after the economic downturn created the “lost generation,” graduates who earned their degrees between approximately 1993 and 2003 and were forced to settle for contract work with low wages and minimal job security, *haken* (temp agency) work, or low-skill part time jobs.<sup>14</sup>

In conjunction with these sociocultural changes, Azuma Hiroki observes the subculture’s sudden loss of interest in stories in favor of a database consumption model primarily concerned with character attributes after 1995, which he considers to be a symptom of the degeneration of “grand narratives.”<sup>15</sup> This tendency is also clearly reflected in the market geared toward otaku.<sup>16</sup> “Grand narratives,” in Azuma’s estimation, are stories which contain shared societal values or ideology, and preserve shared norm consciousness and traditions.<sup>17</sup> In the postmodern period (i.e. since the 1970s), individual self-determination and diversity in lifestyle were gradually affirmed, whereas the communality of “grand narratives” was restrained.<sup>18</sup>

The *sekaikei* boom period coincided with otaku subculture finding its way into mainstream consciousness after *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* won the Academy Award for

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<sup>11</sup> Uno (2008), 29.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 59; Uno Tsunehiro, *Hihyō no jenosaisu: sabukaruchā saishū shinpan* (Tokyo, Saizō, 2009), 70.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>14</sup> Ian Rowley and Kenji Hall. “Global Business - Japan’s Lost Generation.” *Business Week* 28 May 2007: 40-41.

<sup>15</sup> Azuma (2007), 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 18.

Best Animated Picture in 2003; for several years, articles about anime, games, and the content industry were published under the aegis of “Cool Japan.”<sup>19</sup>

According to Maejima, the *sekaikei* boom came to an end after 2007.<sup>20</sup> As potential reasons he names the limited marketability of these narratives due to their comparatively short length and questionable affinity to modern media mix techniques, as battle scenes have been removed from the anime versions of *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* and *Iriya* and the strong focus on the protagonist character is difficult to maintain.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the war imagery of *Evangelion* and early 2000s *sekaikei* narratives was primarily modeled on World War II, which also explains the unknowability of the enemy in these works.<sup>22</sup> After the 9/11 terror attacks in New York and the resultant “war on terror,” the image of war has changed.<sup>23</sup>

Uno, likewise, sees 9/11 as a turning point, alongside the structural reforms enacted by the Koizumi government in Japan.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the continued spread of the Internet, as well as progressing globalization and the emergence of an increasingly unequal society contributed to a change in imaginative patterns evident in subcultural narratives towards an overall more combative reaction to adversity expressed in the phrase *tatakawanakereba, ikinokorenai* (“If I don’t fight, I won’t be able to stay alive”).<sup>25</sup>

## ***Sekaikei* Definitions as Proposed in Critical Discourse**

### *Holistic Definitions*

Maejima Satoshi presents a number of definition attempts in his book *Sekaikei to wa Nani ka: Posuto-Eva no Otaku Shi*. As the earliest example, he mentions the explanation given alongside the term’s original coinage on the website *Purunie Bukkumāku* (“Purunie’s Bookmarks”) in an article published on 31 October 2002; webmaster Purunie states that he uses *sekaikei* in reference to “*Eva*-like (=intense in terms of single-person [i.e. point-of-view] narration) works while including a small measure of ridicule,” describing the genre’s

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<sup>19</sup> Released in English as *Spirited Away*; lit. “The Spiriting Away of Sen and Chihiro”; Azuma (2007), 21.

<sup>20</sup> Maejima (2010), 226.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>24</sup> Uno (2008), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Uno (2009), 70.

characteristic feature as the tendency of the narrator's own thoughts being expressed in exaggerated terms such as "world."<sup>26</sup> Maejima also cites Kasai's "textbook definition" quoted in the introduction, alongside similarly worded examples presented on *Yahoo! Jisho* and in *Bishōjo Gēmu Rinkaiten* ("Beautiful Girl Game Critical Points"), a special issue of Azuma Hiroki's mail magazine *Hajō Genron* released in August 2004.<sup>27</sup>

Uno Tsunehiro provided a similar definition on the website *Wakusei Kaihatsu Iinkai* ("Planet Development Committee"), albeit without the *kimi to boku* element, i.e. the romantic connection between the protagonist and a heroine: "Also called 'Post-Evangelion Syndrome.' A series of otaku-type works which remove [concepts such as] 'society' and 'nation' while extending 'one's own feelings' or 'self-consciousness' to perceive them on the scope of 'the world.'"<sup>28</sup>

A more specific delineation of what is meant by 'extension' in Uno's definition can be found in a statement of anime studio GAINAX co-founder Okada Toshio on the television program "BS Manga Night Talk" broadcast on 28 October 2002, where he defined 'Post-Evangelion Syndrome' as follows: "One's own inner problems end up drawn along the same line as a world-scale catastrophe, such as a war or that sort of thing."<sup>29</sup>

Maejima himself attempts to narrow down the definition in his introduction, positing the following typical elements: love of a youthful couple is directly linked to the fate of the world; *only* the young woman fights, while the male youth remains removed from the battlefield; and a portrayal of society is excluded.<sup>30</sup>

However, he immediately points out that the narratives said to be representative of the genre, i.e. *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, *Iriya no Sora*, *UFO no Natsu*, and *Hoshi no Koe*, do not fit these criteria, as the first involves the male protagonist in the war, the second surrounds the protagonists with a social entity (i.e. the military), and the third features a relationship of protagonists which is not directly linked to the fate of the world.<sup>31</sup>

Maejima mentions that Purunie's definition of "Eva-like" came to be primarily applied to the latter half of the TV series and the theatrical alternate ending *Shin Seiki Evangelion Gekijō-*

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<sup>26</sup> Maejima (2010), 27-8

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-7

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

*ban: Air/Magokoro o, Kimi ni*, i.e., the parts depicting the interior world of the characters.<sup>32</sup> The *Eva* boom had just begun to ebb when, between 2000 and 2002, a number of works using similar elements appeared, which in turn prompted them to be designated *sekaikei*, although doubts as to whether they had so many similarities that one could go so far as to lump all of them together have been voiced multiple times.<sup>33</sup>

Developing the initial definitions by examining the *sekaikei* prototype *Shin Seiki Evangelion*, Maejima states that protagonist Ikari Shinji comes to live on a strange battlefield on which the regular school life and the extraordinary battle to intercept the Angels coexist.<sup>34</sup> The Angels are depicted in various abstract forms defying understanding or empathy; however, as they come to attack, they must be fought.<sup>35</sup> As a result of Shinji's complete ignorance of why the Angels are attacking or why he must fight, his thoughts revolve in circles, become abstract, and end up arriving back at his own problems.<sup>36</sup> For that reason, the always-present daily life setting of Neo-Tokyo 3, with its schools and convenience stores, and the Angels are both needed in the narrative.<sup>37</sup>

Moving on to *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, Maejima observes that both the fictional Hokkaido where protagonist Shūji resides and Ikari Shinji's Neo-Tokyo 3 are frequently involved in battles raging within the respective fictional contexts, yet the next day, daily life continues without change.<sup>38</sup> This work shares another “deficiency” in narrative construction with *Shin Seiki Evangelion*'s latter half: while the “large” (= “world”) situation of war provides the setting, elaborations on the war situation and its origins are completely omitted.<sup>39</sup> These elements remain unclear in favor of putting the focus on the relationship between the protagonist and the heroine.<sup>40</sup>

In Shinkai Makoto's short animation *Hoshi no Koe*, the narrative unfolds almost exclusively between the two characters Noboru and Mikako, the latter of which leaves for an investigative mission into space after they both graduate from middle school; as the ship to

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<sup>32</sup> Lit. “Gospel of a New Century Theatrical Edition: Air/Yours Sincerely,” released on DVD in the United States as *The End of Evangelion*; Maejima (2010), 64-6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, , 66-7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

which Mikako is assigned is separated from Earth by multiple light years, the e-mails they are sending to each other via their cell phones take years to arrive.<sup>41</sup> Maejima compares *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* and *Hoshi no Koe* in observing that similarly exaggerated measures are used to tell these respective narratives' love stories; in the former case, the "ultimate weapon" is depicted as an incurable disease, whereas the long-distance relationship in the latter is described utilizing robots and space exploration.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, creator Akiyama Mizuhito deliberately conceptualized his light novel series *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu* as "UFO Ayanami," i.e. he wrote a narrative in which a girl resembling this most popular *Evangelion* character pilots a UFO and fights.<sup>43</sup> Its plot engages in metanarrative commentary by having the military deliberately place the heroine in the proximity of the male protagonist in order to give her someone to protect, resulting in Maejima positing an ultimate powerlessness, i.e. "the love of you and me determining the fate of the world *is not possible* [Emphasis Maejima]," and "if this is the case, society has just designed it that way."<sup>44</sup> He considers *Iriya* to be a precursor of deliberately created *sekaikei* works, which mostly began to appear from the mid-2000s.<sup>45</sup>

Summarizing the preceding elements, Maejima posits the following commonalities: 1. *Sekaikei* works omit a social dimension; 2. What is fought and on which principle it functions is not understood; 3. These omissions are deliberately included in order to induce sympathy for the protagonist's self-consciousness or the (often tragic) love between the protagonist and the heroine.<sup>46</sup>

After 2004, the genre underwent a transition due to its discovery by art criticism, and additional/alternate defining elements were introduced.<sup>47</sup> They consisted of overt metanarrative commentary on the genre as well as "looping narratives," i.e. the world being suspended in a recurrent time loop, which require the resolution of a particular situation usually related to love or personal relationships.<sup>48</sup> In reference to the looping narrative, Maejima's assertion that it is in line with the *sekaikei* definition of character relations being tied to the fate of the world is

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 151-4.

supported by the article “Zero Nendai ‘Sekaikei’ Anime ni Okeru Shakai Ryōiki Kōkyōken [Sekaikei (The ‘World-Type’ Fiction): Anime of the Noughties and the Public Sphere]” by Nakagaki Kōtarō et al., in which section author Goshima Kazumi points out that this type of narrative shares the symbolic impossibility of future prospects with prior *sekaikei* narratives.<sup>49</sup>

To sum up the proposed definitive elements of *sekaikei* narratives, such works contain a dualistic problem situation composed of small-scale (personal) and large-scale (world crisis) conflict without a mediating social context, in which the latter remains deliberately undefined to allow the consumer to focus on the former. The large-scale and small-scale situations are assumed to be directly linked to each other, and the ‘daily life’ setting remains largely static in spite of the crisis situation. This world crisis may either consist of a concrete threat such as war, invasion and/or human extinction, or of the more abstract problem of a recurring time loop, both of which impede advancement into the future.

### *Specification of Defining Factors*

The discourse in this section primarily concerns the lack of a societal dimension, as it is one of the few factors within the given definitions on which critics unanimously agree.

Kasai Kiyoshi attempts to widen the concept of society removal in *sekaikei* in his article “Sekaikei to Reigai Jōtai” (“*Sekaikei* and the State of Emergency”). He states that, while society is not completely erased in *Shin Seiki Evangelion* (unlike in the very short but “pure” *sekaikei* narrative *Hoshi no Koe*), it leaves the impression of having been wrecked and scattered.<sup>50</sup> Thereafter discussing *Death Note*, a work which remains in dispute as to whether it is a *sekaikei* narrative or not (cf. Uno below), he states that protagonist Yagami Light’s actions lead to society entering a state of emergency and disintegrating, as the rule of law is put out of order.<sup>51</sup> In this context, Kasai considers *Death Note* part of the genealogy of *sekaikei*.<sup>52</sup>

Likewise, Fujita Naoya emphasizes that complete erasure of social entities is not necessary for a work to display *sekaikei* sensibilities. Questioning why the three genre-defining

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 153; Nakagaki Kōtarō, Goshima Kazumi, Tanabe Akira, and Watanabe Shun, “Zero nendai sekaikei anime ni okeru shakai ryōiki to kōkyōken [Sekaikei (The ‘World-Type’ Fiction): Anime of the Noughties and the Public Sphere],” *Daitō bunka daigaku kiyō. Jinbun kagaku* no. 49 (2011), 170.

<sup>50</sup> Kasai, “Sekaikei to reigai jōtai” (2009), 21.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 44-5.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 45.

works all seem to be set on Hokkaido, he refers back to the necessity of minimizing societal influence.<sup>53</sup> In this context he assumes that staging the narrative in places like Toyama or Osaka would produce a feeling of community (i.e. regional, familial, interim) and historical background, which would in turn dilute the “feeling of certainty” (*zettaikan*) of the depicted love.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, he posits that a ‘society’ as such may exist in a *sekaikei* narrative, but community does not; if a society is in existence, it is intrinsically cold and does not offer a “meaning of life.”<sup>55</sup> As a result, people withdraw from it and can only acquire meaning in life from love.<sup>56</sup>

These attempts at further specification of the (non-)function of society in *sekaikei* narratives permit the synthesis of an additional defining factor: If it can either be absent, scattered, in a state of emergency, or cold towards its members in these works in order to achieve the desired effect (i.e. the focus being placed on the small-scale situation), the implication is that the connection of small-scale and large-scale narrative only requires that it is unwilling or unable to mediate either situation.

### *Differential Analysis*

This method of inquiring into the framework of the *sekaikei* genre is utilized to test and discard vague definition attempts using a similar non-*sekaikei* narrative for juxtaposition.

Maejima applies Purunie’s original statement that *sekaikei* narratives are “*Eva*-like (=intense in terms of single-person [i.e. point-of-view] narration) works” to the anime *Mugen no Ryvius* (1999), stating that while this work was strongly influenced by *Evangelion* and features a lot of monologues by the youthful protagonists, it is not usually regarded as *sekaikei*.<sup>57</sup> This narrative revolves around a large group of youths finding themselves on a spaceship without supervision after their station was sabotaged and all adults sacrificed themselves to save them; due to a misunderstanding, the government believes them to be the terrorists who committed the sabotage.<sup>58</sup> Maejima points out the following possible reasons why *Ryvius* is not considered

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<sup>53</sup> Fujita Naoya, “Sekaikei no owari naki owaranasa: Satō Yūya ‘Sekai no owari no owari’ zengo ni tsuite,” in *Shakai wa sonzai shinai: Sekaikei bunkaron*, ed. Genkai Shōsetsu Kenkyūkai, (Tokyo: Nan’undō, 2009), 270.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Maejima (2010), 84.

<sup>58</sup> Taniguchi Gorō, Kuroda Yōsuke, and Takeda Yūichirō, *Infinite Ryvius* (United States: Bandai Entertainment, 2006).

*sekaikei*: 1. The group aboard the *Ryvius* establishes a pseudosociety in which they conduct themselves as adults; 2. Concrete problems such as discrimination, bullying, and food shortages are addressed; and 3. The enemy is clearly defined.<sup>59</sup>

In regard to the criticism of a lacking adult societal influences in *sekaikei* narratives, Maejima goes on to inquire why popular manga and video game series such as *Dragonball* and *Dragon Quest*, which also omit society and feature youthful heroes, are not tarred with the same brush. He extrapolates from his answer, namely the fact that this omission is not overtly stated in *Dragon Quest*, that this very self-referentiality is characteristic of *sekaikei* narratives.<sup>60</sup>

Uno Tsunehiro approaches the genre from a perspective of cultural criticism in his book *Zero Nendai no Sōzōryoku*. Positing a thought dichotomy based on sociocultural changes from the '90s to the 2000s responsible for producing disparate narrative forms, he dubs fictional works produced between 1995 and 2001, among them *Shin Seiki Evangelion*, the products of “old imagination,” or *shinri shugi* (psychologism), whereas “new imagination” narratives such as 2003’s *Death Note* constitute *ketsudan shugi* (decision ideology).<sup>61</sup> Uno states that, while the protagonists of both types reject society, Shinji withdraws into himself (*hikikomoru*) in order to avoid being hurt or inadvertently hurting others, whereas Light, rather than growing timid and withdrawing when presented with a disintegrating social order, accepts it and takes it upon himself to construct a new one out of his own power.<sup>62</sup>

Kasai challenges Uno’s equation of *sekaikei*’s deletion of society with “*hikikomori*/psychologism”-like imagination as erroneous in his article “Sekaikei to Reigai Jōtai,” as he does not think that narratives displaying a tendency to what Uno has termed *ketsudan shugi* escape the the twenty-first-century inevitability of the collapse of the societal domain.<sup>63</sup> For example, in *Death Note*, Light’s actions (i.e. the elimination of crime by murdering criminals via the Death Note), motivated by idealism, lead to society entering a state of emergency and disintegrating, as the rule of law is put out of order.<sup>64</sup> In this context, Kasai considers *Death Note* part of the genealogy of *sekaikei*, even if Light does not fight in the physical sense.<sup>65</sup> Instead of Uno’s firm delineation of psychologism v. decision ideology, he suggests transitional *sekaikei*

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<sup>59</sup> Maejima (2010), 84-5.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>61</sup> Uno (2008), 15-24.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 22-3.

<sup>63</sup> Kasai “Sekaikei to reigai jōtai,” (2009), 30.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 44-5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 45.

forms of *hikikomori*-type *seikaikei* and battle-of-intellect-type *seikaikei*.<sup>66</sup> However, as both rely on society being either absent or caught in a state of emergency, *ketsudan shugi* cannot be regarded as separate from *seikaikei*.<sup>67</sup>

In his article “‘Sekaikei’ Sakuhin no Shinkō to Tairaku” (“The Progression and Downfall of ‘Sekaikei’ Works”), Komori Kentarō proposes another rule for a *seikaikei* definition: Past shared values such as justice and fellowship cease to be shared.<sup>68</sup> He attempts to delimit *seikaikei* protagonists by juxtaposing them with protagonists following the “Golden Rules” of *Shōnen Jump* narratives: Effort, friendship, victory.<sup>69</sup> In this regard, he considers “effort” to be synonymous with “growth,” whereas *seikaikei* protagonists do not grow, forge friendships, or win; put simply, they do not become adults.<sup>70</sup>

Komori’s definition is partially contested by Motoko Tanaka; while agreeing with him on the *seikaikei* protagonists’ suspension of growth, she sees the problem in the narratives affording the main characters the potential to “indirectly control the world through their empowered girlfriends and negate the experiences of resignation, refusal and loss,” the latter of which, in accordance with Lacanian theory, result in maturation.<sup>71</sup>

From these points, it can be surmised that overtly referencing the primary characters’ alienation from, or disbelief in the mediating ability of, society is thought to be another hallmark of *seikaikei*, as active participation in a society as shown in *Mugen no Ryvius* regardless of its dysfunctionality/state of emergency, or omitting societal mediation without comment, are thought to be disqualifying factors.

## Comparative Analysis of *Sekaikei* Plot Progression

### *Shin Seiki Evangelion*

For a comparative exegetical approach to *seikaikei* plot progression, the first necessary step is to establish a baseline, provided here by an analysis of the ending of the television version

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>68</sup> Komori (2009), 151.

<sup>69</sup> *Shūkan Shōnen Jump [Weekly Shōnen Jump]* is a weekly manga anthology magazine specializing in comics for a young male target demographic; Komori (2009), 152.

<sup>70</sup> Komori (2009), 152.

<sup>71</sup> Tanaka (2014), 124.

of *Shin Seiki Evangelion* as it is the narrative most frequently criticized for its protagonist's ostensible withdrawal into himself.<sup>72</sup> For example, Uno states in *Zero Nendai no Sōzōryoku* that, in the second half of the narrative, [the protagonist] Shinji refuses to pilot the Eva and withdraws inside, which, rather than a social realization of the self, represents a demand for an existence which is unconditionally acknowledged/approved of by others (i.e. the “to be/to not be” [-*de aru/-de wa nai*] dichotomy of the self-image is chosen over social self-realization through action [-*suru/-shita*]).<sup>73</sup> In the same vein, Kasai's analysis of *Shin Seiki Evangelion*'s plot in “Sekaikei to Reigai Jōtai” concludes with the assertion that Shinji rejects reality in the end and falls into a *hikikomori*-like mental state.<sup>74</sup>

These analyses neglect to mention a number of salient points evident in episodes 25 and 26 of the series. For one, while the shape of Shinji's “inner world” is initially determined by his rejection of others due to fear, the reason for this inner world becoming the *mise-en-scène* for the final two episodes is the initiation of his father Gendō's “Human Instrumentality Project” (*jinrui hokan keikaku*), in which all of humanity reverts to its original, undifferentiated state, with individual bodies as well as barriers between consciousnesses dissolving. In short, the shift from the outside world is not initiated by Shinji himself, who is terrified enough of this solitary setting in the beginning of episode 25 to call out for all of his acquaintances and even his father, whom he admits to hate and fear: “So, where should I go from here? Someone, tell me!”<sup>75</sup>

Additionally, Uno's statement that Shinji withdraws because he demands approval by others is only partially correct and misrepresents the resolution of the narrative. In the beginning of the Instrumentality process, Shinji does admit that he wants to receive praise and be regarded as valuable. However, it is precisely because of this wish that he initially *did* take action in piloting the *Eva* (this is stated at after being asked whether he does so for others' sake: “That's right. Isn't that a good thing? Isn't that a really good thing? If I do that, I'm being praised by

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<sup>72</sup> Written and directed by Anno Hideaki, first broadcast on TV Asahi from 4 October 1995 until 27 March 1996; the franchise has since branched out into various *otaku*-related media such as manga and video games. This thesis will only treat the original television animation, as well as its first alternate ending provided in a theatrical release in 1997 (*infra*).

<sup>73</sup> Uno Tsunehiro, *Zero nendai no sōzōryoku* (Tokyo: Hayakawa Shobō, 2008), 16.

<sup>74</sup> Kasai Kiyoshi, “Sekaikei to reigai jōtai,” in *Shakai wa sonzai shinai: Sekaikei bunkaron*, ed. Genkai Shōsetsu Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Nan'undō, 2009), 23.

<sup>75</sup> *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Platinum Complete Collection*, dir. Hideaki Anno and Kiichi Hadame, written by Kazuya Tsurumaki, Masayuki, and Hideaki Anno (United States: ADV Films, 2005). Episode 25: “*Nee, boku wa kore kara doko e ikeba ii n da? ...Dareka, oshietero!*” (time index 4:20).

everyone, and regarded as important”).<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the construction of his own, separate “inner world” within Instrumentality occurs, as Uno rightly states, due to despair of inevitably erring whenever he attempts to achieve something or be involved with others, and of hurting someone and being hurt himself.<sup>77</sup> However, no comment is made on how the narrative progresses from there, i.e. to Shinji’s admission that he does not consider himself to have any value beyond piloting the *Eva*: “By piloting the *Eva*, I can be me.”<sup>78</sup> In response, the other characters point out that while this is certainly a part of him, if he clings to the *Eva* as his sole *raison d’être*, it will eventually become *all* he is. He is then told by his mother Yui that only he can determine his own value.<sup>79</sup> The narrative moves on to Shinji’s lack of self-definition, all other characters explaining to him in turns that he is shaped both by his own mind as well as the world around him, and that he cannot understand himself in a world that contains no one but him.<sup>80</sup> After being shown a possible alternate world in which Shinji is a regular middle school student with an average family life, he realizes that his existing without being an *Eva* pilot is a possibility. As a result, he does not reject the real world itself anymore, but moves on to state that he hates himself.<sup>81</sup> It is explained to him that his truth is subjective, and that it can be changed by the way he accepts it.<sup>82</sup> Shinji ponders others hating him, which is dismissed as only being in his imagination, as he never learned how to deal with fearing what others might feel about him; his self-hatred is contingent on this fear. This leads to the narrative outcome of *Shin Seiki Evangelion* as, at the end of episode 26, Shinji realizes that the possibility of liking himself exists; concomitantly, he states that he wants to be himself, and that he wants to exist in the world.<sup>83</sup> Alongside these statements, the backdrop of Shinji’s solitary world begins to crack, until it breaks away with the final statement. All other characters are shown congratulating him, and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.: “*Sō da yo. Ii koto ja nai ka? Hontō ni ii koto ja nai ka? Sō sureba minna ni homete kureru, daiji ni shite kureru n da.*” (time index 5:10).

<sup>77</sup> Uno (2008), 16.

<sup>78</sup> *Neon Genesis Evangelion* Episode 26: “*Eva ni noru koto de, boku wa boku ga irareru.*” (time index 5:30).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.: “*Sore wa anata jishin de mitomeru shika nai no yo, jibun no kachi o.*” (time index 9:15).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.: “*Omae o katadotteiru no wa, omae jishin no kokoro to sono mawari no sekai dakara na... Hoka no hito to no kabe o miru koto de, jibun no katachi o imēji shiteiru. Anata wa, hoka no hito ga inai to, jibun ga mienai no.*” (time index 12:45).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.: “*Genjitsu sekai wa, warukunai kamoshirenai, demo jibun wa kirai da.*” (time index 19:04).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.: “*Uketorikata hitotsu de maru de betsu no mono ni natte shimau zeijaku na mono da, hito no naka no shinjitsu to wa na.*” (time index 20:04).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.: “*Boku wa boku ga kirai da. Demo, suki ni nareru kamoshirenai. Boku wa koko ni itemo ii no kamoshirenai. Sō da. Boku wa boku de shika nai. Boku wa boku da. Boku de itai! Boku wa koko ni itai! Boku wa koko ni ite mo ii n da!*” (time index 20:57).

the screen fades to black with the words “To my father, thank you. To my mother, farewell. And to all the children, congratulations.”<sup>84</sup>

As these final episodes never progress out of the paradigm of Instrumentality, it is not immediately apparent that Shinji is rejecting the merging of humanity in this instance, until one examines the above statements more closely: If other people do not exist, one cannot define oneself. Instrumentality’s purpose is to eliminate Otherness by fusing all of humanity into one undifferentiated existence. Therefore, accepting Instrumentality would equate to non-existence as a self. Considering that Shinji’s final self-defining statements such as “I am me, I want to be me” indicate a desire to continue existing as an individual, his rejection of the process becomes clear.

The above interpretation would indicate a parallel plot development to the alternate ending portrayed in *Shin Seiki Evangelion Gekijō-ban: Air/Magokoro o, Kimi ni*, in which Instrumentality is shown in a more externalized manner.<sup>85</sup> In the *Magokoro o, Kimi ni* part, a full explanation of how the process works is given by Shinji’s father Gendō, the mastermind behind the plan: The AT fields which separate human hearts from each other are dissolved alongside their bodies, and all souls are fused into one.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, it is explicitly stated that Shinji will be the one to determine the future of mankind.<sup>87</sup> Rei explains Instrumentality to Shinji at time index 1:18:00. Then, she gives him the choice to wish for the restoration of AT fields, once again allowing human beings to separate from each other, but warns that the fear of others will begin once more.<sup>88</sup> Shinji chooses this option after stating that he wants to meet people again, even if they may eventually betray him, because at the time he met them, his feelings were real. As Instrumentality is stopped, it is stated that those who can picture themselves in their hearts are able to return to human form, which Shinji does.<sup>89</sup>

Obviously, the protagonist of *Shin Seiki Evangelion*, when given a choice, affirms himself and the world simultaneously in both versions of the narrative, rather than opting for

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.: “*Chichi ni, arigatō. Haha ni, sayōnara. Soshite, subete no kodomo-tachi ni, omedetō*” (time index 21:55).

<sup>85</sup> *Shin Seiki Evangelion gekijō-ban: Air/Magokoro o, kimi ni*, directed by Anno Hideaki, was produced by GAINAX and released in Japanese theaters on July 19, 1997.

<sup>86</sup> *Neon Genesis Evangelion: The End of Evangelion* (United States: Manga Entertainment, 2002). “*AT Field o, kokoro no kabe o tokihanatte, kaketa kokoro no hoka, fuyō na karada o sute, subete no tamashī o ima hitotsu ni.*” (time index 48:55).

<sup>87</sup> *End of Evangelion*, by Fuyutsuki (time index 58:44).

<sup>88</sup> *End of Evangelion*: “*Tanin no sonzai o ima ichido nozomeba, futatabi kokoro no kabe ga subete no hitobito hikihanasu wa. Mata, tanin no kyōfu wa hajimaru no yo*” (time index 1:19:15).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. (time index 1:22:30-1:24:30).

withdrawal. This affirmative decision, even though it is related to being, constitutes an *action* on Shinji's part, invalidating Uno's posited dichotomy. As the "inner world" presented at the end of the television series is irresolvable by piloting the *Eva*, and the alternate theatrical ending of the narrative includes a scene in which Shinji, confronted with a giant Rei about to initiate Instrumentality, attempts to move his *Eva* unit by manipulating the controls without success, it is, in fact, the only meaningful action leading to a resolution.

However, is this ultimate affirmation of living with others and rejection of withdrawal evident in subsequent *sekaikei* works, particularly if the narrative paradigm does not afford its characters the option of reversing the apocalypse?

### *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*

In *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* the male protagonist Shūji, a high school student, starts a relationship with Chise, a girl who turns out to be the SDF's ultimate weapon in a worldwide war with unspecified factions and objectives.<sup>90</sup> He watches Chise's humanity deteriorate as her bodily augmentation evolves, while simultaneously shedding his own alienation from his hometown's society. After a futile attempt of the couple to escape Chise's status and duties as a weapon by leaving their hometown and attempting to live together in anonymity, the remainder of her humanity is consumed after an attack and running out of her medication.<sup>91</sup> The narrative ends in the obliteration of mankind, with Shūji as the sole survivor; Chise still exists, but she is not human anymore; she has become nothing but the weapon.<sup>92</sup>

*Saishū Heiki Kanojo* incorporates a theme which *Shin Seiki Evangelion* only marginally addressed with the clone Ayanami Rei, namely the question of how "humanity" is defined, via Chise's gradual dehumanization. Notably, both Chise and Rei exclusively identify themselves through others.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Takahashi Shin, *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, 7 vols. (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2000-2001). Although, as in the case of *Eva*, versions in multiple entertainment media formats exist, this narrative was originally published in manga form.

<sup>91</sup> The couple's escape and life in another town is depicted throughout volume 6.

<sup>92</sup> As shown in volume 7, page 144 of the manga; Chise's arm disintegrates, and she explains to Shūji that she assumed a body like that of the "original Chise" (*moto no Chise*) for the purpose of coming to meet him, but that it may have been too much.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* episode 25 (time index 7:45): "*Hito no mane o shiteiru itsuwari no buttai ni suginai no yo*"; Ibid. (time index 7:58): "*Watashi wa watashi. Watashi wa kore made no jikan to hoka no hito-tachi to no tsunagari ni yotte, watashi ni natta mono*;" see also Rei's speculative, but unresolved poem in episode 14, featuring the answerless question "*Hito wa nani?*" Compare the above line to *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* vol. 2, page 136: "A,

It is left unclear whether “heroine” Chise personally brings about the apocalypse or not, although she does annihilate her hometown in order to spare her family and acquaintances the pain the end will bring, as well as the remaining fighting factions.<sup>94</sup> Warning Shūji about the impending end of the world in a letter, Chise asks him to come to their regular meeting place at the observatory overlooking their town.<sup>95</sup> As he ascends the hill, he is surprised by a mudslide caused by an earthquake.<sup>96</sup> The background becomes white and featureless as Shūji falls unconscious while lamenting the fate of the world, caused by humanity continuing to engage in warfare.<sup>97</sup> He finds himself on a plain full of corpses, among them his friends and family, and wishes that he had lived life by himself without ever knowing any of them in the face of their deaths, claiming responsibility for their demise.<sup>98</sup> Shūji asks himself what he can do to atone, and how often Chise had to face similar scenes.<sup>99</sup> Crying, he apologizes to the dead multiple times, only to find himself in front of a featureless background once more.<sup>100</sup> Wondering whether this is a dream, and where reality has gone, Shūji goes on to assume that the whiteness symbolizes that he has done nothing with his life, wishing that he had not awoken.<sup>101</sup> He then states that he only wants to live in a world in which people exist, even if it includes fighting, sin, and dead bodies, and even if a lot of pain awaited him there.<sup>102</sup>

While the incorporation of whiteness at this juncture is reminiscent of the “freedom” scene in episode 26 of *Shin Seiki Evangelion* cited above, the accompanying text showcases a major difference in narrative context: Whereas Shinji is transposed into this featureless

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*atashi ga koko ni iru koto o, Shū-chan ga... chanto koko ni iru yo tte, oshiete hoshii n da.*” Cf. also vol. 7, pp. 303-10.

<sup>94</sup> In her letter to Shūji, she writes, “*Jitsu o iu to, chikyū wa mō dame desu*” (vol.7, 205); on page 206, she elaborates that on the other side of the world, terrible things affecting the planet itself have been happening, which could indicate that an external cause is responsible for the end of the world. Finally, on page 207, she states that she has decided to end the lives of the people in her hometown painlessly: “*Watashi no umareta kono machi no hito-tachi to, minna issho ni itakunai yō ni kurushimanai yō ni. Ima no watashi ni wa, sore ga dekiru kara.*” The obliteration of the remaining fighting factions is mentioned by Chise on page 302 of volume 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, vol. 7, 205-8.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 262-4.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 265-6.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 268-71: “*Me o fusaide daretomo shiriawazu ni ikite itara. Tada hitori dake de ikite ita to shitara.*”

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 273-4.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 278-9: “*Miro!? Kono sekai... Boku no jinsei wa nanimo nakatta ja nai ka!? Konna ni shiroku... samishii... Me o samashitaku nanka, nakatta.*”

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 280: “*Aa, yappari hito no sumu sekai ga ii. Soko de shika ikite itakunai. Tatōe, soko ga tatakai ya tsumi ya takusan no shitai de ippai da to shite mo. Takusan no itami ga matteita to shite mo.*”

environment in order to comprehend freedom and self-definition, Shūji's thoughts deliver a eulogy to his own life, as well as to the world as a whole.

After finding a stone slab from the observatory on which Chise had inscribed their names as proof of his existence in spite of the “whiteness” of his life, she appears before Shūji in the form of a “gigantic ship.”<sup>103</sup> Hesitant at first, he eventually decides to board it, even though he does not sense a human presence inside.<sup>104</sup> What is left of Chise's consciousness communicates to him that she ended all fighting, that this was the last “work” she had to accomplish.<sup>105</sup> She tells him that she cannot manifest into a physical form resembling her prior body anymore, but due to Shūji's memories of her, it becomes possible, after all.<sup>106</sup> A final noise is heard from the planet, which sounds like Chise's heartbeat to Shūji.<sup>107</sup> The manga ends with the words, “We will love each other. We will live on.”<sup>108</sup>

The ending of *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* bears some obvious resemblance to the final episodes of *Shin Seiki Evangelion*; not only does it employ similar visual rhetoric in its display of the protagonists' “inner world,” it also features a seemingly paradoxical ultimate declaration. Why are congratulations being expressed to “all the children” (i.e. the child pilots of the Eva units, as *kodomo-tachi* is glossed with *children* in katakana)? How are Chise and Shūji going to live, and is the latter still alive in the first place, considering that his last instance in the “real world” shows him being immersed in a mudslide? The consumer of these narratives is left to ponder these questions.

In *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, no framing device is given for the transition from the outer to the inner world, leaving Shūji's and Chise's ultimate fate, as well as the meaning of the final lines, open for interpretation. However, Shūji's thoughts after realizing his status as sole survivor of humanity are of interest for the purposes of this exegesis. Shūji's perceived ineffectuality is expressed multiple times throughout the narrative prior to this stage, as he can only helplessly observe Chise's deterioration along the worsening state of the world. He takes personal responsibility for the deaths that have occurred while grieving among the corpses; it is implied that he feels his less-than-perfect conduct in his relationship with Chise is to blame for the

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 284-96.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 298-9.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 303-10.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 319-22: “*Boku-tachi wa, aishite iku. Ikite iku.*”

ultimate outcome throughout the final volume of the manga, even though he is explicitly told that “there was no choice, it was nobody’s fault” by one of her former handlers.<sup>109</sup> Faced with a return to the “whiteness,” he recants his initial wish that he had never existed alongside others, stating that living in a world with people is worth the pain. While neither Shūji nor Chise are capable of reversing the apocalypse, leaving them withdrawn from a social context, the rejection of solitude is clearly expressed.

### *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*

In *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*, the large-scale crisis setting is barely featured in favor of emphasizing the daily life setting.<sup>110</sup> Secret aircraft pilot Iriya Kana is introduced to Asaba Naoyuki’s class in the small town of Sonohara as a transfer student after he initially meets her while clandestinely sneaking into the school pool. He becomes her confidante, listening to her story of losing a comrade in the desert and realizing that she was alone and unwanted.<sup>111</sup> Thereafter, he takes care of her repeatedly as her health deteriorates due to the strain of piloting the gravity-defying Black Manta. When she eventually sickens to the point of losing her hair and going blind, Asaba asks her to run away with him.<sup>112</sup> Their money is stolen by a vagrant after a few days and Iriya is sexually assaulted, causing her mental state to worsen, as well. When Asaba loses his patience with her shortly thereafter, she suffers a psychotic break and ceases to recognize him.<sup>113</sup> These circumstances force him to turn to his grandparents for help.

This motif of an attempted escape from the large-scale situation is also in evidence in *Shin Seiki Evangelion* and *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, as is the narrative outcome of the endeavor: Witnessing Asuka and Rei being defeated by an Angel in episode 19, Shinji, who resigned his commission with NERV earlier in the episode, returns to fight. Chise’s and Shūji’s escape ends in the former’s consumption by her inner weapon, after which the latter turns her over to the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 71: “*Shikata nakatta n desu. Daremo warukunai n desu.*”

<sup>110</sup> Akiyama Mizuhito, *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Media Works, 2001-2003). Originally released as “light novel” (i.e. novels which include illustrations and are usually targeted at the same demographic as anime and manga), although versions in alternate media formats also exist.

<sup>111</sup> *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*, vol. 2, 70-1: “*Watashi-tachi igai ni wa, daremo... Watashi-tachi wa, mina iranai ko nan da, sono toki omotta... Ikite iru chidatte, daretomo accha ikenakute, daretomo hanashicha ikenakute, shindara saisho kara inakatta koto ni sarechau n datte omotta.*”

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 248: “*Nigete yaru... Kyō kara Iriya wa kichi ni wa kaeranai. Iriya ga jibun kara kaeritai to omou made kaeranai.*”

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., vol. 4, 144.

military.<sup>114</sup> In *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*, likewise, Iriya's health and mental state deteriorate to such a degree that Asaba is forced to resort to outside help. In short, all of these instances, which occur near the climax of the respective narratives, feature the protagonist admitting that the organization engaged with the large-scale situation cannot be avoided, as it is connected to the small-scale situation (i.e. Shinji's self-worth and the survival of the respective "heroine[s]").

When Asaba and Iriya arrive at his grandparents' house, her handlers are waiting for them. One of them explains the situation to Asaba while Iriya's health is being stabilized for the moment: humanity is engaged in two wars, one with human enemies over the anti-gravity technology used in the Black Manta, and the other with attacking aliens, with the final battle scheduled to be in three days.<sup>115</sup> Asaba returns to Sonohara to wait for the world to end, only to hear on the news just after the clock passes midnight on the third day that the war is over. However, the following morning, a military helicopter arrives at his school, and he is brought to an aircraft carrier, where Iriya is refusing to sortie. Her handler, stating that the news of the war being over is untrue, wants Asaba to convince her to fight. After managing to reach Iriya's side and ascertaining that she recognizes him once more, Asaba apologizes to her for his behavior, confesses his love, and states that would rather risk the fate of the world than her life.<sup>116</sup> However, this convinces Iriya to go to battle, after all, stating that she is doing so, and will die, for his sake alone.<sup>117</sup> Asaba never sees her again; as life in Sonohara returns to normal, he receives a letter from one of the people responsible for Iriya, explaining that he was specifically set up to form an emotional connection to her in order to motivate her to fight; after she lost all of her comrades to the wars and to equipment malfunction, her effectiveness was decreasing, leading to concerns that she would not be able to stop the alien invasion. She needed to establish emotional rapport with another person in order to want to succeed.<sup>118</sup>

*Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*, although on the opposite end of the spectrum from *Shin Seiki Evangelion* in that it emphasizes a daily life setting and depicts the large-scale situation primarily through its effects on the "heroine" Iriya, nevertheless parallels the two preceding narratives in two aspects. Not only is the attempted flight from the large-scale situation a

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<sup>114</sup> *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* vol. 7, 53-61.

<sup>115</sup> *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*, vol. 4, 247-56.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 296-7, 299: "Boku ga settoku suru to omotteta n nara oainikusama da!! Iriya wa shutsugeki sasenai kara na!! Zettai ni shinasenai kara na!! Iriya ga ikiru tame nara jinrui demo nan demo horobeba ii n da!!"

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 300: "Watashi mo, Asaba no tame dake ni tatakatte, Asaba no tame dake ni shinu."

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-8.

narrative element, the choice about the fate of the world ultimately lies in a single character's hands, due to Iriya's crucial role in the war as the only person who can pilot her craft. Asaba's decision to place her fate above that of the world, including himself, ultimately convinces her to embrace her role for the sake of another, i.e. finding her own value in their coexistence and leading her to affirm the world, albeit not for herself. The genre subversion Maejima perceives in the military deliberately bringing Iriya and Asaba together only partially applies; while manipulation of the primary characters is not in evidence in *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, the child pilots of *Shin Seiki Evangelion* are likewise not aware that they are not just fighting the Angels, but furthering the Human Instrumentality Project as envisioned by NERV commander Ikari Gendō and SEELE.<sup>119</sup> However, *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu* does subvert one of the genre conventions in Asaba not displaying any signs of alienation or psychological instability from beginning to end; he has a normal family life, and his participation in a school club occupies a large part of the narrative. It is Iriya who solely bears the psychological burden, rather than both primary characters as in *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, or most of the main cast as in *Shin Seiki Evangelion*.

### *Hoshi no Koe*

*Hoshi no Koe* is the sparsest of the definitive *sekaikei* works: a short animated film of approximately 25 minutes run time.<sup>120</sup> No characters other than the male and female leads, Noboru and Mikako, are depicted. Mikako joins the U.N. after middle school to participate in a war against the extraterrestrial Tarsians, leaving Earth in a robot unit attached to the battleship *Lysithea*. She keeps in contact with her classmate and love interest Noboru via her cell phone, although, due to the immense distances covered by traveling at faster-than-light speed, their e-mails to each other take years to arrive. On the planet Agarthia, Mikako experiences an illusion of herself in various Earth settings shown in the beginning of the narrative, apparently caused by a Tarsian, and begs her double to let her see Noboru again so she can tell him she loves him. An attack on the fleet occurs, and she is only just able to protect the *Lysithea* from being destroyed. Meanwhile, Noboru, after being depicted checking his phone in various settings for the first half

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Chapter 1; see Maejima (2010), 98; *Neon Genesis Evangelion* episode 21.

<sup>120</sup> *Hoshi no Koe*, created as a one-man project by Shinkai Makoto, was released in Japan on DVD by CoMix Wave, Inc. in 2002.

of the story, eventually decides to “harden his heart and become an adult, even by himself,” considering that messages from Mikako will now take eight years to reach him.<sup>121</sup> By the time her message from Agarthia arrives, garbled except for the beginning sentence, Noboru is set to enter the UN as an officer; the newspapers on his table report the victory of the *Lysithea* against the Tarsians from eight years ago, but also state that the ship sustained damage. In the end, both characters muse in a voiceover what they would say to each other if their thoughts could connect them across time and space, and come to the same conclusion: “I am here” (“*Koko ni iru yo*”).

This narrative is the only one among the definitive *sekaikei* works in which the central large-scale conflict, i.e. the war between humanity and the Tarsians, is not conceptualized as resulting in apocalyptic devastation in the story. Noboru is never described as being in danger, and Mikako never explicitly claims to fight for a specific purpose, resulting in no direct connection between the existing large-scale and small-scale situations beyond the characters’ spatial separation. However, even within this sparse context, one point stands out, namely Noboru’s decision to grow up, i.e. refusing to withdraw in order to wait for Mikako. Two other commonalities with the narratives discussed above exist, namely an “inner world” depiction (albeit from Mikako’s perspective, as most of the plot is told from her point of view) and the final declarative statement.

## **The Philosophy of *Sekaikei* Narratives**

The preceding section has presented evidence that withdrawal is not the preferred mode of existence of *sekaikei* characters. However, does this affirmation automatically signify the potential for maturation in a setting where the social dimension is largely or wholly absent?

Tanaka’s Lacanian analysis quoted above, which states that the male protagonists are insulated from loss and tragedy due to their affiliation with the “fighting heroine,” does not bear out in the narratives analyzed. In fact, not only is loss arguably an integral part of the definitive works in this genre, it also leads to the character growth projected by Lacan. This is evidenced in Shinji’s realization that to live means to live with others in spite of the potential for getting hurt in *Shin Seiki Evangelion*, as well as Shūji’s wish to live in a populated world after the apocalypse

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<sup>121</sup> *Voices of a Distant Star - Hoshi No Koe*. dir. Makoto Shinkai (United States: ADV Films, 2003), time index 15:09: “*Dakara boku wa mokuhyō o tateta. Motto motto kokoro o kataku tsumetaku tsuyoku suru koto... Ore wa, hitori demo otona ni naru koto.*”

in *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, even after experiencing personal losses and temptation of withdrawal in order to avoid emotional distress. Shinji enters the Instrumentality process after being forced to kill Kaoru, a new member of NERV with whom he had established a friendly relationship, upon discovering that Kaoru is the final Angel in episode 24. Shūji says his farewells to his parents immediately prior to the apocalypse, and is confronted with their dead bodies in the field of corpses he encounters. Both protagonists enter a state of resignation due to their losses, but ultimately still express a desire to exist in the real world. Iriya sacrifices herself for the sake of Asaba, and, by extension, the world in *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*; in her case, the experience of loss precipitated her withdrawal from social interaction prior to the narrative, as she only acknowledged her fellow pilots as others before forging a connection with Asaba. Her decision, in turn, is preceded by the protagonist's willingness to sacrifice himself alongside the world to affirm her in refusing to enter the final battle. *Hoshi no Koe*, finally, revolves around Mikako's knowledge that she is unable to maintain communication with Noboru after arriving on planet Agartha, and Noboru's resignation at this fact being channeled into the decision to become an adult without her.

The growth of characters depicted in these works, albeit occasionally paralleled in the world situation and relating to a desire of socialization, is primarily of a subjective nature, namely that of the character striving to find meaning in his or her existence. The progression toward this goal follows the Kierkegaardian existentialist stances of despair, which, in his ontology, arise from man being a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, or, restated, of freedom and necessity, the relation between the two states representing the self.<sup>122</sup> Despair is described as the "sickness unto death," not in the literal sense of representing a mortal illness ending in death, but rather as the torment of *not* being able to die.<sup>123</sup>

Applying an existentialist framework is not only apt in the sense that this idea is reproduced in unmitigated form in Shūji's realization of being the only survivor of mankind; existentialism is also used in episode 26 of *Shin Seiki Evangelion*. At time index 11:25 the voiceover provided by the other characters explains to Shinji how he can come to understand

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<sup>122</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980), 13.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

himself as a white world without limitations is presented to him.<sup>124</sup> This world is then limited by a horizontal line, giving him a ground to stand on. From there, the line of reasoning that existential possibility requires limitations for individuation to occur is followed to the conclusion that others are necessary to know oneself. Kierkegaard writes in that regard in *Sickness unto Death*, “Possibility and necessity are equally essential to becoming (and the self has the task of becoming itself in freedom)... The philosophers are mistaken when they explain necessity as a unity of possibility and actuality – no, actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity.”<sup>125</sup> Likewise, Martin Heidegger states in *Being and Time*,

Knowing oneself is grounded in Being-with, which understands primordially. It operates proximally in accordance with the kind of Being which is closest to us – Being-in-the-world as Being-with; and it does so by an acquaintance with that which Dasein, along with the Others, comes across in its environmental circumspection and concerns itself with – an acquaintance in which Dasein understands.<sup>126</sup>

Jean-Paul Sartre, finally, conceives of freedom as a “nihilation of a given; and to the extent that it is an internal negation and a consciousness, it participates in the necessity which prescribes that consciousness be consciousness *of* something [Emphasis Sartre],” the latter statement signifying that freedom can only be conceptualized by placing limits on it.<sup>127</sup>

Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death* describes three different forms of despair. The first is despair over *something* while being unable to acknowledge that one’s anguish is in actuality directed at the unrealized self.<sup>128</sup> In other words, instead of assuming the role of subject, the person perceives her despair as externally imposed. The initial alienation from society apparent in *seikaikei* protagonists can be regarded as emblematic of this state. Scenes such as Noboru sitting by himself in a variety of settings or Shinji riding the train all day after running away in episode four of *Shin Seiki Evangelion* visualize this stage without explicit commentary, but Shūji’s questioning in the first *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* manga volume what stories in the newspapers concerning corporate bankruptcies, wars in far-off countries, and earthquakes mean for someone who is struggling with love in a small town provides a more overt example, as does

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<sup>124</sup> *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Platinum Complete Collection*, dir. Hideaki Anno and Kiichi Hadame. Written by Kazuya Tsurumaki, Masayuki, and Hideaki Anno (United States: ADV Films, 2005), Episode 26.

<sup>125</sup> Kierkegaard (1980), 35-6.

<sup>126</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Being and Time (Selections),” in *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, ed. Charles B. Guignon and Derk Pereboom, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 225.

<sup>127</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1966), 618.

<sup>128</sup> Kierkegaard (1980), 19.

Iriya's feeling of being unwanted and therefore alone while searching the desert for her comrade.<sup>129</sup>

The second form of despair entails recognition of the internal synthesis via self-reflection or a sudden crisis, and subsequently opting to resolve the conflict by immersion in the temporal aspect of the self, i.e. seeking fleeting satisfaction or mundanity in an attempt to disavow the need for self-affirmation through a consciously assumed overarching goal, described as “despair at not willing to be oneself.”<sup>130</sup> This tendency can be clearly observed in *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* in Shūji, who seeks fleeting sexual satisfaction with a prior girlfriend during Chise's absence in an unsuccessful attempt to mask his realization of ineffectuality, in Noboru's initial preoccupation with waiting for Mikako's texts in *Hoshi no Koe* and suspending his process of growing up, and in Shinji piloting his *Evangelion* because he receives praise for doing so.<sup>131</sup> In *Eva's* case, episode 26, which illuminates specifically Shinji's Instrumentality process, even starts out with black kanji on a featureless red background reading *kyōfu* (“dread, fear, terror”), the necessary condition to enter into this stage of despair. The couples' attempts at fleeing from the large-scale situation and living in obscurity in *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* and *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu* are the most obvious examples of this type of despair.

The third form of despair is that of “despair of willing to be oneself,” i.e. the attempt to embrace the events of one's life willfully, but without the courage of the self to lose itself.<sup>132</sup> Kierkegaard states that “no derived self can by regarding itself give itself more than it is in itself by paying attention to itself... In so far as the self in its despairing striving to be itself works itself into the very opposite, it really becomes no self.”<sup>133</sup> A possible solution to this conundrum is the “ethical life” featuring a constantly renewed decision to commit to another, as posited in the example of marriage in the second volume of *Either/Or*; however, the primary way of dealing with this despair, for the Christian Existentialist Kierkegaard, is the commitment to religious life.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* vol. 1, 25.

<sup>130</sup> Kierkegaard (1980), 54-6, 66.

<sup>131</sup> *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* vol. 2, 113-8.

<sup>132</sup> Kierkegaard (1980), 67.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>134</sup> Charles B. Guignon and Derk Pereboom. “Kierkegaard: Introduction,” in *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, ed. Charles B. Guignon and Derk Pereboom (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 9; Kierkegaard (1980), 71.

Within the atheist existentialist stream of thought, this type of despair can be roughly equated with Martin Heidegger's concept of anxiety, which is described in *Being and Time* as follows:

Anxiety individualizes Dasein [i.e. being in awareness, which is peculiar to humans] for its ownmost Being-in-the-world, which as something that understands, projects itself essentially upon possibilities. Therefore, with that which it is anxious about, anxiety discloses Dasein as *Being-possible*, and indeed as the only kind of thing which it can be of its own accord as something individualized in individualization [Emphasis Heidegger].<sup>135</sup>

Restated, Heideggerian anxiety leads to the realization of individual possibility, as well as the potential to self-affirm through the willingness to Be with Others, or *live authentically*, which is described in *Being and Time* not as a different type of Being, but as a different subjective perception of Being:

The “world” which is ready-to-hand does not become another one “in its content,” nor does the circle of Others get exchanged for a new one; but both one's Being towards the ready-to-hand understandingly and concernfully, and one's solicitous Being with Others, are now given a definite character in terms of their ownmost potentiality-for-Being-their-Selves.<sup>136</sup>

As mentioned above, here Shinji's realization that he wants to be himself and exist in the world, as well as Shūji's statement after the apocalypse that he misses the world, even if it was filled with conflict, sin, and death, affirm the world and simultaneously themselves. A similar, albeit smaller-scale affirmation occurs in Iriya's decision to sacrifice herself in the final battle against the aliens, thereby committing to her role out of her own free will, in *Iriya no Sora, UFO no Natsu*. Noboru's conscious resolution to not wait for Mikako in becoming an adult while simultaneously affirming their connection by keeping his old cell phone in *Hoshi no Koe* could also be understood in this manner: The attitude towards one's own Being changes, but the “content” of the “world” does not.

While Shinji's affirmation in *Shin Seiki Evangelion* is shown to have the potential of changing humanity's fate in accordance with Sartre's explanation in *Existentialism and Humanism* that man lives in a world of “inter-subjectivity” in which he “has to decide what he is and what others are,” Shūji's affirmation in the final volume of *Saishū Heiki Kanojo* occurs

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<sup>135</sup> Heidegger (1995), 237.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 245.

seemingly too late to be of value – the world has ended and he is humanity’s only survivor, saved by a transformed, no-longer-human Chise.<sup>137</sup> However, in his discussion of the concept of facticity (i.e. the concrete details placing limitations on the freedom resulting from fundamentally essence-less being, e.g. by having happened in the past) in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre states that “to be free,” in the existentialist sense, does not imply “to obtain what one has wished,” but “by oneself determine oneself to wish;” in short, freedom signifies the autonomy of choice.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, he emphasizes that “I alone in fact can decide at each moment the bearing of my past ... by projecting myself towards my ends, I preserve the past with me, and by action I *decide* its meanings.”<sup>139</sup> Thus, within the existentialist paradigm, Shūji’s statement remains ontologically relevant although *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*’s plot is inherently deterministic, as neither Chise’s struggles with her humanity nor her boyfriend’s eventual affirmation have an effect on the inevitable apocalypse. In fact, Shūji’s belated anguish over the loss of the world is the most poignant indicator within the definitive works of the genre that *sekaikei* does not affirm withdrawal as proposed by Tanaka and Uno, but rather rejects it in an expressed desire for intersubjectivity, i.e. Being with Others or, in the case of Iriya, Being for Others.

Within this existentialist framework, it also becomes possible to define *Death Note*, a narrative which has been alternately described as *sekaikei* and a work surpassing the form.<sup>140</sup> The protagonist Yagami Light makes the decision which defines him throughout the narrative at its very beginning: Rid the world of all crime by utilizing the supernatural Death Note to execute criminals and becoming “Kira,” the mysterious vigilante. Instead of pursuing intersubjectivity or an “authentic” existence, he never shows the potential of growing past seeing the Other-as-object, seeking to suppress the Other’s freedom.<sup>141</sup> The underlying reasoning is the desire to suppress all Others in an attempt to recapture his own freedom, as his alienation from society constitutes his own enslavement to objectification.<sup>142</sup> Even in his success as Kira, Light is ultimately doomed to failure according to Sartre:

If the abolition of the Other is to be lived as the triumph of hate, it implies the explicit recognition that the Other *has existed*. Immediately my being-for-others

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<sup>137</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (Brooklyn: Haskell House, 1977), 45.

<sup>138</sup> Sartre (1966), 621-2.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 640.

<sup>140</sup> Ōba Tsugumi and Obata Takeshi, *Death Note*, 12 vols. (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2003-2006); Maejima (2010), 9; see also the discussion of Uno and Kasai regarding *Death Note* in the definition section above.

<sup>141</sup> Sartre (1966), 532-3.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 533.

by slipping into the past becomes an irremediable dimension of myself ... He who has once been for-others is contaminated in his being for the rest of his days even if the Other should be entirely suppressed; he will never cease to apprehend his dimension of being-for-others as a permanent possibility of his being. He can never recapture what he has alienated; he has even lost all hope of acting on this alienation and turning it to his own advantage since the destroyed Other has carried the key for this alienation along with him to the grave. What I was for the Other is fixed by the Other's death and I shall irremediably be it in the past ... The Other's death constitutes me as an irremediable object exactly as my own death would do. Thus the triumph of hate is in its very upsurge transformed into failure [Emphasis Sartre].<sup>143</sup>

This proposed self-objectification is also echoed in Kierkegaard's description of self-loss in the state of "despair of willing to be oneself," and in Heidegger's exhortation of authenticity requiring Being with Others (see above). While atheist existentialism as espoused in Sartre's and Heidegger's works does not per se comment on morality, the words of the former in *Existentialism and Humanism* make clear that Light's actions constitute a flight from anguish, and therefore from the responsibility which signifies the Sartrean concept of freedom:

The existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish. His meaning is as follows – when a man commits himself to anything, fully realizing that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind – in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility. There are many, indeed, who show no such anxiety. But we affirm that they are merely disguising their anguish or are in flight from it.<sup>144</sup>

If we regard *sekaikei* narratives as containing existentialist considerations, particularly within a framework of "becoming" through self-affirmation after successfully confronting one's despair, *Death Note* cannot be regarded as belonging among works defined as such.

### **Are *Sekaikei* Narratives Incapable of Incorporating a Grand Narrative?**

As mentioned before, *sekaikei* narratives emerged during a period in which grand narratives are considered to have deteriorated due to the progression of postmodernism. Grand narratives are defined as follows in the *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*:

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 534.

<sup>144</sup> Sartre (1977), 30.

The term “grand narrative” was introduced by Jean-François Lyotard (1924–98) to describe the kind of story that underlies, gives legitimacy, and explains the particular choices a culture prescribes as possible courses of action. A grand narrative, also called a “master narrative,” provides coherence by covering up the various conflicts, the differends, that arise in the history of a society... Each grand narrative provides its own set of elements (a hero or subject, a journey fraught with dangers, and a great goal) and promotes a different ideology.<sup>145</sup>

This definition is usually applied to the espousal of political ideology, particularly if the grand narrative is used in the place of objective legitimization in endeavors such as societal structuring or scientific pursuit; in this sense, Lyotard considers the postmodern little narrative taking the grand narrative’s place to be a “possibility of evening the playing field for the language games of the disenfranchised.”<sup>146</sup> However, this type of “grand narrative” seems to be inapplicable to fictional works as even narratives produced prior to the postmodern period did not necessarily espouse the –isms inherent in the concept; rather, the term *sekaikan* (“world view, *weltanschauung*”) used by GAINAX founder Okada should be applied as an initial hermeneutic.<sup>147</sup>

Jerome Ashmore states that *weltanschauung* “usually denotes a perspective and interpretation of the universe and its events held in a sustained way by an individual or by a group. The perspective functions normatively and as a point of articulation. It implies cognition and values and may or may not include a supporting theoretical structure.”<sup>148</sup> Therefore, this term describes a concept similar to, but not identical with, the Lyotardian “grand narrative.”

Azuma contends that third-wave otaku, rather than taking in the entire world of *Evangelion*, were primarily interested in database elements, i.e. “grand nonnarrative” elements such as settings and character designs, stating that, “for them, a grand narrative or fiction with a Gundam style world was no longer desirable, even as a fantasy.”<sup>149</sup> This quote conflates the existence of a grand narrative with elaborate world-building, implying that a systematic *weltanschauung* may be what is called for in a fictional paradigm, instead.

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<sup>145</sup> Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist, *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 164-5.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>147</sup> Maejima Satoshi, *Sekaikei to wa nani ka: Posuto-Eva no otaku shi* (Tokyo: Softbank Creative, 2010), 109.

<sup>148</sup> Jerome Ashmore, “Three Aspects of *Weltanschauung*,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1966), 215.

<sup>149</sup> I.e. otaku born around 1980; Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kōno, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009), 37.

A “world view” within fiction *can* be indicative of an underlying real world grand narrative in the Lyotardian sense in spite of the concept’s overall inapplicability, as it may be informed by ideology shared by society at large: “A grand narrative operates as a metanarrative providing a framework in which all other cultural narratives find their ground and acquire their meaning and legitimacy.”<sup>150</sup> However, is this the case with the *sekaikei* works analyzed above? The historical background seems to answer this question in the negative, as Azuma indicates that the communality of grand narratives has been restrained in favor of individual self-determination since the advent of postmodernism in the 1970s.<sup>151</sup> Yet, this observation poses another problem: If the belief in individual self-determination is culturally pervasive, does it *not* constitute a grand narrative?

Lyotard himself proposed a postmodernist “great narrative of the end of great narratives” in his work *The Differend*.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, the *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* lists capitalism as an example of a grand narrative, identifying as subject the individual entrepreneur and as goal the accumulation of wealth, which indicates that a grand narrative can function on an individual level as long as its tenets represent views shared by a given society.<sup>153</sup>

Following these considerations, the question emerges: Do the definitive *sekaikei* works share a world view, and if so, does it amount to the espousal of a “grand narrative”?

Kasai identifies one problem with existentialism as a basis for decision-making, namely that such choices are by necessity made without being rooted in prescribed ethics as applied to a group.<sup>154</sup> This criticism seems justified when applied to the studied *sekaikei* works, as the decisions shaping the narrative outcome are not grounded in moral considerations, but the individual desire to self-affirm. This is in line with the fact that existentialism, being founded on the principle of subjectivity, does not propose an overt ethical framework. Yet, the mechanism of self-affirmation in a paradigm in which the self is directly connected to the fate of the world *does* have moral connotations: In order to reach the existentialist goal of “living authentically,” i.e. choosing and affirming the meaning of one’s life, interaction with the world and others is necessary, which in turn necessitates the affirmation of the world. While this guiding principle

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<sup>150</sup> Taylor and Winkist (2001), 165.

<sup>151</sup> Azuma (2007), 18.

<sup>152</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 135.

<sup>153</sup> Taylor and Winkist (2001), 165.

<sup>154</sup> Kasai Kiyoshi, “Sekaikei to reigai jōtai,” in *Shakai wa sonzai shinai: Sekaikei bunkaron*, ed. Genkai Shōsetsu Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Nan’undō, 2009), 40.

seems rooted in individual considerations, this is the case in a number of ethical theories, such as virtue ethics, stoicism, and utilitarianism, allowing for the assumption that an existentialist ethics as proposed by Sartre in his essay *Existentialism and Humanism* is, in fact, in evidence:

If, however, it is true that existence is prior to essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus, the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men. ... When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men. For in effect, of all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he ought to be. To choose between this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of that which is chosen.<sup>155</sup>

In agreement with Sartre's statement, Shinji's affirmation of himself and the world in *Shin Seiki Evangelion* occurs in light of the fact that he can only understand himself in reference to a delimited world containing others. This affirmation is based on factors which are normative (characters switch in their explanation of this existentialist concept, and make no claim that it only applies to Shinji), imply cognition (self-evident), and include a supporting theoretical structure (the existentialist synthesis of freedom and facticity as a basis for being), as a consistent *weltanschauung* requires according to Ashmore. The meaning of life is encrypted in Yui's statement about Shinji's value, as well as his realization after the alternate life scene that *he* chooses his possibilities: There is no intrinsic meaning or set of values, which is not negative as it confers freedom (and its concomitant responsibility) upon the individual. In turn, this freedom/responsibility dichotomy determines the value of our actions and therefore the meaning of our lives both in our eyes and the eyes of the Other. This lack of inherent meaning, while derided by Uno as "I will think of a reason to make myself agree" in the context of his psychologism terminology on page 16 of *Zero Nendai no Sōzōryoku*, nevertheless constitutes a consistent systematic approach toward a *weltanschauung*. Furthermore, Uno's "decision ideology" is ontologically the same as the "psychologism" which supposedly precedes it: a

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<sup>155</sup> Sartre (1977), 29.

conscious decision to *be* carries the same meaning as a conscious decision to *act* within the existentialist paradigm.<sup>156</sup>

The other definitive *sekaikei* works are, as Okada observed, more simplistic in their narrative approach: Shūji espouses much the same affirmative views on Being-in-the-world as Shinji does at the end of *Saishū Heiki Kanojo*, but is unable to act on them, as the nature of his world's apocalypse, other than *Shin Seiki Evangelion's* Instrumentality, is irreversible. Iriya affirms her role as pilot and thereby the world after Asaba is willing to sacrifice everything for her. This is the most simplistic form of affirmation, a willful Being-for-others, which is furthermore revealed at the end of the narrative to have been encouraged from the outside by the military, but it is nevertheless authentic in the existentialist sense, as Iriya was not pressured into her decision. *Hoshi no Koe*, finally, while featuring an existentialist decision (namely the negation of withdrawal from the world in the desire to become an adult by Noboru), only espouses a world view in the solitary Mikako's desire to connect with another, although more might be too much to ask from a narrative whose length is a mere 25 minutes.

Lyotard's ironic proposition of a postmodernist grand narrative, i.e. the shared distrust of grand narratives, is indeed an underlying factor of the existentialist *weltanschauung* of *sekaikei* works. Existentialism, with its insistence on subjectivity, can nevertheless be viewed as a "grand narrative," as it provides all elements the *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* identifies as integral to the concept: A subject (the individual), a "journey fraught with dangers" (the descent into despair/anxiety in the attempt of self-realization), and a goal (embracing the synthesis of the self and living authentically).<sup>157</sup> In this function, *sekaikei's* inherent existentialism, with its exhortation of responsibility being inextricably tied to freedom, is utilized to send a message to the consumers of these narratives via the protagonists' shift from alienation towards the desire to exist in the world: Rather than affirming withdrawal, this message consists of "Stop watching anime and return to reality!" according to Maejima.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. Sartre (1966), 560.

<sup>157</sup> For the elements of grand narratives, see Taylor and Winquist (2001), 165.

<sup>158</sup> Maejima (2010), 46, in reference to the criticism of otaku inherent in *Shin Seiki Evangelion gekijō-ban*: "Anime o miru no o yamete genjitsu ni modore!"

## Concluding Remarks

As shown above, the existentialist exegetical framework addresses all perceived shortcomings of the plots of the definitive *sekaikei* narratives: the alienated self of the characters in the beginning of these works, as they have not yet had the impetus of despair to self-affirm; the initial rejection of the world as a whole as objectifying Other; the lacking social dimension, as it is unable to mediate in the subjective conflict of the self; the large-scale crisis escalating in conjunction with the characters' personal level of despair in accordance with Sartre's assertion that individual choice has an effect on everyone; and the eventual existentialist affirmation of the self overturning the rejection of the world. Even the lacking description of the world after the crisis has passed is a feature of this philosophical paradigm, as it avoids determinism in regard to the future.

In comparing the *sekaikei* works described as "definitive" utilizing an existentialist hermeneutic, it can be discerned that they systematize the existentialist paradigm supposedly unsuitable for grand narratives due to its focus on subjectivity by emphasizing the responsibility attached to individual freedom. Not through "making oneself agree," as Uno proposes, but by *authentically* embracing one's role and making a commitment to Being-with-others, can one's meaning of life be defined. "Authentically" is the key word in this regard, as merely doing something because others demand it without personal commitment is uniformly portrayed as negative or insufficient in these works.

It is this conscious decision to commit which disproves the assertion that *sekaikei* narratives affirm withdrawal; in fact, the potential for a resolution of the large-scale crisis, if it is possible within the world depicted, only develops through the characters embracing their freedom as well as their responsibility, thereby finding meaning in their lives. Furthermore, in directly connecting the "world" with the "self," the implicit exhortation towards the consumers of these narratives to reconnect with society, i.e. to Be-in-the-world, emerges.

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