BOMBING AND THE SYMPTOM
TRAUMATIC EARLINESS AND THE NUCLEAR UNCANNY

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Many used the Japanese word bukimi, *meaning weird, ghastly, or unearthly, to describe Hiroshima's uneasy combination of continued good fortune and expectation of catastrophe. People remembered saying to one another, "Will it be tomorrow or the day after tomorrow?" One man described how, each night he was on air-raid watch, "I trembled with fear. . . . I would think, "Tonight it will be Hiroshima." These "premonitions" were partly attempts at psychic preparation, partly a form of "imagining the worst" as a magical way of warding off disaster.*
    —Robert J. Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (1967)

Robert J. Lifton's pathbreaking work on the survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima focuses on the psychological aftermath of the bomb, but opens with a brief and surprising section called "Anticipation." Given the instantaneous and unprecedented devastation caused by the first atomic bomb, the anticipation of so singular an experience is just as difficult to imagine as its subsequent assimilation. In fact, the unassimilable nature of traumatic violence would seem to depend in some way upon the impossibility of its anticipation, as Lifton implies: "Neither past experience nor immediate perceptions—the two sources of prior imagination—could encompass what was about to occur." Yet Lifton also records an expectant, premonitory atmosphere in Hiroshima during the weeks before the bombing, a compound of past experience and immediate perceptions that, while inadequate to "encompass" the eventual experience of the bomb, cannot simply be dismissed as speculation that found an accidental correlate in the nuclear event. While no one in Hiroshima knew ahead of time what would occur on August 6, 1945, many had noted the city's eerie exemption from conventional bombardment and speculated as to the reasons for it. During the summer of 1945, a series of rumors circulated in Hiroshima, rumors attributing the sparing of the city, variously, to its modest military and industrial significance; to the presence of prominent foreigners there, possibly including President Truman's mother; to important American prisoners-of-war supposedly held in the city; to the number of its citizens who had emigrated to the US; to the presence of large numbers of American spies living among its citizens; to its physical appeal in the eyes of Americans who had saved the city as a site for their postwar occupation villas; and, most wishfully, to the wartime grace of a cartographic error: "We thought that perhaps the city of Hiroshima was not on the American maps" [Lifton 15–17].[1] Other inhabit-

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1. *Many other accounts of the bombing mention both the eerie sense of expectation in Hiroshima before August 6 and the rumors that attempted to account for it. See Hersey 4–5, 14; Ogura 18; Knebel and Bailey 39–40; Marx 158–59; PWRS 220–23; Weale 147–48.*

ants of the city feared that Hiroshima appeared all too prominently on US maps, but had been set aside for "something unusually big"—perhaps the inundation of the city by floodwaters that could be released by the bombing of a massive upstream dam. Still others spoke of a "special bomb" [PWRS 220–22; Lifton 17]. All these rumors responded to citizens' impression that their city had been in some way singled out, and the term *bukimi*—also meaning "ominous" or "uncanny"—spoke to the suspended question of whether Hiroshima and its inhabitants had been singled out for preservation or for annihilation.

The survivors who recollected their anticipatory *bukimi* years after the bombing may have retrospectively amplified their memories of weird expectation, perhaps as a way of attempting to master an incommensurable and singular event by installing it within a narrative of causality, continuity, even prophecy. Nonetheless, the *bukimi* experienced by inhabitants of Hiroshima should not be understood as pure retrospection, nor as groundless hunch, since it arose from a series of empirical observations later revealed to have a single and coherent origin in US military strategy. By the summer of 1945, most Japanese cities whose size and military-industrial importance were similar to Hiroshima's had already been bombed with incendiaries: those who lived in Hiroshima had watched waves of American bombers fly past on their way to other targets, while the dozen or so bombs that had fallen accidentally on their own city had caused comparatively trivial damage [Knebel and Bailey 39]. Many assumed, of course, that the firebombing of Hiroshima was inevitable, and the military had already recruited a large civilian workforce to create firebreaks by demolishing tens of thousands of dwellings, preventively destroying much more of the city than US bombs had yet done. Strangely, though, when US planes dropped leaflets listing the next twelve major cities destined for firebombing, Hiroshima—along with Niigata, Kokura, and Nagasaki—was absent from the list [PWRS 215]. Together, those four cities made up the Allied list of reserved atomic targets.

The people of Hiroshima who experienced *bukimi* had detected the opening up of the conditional space of catastrophe—conditional because, despite the signs that informed its citizens' sense of uncanniness, Hiroshima might finally have been spared rather than razed if conditions had been different on the day of the drop.[2] In certain respects, the kind of conditional traumatic space that registered as *bukimi* was unique to human-made devastation, and particularly to early nuclear weapons. The careful sparing of atomic bomb target cities from conventional bombing bespoke American military commanders' confidence in the destructive potential of the bomb and their desire to demonstrate that destructive power in the theater of relatively undamaged cities. Having noticed the passing-over of Hiroshima, its citizens strove to read the intention of the enemy in the signs that constituted that passing-over. Those signs, in a sense, had been returned from one of two futures: one culminating in the nonevent of preservation, the other in the limit event of catastrophe. When that limit event occurred, its survivors underwent a historically specific, unique traumatization. But in the period of eerie suspension before the explosion, those who registered the nuclear uncanny in Hiroshima were also the first to experience a condition that, in a far more explicit incarnation, would become familiar to everyone living in a targeted city during the Cold War: the sense that the present survival and flourishing of the city were simultaneously underwritten and radically threatened by its identity as a nuclear target.

To link the real devastation of Hiroshima to the potential devastation of Cold War

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2. This was actually the case with the second atomic bomb mission, whose primary target was the city of Kokura. When the plane carrying the bomb reached Kokura, smoke from a burning factory obscured the aiming point, and the crew opted instead to bomb the secondary target city, Nagasaki.

target cities may seem to do a violence to the specificity of the former, to its status as event rather than eventuality, and to the real suffering and annihilation of its victims. My claim, however, is not that the inhabitants of Cold War cities exhibited post-traumatic symptoms akin to those of the atomic bomb survivors, or *hibakusha*, but that they became accustomed to a more overt and permanent variant of the uncanny *frisson* felt in Hiroshima before the bombing, as a structuring condition of everyday life. In other words, what I have called the conditional space of catastrophe that gave rise to feelings of *bukimi* in Hiroshima became a general characteristic of Cold War urban experience. In her 1965 essay "The Imagination of Disaster," Susan Sontag wrote suggestively that "Science fiction films are not about science. They are about disaster, which is one of the oldest subjects of art." In the course of discussing the "aesthetics of destruction" in Cold War science fiction films, Sontag ventures a traumatic referent for that aesthetics: "One gets the feeling, particularly in Japanese films but not only there, that a mass trauma exists over the use of nuclear weapons and the possibility of future nuclear wars. Most of the science fiction films bear witness to this trauma, and, in a way, attempt to exorcise it" [461–63]. Sontag's formulation does not adequately distinguish among the intense trauma of *hibakusha*, the more attenuated national trauma experienced by non-*hibakusha* Japanese, and the worldwide response to the looming specter of nuclear war. One might also object that by compulsively repeating a particular scene of traumatic violence, the filmic spectacles of monster-suited men wrecking model cities likely did more to act out than to work through the trauma engendered by the past nuclear bombing of cities, or that induced by the possibility of a future nuclear war. Nonetheless, Sontag's observation allows that certain traumatic responses to the use of nuclear weapons might not have been limited to the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki but rather shared by all who knew of nuclear weapons, their devastating effects, and the escalating likelihood of their use. In this, Sontag seems to have been among the first to posit what we might call the *hysteron proteron* of the nuclear condition: the literally preposterous phenomenon of traumatic symptoms—denial, dissociation, fragmentation, repression, the compulsive repetition of extreme violence—that exist not in the wake of a past event, but in the shadow of a future one.

But one might want to stop short of claiming that the *bukimi* experienced by inhabitants of Hiroshima constituted a symptom in advance of its originary traumatic event. Such a feeling of weird anticipation or uncanniness may have been allied to the symptom as return-of-the-repressed insofar as it arose from an experience not of singularity but of repetition—the repetition, say, that inheres in awaiting an expected catastrophe others have experienced (for example, conventional aerial bombardment) while also repeating what must once have been their hopes to be exempted through some special dispensation. But the traumatic cause of repression, the explosion of the bomb, with its immediate effects, had not yet occurred. Surely if something repressed were returning in *bukimi*, it must have been something anterior to the feeling of uncanniness, a different trauma; certainly, it was not the future nuclear catastrophe that anachronistically "returned" to a moment before its occurrence. Similarly, if a mass traumatization existed, or exists, in relation to nuclear weapons, its inaugural event might not be a future conditional nuclear holocaust but the completed events of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Such a suggestion may accord a secondary witness status to most of the Cold War world and thus erode distinctions between different degrees of witnessing and indeed between the survivor-witnesses and bystanders of a traumatic event. But at least it does not posit the seeming temporal impossibility of a pretraumatic stress syndrome.

The notion of a proleptic traumatic symptom, of a repressed that returns from the future, would appear to make nonsense, too, of the temporal and causal assumptions

basic to current understandings of historical trauma. Working largely from the Freudian lexicon of repression, repetition, remembering, and working through, the field of trauma studies has oriented itself around memory work that restores a conventional temporal sequence and hierarchy by seeking to reduce the domination of the present by the past. Traumatic neuroses, according to Freud, are inaugurated by experiences of shock or violence so extreme as to be unassimilable in their present tense. The traumatic event, as Geoffrey Hartman puts it, is "registered rather than experienced. It seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche," where its "exceptional presence" is bound up with the fact that it has not been fully or conventionally experienced [537]. As a result, the impact of the traumatic event is felt belatedly, after a period of latency, through symptoms that often include the return of repressed memories and the compulsive repetition of behavior, gestures, dreams, and fantasies associated with the traumatic event. As Cathy Caruth and others have noted, traumatic dreams and flashbacks that replay the repressed event or image differ from other dreams and fantasies in their literalness, their seeming exemption from the distortive, encryptive operations of the dreamwork. In part because of its literal and insistent return, the traumatic past remains transgressively present as revenant, haunting, possession, dominating the present rather than receding, as it should, into the past. The survivor who experiences this return often acts out the trauma, repeating in the present scenes or behavior whose origins are in past instances of unassimilated, and often unassimilable, violence.

According to this model, the proper work of mourning should at least partially restore the pastness of the past and enable the survivor of trauma to reinvest in the present. Furthermore, the process and the stakes of working through are not solipsistic but importantly social. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma,* Dominick LaCapra asserts that "Through memory work, especially the socially engaged memory work involved in working through, one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recognize something as having happened to one (or one's people) back then which is related to, but not identical with, here and now" [66]. LaCapra later makes explicit that "ethically responsible agency, including consideration for others," is one of the high sociopolitical stakes of working through, insofar as the survivor trapped in acting out past scenes of traumatic violence and ethical impossibility (for example, the survivors of death camps who were forced to expose, exploit, persecute, or kill fellow prisoners on threat of their own deaths or the deaths of those they cherished) may be less capable of such agency in the present:

> When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring full transcendence of acting out (or being haunted by revenants and reliving the past in its shattering intensity) but which may enable processes of judgment and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency. These processes are crucial for laying ghosts to rest, distancing oneself from haunting revenants, renewing an interest in life, and being able to engage memory in more critically tested senses. [*Writing* 91, 90]

If a symptomatic effect can precede its traumatic cause, however, and if temporality and causality are reversed, then what becomes of the goals of restoring the pastness of the past, reinvesting in the present, and reconstituting the trauma survivor as ethically responsible agent? What becomes of the ethical stakes of working through traumatic symp-

toms if we imagine that at least some of those symptoms might precede trauma, traveling back through time as it were from the future, or even the merely possible future, to the present? To be sure, such a *hysteron proteron* occurs with a marked frequency in fictional treatments of historical trauma.[3] Such anachronisms and time travels might powerfully suggest, among other things, how the singularity of a traumatic event can manifest itself in a perceived leveling of past and future into identical orientations of the symptom: time, for the survivor, is spatialized, such that the traumatic event can seem to scatter the shrapnel of its symptoms evenly across the past and the future. But aren't such reversals and recursions either deliberate literary conceits or observations about the pathological temporality perceived by the trauma survivor, rather than evidence that symptoms might "really" precede traumatic causes?

Žižek's account of traumatic symptoms in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, interestingly, enacts just such a reversal of the conventional temporality in which symptoms point back to their origins in unassimilated past traumas, and the repressed returns from a past to which it can be at least partially reaffixed through memory work. Žižek's discussion of the time travel of the symptom begins with Lacan's reference to a Norbert Wiener parable in the first Seminar. There, Lacan asserts that the unconscious is made of "imaginary fixations which could not have been assimilated to the symbolic development" of the subject's history; as a result, it is "something which will be realized in the Symbolic, or, more precisely, something which, thanks to the symbolic progress which takes place in the analysis, *will have been*" [Lacan 158, qtd. in Žižek 55]. The orientation of analysis, then, is not fundamentally toward the recuperation of a past traumatic event but rather toward a future in which the islanded traumatic symptom will have been encompassed within a retrospective sense. If working through has a tense, in other words, it is the future anterior, the "will have been" that proleptically crystallizes a view of the past as seen from the vantage of the future. Žižek continues:

> The Lacanian answer to the question: From where does the repressed return? is therefore, paradoxically: From the future. Symptoms are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively— the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning […] the symptom as a "return of the repressed" is precisely such an effect which precedes its cause (its hidden kernel, its meaning), and in working through the symptom we are precisely "bringing about the past"—we are producing the symbolic reality of the past, long-forgotten traumatic events. [55-57]

The past, for Žižek, is not the locus of a truth that may be unearthed or discovered; rather, it is the artificial environment in which, or through whose construction, we return symptoms to the future from which they originate. That future, by the same token, is not a "place" from which symptoms "return" in any predetermined, unitary, or straightforward manner but the vector of analysis and working through. We could say, instead, that the future is simply *when* we will have endowed the initially meaningless trace of the symptom with a signifying frame, installing it in the plenum of an interpretation.

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3. For example, Lisa Erdman's "hysterical" symptoms precede their origin in the Babi Yar killings in D. M. Thomas's The White Hotel; the narrator of Martin Amis's Time's Arrow inhabits his perpetrator-host backward through time to the Holocaust, experiencing its historical aftermath as a premonition. In Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow the sound of the approaching V-2 rocket arrives after the rocket itself, and in Chris Marker's 1962 film La Jetée, a nuclear war seems to rupture chronology in such at way that a child may not just fantasize but actually witness what will turn out, a lifetime later, to have been his own death.

Bearing this in mind, one might observe that Žižek's account is less anachronistic, less literally preposterous, than it seems, and that despite their differences of emphasis and terminology, he and LaCapra describe a very similar process of working through that proceeds forward in time, however much it must look back both from the present and from a hypothetical future. But there is one crucial difference between Žižek's account and LaCapra's: for Žižek, the past is brought about or produced according to present interpretive requirements, whereas for LaCapra there must be limits to the malleability of the past if working through is to rehabilitate the ethical and political agency of trauma survivors in the public sphere.

Žižek's notion of the time travel of the symptom assumes that it will rendezvous with its symbolic place or signifying frame, its meaning or hidden kernel, in the future of its interpretation. However, because of its either/or structure, the nuclear condition promises no such entry into the fullness of symbolic place. The binary future it constructs will deliver either a nonevent that exposes the anticipatory symptom as a needless phantasm, or a limit-event that obliterates the symptom, the activity of interpretation, and, one could even say, the symbolic order itself. Because it offers the possibility of a future without symptoms, without a symbolic order—in other words, no future at all—the nuclear condition can, in a sense, *only* cause anticipatory symptoms; in relation to nuclear annihilation, the preposterousness of the symptom would then be site-specific, as against Žižek's generalizing account of all symptoms as returning from the future. But what Žižek writes about the anticipation of catastrophe does shed light on a survivable nuclear event, and particularly on *bukimi*, its uncanny anticipation. Discussing the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912, Žižek notes that a space had already been cleared for just such an event in the fantasy-*Zeitgeist* of the moment. This does not mean that the sinking was inevitable, the product of some technological or cultural determinism, but that a receptivity had appeared in response to its growing likelihood, one that could amplify and even sacralize its effects should it come to pass [69–71].[4] Like *bukimi*, this notion goes contrary to what is usually said of trauma, that the belatedness with which it is apprehended arises from the lack of any commensurate experience or even fantasy on the part of survivors. It suggests that traumatic aftereffects can obtain despite the event's having had a kind of precedent, even if that precedent only occurred in fantasy. This is nothing against the overwhelming immediacy or singularity of the limit event; but it does question the assumption that that event must be a sudden and totally unheralded irruption of violence into a world, or a consciousness, utterly unprepared for it. To the contrary, it suggests that a certain preparation for trauma may amplify, rather than mitigate, the ensuing post-traumatic syndrome, insofar as those undergoing the trauma have had to confront not the question "What is this?" but the more horrifying question "Is *this* the real thing, then, which I have dreaded all along? Is this *really* it?" This sense

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4. *Žižek recounts Walter Lord's description of an 1898 novel in which an enormous ocean liner named the* Titan, *loaded with rich passengers, strikes an iceberg and sinks on an April night, adding that "precisely as a shock, this sinking arrived at its proper time—'the time was waiting for it': even before it actually happened, there was already a place opened, reserved for it, in fantasy-space. It had such a terrific impact on [the] 'social imaginary' by virtue of the fact that it was expected" [69]. He goes on, however, to identify the wreck of the* Titanic *with the traumatic Real: "The* Titanic *is a Thing in the Lacanian sense: the material leftover, the materialization of the terrifying, impossible* jouissance. *By looking at the wreck we gain an insight into the forbidden domain, into a space that should be left unseen: visible fragments are a kind of coagulated remnant of the liquid flux of* jouissance, *a kind of petrified forest of enjoyment" [71]. One might observe that if, as Žižek suggests, the perennial conscription of the* Titanic *as a metaphor is an attempt to "domesticate the Thing by reducing it to its symbolic status," his own analysis repeats such a gesture at another level by turning the wreck into an exemplar of the traumatic Real, the Thing that supposedly stands outside symbolization.*

that the event manifests what was feared ahead of time may, paradoxically, be that which prevents its being registered, leaving a void, a hole—as Dori Laub puts it, a "record that has yet to be made" [57].

The notion of a preposterous traumatic symptom—of a traumatic earliness in addition to the widely recognized traumatic belatedness—aggregates around the nuclear condition, and particularly around the unique temporality of nuclear war as I have been describing it and as it has usually been imagined: as a full exchange so devastating that it leaves no aftermath in which to act out or work through trauma, no survivors to suffer the belatedness of a post-traumatic disorder. Baudrillard's "The Anorexic Ruins" (1989) engages nuclear temporality and the *hysteron proteron* of the nuclear condition in an appropriately, or at least symptomatically, antic fashion:

> *Nevertheless, do not panic. Everything has already become nuclear, faraway, vaporized. The explosion has already occurred; the bomb is only a metaphor now. What more do you want? Everything has already been wiped off the map. It is useless to dream: the* clash *has gently taken place everywhere.*
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> *The last bomb, the one no one speaks about, is the bomb that is not content to strew things in space but would strew them in time. The temporal bomb. Where it explodes, everything is suddenly blown into the past; and the greater the bomb's capacity, the further into the past they go. Look around: this explosion has already occurred. In an amnesic world like ours, everything living is projected into the past as though things had been overhastily plunged into a dimension in which the only meaning they acquire is that wrested from time by a final revolution. That is the real bomb, the bomb that immobilizes things in eerie retrogression.* [34–35]

Baudrillard offers a sort of mock consolation by upending the temporality of the nuclear condition: rather than warning of a future apocalypse, he speaks of the global nuclear event as having already occurred; if it does not quite occupy the comfortingly preconditional realm of the *toujours déjà*, it has at least been relegated to the less threatening status of *déjà*. In this gesture, Baudrillard's discourse has perhaps a greater symptomatic than constative truth. Rather than confront the preposterous temporality of the nuclear condition, in which symptoms occur in advance of a future conditional event, it banishes the imminent disaster to the past, makes a metaphor of the bomb, turns it into a sign of the *fait accompli* of late capitalist overproduction, satiation, and inertia. The nonfigural truth on which Baudrillard touches, however, is the peculiar temporality of a nuclear condition that blows its presumed aftermath—the future of the catastrophe—into the catastrophe's past, inducing proleptic symptoms through the sort of traumatized and perhaps traumatizing anticipation Sontag found in Cold War science fiction films: a phantasmatic dread of a future catastrophe, a mourning in advance of loss because the loss to come will permit no aftermath in which to mourn. Should such a catastrophe achieve its present tense, it will already be too late for the symptom.

The most compelling formulation of the unique temporality of the nuclear condition is not Baudrillard's but Derrida's in "No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missives, seven missiles)," a piece delivered at Cornell University in 1984, and appearing later that year in an issue of *Diacritics* devoted to nuclear criticism. Where Baudrillard imagines that everything is "already nuclear," Derrida cleaves, uncharacteristically, to the less counterintuitive *pas encore*. Discounting the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs as having ended a conventional war rather than initiated a nuclear one, he observes that because total nuclear war has never occurred, it exists only in talk and writing, only in discourse, its essential feature being that it is "*fabulously textual*, through

and through" [NA 23]. But the textual fable of nuclear war produces tangible enough military, economic, and geopolitical results: " 'Reality,' let's say the encompassing institution of the nuclear age, is constructed by the fable, on the basis of an event that has never happened (except in fantasy, and that is not nothing at all), an event of which one can only speak, an event whose advent remains an invention by men (in all senses of the word 'invention') or which, rather, remains to be invented" [NA 23–24]. Because it so far exists exclusively in the archive, nuclear war holds up, for Derrida at least, nothing more vividly than the possibility of the destruction of the archive:

> Now what allows us perhaps to think the uniqueness of nuclear war, its being-for-the-first-time-and-perhaps-for-the-last-time, its absolute inventiveness, what it prompts us to think even if it remains a decoy, a belief, a phantasmatic projection, is obviously the possibility of an irreversible destruction, leaving no traces, of the juridico-literary archive—that is, total destruction of the basis of literature and criticism. […] If "literature" is the name we give to the body of texts whose existence, possibility, and significance are the most radically threatened, for the first and last time, by the nuclear catastrophe, that definition allows our thought to grasp the essence of literature, its radical precariousness and the radical form of its historicity; but at the same time, literature gives us to think the totality of that which, like literature and henceforth in it, is exposed to the same threat, constituted by the same structure of historical fictionality, producing and then harboring its own referent. We may henceforth assert that the historicity of literature is contemporaneous through and through, or rather structurally indissociable, from something like a nuclear epoch. […] Literature belongs to this nuclear epoch, that of the crisis and of nuclear criticism, at least if we mean by this the historical and ahistorical horizon of an absolute self-destructibility without apocalypse, without revelation of its own truth, without absolute knowledge. [NA 26–27]

Derrida's emphasis here on the destruction of the archive rather than of human life and habitat is chilling, but only superficially because it seems to subordinate life to literature. The term "archive," for Derrida, does not just comprise the aggregate or "stockpile" of all written discourse but the juridical systems that legislate dimensions of writing's meaning: "a positive law implying authors' rights, the identification of the signatory, of the corpus, names, titles, the distinction between the original and the copy, the original and the plagiarized version, and so forth" [NA 26]. Broader still, it includes "all symbolic capacity, […] the 'movement of survival,' what I call 'survivance,' at the very heart of life" [NA 28]. The archive, then, with its effaceable self-referentiality and its fragile material, legal, and conventional bases, is imagined not as an informational repository external to the living, but as a sort of indwelling transmissibility and continuity inseparable from what can recognizably be called "life." It is that without which the survivors of a nuclear war would be unable to engage in "the symbolic work of mourning, with memory, compensation, internalization, idealization, displacement"—the functions that make catastrophe survivable [NA 28].[5]

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5. Notwithstanding Derrida's broad conception of the archive, the nuclear condition has frequently given rise to anxieties about the eradication of both the written record and its accompanying juridical and conventional contexts. Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell record that James Conant, a key figure in US atomic bomb development and an advocate of its use against heavily populated Japanese cities, later asked a librarian at Harvard to draw up "a report on books and other printed material that would constitute a record of our civilization—to be microfilmed in ten copies and buried in different places around the country. Conant explained that the atomic bomb might cause our present civilization to 'come to an end,' and we should try to avoid

"No Apocalypse, Not Now" sets out by positing the "absolute inventiveness"—the utter novelty and singularity—of a nuclear condition that makes possible the remainderless destruction of the archive, warning that "the critical zeal that leads us to recognize precedents, continuities, and repetitions at every turn can make us look like suicidal sleepwalkers, blind and deaf *alongside the unheard-of.*" This critical zeal of precedent-finding would "seek in the stockpile of history […] the wherewithal to neutralize invention, to translate the unknown into a known, to metaphorize, allegorize, domesticate the terror" [NA 21; original emphasis]. But the essay also contracts from its nuclear subject a certain strategy of rhetorical escalation, one that enlarges the scope of the nuclear condition by identifying its precedents, continuities, and repetitions, thereby performing the very domesticating gestures it has already diagnosed as a pathological deadening of the senses in the face of the nuclear condition's dire singularity. Having described all symbolic capacity as an archive whose irreversible annihilation is now thinkable, Derrida suggests that literature has, in fact, been incapable of thinking anything but this possibility of its annihilation. Though he remarks that it need not take the form of nuclear catastrophe, the "remainderless and a-symbolic destruction of literature" toward which the nuclear condition beckons is "the only referent that is absolutely real […] the only 'subject' of all possible literature, of all possible criticism, its only ultimate and a-symbolic referent"—the referent to end all reference [NA 28]. Resonating with the futurity of the Lacanian symptom, these claims imply that all literature exists in a future anterior relation to its own utter effacement, striving to "assimilate that unassimilable wholly other": not just loss but the loss of loss, the termination of the capacity to symbolize, circumscribe, and thus recover from loss, the loss of the very aftermath of loss. We should remember, however, that this absolutely real referent, at least insofar as it can be associated with the nuclear condition, has already been identified in the essay as "fabulously textual," existing only in discourse, not yet in experience. That the essay preserves the nuclear condition's fabulous textuality by rewriting the nuclear war the US waged in 1945 against Japan as "conventional" may reveal something about its allergy to historically discrete events and phenomena, an allergy it also exhibits in finding that the absolutely real referent of all possible literature, all possible criticism, is a web of archival traces. The road through what had appeared to be the absolutely inventive threat, temporality, and deadlock specific to the nuclear condition leads back to nothing less pervasive than *différance*.

Despite having asserted "the uniqueness of nuclear war, its being-for-the-first-time-and-perhaps-for-the-last-time, its absolute inventiveness," "No Apocalypse" ultimately performs what one might call the Derridean move par excellence: the transumption of what has been offered as an extreme condition, limit case, or singularity to the preconditional status of *toujours déjà*—that which has always already been infrastructural to signification. After describing the nuclear condition as terminal, epochal, absolute, its "apocalypse without revelation" threatening the annihilation of the symbolic order, Derrida arrogates this condition to the general case of modern literature (that is, one whose project "cannot be shown to antedate the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries"):

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what happened when Rome fell and almost all written records were lost. . ." *[226–27]. I would suggest that the furor that arose in 1996 when the writings of* hibakusha *poet Araki Yasusada were discovered to be forgeries owed partly to the preview the forgeries gave of a writing in the wake of the destruction of the juridico-literary archive. It was less a case of an author who had been metaphorically vaporized or disappeared into discourse in kinship with the real atomic bomb victims (one defense of the Yasusada texts) than of a literature that behaved as if it had survived the nuclear annihilation of the archive, and particularly of its conventions of attribution, authorial identity, authenticity, originality, testimony, and internal self-reference [see Yasusada].*

> *In what I am here calling in another sense an absolute epoch, literature comes to life and can only experience its own precariousness, its death menace and its essential finitude. The movement of its inscription is the very possibility of its effacement. Thus one cannot be satisfied with saying that, in order to become serious and interesting today, a literature and a literary criticism must refer to the nuclear issue, must even be obsessed by it. This has to be said, and it is true. But I believe also that, at least indirectly, they have always done this. Literature has always belonged to the nuclear epoch, even if it does not talk "seriously" about it. And in truth I believe that the nuclear epoch is dealt with more "seriously" in texts by Mallarmé, of Kafka, of Joyce, for example, than in present-day novels that would offer direct and realistic descriptions of a "real" nuclear catastrophe.* [NA 27–28]

Where Baudrillard announces that everything has already become nuclear, "No Apocalypse" implies that literature, at least since the Enlightenment, has never not been nuclear, adding that literature dealt more "seriously" with the nuclear referent before the invention of the atomic bomb and then as precondition rather than as topic. Literature, that is, deals seriously with the nuclear condition not through depictions of the nuclear event and its aftermath but by a more general recognition that "the movement of [literature's] inscription is the very possibility of its effacement" [NA 27]. If the nuclear epoch does not begin for literature with the advent of the bomb, one might assume that literature would not *stop* belonging to the nuclear epoch in the wake of the Cold War context that saturates "No Apocalypse" and the nuclear criticism it helped initiate; surely the movement of literature's inscription inheres no less in the possibility of its effacement now that phrases like "Mutually Assured Destruction" and "nuclear holocaust" have begun, for many, to sound dated. But Derrida's work has never dealt with the nuclear condition—at least not in the nonserious manner of a topic—since "No Apocalypse," all but conceding by its silence that the nuclear epoch really is over. Either that, or the enduring nuclear epoch is legible only in figural traces, perhaps in Derrida's more recent discussions of the archive as haunted from its origin by "its iterability, that is to say, its immanent divisibility, the possibility of its fission," and of "a series of cleavages that will divide every atom in our lexicon" when we grapple with the concept of the archive [*Archive* 100, 1]. In the latter, more likely case, such tropes seem to affirm a series of gestures made in "No Apocalypse, Not Now": the fissioning of the nuclear condition, its dispersal within the transhistorical space of the archive, its absorption into a general account of writing through the nullification of its traumatic singularity.
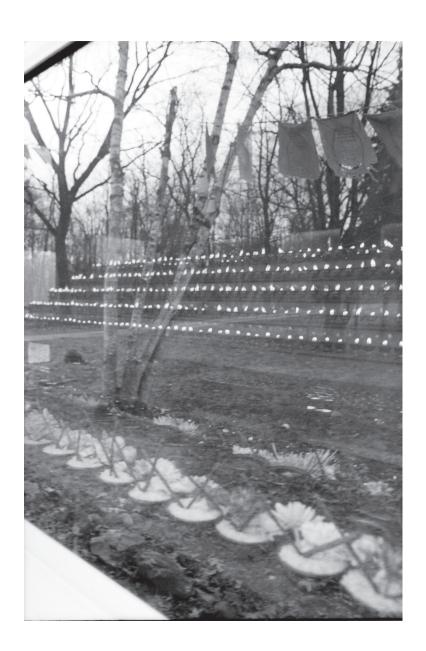
As I suggested earlier of Baudrillard's "The Anorexic Ruins," however, certain claims in "No Apocalypse, Not Now" may be far more suggestive in their symptomatic or performative dimension than in their constative one. According to LaCapra, one common symptom of traumatization is the tendency to see the trauma everywhere, to reduce or ascribe all phenomena to it, to conflate the trauma with history, ontology, signification, to construe it as general rather than as exceptional, structural rather than ruptural.[6] Like Baudrillard's "already nuclear," the apparently hyperbolic pronouncements in

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6. LaCapra is writing about Cathy Caruth's essay "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History": "What is unclear in Caruth's approach is whether trauma not only is postulated as the condition of possibility of history but tends to be generalized and conflated with history. This uncertainty may itself perhaps be seen as a symptom of post-traumatic stress in which the recognition of a crucial problem (both the prevalent role of trauma in history and trauma as a possibility that may unexpectedly happen at any time in history) is rendered in a hyperbolic fashion that seems to equate history and trauma" [Representing 14n10].

Derrida's essay (for example, that all modern literature belongs to a centuries-long nuclear epoch, that the nuclear condition beckons toward the only absolutely real referent of literature and literary criticism) may not persuade as formulations, but as extravagant and perhaps deliberately staged symptoms of a pretraumatic nuclear syndrome they are powerful. How, they ask, can the subject living in the future conditional shadow of the symbolic order's annihilation help but see that possible Armageddon as the absolute yet unutterable referent of all discourse? It may be that the central project, or at least the central achievement, of Derrida's essay is not to establish nuclear war as the transcendental referent of all literature but to perform a pretraumatic syndrome in relation to nuclear war, a syndrome whose chief symptom is the elevation of nuclear war to a transcendental and unspeakable status. The essay's parody of the sermon, its gnomic and exegetical statements, its formal resemblances and references to the Book of Revelation—all these replicate the way in which a pretraumatic syndrome, as much as a post-traumatic one, may elevate the trauma to the status of the sublime or sacred, categories that share with trauma the quality of incommensurability with the quotidien. In this respect, "No Apocalypse, Not Now" is very seriously engaged with the particularities of the nuclear condition as seen from the mid-1980s, but in neither of the ways it imagines literary texts may "deal with" the nuclear referent (that is, as topic and as enabling structural aporia). Instead, it takes seriously the capacity of the nuclear condition to afflict its inhabitants with an anticipatory syndrome, one of whose symptoms is the radical hyperbolization of a future conditional catastrophe whose eventuality will either be meiotically defused, or realized on a scale commensurate, after all, with the wildest hyperbole.

Dubbing all modern literature "nuclear" insofar as its writing necessarily anticipates its effacement, Derrida's essay forgoes the possibility that criticism might identify more circumscribed literary anticipations of the nuclear condition without falling into the "suicidal sleepwalking" of diluting or overgeneralizing that condition. In the second half of this essay, I propose to take up Derrida's claim that pre–1945 literature might "seriously" address the nuclear condition, while distancing myself from his conflation of the nuclear condition with the general condition of literature since 1600. The *bukimi* experienced in Hiroshima before August 6, 1945, will serve as a touchstone in my discussion of nuclear premonition: without lessening the traumatic singularity of the atomic explosion, *bukimi* demonstrates how an unprecedented event is nonetheless susceptible to a nonmagical anticipation and furthermore how the uncanniness of that anticipation, its eerie suspension between event and nonevent, might intensify rather than weaken the ensuing trauma. If *bukimi* registered the opening of the conditional space of a particular nuclear catastrophe, one might posit the emergence of a more diffuse nuclear uncanny during the decades before Hiroshima, decades that not only saw the technological preconditions for atomic weapons appear alongside cultural premonitions about the bomb, but witnessed other equally crucial openings toward the nuclear future in the rise of the massive aerial bombardment of civilian populations and the decreasing time it took to raze an entire city with conventional bombs. Derrida describes the work of Mallarmé, Kafka, and Joyce as dealing "seriously" with the nuclear epoch. Though for reasons different from Derrida's, I will focus on the ways Joyce's *Ulysses* bears witness to the opening of the conditional space, not just of catastrophe in general, but of the wartime erasure of cities that was to culminate in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and whose legacy was the Cold War reconceptualization of the city as a space whose daily security and continuity were guaranteed by the possibility of its annihilation. In Žižek's terms, this will mean regarding the Cold War as the future from which the symptom *Ulysses* returned to the wartime and interwar period of its writing. The nuclear epoch, in other words, was the future in which certain elements of Joyce's novel would cease to be meaningless traces and enter into the fullness of a condition they had

variously forecast, courted, dreaded, safeguarded against, and warded off all along.

Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) will seem an odd text to set in any sort of relation to the nuclear condition. One would think that the advent of atomic weapons is among the historical developments that separate us from rather than join us to Joyce, who died in 1941. Of all his books, only the last, *Finnegans Wake* (1939), would seem even proleptically "nuclear," insofar as it enacts what it calls the "abnihilisation of the etym" [*FW* 353.22]—both the fission of the word and its fusion out of the atomized near-nothingness that results. The *Wake* is also the most futuristic of Joyce's major works, anticipating a fratricidal war in which "Television kills telephony in brothers' broil" [*FW* 52.18]; it even contains what looks to be a forecast of nuclear holocaust, asking, "The end? Say it with missiles then" [*FW* 115.2–3]. Compared to *Finnegans Wake*, the earlier novel seems downright back-ward-looking, set as it is in 1904, eighteen years before its publication. *Ulysses* will seem an oblique and unlikely symptom of the nuclear condition, too, given the long list of more obvious choices: science fiction writers had been vividly imagining nuclear weapons since 1914, in H. G. Wells's *The World Set Free*, and genocidal superweapons since 1898 at the latest, in Garrett Serviss's *Edison's Conquest of Mars*. Against these dire forecasts, Joyce's novel can seem expansive, jokey, optimistic—interested, that is, in comic rather than apocalyptic forms of expectation and discharge. If one is looking for a historically circumscribed anticipation of the nuclear condition, surely one ought to begin with writers whose work more gravely and more directly addressed the techno-logical viability, the political leverage, and the moral and eschatological ramifications of a weapon that could incinerate a city.

If *Ulysses* does not engage the coming nuclear condition through concrete forecast, however, it is nonetheless marked by an unfocused but central foreboding, one whose lack of an apocalyptic referent amplifies rather than diminishes its *bukimi*, its sense of uncanny anticipation, of being singled out for a still unrevealed end. Though the means to that comic or apocalyptic end remain unspecified in the text, Joyce was on one occa-sion able to give a sense of scope to the future conditional terminus the book registered. While writing *Ulysses*, he told his friend Frank Budgen that he aimed "to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book" [Budgen 67–68]. Until recently, this remark has done little more than trigger debates about the nature and success of the book's encyclo-pedic documentarism. These debates have tended to ratify the comic reading of *Ulysses* by anointing the book itself as the integral thing whose creation is awaited over so many pages, the punchline to the joke of the vanished or vanishing city. But scholars have lately begun to pay attention to the catastrophic event—the disappearance of the real city—that Joyce imagined would validate his efforts to capture Dublin in his book [Fairhall 194–95; Duffy 123–25]. Written between 1914 and 1921, *Ulysses* took shape during years of warfare that bore witness not just to mass death on the battlefield but to what were, at least in major European cities, unprecedented levels of destructive vio-lence against civilians and nonmilitary structures. Despite being set in 1904 and sharing none of science fiction's interest in extrapolating possible futures from present techno-logical forecasts, Joyce's book bears traces of certain diegetically future events that marked the years of its writing. *Ulysses* might be said, then, to embody a kind of trau-matic earliness with respect to the events of 1914–18, exhibiting an array of pretraumatic symptoms thanks to its anxious depictions and expectations of disaster and, above all, to the privileged retrospective vantage of its author. But in its concern to document a city it imagines might vanish, *Ulysses* looks not just into the wartime years of its writing but ahead to what the Great War's zeppelin and bomber raids themselves adumbrated:

the utter devastation of cities and incineration of civilian populations by aerial bombardment just before and during World War II, such that the names of cities like Guernica, Lübeck, Hamburg, Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki have become metonyms, not for those cities' structures or cultures or citizenry, but for their annihilation.[7] In the face of such past and future disasters, Joyce's novel manifested a new motivation, even compulsion, in cultural production: to archive the city against the growing likelihood of its erasure.[8]

Still, even if we accept Joyce's own suggestion that the text works against the eventuality of a city's vanishing, we might observe that there are many ways a city can vanish: through wartime violence, yes, but also through natural disaster, through catastrophic projects of urban renewal such as Haussmannization, through more gradual development, demolition, and decay, and through the natural death of a generation of its citizens. *Ulysses*'s embrace of the everyday would seem to favor a gradualist view of urban change. Walking through Dublin's central shopping district on his way to lunch in the book's "Lestrygonians" episode, Leopold Bloom meditates on the incremental turnover of the city's population, set against the backdrop of both its slowly corroding physical structures and the property forms that enable their transfer from one generation to the next.

> *Cityful passing away, other cityful coming, passing away too: other coming on, passing on. Houses, lines of houses, streets, miles of pavements, piledup bricks, stones. Changing hands. This owner, that. Landlord never dies they say. Other steps into his shoes when he gets his notice to quit. They buy the place up with gold and still they have all the gold. Swindle in it somewhere. Piled up in cities, worn away age after age. Pyramids in sand. Built on bread and onions. Slaves Chinese wall. Babylon. Big stones left. Round towers. Rest rubble, sprawling suburbs, jerrybuilt. Kerwan's mushroom houses built of breeze. Shelter for the night.*
>
> *No-one is anything.* [*U* 8.484–93]

Even in Bloom's rather gentle and regenerative vision of the city, however, exploitation and ruins predominate. In the later and more violent "Cyclops" episode, a Jacob's biscuit tin thrown after Bloom by the irate "Citizen" triggers an interpolated mock-news report of an earthquake or meteor strike that devastates the center of Dublin; as we will see, similar fantasies of urban disaster, rather than the stately "passing away" imagined by Bloom, will dominate the later chapters of *Ulysses*.

> *The catastrophe was terrific and instantaneous in its effect. […] The epicentre appears to have been that part of the metropolis which constitutes the Inn's Quay ward and parish of Saint Michan covering a surface of fortyone acres, two roods and one square pole or perch. All the lordly residences in the vicinity of the palace of justice were demolished and that noble edifice itself, in*

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7. *For related reasons, I would hazard that the word "city" itself now carries a permanent connotation of "wartime bombing target" for generations who remember World War II and the Cold War, by dint of its repetition within the discursive contexts of strategic bombing and, later, nukespeak ("city trading," "city busting," "no-cities strategy," etc.).*

8. *In this, I would add, Joyce's novel is not alone, but joined by a host of interwar city texts and city films whose urban documentarism has a kindred archiving impulse against the erasability of the city. Some prominent examples include Virginia Woolf's* Mrs. Dalloway *(1925) and Alfred Döblin's* Berlin Alexanderplatz *(1929), and the "city symphony" films of the 1920s such as Walter Ruttmann's* Berlin: Symphony of a Great City *(1927) and Dziga Vertov's* The Man with the Movie Camera *(1929).*

which at the time of the catastrophe important legal debates were in progress,
is literally a mass of ruins beneath which it is to be feared all the occupants
have been buried alive. […] Other eyewitnesses depose that they observed an
incandescent object of enormous proportions hurtling through the atmosphere
at a terrifying velocity in a trajectory directed southwest by west. […] The
work of salvage, removal of débris, *human remains etc has been entrusted to*
Messrs T. and C. Martin […] [*U* 12.1858-90]

Enda Duffy [123-24] has noted the similarity of this vision to photographs of the center of Dublin in the wake of the Easter 1916 Rising ("Cyclops" was written in 1918 and 1919). Shortly before the Rising, one of its leaders, Padraic Pearse, had imagined annihilation as a favorable alternative to continued British occupation: "My God, rather than go on living as we are, I would prefer to see Dublin in ruins" [Caulfield 47]. Pearse was, at least partly, to have his way. Lobbing incendiaries and explosives in through the roofs and windows of buildings occupied by the insurgents, the British gunners gutted portions of the Dublin city center; during the week of the Rising, 500 people died and 2500 were wounded, most of them civilians cut down by crossfire [Jeffery 51]. Duffy observes that the itinerary taken by a procession of saints in one of the same episode's earlier interpolations—"Nelson's Pillar, Henry street, Mary street, Capel street, Little Britain street" [*U* 12.1720–21]—names some of the streets hit heaviest by British shells, and that even the brand identity of the biscuit tin hurled by the Citizen preposterously commemorates the rebels' use of the Jacobs factory as a stronghold in 1916 [124]. The mock-tragic, inflationary tone in which "Cyclops" delivers its vision of urban catastrophe might be read as an ugly levity in the face of the spectacle of mass death, or as an attempt to master the experience of disaster by belittling the officialese that flourishes in its aftermath. But the jarring interruption of the episode's main narrative by passages of comic rhetorical excess replicates, rather than belittles, the sudden irruption of violence into the daily life of the metropolis, performing both the incommensurateness of traumatic violence with the everyday and the absurdity of attempts to domesticate that violence through the shopworn rhetorical conventions of reportage. If *Ulysses* is at once an epic and a comic celebration of the quotidien, it also attests to the more frequent and extreme outbreaks of traumatic violence in everyday urban life and to the fact that in the early-twentieth-century imaginary, the city had begun to host new forms of sudden mass death and severe physical destruction.

Cities had, of course, been sites of mass death before 1916. But the Easter Rising differed from nineteenth-century urban barricade fighting in the use, principally by British soldiers, of more precise and destructive weapons; fired from the ground, from rooftops, and from gunships in the Liffey, the new cannons, incendiaries, and machine guns rapidly reduced whole blocks of the city center to ruins. These emerging military technologies and strategies link the Rising to the Great War then raging in England and on the Continent, whose fields and cities had become proving grounds for new weaponry and modes of warfare. In *Ireland and the Great War*, Keith Jeffery writes that "Like the Western Front [the Easter Rising] became a war of attrition, and the lessons of the Western Front were taught again in the streets of Dublin" [50]. Inexperienced fighters on both sides attacked shoulder-to-shoulder, in the manner of nineteenth-century infantry, and were slaughtered by the new weapons; those who survived dug in and adopted guerrilla tactics, the Irish even digging and defending trenches in St. Stephen's Green against British rooftop snipers [Jeffery 50–51]. For many who witnessed its aftermath, the Rising evoked the images of cities ruined in the War. Shortly after the Rising was put down, one Dublin resident wrote, "I have just returned from walking round the GPO and Sackville Street. If you look at pictures of Yprès or Louvain after the bombardment

it will give you some idea of the scene" [Norway 68, qtd. in Jeffery 45]. One souvenir picture postcard published in Belfast and depicting the devastation along Sackville Street bore the caption "Yprès on the Liffey." If scenes of urban catastrophe in "Cyclops" seem a proleptic memory of the Easter Rising, they also, by extension, commemorate the destroyed towns and cities of the Great War in the midst of which the Rising occurred. Such commemoration supports Robert Spoo's contention that parts of *Ulysses* are so saturated with the wartime context of its writing as to bear comparison with the poems of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon [107].

Though the shelling of Dublin in 1916 reminded observers of Yprès, Louvain, and other European cities ruined in the Great War, it might as credibly have called to mind a different list: Canton, Kagoshima, and Alexandria. During the second half of the nineteenth century, British naval bombardments made rubble of these coastal cities, of which only Kagoshima was defended. The naval bombardment of undefended cities and civilians, particularly those in colonial territories, paved the way for the first airplane bombardments, in which the imperial powers of Europe dropped bombs on nonwhite, non-European adversaries and anticolonial forces. Italy pioneered airplane bombardment in 1911 by bombing Arab oases outside Tripoli; British planes bombed Pathans in India in 1915, Egyptian revolutionaries and the Sultan of Farfur in 1916, a Mashud uprising on the Indian-Afghanistan border in 1917, and Somaliland and the Afghan cities of Dacca, Jalalabad, and Kabul in 1919 [Lindqvist 42–43].[9] Several years before the inhabitants of European cities experienced it, aerial bombardment had been established as a uniquely colonial nightmare. As Sven Lindqvist has shown, the initial use of airplane bombs against colonies was foreseen and even fed by a racist fantasy pervading early-twentieth-century European science fiction, a fantasy of bombing subject races either into submission or out of existence.[10] In 1907, forty-four nations had signed Hague Convention Article 25, prohibiting "the attack or bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings which are undefended."[11] The willingness of several signatory nations to ignore Article 25 when bombing nonwhite soldiers and civilians made colonial towns and cities the first civilian spaces secured by the implied threat of bombardment from above.

In the world war during which much of *Ulysses* was written, however, the brief tenure of aerial bombardment as an exclusively colonial technique ended when imperial powers launched the first bombing campaigns against the cities of other imperial powers, initiating a change that would later find its apogee in the nuclear condition: the reconfiguration of the major metropolis as target. The bombing of cities began just a few weeks into the war, when a German dirigible dropped 1800 pounds of shrapnel bombs on the undefended city of Antwerp, killing 12 civilians [Norman 346]. Paris was

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9. *Lindqvist's superb* A History of Bombing *is divided into 399 brief, numbered, chronologically arranged sections. Readers make their way through the book along 22 thematically oriented narratives, with each numbered section directing readers to the next section in the narrative to which it belongs. Though the narratives move for the most part chronologically, they occasionally leap ahead and then back again, or the reverse, as if the text were registering the power of the traumatic events it discusses (Kagoshima, Chechaouen, Dresden, Hiroshima) to shatter chronological hierarchies, to spatialize time. The adjacency of numbered sections belonging to thematically disjunct narratives seems likewise to reflect, through form, both the disorientation that ensues from bombing and the disconnected experiences of bombers and the bombed.*

10. *See Lindqvist's discussion [22–25, 29–31] of Samuel W. Odell's* The Last War, or the Triumph of the English Tongue *(1898), Robert W. Coles's* The Struggle for Empire *(1900), J. Hamilton Sedberry's* Under the Flag of the Cross *(1908), and Jack London's "The Unparalleled Invasion" (1910).*

11. *Notably, Germany, France, Japan, and Russia did not sign the 1907 Hague Convention [Lindqvist 26].*

bombed three days later, and in May 1915 a zeppelin dropped the first German bombs on London, killing 7 people, injuring 35, and setting fires described by the commander of the retreating vessel as "a gorgeous arch of firelight flickering in the sky above the city" [Norman 356–58]. Far more destructive than the zeppelin raids, however, were bombing missions flown by German Gotha bombers. In July 1917, Lovat Fraser wrote in the London *Times*, "If I were asked what event of the last year has been of the most significance to the future of humanity, I should reply that it is not the Russian Revolution, nor even the stern intervention of the United States in a sacred cause, but the appearance of a single German aeroplane flying at high noon over London last November" [qtd. in Kern 310]. The first plane to drop bombs on London did little enough damage, but it heralded an escalation in the severity and effectiveness of German aerial bombing through the switch from zeppelin to airplane delivery. Over the course of the war, bombs dropped on English cities and towns by German planes and dirigibles killed 1414 people and injured 3416. The British, French, and Americans, for their part, killed 641 and wounded twice that number in the twenty-two German cities they bombed; a US survey of Allied aerial bombing prepared after the war conceded that the German casualties "may not be considered very important, inasmuch as most of these were civilians," but went on to remark that bombing civilian populations and structures could damage the enemy's industrial and military morale while diverting enemy resources to help bombing casualties and their dependents [Crane 14]. With the area bombing of civilians now a thinkable means of terrorizing and demoralizing enemy states, the conceptual bases had been laid for the far more destructive and indiscriminate area bombing that the British and Americans, in particular, would favor during World War II. The city had become a place where, among other things, one was likelier to be killed by falling bombs—or, as *Ulysses* puts it, in a patchwork of Blake fragments, by "Time's livid final flame," accompanied by the "ruin of all space, shattered glass, and toppling masonry" [*U* 15.4244–45].

This language occurs at an apocalyptic moment in the "Circe" chapter of *Ulysses*, but is introduced in the book's second episode, "Nestor," which Joyce completed in November 1917 [Ellmann 419; Spoo 106]. By then, Joyce and his family had been living for more than two years in Zurich, having left their former home in Austro-Hungarian Trieste in 1915. Italy had entered the war in May of that year, and, as Trieste was a military objective—not only an important port, but the "City of Desire" in *Italia irredenta*, to be redeemed from five centuries of Austro-Hungarian rule—military authorities ordered a partial evacuation of the city. As British citizens, Joyce and his family had to decamp, arranging to leave for neutral Switzerland in late June; by then, they and the rest of Trieste's inhabitants had endured daily artillery fire and four air raids by Italian planes [Ellmann 383]. The Joyces' departure from Trieste for Zurich had been precipitated by the kind of cannonading and aerial bombardment of cities that would escalate over the course of the war, and even the early chapters of *Ulysses* bear traces of their author's evacuation from one of modern aerial warfare's early target cities. As is typical with *Ulysses*, however, the traces of contemporaneity are transmitted covertly, as if on the carrier wave of more historically remote references. "Nestor" opens with Stephen Dedalus's history lesson on Pyrrhus's costly victory at Asculum in 279 BC. A student's blank stare in response to a question triggers Stephen's meditation on history, memory, and apocalypse: "Fabled by the daughters of memory. And yet it was in some way if not as memory fabled it. A phrase, then, of impatience, thud of Blake's wings of excess. I hear the ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry and time one livid final flame. What's left us then?" [*U* 2.7–10]. While the passage mobilizes fragments from Blake's work—from *A Vision of the Last Judgement*, with its eschatological visions of "a Great City on fire" [*Writings* 608] and from *The Marriage of Heaven and*

Hell, with its profession that "the world will be consumed by fire at the end of six thousand years" [*Poems* 187]—it does so in the context not of a theological apocalypse but of a military one. While the diegetic level of the text revolves around Pyrrhus and the battle of Asculum, the episode's Homeric subtext, Telemakhos's visit to Nestor to learn of Odysseus's whereabouts, invokes the siege, sack, and destruction of Troy and the subsequent trials and disasters that awaited the homegoing Greeks. In alluding to ruined Ilium, "Nestor" reminds that the wily Odysseus was not just "long enduring" and the "canniest of men" but the architect of the Trojan horse and a "raider of cities"; his subsequent wanderings may undergird the archival preservation of Dublin through *Ulysses*, but in Homer they occur in the shadow of the city he helped to raze. Stephen's shards of Blake and his trauma survivor's question "What's left us then?" commemorate not only burned Troy but bombed Trieste and another bombed and burning city Blake seemed elsewhere [*Poems* 195] to have foreseen: "The fire, the fire, is falling! / Look up! look up! O citizen of London, enlarge thy countenance[!]"

The Dublin of *Ulysses* is conserved through, and not only against, the possibility of its own burning. If Joyce's novel is concerned to give a complete picture of the city, that concern is knit up with recurrent spectacles of the city's destruction—by that which would make the textual double or surrogate of the city all that is "left us." We have already seen one example of such a spectacle in the earthquake-meteor-strike in "Cyclops," but the most extravagant staging of urban apocalypse occurs in "Circe," in the run-up to Stephen's being struck by the jingoist British soldier, Private Carr:

DISTANT VOICES

Dublin's burning! Dublin's burning! On fire, on fire!

> (*Brimstone fires spring up. Dense clouds roll past. Heavy Gatling guns boom. Pandemonium. Troops deploy. Gallop of hoofs. Artillery. Hoarse commands. Bells clang. Backers shout. Drunkards bawl. Whores screech. Foghorns hoot. Cries of valour. Shrieks of dying. Pikes clash on cuirasses. Thieves rob the slain. […] The midnight sun is darkened. The earth trembles. The dead of Dublin from Prospect and Mount Jerome in white sheepskin overcoats and black goatfell cloaks arise and appear to many. A chasm opens with a noiseless yawn. […] Factory lasses with fancy clothes toss redhot Yorkshire baraabombs. Society ladies lift their skirts above their heads to protect themselves. Laughing witches in red cutty sarks ride through the air on broomsticks. […]*) [*U* 15.4659–79]

This passage is a jumble of historical, theological, and cultural referents, equal parts Armageddon, Last Judgment, *Walpurgisnacht*, World War, Easter Rising, 1798 Rebellion, suffragist and proletarian revolution, and horror film. The comic energy with which these elements are brought together interferes with the presumed gravity of the apocalypse they describe, inviting the reader to enjoy the spectacle of the Last End as bravado prose performance or as comic pastiche. Such an enjoyment recalls Sontag's analysis of the Cold War monster movie as an "aesthetics of destruction" that, for all its comically heterogeneous traits, acts out a mass traumatization the genre may or may not also work to exorcise. Part of what is enjoyable about this exaggerated "wrecking" of the city the text has been at pains to conserve is the implicit reassurance that the book-city, at least, is "still there," its spatial and institutional matrices, the names of its streets and shops and citizens carefully preserved in other, less paroxysmal parts of the text; this, again, is

the comic reading in which the fact of the book is what closes the fissure the reader opens in traversing the book. There is the sense, too, that nothing has "really" been wrecked, that the text is simply dreaming of or playing at a pantomime Armageddon it describes, after all, in an impossible genre: as stage directions for an unperformable play. Such passages, then, might well function as survival strategies—as ways of working through the past experience of trauma, or warding off its eventuality, through the sense of mastery afforded by imitative play.

The penultimate chapter of *Ulysses*, however, is much less concerned with representing catastrophe, to whatever end, than with acknowledging its eventuality or inevitability in the future, and thus its role in structuring preapocalyptic experience. "Ithaca" is written in a catechetical form whose questions do not so much extract answers as knowingly anticipate them, its call and response dancing a prescripted *pas de deux* on the harmony and release of homecoming. Yet in Homer, the *nostos* is gory as much as restorative, a cold-blooded slaughter of the suitors and unfaithful servants by Odysseus and Telemakhos, as if the raider of cities had made a mini-Troy of his home. Though "Ithaca" displaces the Homeric violence into its less kinetic registers, it remains nonetheless preoccupied with violent visions of the end: "the deluge" [*U* 17.749], "a submerged, petrified city" [17.1975], "decimating epidemics: catastrophic cataclysms which make terror the basis of human mentality: seismic upheavals the epicentres of which are located in densely populated regions" [17.1003–05], "sublunary disasters" [17.1152], "holocaust" [17.2051], "Armageddon" [17.2056], "a cataclysmic annihilation of the planet in consequence of a collision with a dark sun" [17.2181-82]. The episode's encyclopedia of last things makes Revelation, rather than the *Odyssey*, its chief intertext. Bloom's and Stephen's simultaneous vision of a "heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit" [*U* 17.1039], conjures up a last serene moment before the end of history as Revelation 6:13 imagines it: "and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when it is shaken by a gale." Revelation favors inventory as much as the *Odyssey* does, and a catalogue of the goods of Rome, called "Babylon," precedes a description of the great city's razing by an angel "in one hour." The burning of Rome seems to precipitate the descent from heaven of the holy city of Jerusalem, along with a rehearsal of its dimensions and the materials of which it is built; as in *Ulysses* generally, the archiving of the city occurs in response to its coming destruction, while also constituting the possibility of its resurrection. The whole of "Ithaca," with its drive to list and tabulate and compute, occurs in the shadow of the following apocalyptic exchange:

> *What events might nullify these calculations [of Stephen's and Bloom's relative ages]?*

> *The cessation of existence of both or either, the inauguration of a new era or calendar, the annihilation of the world and consequent extermination of the human species, inevitable but impredictable.* [*U* 17.462–65]

Even when offered as speculation, this irruption of apocalyptic scale and finality into the domestic setting of "Ithaca" flings into a momentary abyss two characters whose communion the chapter is supposed, if only briefly and imperfectly, to enact. As vividly as Homer's description of the slaughter of the suitors, such moments in "Ithaca" forge a connection between domicile and radical violence, even obliteration; they insist that every Ithaca may host, beget, even become, an Ilium.

Joyce maintained that the end of "Ithaca" was the true end of *Ulysses*, with the final "Penelope" episode serving as a kind of coda or postlude [*Letters* 172]. As I noted earlier, *Ulysses*'s premonition of apocalypse—its "ecstasy of catastrophe" [*U* 17.786]—

does not identify a single referent. The final lines of "Ithaca," however, despite their seemingly quotidien project of seeing a tired man off to sleep, simultaneously suggest a vision of a cataclysmic finality that comes from the sky:

Womb? Weary?
He rests. He has travelled.

With?
Sinbad the Sailor and Tinbad the Tailor and Jinbad the Jailer and Whinbad the Whaler and Ninbad the Nailer and Finbad the Failer and Binbad the Bailer and Pinbad the Pailer and Minbad the Mailer and Hinbad the Hailer and Rinbad the Railer and Dinbad the Kailer and Vinbad the Quailer and Linbad the Yailer and Xinbad the Phthailer.

When?
Going to a dark bed there was a square round Sinbad the Sailor roc's auk's egg in the night of the bed of all the auks of the rocs of Darkinbad the Brightdayler.

Where?
•

The last two responses tend to be read as a transcript of Bloom's thoughts as his mind chants itself to sleep, seizing on data from earlier in the day (his recollections of a song lyric he had intended but failed to complete for an 1892 Christmas pantomime of *Sinbad the Sailor*, which featured characters named Tinbad and Whinbad) and ringing somnolent changes on them until they loosen, first into babble, then into oblivion [see Gifford 606]. But Bloom's variation on sheep counting makes a more than incidental use of the figure of Sinbad, for whom both help and devastation could come from the air [see Blankenship 194]. In his second voyage, as *Arabian Nights* recounts it, Sinbad sails to an island where he discovers a giant white dome that turns out to be the egg of a roc, an enormous bird. When the parent bird returns to sit on the egg, Sinbad ties himself to one of the bird's legs with his turban and is eventually flown up and deposited in a diamond-studded valley populated by serpents. Having spent the night in a serpent's cave, he fills his pockets with diamonds, attaches himself to the underside of an animal corpse, and is airlifted out of the valley by another scavenging roc. The rocs reappear in Sinbad's fifth journey, when his traveling companions find a roc's egg about to hatch, break it open with stones, and kill and roast the baby roc. The roc's avenging parents pick up boulders in their beaks and drop them on the perpetrators' fleeing ship, annihilating the ship and its crew with the exception of Sinbad, who survives and later washes up on an island. The enlarged fullstop that ends "Ithaca" is the inkblot of sleep [Briggs 127] but also a receding object (perhaps the city of Dublin, from which "Ithaca" constitutes a long goodbye) as seen by an airborne eye and the retaliative boulder as it drops in what must be one of the first aerial bombardments in imaginative literature. It tropes extinction, too, in the passage's reference to the great auk, a flightless seabird hunted out of existence by 1844 for its feathers and meat, for its usefulness as fishbait, for the oil its flesh yielded, and for the large, highly collectible single egg it laid.[12] As we have come to

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12. *The great auk not only became extinct in 1844 but quickly came to symbolize the phenomenon of species extinction, particularly at the hands of human beings. But while the great auk was finished by human specimen collectors, who killed the last two adult birds as they were incubating their egg on Eldey Island, the bird's demise was hastened by natural catastrophe as well: by the submergence of its primary habitat in the Geirfuglasker Skerries as a result of volcanic activity.*

expect with the spatialized chronology of traumatic literature, and particularly with *Ulysses*'s complex temporality, the final lines of "Ithaca" go back to events in both the remote and the recent past to find symptoms of some unnamed catastrophe that is still to come. And because *Ulysses* grants us no access to its aftermath—no passage to June 17, 1904—the terminal dot of "Ithaca" is, finally, the vanishing point on a temporal horizon we cannot breach.

Yet, while the actions of *Ulysses* open out into no tangible diegetic future, the novel is in other respects powerfully bent toward the future anterior tense that Lacan and Žižek ally with the symptom. This proleptic orientation is most spectacular in a certain havoc the text plays with the archive that precedes it—the stockpile of newspapers, directories, maps, tables, schedules, rumors, ephemera, and apocrypha that Joyce consulted in writing *Ulysses,* and which the text aims at once to augment and to antagonize. The replication of so much of this archive in *Ulysses* leads its readers to half-expect that the book's central characters will also have been mined from the same archive and that their archival traces will be excavable. But when we open the *Thom's Official Directory for the Year 1904* that confirms so many of the novel's peripheral figures as having "actually" lived in Dublin at the addresses *Ulysses* gives them, we find no trace of Leopold, Molly, or Millicent Bloom, nor of Stephen, Simon, Boody, Katey, Maggy, or Dilly Dedalus, none of Buck Mulligan or Blazes Boylan. *Ulysses*'s documentarism is in most respects so unswerving that it seems less likely these figures are fictions than that they were somehow dropped from the official record in some act of revisionary erasure, some selective fire in the archive. Yet, while they did not live in Dublin in 1904, by the time Joyce is through with them, it will be as if they had; in the future anterior tense in which *Ulysses* directs the future's backward gaze at its mingling of archive and invention, they will have lived there. Through the double fact of their disappearance from the official record and their centrality in the surrogate archive of the novel, *Ulysses* suspends its central characters in something like the uncanny interval of *bukimi*—the anticipatory sense of uncanniness at feeling marked without knowing if it is for annihilation or salvation. This is why Bloom's story can only end, on the last line of "Ithaca," with a mute and stupefied blot, a fullstop, a hole in the symbolic that nonetheless seems to organize and authorize what precedes it. It is as if the narrative has foundered at last on the traumatic kernel, the rock of the Real, what Lacan calls the *extimité*, the indispensable, irreducible strangeness at the core of the symbolic order. The fullstop does not hide, encrypt, or trope a particular disaster, but rather constitutes the centrality of a possible but unknowable one within the imaginary of the text and the not-knowing of whether its witnesses have been singled out for or from catastrophe. That *Ulysses*'s fullstop is, textually, a swollen sign of closure suggests an odd symbiosis between the text's comic and apocalyptic registers, one that can imagine any punchline as an apocalypse without revelation, any comic closure as a terminus whose aftermath cannot be represented. If "Penelope" seems to offer a coda or remainder, it is one that exists above or below the plane of the rest of the novel, in a space exterior even to the surrogate archive of the text; it is less an aftermath than an elsewhere, and its temporal vector, to the extent it possesses one, is retrospective. The book ends with a memory, as if it were incapable of putting faith in the futurity of the future. In Baudrillard's words, it is "immobilized in eerie retrogression." In the advance guard of Cold War eschatology, *Ulysses*'s anticipation of a past, along with the spectral status of its characters with respect to the archive, limns the epistemological suspension, the uncanny dread, the *hysteron proteron* of the nuclear condition.

These meditations lead me to a chilling speculation: that part of the reason *Ulysses* was so energetically consecrated during the Cold War, particularly by US academics in the first nation of nuclear weapons, is that Joyce's book commissions its readers to

perform the consolatory ritual resurrection of an absent or vanished city out of its archival traces, even as the text also exhibits the pretraumatic symptoms of a catastrophe it cannot represent, can only register. *Ulysses*'s conspicuous lack of a conventional sequel means its readers can only repeat the symptoms of the pretraumatic syndrome the text manifests, can never work them through in relation to a known trauma such that they are transumed within the fullness of a completed analysis. In the apocalyptic temporality mobilized by the text, the future in which such an analysis would be complete would be too late, a time after the devastation of all that makes interpretation possible. *Ulysses* arrived too early for most of its first readers to experience its pretraumatic foreshudderings as pertinent to their own present; ironically, it was not until the Cold War—the historical future of Joyce's novel, but also the contemporaneity of its apocalyptic temporality— that aspects of *Ulysses* came into their "moment," entering a period in which the predication of the text's compulsive documentarism on the future conditional erasure of its target city could be understood as more than a symptom, more than a "meaningless trace"—as nothing less than the emerging general case about cities. This is not to say that *Ulysses* has at last been subjected to a completed analysis that narrates or anatomizes all of its symptoms, or the symptom it constitutes, out of existence; even if one believed this were possible to do with texts, Richard Ellmann's claim that "we are still learning to be James Joyce's contemporaries" [3], so long as it continued to ring true, would attest to *Ulysses*'s singular resistance to terminable analysis or exhaustive etiology. But the arrival and rapid escalation of the Cold War activated a previously latent characteristic of *Ulysses* through what the nuclear condition shared with the deep structure of Joyce's novel: the centrality of a traumatic referent that lies always outside and after the text but whose only traces are textual, and therefore exclusively, and uncannily, premonitory.

The call for papers that initiated both the 1984 colloquium on nuclear criticism and the subsequent *Diacritics* issue invited, among other varieties, "the sort [of criticism] that reads other critical or canonical texts for the purpose of uncovering the unknown shapes of our unconscious nuclear fears" ["Nuclear" 3]. This essay has undertaken such a reading, though without appealing directly to the notion of "unconscious fears"—by appealing, rather, to the notion of a mass trauma brought about by the conspicuously increasing vulnerability of civilian populations to incineration in total war since 1900. The "nuclear condition" in which I have seen this trauma culminating is the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), whereby the Cold War superpowers held one another's civilians hostage with nuclear arsenals large enough to survive a first-strike and devastatingly retaliate against the aggressor's cities. The MAD doctrine held out the possibility of an "apocalypse without revelation" to which the first examples of nuclear criticism responded. Since 1989, the focus of the nuclear debate has shifted to the growth of the "nuclear club"; the rise of nuclear programs in so-called rogue states such as Libya, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and North Korea; the trimming, detargeting, and retargeting of superpower nuclear arsenals; the theft of fissionable materials from Russian and other former Soviet states' storage facilities; the aging of the remaining arsenals and the growing danger of accidental launches; the prospect of a brain drain of both Eastern bloc and US nuclear scientists and workers; the destabilizing influence of US "Star Wars II" missile shield development; the US withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and revised deterrence posture; and the possibility of nuclear terrorism. Since September 11, 2001, the phrase "ground zero" has been revived, but in the context of an explicitly non-nuclear catastrophe. Yet despite the apparent waning of images of nuclear holocaust in the global imaginary, a nuclear condition still exists, and

one that retains the fundamental logic of Mutually Assured Destruction beneath these shifts in focus and terminology. But because a full nuclear exchange seems less imminent in the current climate, it is easy to ignore the persistence of arsenals and defense policies that continue to hold such an exchange open as a possible, even foundational, scenario. Meanwhile, many supposedly nonrogue states continue to accept a severe degree of civilian "collateral damage" in conventional military action. And while international humanitarian law prohibits the use of nuclear weapons in most scenarios, it leaves open a loophole case—one of desperate self-defense—in which nuclear weapons use might still be considered legal, and nuclear states continue to maintain overkill-sized arsenals, in the name of such a slim eventuality.[13] Nuclear criticism, or whatever undertaking succeeds that problematic but prematurely decommissioned enterprise, will need not only to investigate the cultural prehistories of the nuclear epoch but to meditate on the reasons for the near-invisibility of present nuclear politics and nuclear stockpiles, the dangers these stockpiles entail, and the costs they exact—to begin the future anterior work of determining what *this* nuclear condition will have been when it is really over.

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13. *As Lindqvist [177–82] reports, the 1996 International Court at The Hague ruled that the threat or use of nuclear weapons is legal (1) only if the weapon is used in compliance with the UN charter, that is, in self-defense and without using more violence than necessity demands; (2) only if the weapon is used in compliance with humanitarian international law, that is, without affecting civilians or neutrals; and (3) only if the weapon is used in a situation of extreme emergency in which the existence of a state is threatened. As Lindqvist points out, the loophole exists to provide nuclear powers with a legitimate scenario to justify maintaining their arsenals: "As long as there was the tiniest possibility for legal use of these weapons, the powers can say that they need their stockpiles for just that eventuality" [Lindqvist 182].*

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