Article

Beyond 2015: Nihilism and Existentialist Rhetoric in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

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Generally categorized as low art, Japanese manga and anime draw insufficient overseas critical attention, regardless of their enormous cultural influence in East Asia. Their popularity not simply proved the success of cultural industrialization in Japan, but also marks a series of local phenomena, reflecting social dynamicity and complexity, that deserve interdisciplinary analysis. During the lost decade in the 1990s, which many scholars studied with economic accent (Katz 1998, Grimes 2001, Lincoln 2001, Amyx 2004, Beason and Patterson 2004, Rosenbluth and Thies 2010), manga and anime industry in Japan entered its golden age. The publication and broadcast of some remarkable works, such as *Dragon Ball, Sailor Moon, Crayon Shin-chan* and *Slam Dunk,* not only helped generate huge income (nearly 600 billion yen earned in the manga market in 1995) that alleviated economic depression, but also distracted popular focus from the urge of demythologising national growth.

This paper will focus on the TV-series version of Hideaki Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–1996), a well-received anime broadcast after the Great Hanshin earthquake and the Tokyo subway sarin attack perpetrated by terrorists of Aum Shinrikyo, both happening in 1995. I will base my discussion on some important concepts of Jean-Paul Sartre, such as *le pour-soi* (the for-itself) and bad faith, to illustrate how Hideaki Anno represents his protagonists as figures emancipated by existentialist morality. His frequent use of monologue in latter episodes individually enquiring the meaning of personal existence, following the dystopian fall of Tokyo-3, echoes the nihilistic context of both post-traumatic Europe and over-capitalized Japan. I argue that the subjective bonding between given existence of self-consciousness and innate search for fixing the purpose of being has pre-universalized relevant reflection. It sustains the celebrity of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* until now, especially when Japan has not yet recovered from the 2011 earthquake off the Pacific coast of Tōhoku, which carried unresolved economic challenges.

Keywords: *Neon Genesis Evangelion,* Nihilism, Existentialism, Lost generation, Cultural representation, Japanese economy

Introduction

In 2015, Shinji Ikari goes to Tokyo-3, following the command of his estranged father, who attempts to revive his dead wife through practising his own version of the "Human Instrumentality Project," which aims at emancipating all mankind from interpersonal barriers (namely, "AT fields"). Shinji soon becomes the operator of EVA Unit 01, a cyborg designed for defending Tokyo-3 from the anti-human attack of Angels (literally referring to "disciples" in Japanese). After the mental breakdown of Shinji and his partners due to a series of failure, which recalls their tragic personal background and the meaninglessness of life, the "Human Instrumentality Project" begins and the souls of all mankind dissolve and merge with one another. As Shinji finally understands the meaning of being individually existing, he regains his physical body, implying a subjectivity-driven turn of

the material world, back to normal.

On the other side of our parallel universe, there was no Angel invading us on 22 June, 2015. Instead, there were a lot of manga-anime zealots commemorating what is virtually happening in that imaginative space and logic. Their support of Hideaki Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion,* which aired in 1995, reveals its charisma that transcends the socio-historical context of Japan 20 years ago and also its successful formulation of plots, characters and symbols that address universal and shared conditions of human beings. In the following, I will base my discussion concerning its philosophical narrative and rhetoric on the 26-episode TV series of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* that Hideaki Anno directed, instead of the manga version that Yoshiyuki Sadamoto published, for drawing popular attention to the upcoming anime series and the film version that provided a more explicit ending following the well received TV version.

1. Two tracks in opposite directions: Cultural and economic development of Japan in the mid-1990s

Andrew Wells Garnar asserts that "*Neon Genesis Evangelion* is all about anxiety" and explains that "[t]he most obvious example is Shinji's angst about his relations with his father, his mother, women in his life, friends, and EVA Unit 1."[1] He applies protagonist-centred analysis to deal with the in-story context that baffles Shinji, with less concern of the external context of this work that baffled a majority of Japanese, and also the residents in prosperous area of East Asia, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. In contrast, Tang Zhenzhao summarizes the perspective of Japanese critic Eiji Ōtsuka and regards the uncertainty of Angels as a symbol revealing the anxiety of the Japanese public after the Great Hanshin earthquake and the Tokyo subway sarin attack perpetrated by zealots of Aum Shinrikyo.[2] As the incidents both happened in 1995, the earthquake and the terrorist attack triggered nationwide cynical emotion that had sprouted a decade ago following the depreciation of Japanese yen and upcoming economic depression that the signature of the Plaza Accord in 1985 caused.[3] Unlike other countries that experienced the crash of the stock market in 1987, especially Hong Kong, Japan failed to recover from a series of financial fluctuations. Its over-appreciated currency and over-valued assets, as structural problems, disadvantaged the export of its industrial products and services and led to long-term unstable living standards.

However, cultural industry was less likely impacted by the economic downfall, but, to a certain extent, stimulated by the gloomy social atmosphere that pessimistic forecasts about national development brought instead. According to the analysis of Jean-Marie Bouissou,

> In 1995, the circulation of manga magazines surpassed 2 billion, and the total earnings for printed manga alone surpassed 600 billion yen - $6 billion (ARTE). But the bulk of the profit is made through TV-series, animation movies (anime) and licensed goods. […] Combined with the videogames industry, the total

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[1]   Andrew Wells Garnar, "It's the End of the Species as We Know It, and I Feel Anxious," in *Anime and Philosophy: Wide Eyed Wonder,* ed. Josef Steiff and Tristan D. Tamplin (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2010), 290.

[2]   Tang Zhenzhao, *Poison from Japan* (日本中毒) (Hong Kong: Enrich Culture Group Limited, 2015), 243. The perspective that Tang summarizes is from EijiŌtsuka's *On the Spiritual History of "Otaku" in the 1980s* (「おたく」の精神史　一九八〇年代論), published in 2004.

[3]   As Carin Holroyd describes, "In September 1985, at the Plaza Hotel in Washington, the leaders and finance ministers of the G5 nations agreed to put in place mechanisms that would see the yen and the German mark increase in value and the dollar decrease." (Carin Holroyd, *Government, International Trade, and Laissez-Faire Capitalism: Canada, Australia, and New Zealand's Relations with Japan* [Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2002], 68) It led to the "bubble economy" in Japan from 1986 to the middle of 1990, which "saw massive expansion, primarily due to a rapid surge in domestic demand – a growth in capital investments and in personal spending" (p.69). The overheated economy finally led to economic depression in Japan from the 1990s until now.

earnings of Japanese "pop culture" industry may exceed $30 billion, and much more if hardware for video viewing and computer games is added.[4]

In fact, the sales of manga, anime and surrounding products only accounted for around 1% of the gross domestic product (GDP) throughout the 1990s that was insufficient to support the revival of a whole country's economy. However, their boom, especially based on a shift of marketing target from children to adults, significantly revealed a social phenomenon: the general public in Japan had begun to merge their everyday life with cartoon culture, which enabled them to alleviate their daily stress through consuming virtual images and messages that were encouraging, funny, satirical, hilarious or bold. The works that attracted adult consumers, such as *Dragon Ball, Crayon Shin-chan, Slam Dunk, Yu Yu Hakusho and City Hunter,* functioned as imitation of reality reflecting rules of life, similar to TV dramas or non-anime films. They granted consumers even higher flexibility to think of their personal situation, because the virtual constitution of plots and symbols in form of manga or anime favored deeper allegorical expression. The increase in demand for indulging in virtuality as a solution to resolve or escape from the conflicts in reality encouraged manga/anime makers to invest more in raising the quantity and quality of their products in order to suit the need of those who can spend. It further enabled Japanese manga and anime to attain a growth in the domestic and also overseas market share of cultural products, especially after the international commercial success of *Akira* and Miyazaki Hayao's anime films. The capitalization of manga and the anime industry accelerated its development of division of labour and economies of scale. The higher-standard products finally shaped the consumption habit of Japanese and East Asian consumers, and marked the hegemonic success of Japanese manga and anime as notable media that spread the soft power of Japan.

2. Universality of existence makes popularity

As a product in 1995, the TV series of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* has delicate visual and narrative design, and implicit response to the social atmosphere of being empty and anxious due to the economic frustration, natural disaster and terrorist attack. Although it is a work surrounding the battles between the robots Evangelions (or EVAs) and the supernatural beings Angels, the personal experiences of the pilots of Evangelions, instead of the result of fights, is central in the story. As Timothy Iles concludes, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* "is an extended and powerful exploration of the individual and society, informed by Existentialism and wrapped in a post-apocalyptic 'techtopia.'"[5] The "techtopia" he mentioned can be interpreted as a utopia in which Japanese could utilize advanced technology to resolve even unknown difficulties in the future. On the contrary, it can also signify a disordered dystopia in which only the subjective mind is what one has authority to control for changing discontented circumstances. In Episode 7, a military leader asks Akagi Ritsuko, a scientist of NERV (an anti-Angels military force), "Do you really think that science and the willingness of a person can suppress that monster?" She said, "Sure." It seems that the director wants to deliver an idea that the collaboration between sincere understanding about technology and personal insistence on one's own stance can save disadvantaged Japan. However, taking into account the nature of Evangelion as a hybrid of man and robot, and the existential self-counselling of the main characters that ends the story, the position of human beings, especially the part of their subjective autonomy, is certainly prior to mechanical beings.

With many plots narrating the traumatic past of the main characters, Hideaki Anno is concerned about how sudden frustration overwhelms individuals through recalling their repressed memory. Unlike Sigmund Freud's

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[4]   Jean-Marie Bouissou, "Manga Goes Global." *Critique Internationale* 7 (2000): 2.
[5]   Timothy Iles, *The Crisis of Identity in Contemporary Japanese Film: Personal, Cultural, National* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1.

view of trauma which necessitates the function of libido (the intuitive sexual drive),[6] Hideaki Anno places the matters of sexuality aside what characters experience. Sexual desire is more likely a by-product of lost family intimacy and its object is a substitute of irretrievably estranged parents. He tends to attribute the characters' haunting psychological pain to their unforgettable childhood while they are unloved and even forsaken. Cathy Caruth's interpretation of Freud's trauma places more emphasis on the result rather than the cause of psychological wounding. Her special notice of repetition and the flashback of a victim, carrying his irretrievable past shock and anxiety to his present mind, coincides with what Anno editorially expresses in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. In the latter episodes, Angels attempt to pollute the spirit of Evangelion pilots. The frustration of defending against unpredictable Angels and relevant moribund experience altogether recall the memory of Asuka about her mentally ill mother, who attempted to commit suicide with her and finally died alone, and the memory of Shinji about his lost mother and his apathetic father, who left him to a relative's home after an accident happened to his wife. Two main characters repeatedly memorized their sudden loss of mother that leads to their nihilistic feeling and cynical attitude about existing at the present moment. They want to escape from both the traumatic flashback and the current plight that repeats their weakness. However, both of them could not get rid of repetition compulsion. In Caruth's view, "Freud's speculation on the causes of repetition compulsion in relation to the origins of consciousness can indeed [be] understood as an attempt to grasp the paradoxical relation between survival and consciousness."[7] She links the uncontrollable repetitive activities of consciousness that traumatic events cause to the cognitive support of survival. As traumatic flashback can be both a signal that protects victim from further traumatized by repeatedly making similarly wrong decisions and a disturbance of victim's control of consciousness that may even lead to suicidal attempt, its link to the significance of being is twofold: either sustaining or devastating a self.

The post-traumatic effect that affects whether one is still willing to live and to keep making autonomous decisions is what concerns both existentialists and Anno. In the post-Second-World-War period, the European public was seeking for a value that could let them accept the ridiculous loss of life in the past. They tended to annihilate the meaning of existence and interpersonal communication, in order to reduce their pain from facing their essentially impacted mind and bodies, relationships, properties, beliefs and so on. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness,* published in 1943 while Germany was still occupying France, provided a certain degree of theoretical guidance to the post-war public who were baffled by their condition as being with experience of nothingness. The popularity of this work and his literary pieces with existential accent proved the desire of victims and witnesses to rationalize their own being after traumatic events. Similarly, the well reception of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* followed general individual experience of instability that became collective enquiry of the meaning of survival soon after the spread of a social catastrophe that overheat finance caused. When the focus of surviving shifted from earning money and enjoying a control over life to encountering difficulties that negated any effort paid for an equal exchange, Japanese manga and anime market increasingly produced works that encouraged a self-exploration of potential ability and recognized the value of effort. While the plots that protagonists win or defeat their villains after hard training and long adventure had become over-formulated cliché, such as Son Goku in *Dragon Ball* who can ever kill those who want to destroy the Earth, the broadcast of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* renewed the way of interpreting the power of personal autonomy in coping with the frustrating past and the difficult present, and hence received great commercial success.

In fact, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* not simply provides an existential therapy[8] to those who questioned their

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6   Freud asserts that the liberation of a quantity of sexual excitation, "owing to the lack of preparation for anxiety", is the core drive of traumatic effects. (Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* trans. James Strachey [New York: Dover Publication, 2015], 27.)

7   Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1996), 61.

8   With reference to Mick Cooper's *Existential Therapy,* "the term existential therapy has been used to refer to so many

life in a specific post-traumatic context. Its complicated narrative and symbolic settings enables trans-historical and trans-national contextualization. Although it especially suits the audience who concern their anxiety about being, triggered by sudden loss of control over life, its conceptual intersection of being and non-being allows all kinds of audience to participate in its heteroglossia of binary oppositions which constitutes our perception about the world, which is metaphysically from nothing to being, and further to the diversity of being.

3. The failure of the "Human Instrumentality Project": On nihilism and being-in-the-world

The core part of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is the implementation of the "Human Instrumentality Project," which aims at emancipating all the human beings from their material bodies and merging them with each other. Garmar comments that it is an attempt to resolve the reasonably anxious situation when "humanity can no longer evolve," and "humans will remain sad, isolated organisms" and "are faced with the hollowness of the human endeavor."[9] As a result of the project,

> Humans lose their individual bodies, which is the ultimate form of falling in to Heidegger's "the They." Everyone is forced into this "single, consummate being," without any possibility of escape, either in the sense of opting out or retaining the capacity to be anxious. […] Faced with pain and alienation, SEELE[10] opts, in a very undemocratic manner, to end a distinctive human sort of evolution in favour of a collective existence.[11]

With no doubt, the "Human Instrumentality Project" is a virtual solution to interpersonal conflicts and the difficulties that materiality of the world brings to personal life. Its narrative function is to offer heuristic imagination but not practical guideline. As a trial that puts the living conditions of human being on two extremes: either breaking down the mentality caused by loneliness or losing the self, due to the desire of being together with others without barriers, the plots related to the project integrate personal freedom with political sovereignty and give priority to the former one. Although, as Garmar highlights, it is basically an organization, held by a few leaders, that undemocratically determines the form of existence of all mankind, the director finally lets Shinji, the protagonist through which the audience can self-posit, hold the right and autonomy to choose the destiny of human beings — his being plus the beings surrounding him. Susan J. Napier observed that Shinji, in spite of holding power to rescue, regards himself as "less than conventionally heroic."[12] In Michael Berman's interpretation, "Shinji is the hero who longs not to be the hero."[13] The matter is that the uncertainty of

different therapeutic practices. Whilst Yalom's (1980) existential psychotherapy, for instance, encourages clients to face up to four "ultimate concerns" of existence – death, freedom, isolation, meaninglessness – can Deurzen's (2002a) existential psychotherapy encourages clients to explore four dimensions of worldly being: the physical, personal, social and spiritual dimensions. Similarly, whilst Bugental's (1978) existential-humanistic approach encourages clients to focus in on their subjective experiences, Frankl's (1984) existential analysis frequently encourages clients to focus out on their responsibilities towards other." (Mike Cooper, *Existential Therapies* [London: Sage, 2003], 1.) Here, I use the term "existential therapy" to signify Anno's attempt to counsel his audience through putting together the self-reflection of different characters on their own existence.

9   Garnar, "It's the End of the Species as We Know It, and I Feel Anxious," 293.
10   SEELE, to which NERV and Shinji's father, the commander of NERV, is subordinate, is a secret organization dedicated to complete the "Human Instrumentality Project."
11   Ibid.
12   Susan J. Napier, "When the Machines Stop: Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments Lain,*" Science Fiction Studies 3 (2002): 425.
13   Laura Wiebe Taylor, "Science Fiction and Metal Music: The Dystopian Visions of Voïvod and Fear Factory," in The *Everyday Fantasic: Essays on Science Fiction and Human Being,* ed. Michael Berman (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 79.

the future and the option of escaping, parallel to the option of rescuing, increase the tension between Shinji's being and others' beings. Under Anno's narrative arrangement, Shinji's individual control over his subjectivity is more significant than a sense of salvation. The autonomy of individual is overall at the central position of *Neon Genesis Evangelion.*

Anno's imaginative authorization for Shinji to change the discipline of a post-apocalyptic world reveals his agreement with Sartre's existentialism. Mary Warnock portrays that Sartre's model of existentialist thought is marked by "treatment of the concrete and the particular," which is a "matter of method," and "treatment of the key concept of human freedom."[14] The concept of "human freedom," founded on a deep reflection on nothingness, is what both Sartre and Anno centre in their works.

Observing the monologues of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* before the ending, one probably feels that this drama series is nihilistic rather than existentialistic. The characters negate their personal value and explore mainly the emptiness and meaninglessness of existence. For instance, in Episode 14, Rei Ayanami, the pilot of the Evangelion Unit 00 who is a clone made from a part of Shinji's mother, says,

> What is human? Is it something that God created? Or is it something that human created with each other? What I own are life, something in my heart, and a cockpit. They are the seat of soul. Who is this? This is me. Who am I? What am I? What am I? What am I? What am I? I am the self. I am a self, such an object, and am the appearance that the self constituted through itself. I can see me, but I don't think it is me. There is a weird feeling that my body begins to dissolve. I am nearly unable to figure it out. My appearance gradually elapses. I can feel someone who is not me.

She asks the questions that are, in Immanuel Kant's term, "transcendental." Given that there is no God who has granted human a purpose to survive, her enquiry about the nature of self points to nothing. If the story ends up with a success of the "Human Instrumentality Project," the elimination of interpersonal barriers can only satisfy the audience's desire to escape from difficult situations. It would fail to, as Anno intends, assist audience with conceptual support so that they could apply virtual logic to face the plights in reality.

However, it is important to notice that nihilism is the foundation of existentialism, so the self-denial of characters is crucial to deliver the central focus on the significance of self-recognition in *Neon Genesis Evangelion.* In *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre mentions the dialectic relationship between being and nothingness and asserts that "nothingness haunt[s] being."[15] In his view, being "has a logical procedure over nothingness" and nothingness "gets its being from being."[16] Despite being "already secondary," negativity, as "original transcendence," causes a being to exist.[17] It enables one to detach from the world to obtain freedom. Given that Martin Heidegger regards "being-in" as "existential,"[18] nothingness functions as reflective absence of being for authentic return to being itself. To interpret Heidegger's "being-in-the-world," Sartre writes,

> The world is a synthetic complex of instrumental realities inasmuch as they point one to another in ever widening circles and inasmuch as man makes himself known in terms of this complex which he is. This means both that 'human reality' springs forth invested with being and 'finds itself' (*sichbefinden*) in being –

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[14] Mary Warnock, "Introduction," *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology,* Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), xi.

[15] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), 35.

[16] Ibid., 40.

[17] Ibid., 203.

[18] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 50.

and also that human reality causes being, which surrounds it, to be disposed around human reality in the form of the world.[19]

He expresses that the complexity of the world necessitates the need of those in it to search for their selves, their relationship with this world and with other self-beings, and the mechanism that connects the in-world to out-of-world. Looking into another monologue by Rei in Episode 23, similar to the one quoted before, one can prove that Anno apparently foregrounds the characters' sensitivity to their beings in the world:

> Who? Is it me? The me in EVA? No, I feel that that person is not me, but someone else. Who are you indeed? An Angel? The object that we call Angel?
> Do you want to be a one with me?
> No. I am me, but not you.
> This's true, but you cannot get on time.
> I will share my heart with you. I will share this feeling with you. Painful? Isn't it? Your heart is painful?
> Painful? No, no. Lonely?
> Yes, you are lonely.
> Lonely? I don't know.
> You don't like being on your own, right? Because there are so many of us, you hate being on your own.
> This is called "loneliness"?
> This is your heart – the sorrowful heart that is yours.

The monologue begins with Rei's questioning of the essence of herself. Then, her self becomes two and she starts a conversation with the split self. Different from the first quoted monologue, this monologue does not merely annihilate her unique, single and independent existence. Instead, it seeks for the source of annihilation, negation and instability. Anno attributes Rei's confusion about the incoherence of her mind and the disunity between her and the material world to loneliness, which is a feeling given to psychological structure while one is singly thrown into the world. He obviously shows that the process that Rei is rejecting herself is also a process of discovering and rebuilding her traumatized self.

4. Shinji's return to reality as a symbol of being for-itself and rejecting bad faith for personal freedom

After Rei notices that her anxiety is due to loneliness, she has courage and autonomy to make decisions. She is no longer a slave blindly following the command of Shinji's father, the one who created her from his wife, but a master of her life. She finally chooses to absorb an Angel and then explodes. Her willingness to sacrifice is a representation of personal freedom that is the condition of annihilation through which one can become the ideal being that Sartre suggests in his existentialist writing.

Similar to Heidegger's "authentic self," Sartre's *le pour-soi* (the for-itself) is a being that transcends its internality through meta-existential understanding. It is a conscious and free being opposite to *l'en-soi* (the in-itself). Mary Warnock summarizes that "[b]eings-in-themselves are non-conscious things, which can be said to have essences, which exist independently of any observer and which constitute all the things in the world. Beings-for-themselves are conscious beings whose consciousness renders them entirely different from other things, in their relation both themselves and to one another, and to these other things."[20] Through categorising

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[19] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology,* 41.
[20] Warnock, "Introduction," xii.

two kinds of beings, Sartre highlights the autonomy that human has. It can be undermined by bad faith, which, as he defines, is a tendency "to choose and to examine one determined attitude which is essential to human reality and which is such that consciousness instead of directing its negation outward turns it toward itself."[21]

In *Neon Genesis Evangelion,* Shinji obviously holds bad faith. He decides to drive the Evangelion and keeps doing so just because of his father's command and a hope for obtaining his recognition. He is not a being surviving for himself. No matter accepting or escaping from challenges, he has to deal with the unwanted haunting of memory that increases his anxiety of accepting the result of any decision that he makes on his own. He cannot be authentically confident in following or examining his intention, and would rather be baffled by the determined attitude constituted by his past experience and his concern of other people's perspective.

In order to enlighten the audience through preaching existentialist morality, Anno finally let Shinji recognize the importance of self-acceptance. After a narration about Shinji's imagination of an ideal world, in which he lives with his father, his mother and beloved Asuka, there is a monologue of Shinji that delivers the director's call for seeking for a self that creates value for itself, but not negates or blindfolds it:

> Yes. It is also a world. It is the possibility in me. The "I" at present is not me. It is possible to have a different self to exist. Right. I can exist even though I am not a pilot of Evangelion. If it is so, the real world is absolutely not bad. Perhaps the real world is not bad, but I just hate myself. […] I hate myself, but maybe I can like myself. Maybe it is good for me to stay here. Right. This can just be me. I am me. I want to be me! I want to stay here! I can stay here.

When Shinji sees the possibility and freedom he can have while being in the world, he refuses to obey the "Human Instrumentality Project," which can let him totally lose his sensitivity to existence. His desire to be a being, instead of a non-being merging with other beings that lose their selves, leads to the failure of the project and ends up the story.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I review the increase in cultural consumption during the mid-1990s in Japan following a series of incidents that led to economic and social instability. Arguing that the nihilistic ideas and existentialistic narrative arrangement that Hideaki Anno used in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* reformulate robot-theme anime, shifting its focus from the fights between robots and their enemies to their pilots' subjective search for the meaning of being, I assert such a search matched the psychology of post-traumatic Japanese, fulfilling their expectation in a specific context.

As a being thrown in the world, like every one of us, Shinji universally represents the audience to long for obtaining an authentic understanding about himself and the relationship between himself and his exterior world, and to further take into practice a rejection of bad faith and a return to reality. Overall, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* does not merely deliver a straightforward message about the power of "trusting in yourself" or personal freedom. It fits in the subjective bonding of human between given existence of self-consciousness and innate search for fixing the purpose of being. The characters' exploration of the meaning of self and the purpose of survival, coinciding with existentialist emphasis on autonomy and reflexivity, grant this work an enormous commercial success due to the universality of the questions that the characters and the audience share. Anno's in-depth narratization of hopelessness, weakness and emptiness of being (especially through monologues), deriving from the ever-haunting nothingness, let *Neon Genesis Evangelion* be an allegory for a

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[21] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology,* 71.

majority of people.

It is foreseeable that the last episode of *Evangelion: New Theatrical Edition* – a revised vision based on the anime TV series – screened next year, 2016, one year after the first Angel appears in the virtual world, will be a big hit in Japan, especially due to the fact that Japan has not yet resolved a series of economic risks, including the loss that the earthquake in 2011 caused.

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