

Textual Nuclear War based on the Memory of Hiroshima

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Apocalypse and the ‘Non-event’

World War Two concluded with the deployment of American nuclear weapons on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6th and 9th of August 1945. This event signalled the first use of nuclear weapons in war and rendered the cities landmarks of nuclear destruction.

The ramifications of nuclear weaponry quickly became part of the collective human consciousness; the atomic bomb left an impression on the human race as the horrific events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki became burnt into the minds of the people of the world. *New York Daily News* headline described the bomb as ‘Most Destructive Force in the Universe’ and while the *New York Times* dubbed the bomb a ‘Rain of Ruin’ (Seldon 1989, p. xviii). Not only did such technology exist, but it was being used with catastrophic effects. The nuclear threat continued through the Cold War (1945–91)¹ and the importance of the nuclear attack continues today, prompting Peter Schwenger (1994, p.251) to claim ‘there will be no time when Hiroshima will have been over.’ In fact the plethora of fiction, non-fiction, TV and film inspired by the nuclear attack highlights the permanence of the 1945 event. John Whittier Treat

¹ Cold War dates are an issue of contention. My dates are sourced from the following academic texts:

Lewis Gaddis, John. 2007. *The Cold War*. London: Penguin.
Mason, John W. 1996. *The Cold War, 1945–1991*. London: Routledge.
Smith, Joseph. 2000. *The Cold War, 1945–1991*. Oxford: Blackwell.

(1994, p.233) claims that Hiroshima itself failed to be a city during the attack and became ‘the name of a story. That story has belonged to the world for almost half a century.’

The aim of this paper is to examine how the memories of the 1945 nuclear attack on Hiroshima has been reposed and performed in modern fiction. Although Jacques Derrida in ‘No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives)’ in 1984, termed nuclear war a ‘non-event’, I argue that the memory of Hiroshima and the wealth of nuclear science fiction made the ‘non-event’ familiar. This article offers a fresh interpretation of nuclear history with reference to how nuclear concerns have significantly influenced literature and presented an understanding of the ‘non-event’. I suggest that it is the memory of the nuclear attack on Japan which has enabled the construction of apocalyptic nuclear war scenarios in fiction.

It is possible to view weapons technology, especially nuclear technology, as reimagining the notion of apocalypse itself. The apocalyptic imagination has altered over time and through shifts in culture. Historically, images of apocalypse have often concerned a displeased deity raining fire and brimstone. For example, in the first book of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, Sodom and Gomorrah is destroyed by God with ‘brimstone and fire’ (Genesis, 20: 24). Also, in the New Testament, John describes the city of Babylon being destroyed by fire coming down from Heaven to devour the sinful (Revelation, 20: 9-10). However, after Hiroshima, a new apocalyptic projection arose: one of synthetic mushroom clouds and scorched landscapes. The creation of a device which can instantaneously end existence wrenched the apocalyptic from the imagination. As John R. May (1972, p.3) argues, the apocalypse is

now historical. The aftermath of the Holocaust and the fear of World War Three were exacerbated by escalating Cold War tensions. The nuclear bomb seeped into every avenue of American existence and resonated as a dominant part of American thought. Peggy Rosenthal (1991, pp.63-92) explains, the mushroom cloud became a symbol for the atomic age and was enshrined with a multitude of cultural meanings from politics to history and from triumph to disaster. Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* goes as far as to argue that the modern world ‘was born with the first atomic explosions’ (1958, p.7).

Modern imaginings of apocalypse often have secular meanings and refer more generally to universal, wide-spread disaster. John Wallis (2009, p.73) argues that in contemporary uses the term apocalypse often alludes to ‘immense cataclysm or destruction.’ Robert J. Lifton (1982, p.58) argues that nuclear extinction revolutionised how the human race viewed apocalypse, and stated that a new apocalyptic vision had formed, which Lifton calls ‘extinction by technology.’ Lifton (1982, p.58) further claims that ‘extinction by technology’ brings with it an intense psychological trauma as we realise that extinction will be a man-made act.

Although the nuclear apocalypse was a modern concern after Hiroshima, the event had already detonated, erupted and blazed away in science fiction. The literary flash and boom preceded the event itself. It could be argued that fiction anticipated the science. For example, Frank R. Stockton wrote about an atomic bomb in *The Great War Syndicate* (1889) before science had produced it. However, the leader of science (fiction) prophesy is H. G. Wells. Martha A. Barrter (1990, p.177) nominates Wells as the founding father of the Manhattan Project twenty nine years before its creation.

H. G. Wells wrote *The World Set Free*, a tale which famously depicts an atomic bomb, in 1913 (published 1914). In the text, a physicist by the name of Holston reflects on his discovery of atomic energy and echoes his own fateful action: 'It has begun' (Wells 1956, p.54). Here, Holston is reflecting on the advent of nuclear power and the ramifications it entails. In Wells's novel, the repercussions are prophetically revealed to be the nuclear bomb and later a nuclear war. What Wells actually introduced was awareness; as Brooks Landon (2002, p.xii) ventures 'All science fiction is preparation.' The affiliation between literature and scientific revelation placed writers Philip Wylie and Cleve Cartmill under suspicion for their technically accurate stories which bore remarkable similarities to the science secrets of the Manhattan Project (Franklin 1988, p.147). Both Cartmill's *Deadline* (1944) and Wylie's *Paradise Crater* (1945) feature the Axis using uranium based atomic bombs during a time when such technology was strictly classified within the Manhattan Project (Franklin 1988, p.147).

The prophetic nature of Wells's and Stockton's fiction cements another layer of grave concern, for it was not only the nuclear bomb that was predicted, but a resulting apocalypse. Notions of the atomic apocalypse emerged from literature and have been sustained through stories compounded by scientific and technological advancements. The textual atomic apocalypse has thus become both a commentary on the future, as well as a critique of the present. In most cases, apocalyptic literature seeks to educate. For Roslyn Weaver apocalyptic science fiction: 'enables writers to imagine present systems of society coming to an end or illustrate how a new, revised world might be after a catastrophic event' (2009, p.178).

During the 1950s, the prophesied apocalypse was closer than ever before with the indelible reminder of the effects of technology capable of apocalypse still smouldering in Japan.

In 1984, Jacques Derrida wrote ‘No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead, seven missiles, seven missives)’ and cast the nuclear apocalypse as a textual ‘non-event’. Derrida (1984, p.23) argues that a nuclear war can be nothing other than a work of imagination: ‘a nuclear war has not taken place: one can only talk and write about it.’ While people can discuss a nuclear war with some level of consensus as to what this event might entail, the event is ultimately ‘fabulously textual’ which means that it has no form or reality beyond a mental formation (Derrida 1984, p.23). Derrida has a valid argument because, despite the amount of attention the scenario receives, a nuclear war is a ‘non-event’. Although the nuclear war is a still a ‘non-event’, society has knowledge of what this event may be like through exposure to nuclear acts within war. Arguably, Hiroshima and Nagasaki partially foreshadow the ‘non-event’, and thus can be described as ‘pre-events’.

Derrida also speaks of the speed at which technology advances compared to the speed of criticism. Derrida notes a human lack of speed when it comes to challenging technological advancements. For Derrida (1984, p.20) the war wages fast: ‘the most classical wars were also speed races.’ The time lapse between the development of the atomic bomb and the deployment was only seven years. However, nuclear criticism within science fiction existed long before the creation of the technology. Science fiction seeks to represent the future ‘non-event’ and craft a reality out of it. Whilst science fiction indulges the apocalyptic theme and presents texts the reader can enjoy, there are serious underlying messages. The genre

partly exists to offer preparatory texts to help ensure the ‘non-event’ remains ‘fabulously textual’ and the literary apocalypse does not become a reality.

Fiction as Representing Nuclear Concerns

Nuclear technology has always been a ‘textual’ device. Before the Soviets developed their nuclear weapon, American popular culture found delight and humour in the nuclear bomb. The ‘Atomic Bomb’ became a popular term and marketing tool and even became a cocktail in the Washington Press Club bar (Boyer 1994, p.10). The bomb dominated radio, Hollywood, journalism, music, novels and poetry.

However, with the ‘textual’ representation of the bomb in light-hearted contexts, a sense of ambivalence arose in the American public towards the technology. In some cases there was even a degree of nonchalance. One example of this is evident through how atomic tests became sublime sources of terror and fascination for tourists. David Nye notes how the Nevada desert was visited by groups of school children and families hoping to catch a glimpse of an atomic detonation at the test site (1994, p. 228). This sort of casual attitude was not surprising considering that Leo Szilard, a nuclear physicist and eventual campaigner for nuclear disarmament, first encountered the threat of nuclear energy in Wells’s *The World Set Free* (1914) and blithely dismissed it.

In a letter to Sir Hugo Hirst, Szilard recommended the reading of *The World Set Free* and instructed Hirst to only pay attention to the first three paragraphs of the first chapter.² This recommended first paragraph concerns the development of ‘atomic

² Letter from Leo Szilard to Sir Hugo Hirst reproduced in Williams and Cantelon (1984, pp.7-12).

disintegration' through the mastery of 'internal energy of atoms' culminating in a nuclear detonation: an explosion with 'great violence into a heavy gas of extreme radio-activity' (Wells 1956, p.47). However, to read on would cause the reader to venture forth into 'Chapter The Second', where they would gaze upon details of the 'Last War' and the terrifying moment in which an unnamed woman watches nuclear missiles plough, in a blaze of thunder and 'curling trails of red', into the earth (Wells 1956, p.92). Hirst would have witnessed the design of the atomic bomb but would not have encountered the victim who found herself in a 'strange world, a soundless, ruinous world, a world of heaped broken things' (Wells 1956, p.93). Szilard dismissed this part as dull and not worth reading. Although Szilard would eventually campaign against the use of nuclear weapons, initially he found no credence (or worth) in depictions of destruction.

With the fear of Hitler developing nuclear weapons, The Manhattan Project was formed in 1942 under the scientific leadership of J. Robert Oppenheimer with the aim to create an atomic bomb before the enemy. The successful creation of the weapon was both a moment of triumph and horror. After chasing the creation of the atomic bomb, Szilard became concerned with how it would be used. In fact he became so anxious that he tried to warn President Roosevelt and appealed to President Truman. When America used the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Szilard suffered intense grief and termed the event 'one of the greatest blunders of history' (Lanouette 1994, p.276). Following the event, Szilard continued to petition against the use and further development of nuclear weapons. He became convinced that an American/Russian nuclear war was inevitable and even encouraged his loved ones to

move to Australia or New Zealand (Bess 1993, pp.60–61). In a few short years after reading *The World Set Free*, Wells's fears had been validated and Szilard's initial disregard proven negligent.

Szilard grew increasingly concerned about the ambivalence and marvel directed towards the atomic bomb and even attempted to raise money to educate the public on nuclear energy (Lanouette 1994, p.359). However, the best education came when the Soviets tested 'Joe 1' in 1949. Suddenly the American people had to think about nuclear shelters and radiation – all previously abstract and irrelevant issues. The atomic bomb was no longer perceived as under the control of the American government; the threat was now close to home and looming ever closer. Despite some positive attitudes to the nuclear bomb, after 1945 the atom had become a public concern: 'people were forced to live with the traumatic awareness that total, worldwide obliteration was a strong possibility' (Brosnan 1978, p.72).

The burgeoning fear of the American people was tempered by the media and government. As Boyer (1994, pp.303, 334) explains, the government attempted a 'soothing' of atomic fears, which led to acceptance and even an appreciation of the nuclear bomb. Hollywood and television became an important medium through which audiences were informed on the Cold War, communism, the atomic bomb and radiation. For example, the film *The Medical Aspects of Nuclear Radiation* (1954) sought to lighten the fear of radiation by wilfully misleading the public through unrealistic scenarios. The film *Duck and Cover* 'Bert the Turtle' (1951) showed audiences that even the weakest and slowest of animals will survive the nuclear bomb. Most propaganda encouraged the audience to be 'calm' through the guarantee that survivability is practically assured.

The placatory scenarios offered by the media and Hollywood acted to subvert prevalent concerns over the nuclear bomb by presenting it as familiar and relatively safe. Film and television became mediums through which the government tried to reassure the worried public. This action resulted in a split within popular culture between the placid view of the nuclear bomb, and the hysteria of the weapon. One of the most successful acts of ‘soothing’ came via Walt Disney’s publication and television documentary *Our Friend the Atom* (1957).

In response to the overly optimistic messages presented to the public, many scientists wanted to forewarn the public of the real threat. Boyer (1994, pp.49–58) notes that it was this drive within the scientific world to expose and explain the technology of the atom bomb that led to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Created in 1944, the *Bulletin* aimed to educate the public over developments in nuclear science, and to any other potential threats to the planet and populace (Benedict 2012). Initially the *Bulletin* was a platform through which atomic scientists discussed their concerns over atomic weaponry (Franklin 1988, p. 158). In 1947, a clock was added to the front page of the publication: ‘The Clock evokes both the imagery of apocalypse (midnight) and the contemporary idiom of nuclear explosion (countdown to zero)’ (Benedict 2012). It was this concern of nuclear weaponry causing apocalypse that invaded the consciousness of both scientists and popular culture.

Perhaps in an effort to achieve a balance between the reality of the nuclear bomb and the fictional potential of the bomb, *Astounding Science Fiction Magazine* published many scientific articles alongside their science fiction stories. Moreover, many science fiction texts attempted to present plausible scenarios. Ray Bradbury’s short story, *There Will Come Soft Rains* (1950) depicts humanity as

literally disappeared after a nuclear war. In Bradbury's tale, the disappearance of mankind is witnessed through the empty family home in which technology carries on functioning for non-existent residents. Many of Philip Wylie's texts address nuclear war; *Blunder* (1946) and *Tomorrow!* (1954) are notable examples which feature extensive atomic devastation. Both Leigh Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow* (1955) and Philip K. Dick's *The World Jones Made* (1956) feature post-apocalyptic America. In addition, Nevil Shute's post-apocalyptic World War Three novel *On the Beach* (1957) received praise for portraying a plausible nuclear scenario. All of these texts feature themes such as death, radiation, dehumanisation, the collapse of civilisation and destruction. There is a concentrated effort in each text to present sensible scenarios based on historical and factual understanding of nuclear effects. The similarity between nuclear war depictions by each writer further articulates how the historical memory of Hiroshima is dominant and pervasive.

First Person Testimonials from Hiroshima and the Early Creation of the 'Non-event'

For Paul Brians, realism is essential in any nuclear fiction text. Brians (1990, p.133) argues that any nuclear fiction text which enshrines themes of hope is 'unhelpful' and grossly misleading. However, Derrida's argument that a nuclear war is a 'non-event' contradicts the notion that a nuclear text can ever be realistic. Regardless, early texts emerging shortly after the 1945 event featuring nuclear accidents, war or apocalypse drew on the history and memory of Hiroshima in order to relay a sense of 'realism', and present the 'non-event' as something that could be articulated and understood.

Using historical facts and emotive memories of Hiroshima was crucial when penning nuclear war texts because knowledge of

the 1945 nuclear event was the only exposure many members of the public had to the nuclear threat and the ramifications of nuclear technology. Nuclear texts throughout the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries echo the historical detonation and feature mushroom clouds, ruination, fire damage and radiation as standard. Even texts set in the future where the nuclear theme is demoted to a subplot, the nuclear landscapes are similar to the historical depiction. In Philip K. Dick's futuristic world of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), the planet has been maimed by ruination, mass exodus and radioactive fallout. Numerous references are made to the lingering effects of the nuclear war in Dick's text, through the repetition of 'empty, decaying buildings which had once housed thousands' and the emptiness of the city caused by migration and war (Dick 2001, p.14). A similar depiction of ruination occurs in Andre Norton's *Star Man's Son* (1952). In this text the protagonist spends the majority of the novel penetrating the ruins of the deceased former civilization. These ruins are referred to as 'skeletons of old buildings' and 'tangled bulk of rotting wood and tumbled brick and stone' (Norton 1987, p.50). All the structures familiar to the reader have been destroyed, decayed or corroded following the 'Great Blow-Up'. For the contemporary reader, Norton's ruins attempts to anticipate the destruction of their own world and thus the ruins simultaneously represent future disappearance and remembrance of Hiroshima.

Another great concern of nuclear weaponry is radiation. Radiation was an old fear the American people were familiar with; the story of Marie Curie's incredible discovery of radium in 1898 was always tempered with her tragic demise. The unit of measure for radioactivity, the 'curie', would forever memorialise both her discovery and her death. However, it was the nuclear detonation in

Japan that made the American public aware of the catastrophic effects of radiation after a nuclear strike (Pant 1987, p.64). As G. S. Pant in his report on the effects of the nuclear weapon in Hiroshima remarks, ‘Japanese survivors of atomic bombing make up the largest group of human beings exposed to atomic radiations’(1987, p.64). Since then, a dominant theme in fictional representations of nuclear events is the portrayal of extensive physical and genetic diseases and mutations. It became well documented that victims of radiation exposure experienced: ‘weakness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, bloody discharge from the bowels, hematuria, epilation (falling of hair) and other symptoms’ (Pant 1987, p.63). Late effects consisted of tumours, psychoneurological problems and a spike in leukaemia and other cancers (Pant 1987, p.63).

In many real accounts, the physiological effects of the detonation and radiation were so horrific that many witnesses described the human body as absent of any humanity. In the father’s account in *August 6th*, Agawa Hiroyuki describes the subhuman state of a woman’s corpse: ‘...her mouth, like a wolf’s, torn from ear to ear and both eyeballs blown out. It hardly looked like a human face’ (Hiroyuki 1989, p.4). In another account by witness Michihiko Hachiya, victims are described like ‘squid’ and ‘octopus’ (Hachiya 1995, p.101). In *Residues of Squalor* by Ota Yoko, the disfigured survivors are described as not fully human since the attack: ‘I came to visit another girl whose appearance had also become half human...’ (Yoko 1989, p.69).

Building on the knowledge that radiation can ‘taint’ the human condition, a dominant theme in many nuclear texts is the mutation and threat of the innocent body represented through the child. Again, this theme is rooted in many personal accounts from

Japan. For example, Tada Makiko contemplates murdering her children due to the dire physical and economic situation of her family (Makiko 1989, p.181). This decision Tada feels (hysterically) has been forced upon her by the nuclear bomb. A similar situation occurs in Nevil Shute's fictional story *On The Beach* (1957). Here the father, Peter Holmes, warns his wife that she might have to euthanize their daughter Jennifer because it's 'the end of everything for all of us' (Shute 2009, p.157). In Judith Merril's *Shadow On The Hearth* (1950), the only main character to suffer from radiation poisoning is the child. In Merril's *That Only a Mother* (1948) a father returns home from war to discover his wife has given birth to a grievously mutated child. It is implied that upon witnessing the mutated child, the father is provoked to murder the baby.

Murder is one symptom of the breakdown in family and society following a nuclear event. The collapse of civilisation is documented in many personal accounts. Witness Michihiko Hachiya, notes the fracturing of society at a time of distress:

How selfishly everyone acted. What an unhappy society was coming to life. While some wandered around poverty-stricken, others appeared to come to life, as though suddenly they had come into their own. People with evil faces and foul tongues were wearing the best clothes. Those who wore the aviator uniforms looked like gangsters or cheap politicians. These fellows would enter the little shacks near the station, boldly and obscenely fondle the uncouth girls, and otherwise behave outrageously. The country was in the clutches of the mean and unintelligent. I felt hate in my heart for them and gritted my teeth to think they had come to power. How conditions had changed (Hachiya 1995, p.101).

A break down in society including accounts of looting, local government corruption, violence and sexual deviance was noted in the diary of Hachiya. The break down of civilization is

understandable when taking into account the annihilation of buildings, the absence of food and water (and the later rationing), the psychological damage of the populace, the abandonment of the city, the decline in the economy, and the ‘survival of the fittest’ mentality.

The collapse of society is a key theme developed in many nuclear fiction texts, namely Pat Frank’s *Alas, Babylon* (1959), which documents the social decline of a town. In *Alas, Babylon*, following the atomic detonation in the city, suburban communities devolve to a ‘Neolithic Age’ as depicted through the demise of popular motifs of contemporary life: ‘there is no music or coffee, the economy collapses and the postal service is suspended’ (Frank 1999, p.229). Furthermore, communication with the outside world is limited and traditional notions of worth have changed, for example a car can be swapped for two bicycle tires and a pump. people are irrevocably altered as evidenced by the removal of basic commodities: ‘Every building still stood, no brick had been displaced, yet all was altered, especially the people’ (Frank 1999, p.153). The *Story of Charlottesville* is an interesting text produced by The Office of Technological Assessment to illustrate what would happen in the event of a nuclear war (Randall 1979, pp.124–138). This story records the possible effects on a region outside the blast range of a nuclear weapon. After the blast, the fallout and radiation sickness came the fracturing of the community. A collapse in civilisation was described through looting, criminal activities and vigilante justice. Inevitably gangs emerged, society ground to a halt, currency became void and social roles changed dramatically. Finally, due to the state of society the winter brought thousands of deaths. Such a prediction by the OTA would have been near impossible without the historical precedence, and ‘pre-event’ of Hiroshima to give a basic framework.

Although Hiroshima informed many portrayals of contemporary literary nuclear acts, it is often the case that texts featuring the ‘non-event’ of nuclear war exaggerate the facts of Hiroshima in order to show a ‘realistic’ nuclear war. Thus, in many science fiction depictions, a nuclear war features blast damage and physical mutations that are more extensive than documented in Hiroshima, although the root portrayals remain similar.

In Norton’s *Star Man’s Son* radiation mutation is exaggerated to speak of the ‘reality’ of war through the inflation of historical examples. The ‘Beast Things’ are inhuman survivors of the war, who live in the ruins of destroyed, radiation drenched cities. As dehumanised mutant outcasts, the Beasts are described as monsters who inhabit ‘evil-smelling burrows’ and they are compared to vermin (Norton 1987, p.16). The ‘Beast Things’ have mutated into a subspecies unidentifiable with the human race as represented by the reader. The dehumanisation of the ‘Beast Things’ is similar to the plight of the Japanese ‘A-Bomb outcasts’ who were ‘shunned or even ostracised’ after Hiroshima over fears of radiation contamination (Lifton 1986, p.25). However, through amplification, the ‘Beast Things’ represent more than just mutation; they represent the destruction of the human genome. In this story radiation does not only suggest death and illness, it speaks of the annihilation of the human race as we know it, including damage to concepts of identity and basic humanity.

In Mordecai Roshwald’s *Level 7* (1959), the destruction caused by the detonation is global. Two survivors from an underground bunker venture outside to roam the land and discover ‘nothing, absolutely nothing’ (Roshwald 1981, p.114). The only structures to greet them are monuments to ruination: ‘every now

and then they see the remains of a steel frame sticking out of the ground, sometimes twisted into a strange shape' (Roshwald 1981, p.115). The pair of survivors speak of the uniformity of the 'complete destruction' and the complete absence of life. They lament over an 'empty world' in which the entire human race died from the blast or from radiation sickness (Roshwald 1981, p.118). Eventually the pair succumb to radiation sickness and die. In Roshwald's story, the horror of Hiroshima is extended to speak of a complete apocalypse and the extinction of the human race. The details of the blast and the landscape are the same but amplified to signify a 'textual reality' of a nuclear war. Derrida's 'non-event' has become a textual one, built on the knowledge gained from the only 'real' wartime nuclear scenario.

Conclusion: The Continued Relevance of the 'Non-event'

Although the nuclear war has remained a 'non-event', Derrida's 'non-event' was a dominant source of anxiety throughout the Cold War. Events such as the launch of Sputnik in 1957 and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 only provoked renewed panic and concern. The fear of nuclear war was joined by concerns over nuclear accidents. The late 1970s experienced another spike of fright when an accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant led to a partial nuclear meltdown. Three Mile Island was followed by a similar, but considerably worse, event in 1986 when a reactor ruptured in the nuclear power plant of Chernobyl. More recently, a state of emergency was declared when the cooling system in Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant failed, and in 2013 North Korea renewed nuclear tests. So while Derrida's nuclear war is a 'non-event', it can be argued that the *idea* of the event was traumatic

enough that nuclear concerns survived the Cold War and still exist in the present day.

Even new generations, who may not be specifically educated on the historical precedence of the nuclear strike on Japan, will form an understanding of what a ‘nuclear war’ would be like based on their exposure to the ‘non-event’ within popular culture. Science fiction film and TV helps to continuously represent, and extend, the concept of nuclear war. In modern texts the nuclear concern can be explicit or implicit. Computer games such as *Fallout* (1997–2010), *DEFCON* (2006) and *Metro 2033* (2010) directly reference nuclear war. However, novels such as Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) and Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* (2008) feature an unknown apocalyptic event which appears to be man-made and potentially nuclear. Further, many science fiction texts which directly present nuclear war scenarios also depict new, fearsome technologies developing in the wake of this catastrophic disaster. In this respect ‘non-events’ provoke and predict future ‘non-events’. If part of the memory of Hiroshima acts as a warning of ‘Never again’, and ‘No More Hiroshimas’, then fictional texts representing nuclear war, nuclear apocalypse and nuclear extinction expose the fear of ‘more Hiroshimas’.

Today, an awareness of the ‘pre-event’ of Hiroshima is no longer needed to develop the ‘textual reality’ of nuclear war: the ‘non-event’ now perpetuates itself. Yet, every fictional portrayal of destruction, and radiation drenched landscapes produced by a nuclear device echoes that moment from 1945. Unless the ‘non-event’ becomes a reality, the portrayal of ‘nuclear war’ will always be an act of remembrance and fearsome imagination.

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