INTRODUCING
Japanese Popular Culture

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ROUTLEDGE

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Post-Apocalyptic Posthumanity in *Tokyo Jungle*

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Alan Weisman's 2007 thought experiment *The World without Us* imagines a world in which humankind has suddenly disappeared from the face of the earth. The roofs of houses and apartment buildings collapse as weeds and trees push their way up through concrete and asphalt. Native flora and fauna proliferate as they intermix with exotic imported species used for decoration and kept as pets, and new ecosystems emerge. Shells of automobiles rust silently away while the steel frames of bridges and skyscrapers remain, even as they are grown over with flowering vines and kudzu. "Central Park's grass is gone," he writes:

> A maturing forest is in its place, radiating down former streets and invading empty foundations. Coyotes, red foxes, and bobcats have brought squirrels back into the balance with oak trees tough enough to outlast the lead we deposited, and after 500 years, even in a warming climate the oaks, beeches, and moisture-loving species such as ash dominate.
>
> (Weisman 2007: 44)

This is how Weisman pictures New York City after the departure of humankind, but it could just as easily be a description of *Tokyo Jungle* (*Tōkyō janguru*), an open-world urban survival game published for the PlayStation 3 game console (and digitally released over the PlayStation Network in Region 1 territories) in 2012. In this game, the player takes on the role of a solitary animal or pack of animals fighting to stay alive on the mean streets of Shibuya after humanity has mysteriously vanished (see Chapter 32 for more information on Shibuya). The railway bridges are intact, but there are no trains. The lettering on the signs hanging beside the unbroken windows is legible, but everything is covered with dust and grime. The game's fully interactive environments provide a striking visual contrast between the cold gray concrete and metal structures human beings have left behind and the lush greenery that has begun to overtake them. As in Weisman's visualization of a depopulated Manhattan, there is a thrilling juxtaposition between the player's understanding of Shibuya as a thriving metropolis and the game's invitation to view

familiar landmarks through the eyes of a nonhuman animal focused not on the acquisition of consumer goods but rather on the means of survival.

Japanese videogames have featured a multitude of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic scenarios. Well-known examples include Nintendo's 2002 open-world adventure game *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* and Square Enix's 2009 role-playing game *Final Fantasy XIII*, in which the player's goal is not to prevent an apocalypse from occurring but rather to come to terms with an apocalypse that has already occurred (see Chapter 7). What's especially interesting about *Tokyo Jungle* is that it was released in Japan in the June of 2012, a little more than a year after the triple disaster earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown on March 11, 2011. Furthermore, the game eschews stylishly rendered graphics and instead encourages its player to enter an environment saturated with gritty realism, with area maps closely modeled on the urban scenery and layout of the Shibuya Station vicinity and the surrounding district. *Tokyo Jungle*'s producer and distributor, Studio Japan, is a well-known and well-respected team with direct ties to no less than Sony Computer Entertainment, which published the game. Why would such a major media development studio release a high-profile title featuring a fantasy disaster so shortly after a real disaster whose real effects were still being felt and analyzed across Japan and across the ocean? Why does the game seem to celebrate the absolute disappearance of humanity from the urban landscape of Tokyo? Furthermore, *Tokyo Jungle* received generally favorable critical reviews, with North American and European reviewers praising its originality and Japanese reviewers praising its setting and accessibility (Eisenbeis 2012; Gibson 2012; Moriarty 2012). What is the appeal of such a dark post-apocalyptic environment in not only *Tokyo Jungle* but in other titles in contemporary Japanese popular media as well?

When examined in the context of other depictions of disaster in contemporary Japanese fiction, cinema, and television, the ideology of *Tokyo Jungle* demonstrates an emerging awareness and acceptance of philosophical posthumanism and a literally posthuman world. Fears concerning disaster and the resulting annihilation of humanity are ameliorated by the game's representation of the nonhuman harbingers of the post-apocalyptic world as being primarily small, furry, and adorable. I argue that this link between cuteness and the nonhuman is tied to a broader connection between apocalypse and the feminine in contemporary Japanese media, in which adolescent female sexuality is often imbued with anxiety over the possible extinction of the human species mixed with an affective longing for healing and regeneration. Far from being merely escapist or nihilistic, the narrative attraction to the nonhuman and the posthuman, especially as represented by the animal and the feminine, can be understood as a speculative alternative to the irrational rationalism of the masculinist grand narrative involving the equation of scientific progress with economic growth that has shaped Japan's postwar history yet come increasingly under fire in the wake of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant (Aldrich 2013; Miyamoto 2013).

Cuteness as a Catalyst for Affective Gameplay

The mascot for *Tokyo Jungle* is a tiny, fluffy Pomeranian dog, one of the first animals the player is able to control and a lone spot of cuteness against a dreary urban backdrop. The cute, or *kawaii*, aesthetic and related subcultures of contemporary Japan are well known (see Chapter 35); yet it may be difficult to associate the survival-of-the-fittest struggle for life in post-apocalyptic Tokyo with the image of "a haven of play and nostalgized childhood" associated with mascot characters such as Hello Kitty and Rilakkuma (Yano 2013b: 11). The cuteness factor comes into play with the fifty species of animals that the player can choose to control, which range from pet dogs and horses to lions and elephants. Even the largest of these animals appears tiny against the Shibuya skyscrapers, and each has endearing characteristics, such as the whining noises it makes when hungry and the happy yips and chirps it makes when satisfied. Each of these animals has a set of strengths and weaknesses that affect gameplay in a rock-paper-scissors configuration (e.g., an animal with low stealth and attack power, such as the sheep, might have high stamina and an increased resistance to environmental toxicity). The game's Japanese language and English language promotional video trailers promise players that they will be able to hunt for food, flee from danger, and generate offspring. Watching a cast of fluidly rendered animals undertake and succeed in these life-or-death scenarios has a clearly affective appeal; players may find excitement and humor in using a chicken to attack a wolf in the face in order to protect a nest full of fluffy yellow chicks, for example. By sharing the trials and triumphs of her onscreen avatars, the player is able to establish an emotional bond with these animals and their offspring.

The affective appeal of *Tokyo Jungle* is underscored by the game's roleplaying aspects. Each of the playable animals has its own storyline, one of which will take a typical gamer approximately five to ten minutes to complete. The majority of these storylines are simple and follow a similar narrative pattern: a lone and hungry animal, formerly under the care of humans, must leave its familiar surroundings and venture into the world in order to grow stronger and achieve territorial dominance. The Pomeranian dog, which is one of the first animals the player can control, serves as an example of this narrative pattern. In the suburbs of Shibuya, the Pomeranian lives in its owner's apartment even though the whereabouts of its owner are unknown. Having run out of food, the Pomeranian can no longer live as a pampered pet. As the onscreen text tells the player, "The time to rise from toy dog to noble beast is at hand" (Kataoka 2012). The scene then shifts to the street outside the apartment building, and the player is prompted to begin hunting. Bars representing the dog's life, hunger level, and stamina appear in the corner of the screen, and the game is afoot. After sneaking under abandoned vehicles and leaping over crevasses that have appeared in the pavement, the Pomeranian finds itself in the territory of a hostile cat, which promptly attacks. Upon defeating the cat

and claiming its territory, the player is rewarded with the message, "You're a bona fide hunter now!" Thus encouraged to share the animal's sense of achievement, the player becomes invested in the survival of each animal and is, through the game's story mode, strongly encouraged to identify with the animal itself.

After having beaten an animal's story mode, the player is free to play as the animal in a more open-ended survival mode while exploring the abandoned streets, alleyways, and buildings of a post-apocalyptic Shibuya, a digital play-ground that partially mirrors the architecture and topography of the area surrounding the real-world Shibuya Station. By playing in survival mode, the player can find at least one USB stick as each animal, and the data stored on these drives provides clues concerning the fate of the human race.

To abbreviate a complicated story involving the more speculative aspects of quantum physics, the human population of the year 2215 exhausted its resources and attempted to send itself back in time, which backfired and resulted in a world with no humans at all. Towards the end of the game, the player must take on the role of one of the advance scouts of the human species, a robotic dog clearly modeled on Sony's dog-like robot companion AIBO. As ERC-003, a cyborg that supposedly contains organic canine DNA, the player must choose whether to restore humanity to the present time. If the player chooses to do so, the screen goes black, and no further gameplay or narrative fragments are accessible. If the player chooses not to do so, then the player is rewarded with beautiful music accompanying the ending credits and images of a gorgeously overgrown Shibuya that is teeming with wildlife. The return of humanity is thus configured as the "bad ending," while the banishment of humankind is the "good ending." From the beginning to the end of *Tokyo Jungle*, the player is thus encouraged to sympathize with animals instead of humans, especially since the empowerment of animals is characterized as being directly tied to the absence of humans. After hours of playing through the stories of the various species that have come to inhabit Shibuya, the player has presumably been influenced to experience the extinction of the human race as a crowning achievement for animals as the end credits roll.

Digital Animals as Stewards of Posthuman Philosophy

The story and gameplay features of *Tokyo Jungle* encourage the player to develop an antagonistic attitude towards humanity and its failed stewardship of the environment. This view reflects theories of such environmental philosophers as Nick Bostrom, founder of Oxford University's Future of Humanity Institute and proponent of human enhancement, and John A. Leslie, member of the advisory board of the Lifeboat Foundation and strong critic of the anthropic bias, or the seductive and persistent ideological fallacy that the universe was created for the benefit of humankind. Both Bostrom and Leslie champion astrophysicist Brandon Carter's Doomsday Argument, which holds that there is no cause to believe that we are not more than halfway through

the lifespan of the human species, as it is statistically unlikely that more than a trillion human beings will ever live (Leslie 1996: 2). Therefore, the greater the birthrates and lifespans of the members of our species are, the more likely that we will self-inflict a doomsday scenario. In *The End of the World: The Science and Ethics of Human Extinction*, Leslie details many such scenarios, from nuclear threats to unforeseen consequences of nanotechnology to Schopenhauerian pessimism (namely, the troubling notion that it is a small step between deciding that all life should be annihilated to making it so) (Leslie 1996: 172). Leslie dispassionately skips through dozens of global catastrophic risks, making no overt value judgments but rendering the consequences of human irresponsibility abundantly apparent.

At the end of the book, in a chapter titled "Why Prolong Human History," Leslie makes the utilitarian argument that perhaps we should not. Perhaps the happiness of a small population is preferable to the misery of a large population. How ethical is it, however, to demand unconscionable sacrifices of individuals in order to ensure the survival of the human species? Leslie writes:

> Obligations to keep the human race in existence may sometimes be recognized in theory, but are then eroded by a thousand considerations: uncertainty about what future people would be like; loving concern for those already in existence; the reflection that things like pollution control might have to be imposed undemocratically or in defiance of 'rights' which manage to be 'genuine' or 'taken seriously' only because they must never be overruled, and so forth.
>
> (Leslie 1996: 184)

The action we as a supposedly civil society may be forced to undertake in order to guarantee our survival may not justify the means. If the global population is to be reduced, how do we decide who must die? Furthermore, do our obligations concerning the happiness of the people of the future truly outweigh our obligations concerning the happiness of the human beings presently on the earth? Indeed, how are we to measure a concept such as "the quality of life" if a high quality of life for some is presupposed by a low quality of life for others? As Leslie is careful to point out, he is not suggesting that we should strive toward human extinction or to discourage efforts to oppose risks against its continued existence. Rather, he advocates an almost Buddhist disavowal of the attachment to the notion of the cosmic importance of human existence. In other words, we will almost certainly perish as a species, but this eventuality is not something over which we should be unduly concerned.

Philosophers such as Nick Bostrom have pursued this line of thinking in a different direction, arguing that there is no need for future sentient life to be human at all. We can instead become "transhuman," a term that designates *Homo sapiens* in a transitional period as a species, a state into which we have already made tentative progress though mechanical and medical advances

ranging from eyeglasses to organ transplants. Far from being somehow "unnatural," or "better than evolution," selective human enhancement may instead be understood as an intervention into many of the problems we have created for ourselves by allowing processes such as global population growth, climate change, and reliance on nuclear energy to progress unchecked (Bostrom and Sandburg 2009: 408). Moreover, as evolutionary theorists such as Christopher Willis have argued, the only way to circumvent the existential risks facing the human race is to either alter our physical selves or our behavior as a species so profoundly that we, as a group of sentient organisms, might even become unrecognizable to contemporary humans (Willis 2008: 68).

Although such ideas may seem lifted directly from the pages of a sciencefiction story, certain policy makers take them quite seriously. In a short essay on transhumanism published as part of the "World's Most Dangerous Ideas" series run by *Foreign Policy* magazine, political scientist and former U.S. policymaker Francis Fukuyama describes transhumanist ideals as hubristic "Promethean desires" that will ultimately lead us to "deface humanity with […] genetic bulldozers and psychotropic shopping malls" (Fukuyama 2004: 43). These strong words succinctly encapsulate the neoconservative argument Fukuyama sets forth in his 2002 monograph *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, which essentially states that the loss of human dignity and affronts against "human nature" implicit in speculative scientific practices such as genetic modification will result in the swift downfall of liberal democracies across the world. Posthumanists themselves disagree on the means and benefits of transhumanism and human extinction, with some scientists and philosophers favoring gradual yet complete human extinction over evolution. Les Knight, one of the leaders of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, sees the vast majority of human impacts on the natural environment as negative, meaning that the story of our time on earth can have only one possible conclusion. If *Homo sapiens* is indeed doomed to drag itself and countless numbers of other species into oblivion, voluntary extinction is "so much nicer than involuntary extinction, don't you think?", Knight quips (Southan 2012).

Nonhuman "Life" as a Theme of Apocalyptic Popular Media

Tokyo Jungle falls on the extreme end of the posthuman philosophical spectrum, leaving the fate of the human race in the hands of robotic canines that become more attached to the Shibuya wildlife than they ever were to their former human masters. Just as the player vicariously feels the triumph of the Pomeranian who leaves its owner's apartment and claims a small section of the abandoned Shibuya suburbs for its own, so too is the player guided to understand the game's "good" ending, in which the robotic dog ERC-003 (its design a play on Shibuya's iconic "loyal dog" Hachikō) consigns humanity to oblivion so that all other animals might prosper, as a positive and even

welcomed scenario. Should the player achieve this ending, the final reward after the credits finish is a warmly lit image of ERC-003 overgrown with moss and flowers overlaid by peaceful music. Although this is a fair and fitting conclusion to the game, as the theme of social collapse and human extinction has been foreshadowed, explored, and reiterated in each animal's individual story, we cannot fail to note the emotional discrepancy created by the game's proximity to the March 2011 triple disaster, especially as some of the game's environmental settings, from collapsed highway bridges to irradiated water, could have been drawn directly from the news and footage that flooded the media in the wake of these events.

Crispy's, the studio responsible for *Tokyo Jungle*, is the brainchild of director Kataoka Yōhei, who founded the collective of game designers with no previous industry experience in 2006. Crispy's received funding through a Sony Computer Entertainment project called Playstation C.A.M.P. (Creator Audition Mash Up Project), which has provided young industry hopefuls the chance to pitch game ideas to Sony. When Kataoka first proposed the idea for *Tokyo Jungle* in 2009, Sony Worldwide Studio president Yoshida Shuhei's response was not positive. One of the primary objections to the project was that North American and European gamers would not be able to appreciate the game's Japanese setting or lack of human protagonists (Kumar 2013), but the positive reception to a short advance demo of the game at overseas videogame trade shows resulted in a substantial budget increase (Dutton 2012). The advance demo was a hit at the 2010 Tokyo Game Show as well, which allowed Crispy's to retain the privilege of designing promotional materials for *Tokyo Jungle* according to Kataoka's vision for the project (Klepek 2012). The game's development period continued through the aftermath of the March 2011 disasters for its scheduled release in the summer of 2012. If the project had not found widespread appreciation and acceptance with such a large audience, it may well have been canceled. Its Tokyo setting was not altered, however, nor was the creative vision of its developers unduly affected, as they saw their work as a positive celebration of life.

"Life" (*seimei*) emerges as a frequent thematic keyword in Kataoka's descriptions of *Tokyo Jungle* in his interviews with the Japanese gaming press. The director's insistence on a gritty and muted color palette and a visual emphasis on emptiness instead of busyness was strongly influenced by the photography collection *Tokyo Nobody* released in 2000 by Nakano Masaaki. The photographs in *Tokyo Nobody*, mostly taken in the early hours of the morning, depict the streets of Tokyo, both large and small, completely devoid of human beings. Far from being disturbed by such images, Kataoka, who was searching for "a setting that would be conducive for life to thrive," admits that, "The moment I saw [these pictures], I thought, 'What a gentle (*yasashii*) perspective on the world; this is exactly what I was looking for'" (Ōji 2012). The game's music producer TaQ (Sakakibara Taku), who was specifically assigned to the project by Sony, recounts a similar search for an appropriate atmosphere. In an interview with *Famitsū*, Japan's foremost videogame magazine, TaQ explains:

Since animals are the stars of the game, music too strongly reminiscent of a human presence (*ningen aji*) wouldn't be a good fit. For example, I thought, 'if we're talking about a jungle, then the first thing that comes to mind is drums,' so I tried it out. But really, since drums are made from the hide humans skin from animals, and since humans are the ones who beat drums, the music ended up feeling way too human.

(*Famitsū* 2012)

In order to portray a world devoid of human influence yet alive with possibilities, TaQ finally settled on electronically produced techno music, a decision that Kataoka enthusiastically embraced. *Tokyo Jungle*'s staff and producers were thus intensely committed to creating a window into a post-apocalyptic world that was not frightening or upsetting like the aftermaths of real-world disasters, not to mention many fictional and religious depictions of the apocalypse, but rather exciting and vivacious. Of course, the game's adorable mascot animals do not detract from this intended impression, instead enhancing the international marketability of the game by bypassing the need to code human characters with racial and ethnic markers.

Although the appeal of apocalyptic and dystopian themes is universal, there is evidence that North American and European gamers enjoyed *Tokyo Jungle* not in spite of its Japanese origin but rather because of it. In an interview with the online gaming magazine *Gamasutra*, producer Yamagiwa Masaaki recounted that "he is often told by *Tokyo Jungle*'s Western fans that they love the game for being so Japanese, rather than attempting to please Western culture" (Rose 2012). The widespread familiarity with contemporary Japanese media among gamers, bolstered by the successful localization of bestselling Japanese videogame franchises such as *Pokémon* and *Final Fantasy*, has resulted in an international audience of gamers eager to experience the newest titles from Japan. Japanese videogame production companies have offices in multiple overseas territories and pay close attention to international markets during the production phases of not only high-profile titles but often more niche-market projects as well. These companies also typically use different marketing strategies for different territorial markets based on perceived and demonstrated differences in these markets, which may include emphasizing or de-emphasizing the product's "Japanese cultural odor" (Consalvo 2009: 140; Iwabuchi 2004a: 48).

Tokyo Jungle is not a flash in the pan of popular culture or a lone radical voice in a crowd of stories vociferously advocating human survival. As scholars of Japanese religion have argued in various contexts, Japanese eschatologies on both a personal and a societal scale are more cyclical than teleological (Glassman 2012; LaFleur 1986). This broad perception of the end of the world as something inevitable yet not final manifests itself in anime, manga, and videogames through the common scenario of characters living in a world that is slowly fading away after the apocalypse has already occurred. Some of these scenarios, such as those of the 2006 animated series

Ergo Proxy and the 2009 videogame *Final Fantasy XIII*, feature a dystopia that is largely a result of humanity artificially clinging to life through an authoritarian application of advanced technology. In other scenarios, such as those of the 2013 animated series *From the New World* (*Shinsekai yori*) and *Humanity Has Declined* (*Jinrui wa suitai shimashita*), extremely low birthrates and sparse population densities have resulted in relatively peaceful agrarian societies in which most humans lead rich and satisfying lives. As opposed to the narrative tendency in many popular media titles in which a lone male hero or small (and mostly male) band of heroes attempt to avert an apocalypse, the apocalypse has already happened in many recent anime and manga, and the heroes left to pick up the pieces afterwards tend to be attractive young women, or *bishōjo*.

Many of the most iconic characters of anime and manga are *bishōjo* directly associated with apocalyptic and transhuman themes. The gynoid Chi from *Chobits* (2002) and the clone Ayanami Rei from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–1996, *Shin seiki Evangerion*) spring immediately to mind, as does the genetically posthuman Nausicaä, who makes a choice at the climax of the manga *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (*Kaze no tani no Nausicaä*, 1982–1984) quite similar to the "good ending" choice made by the player at the end of *Tokyo Jungle*. Cultural critics such as Susan Napier (2005), Saitō Tamaki (2011a), and Thomas Lamarre (2009) have highlighted the parallels between attractive young *bishōjo* characters and themes of freedom, flight, hope, healing, and regeneration, so it is interesting that so many of these characters are so closely related to the apocalypse and the resulting end of humanity. Perhaps, through the regenerative reproductive capacity of these characters, whose nascent sexuality is not yet tainted by male bodies and masculinist ideologies such as nationalism, militarism, and scientific rationalism, the end of the world may indeed be coded as a positive event whose promise of ecological balance and emotional serenity extends beyond Susan Sontag's (1965) conceptualization of the "delight in disaster" inspired by visually stimulating spectacle and an almost anarchist glee in the collapse of the established order. As Raffaella Baccolini (2004) writes concerning dystopic fiction, the apocalypse is capable of overturning artificial boundaries, erasing political borders, and providing "a subversive and oppositional strategy against hegemonic ideology." The post-apocalyptic world is thus fertile ground for the seeds of new and different ideas to spread roots and thrive, and what better symbols of a potential new order than those marginalized by the old order, such as young women and animals? In their co-authored monograph *Ecofeminism*, Maria Miles and Vandana Shiva make a case for ecological feminism, which "creates the possibility of viewing the world as an active subject, not merely as a resource to be manipulated and appropriated" (1993: 34). Miles and Shiva argue that the capitalistic and patriarchal ideologies underlying many scientific discourses construct the environment as something to be consumed, commodified, or preserved as a site of future production. Fictional young women and animals thereby serve as potent symbols for the possibility of an

existence that is not limited by masculinist and anthropocentric views of the natural world.

In *Tokyo Jungle*, the affective response of hope and delight hidden in a post-human, post-apocalyptic world is facilitated by player identification with cute animals adorably engaging in life-or-death struggles against the backdrop of a ruined Tokyo that has started to bloom. Just as the Pomeranian must leave behind its owner's apartment in order to fulfill its potential, the player must leave behind the social and political baggage of the human species in order to fully enjoy the game and its lush environment and to achieve the "good end-ing" in which humanity vanishes forever from the face of the earth. Like the animated and illustrated *bishōjo*-centered narratives that mediate fears con-cerning the collapse of society, *Tokyo Jungle* serves as a means of addressing anxiety relating to disaster. If social and environmental catastrophe and the eventual extinction of humanity are just as unavoidable and unpredictable as earthquakes and tsunamis, then perhaps it is comforting to take a more posthuman view of a post-apocalyptic world instead of continuing to struggle against the inevitable. Cute animals fighting for survival and dominance in a jungle growing out of the ruins of Tokyo are therefore an expression of a positive posthuman hope for the survival of life in all its forms.

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