

I AM (YOU ARE) NOT ALONE: A SELF-REVELATION AND PERSONAL
EXEGESIS OF NEON GENESIS EVANGELION & END OF EVANGELION

I Am (You Are) Not Alone

A Self-Revelation and Personal Exegesis of Neon Genesis Evangelion & End of

Evangelion

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May 5th, 2015

(Korea & Japan: Children's Day; 어린이날, こどもの日)

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*Dedicated in spirit to Kee Choon Lee & Kevin Ma
Also dedicated in spirit to Stanley Kubrick, Hideaki Anno, Hideo Kojima, Tetsuya Takahashi,
and also to whom I wish would one day come to know Christ.*

A Work in Progress

Note: I believe it would provide some poignancy to listen to these OSTs before continuing,
especially for people who are not familiar with *Evangelion*:

Neon Genesis Evangelion OST: *Rei I, Hedgehog's Dilemma, Rei II, Shinji [Orchestral]*

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Acknowledgements

*To all my friends and family
And to Jane for editing*

*For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all
comparison.*

2 Corinthians 4:17

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Foreword

I'll preface this piece by stating that I don't consider myself to be an eloquent writer and this is possibly one of the last things I ever imagined myself doing as a college student—spending my personal, free time crafting a complete-as-possible, seven-thousand word appraisal of my personal introspections. If someone, perhaps three or four years ago, were to ask me to write something similar, I would have politely declined and laughed at the thought of even attempting such an undertaking. However, as I have matured and burgeoned intellectually, I have developed an irreplaceable fondness of the written word and acknowledged writing as an indicative medium of artistic and personal expression—namely as a conduit of expressing the author's deepest ruminations and sincere reflections. I've also come to appreciate the convenience of conveying my most intimate thoughts, not merely as a way of expressing myself, but to amplify, analyze and express my own thought progression and internalizations.

This self-reflection describes my four tumultuous years as an undergraduate at New York University, while viewing a major conflict from the lens of an artistic work that has deeply impacted me during this time of personal struggle. As such, I want to say that I do not take myself this seriously most of the time, and whatever I convey here expresses my most genuine, heartfelt sentimentality. I would greatly appreciate readers to forgive any youthful naivety I may express—I hope nothing here comes off as too sophomoric or ostentatious, and I sincerely wish readers to have the opportunity to view the piece from my vantage point.

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Uncovering the Unconscious

*Your vision will become clear when you look into you own heart. Who looks outside, dreams;
who looks inside, awakes.*

— C. G. Jung

It was perhaps during these, my most dismal days—as I constantly was combating agoraphobia, persistent anxiety, lethargy and fatigue, gastroparesis, and pervasive feelings of isolation and loneliness—that I maintained minimum social ties outside of my immediate family. My studious and introverted inclinations did even less to uplift my seemingly hopeless situation. School, home, study, sleep described my life in a nutshell; this period felt like perpetual purgatory and torment. One may ask, “What kind of illness or disease did he have?” and “How severe was it?” And fair enough, it was not a type of cancer nor was it any other terminal illness. I was diagnosed with chronic/excessive Gastro-Esophagael Reflux Disease (GERD) in early 2012, and although many are not aware of its life-altering symptoms, they crippled my undergraduate years, and I have been forever changed by it. Among other perhaps more severe sequela, I vomited over a hundred times over two and a half years, and at its worst, plunged from a healthy weight of close to 140 lbs to a dangerous 98 lbs. Some days, I would be fortunate enough to stomach a glass of water but would spend the next five hours experiencing a sensation equivalent to getting my esophagus and stomach torched. Fruits and vegetables comprised the majority of my fatless, protein-less diet, and even they didn’t bode well with my digestive system. Proton-Pump Inhibitors, antacids, and other reflux-related medication were within arm’s reach, and my gastrointestinal tract became an incessant skirmish ground for acidic and basic chemicals.

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Three years later (2014), doctors assessed that I was exhibiting symptoms of major depressive disorder: feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and loss of interest in daily activities and life; they said I was in the verge of becoming clinically depressed. Although my physical degradation was sudden and noticeable, it wasn't impossible to endure. My sternum and upper thorax began protruding from my body and I became fascinated with my own anatomical structure and physiology. And after about a year of suffering from GERD with no signs of improvement, the disease began working its way into my psyche. Although I don't want go into the details of what might have precipitated my being sick, I believe the amalgamation of various life stressors culminated in my GI tract's inability to withstand the physical and mental strains. I began to question the underlying cause of my disease, and my life, hyperbolically, resembled something like Kubler-Ross' stages of grief and loss. The apparent decline of my health initially resulted in self-denial and my seclusion; it caused me to become pessimistic, elusive and to avoid social interaction altogether. I began to express anger and became hostile toward others. I started to question God: "why me?" I became resentful of others who didn't seem to care about my condition, and I envied them as I watched them enjoying life. In contrast, my constant agony made me feel hopeless and distressed all the more. I began projecting my hostility toward my closest friends, parents, and even to my doctors, knowing full well that it would not aid my situation but aggravate it further.

After a year of this perpetual vicious cycle, I began to experience full-blown depression, considered the most insidious of Kubler's five stages. Waking up every morning with a mouth full of hydrochloric acid, not being able to ingest even the basic types of liquid soluble and foods without vomiting or experiencing some sort of burning sensation due to regurgitated acid, I was in utter despair. Soon, the pervasive pain caused me to turn into a state of anhedonia, and a veil

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of absurdism began to shroud my thinking. My state seemed akin to Job's predicament of the Old Testament, although not comparable in the least in terms of grief and suffering. It was here that I experienced firsthand what philosophers referred to as “existential angst,” or a personal loss of hope and a dread that permeated all rational thought. Although my body had given up, something deep inside me—perhaps my psyche—began to search for something to remove this inexorable dismay and sense of nihilism. It unconsciously compelled me to search for a mode of recourse; a person, place or thing to relate to and to receive some sort of consolation and conviction from.

Evangeliion: Anno's Postmodern, Existential Outlet

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.

— J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*

During the spring semester of 2013 I was introduced serendipitously to the anime series, Neon Genesis Evangelion (Shinseki ebangerion, Japanese: 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン; Evangelion for short). How much this series means to me is inexpressible: I place Evangelion¹ on the same level as works like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Paradise Lost*, *Hamlet*, *Ulysses*, and *The Odyssey*. And my admiration for Hideaki Anno (the writer and director of the series) is not any less than my respect for Hitchcock, Tolkein, Kubrick, Beethoven, Bach, Milton, Homer, Shakespeare and Joyce. My indelible fondness and respect for Evangelion is due not only to the fact that it acted as a sort of personal saviorist narrative or some panacea to my predicament, but because of its intellectual breadth in psychology, philosophy, theology, narratology and interpersonal relations, and its germaneness to human intimacy and self-actualization. These were all disciplines and philosophies in academia I ostensibly had vested interests in, and it was after countless hours of scrutinizing numerous written analyses and documents that I learned that

¹ I will use the term Evangelion to be a combination of the original TV series, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and the finale film, *End of Evangelion*)

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Evangelion's sophistication genuinely rivaled the psychology and religiousness of Dostoyevsky, the social commentaries of Orwell, and the cinematic expertise and panache of Kubrick.

Several scholars have written on the crucial influence of Evangelion on the anime industry, and the importance of the medium as a whole in terms of artistic expression and literary depth. While some may criticize Evangelion as abstruse and overly ambitious, others exalt it as a work of sheer genius, and I concur. Although animated works by Hayao Miyazaki, including *Princess Mononoke*, *Castle in the Sky* and *Spirited Away*, received both commercial success and critical acclaim, there has been a resounding unanimity among critics and scholars when it comes to which animated motion picture triumphs in sheer intellectual and artistic density. Anime critic Verboon (2013, in *Unreality Mag*) stated that:

...arguably the greatest and certainly most thematically dense of the three 90's sci-fi anime masterpieces is *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. It has one of the most enduring worldwide cult franchises and passionate fanbases in all of geekdom ... the most celebrated cast in anime ... [and] poster boy/protagonist Shinji is one of the most nuanced, popular, and relatable characters in anime history. (no page)

In addition, literary critic Mike Crandol (2002) states that it cannot be denied that the limits of what the animated film could convey were expanded at an unprecedented level because of Evangelion. He asserts that perhaps *no other work in the history of anime has been as scrutinized, psychoanalyzed, and generally picked-apart to such an extent*. Furthermore, one of the reasons why Evangelion is so profound and remarkable is that it functions on no fewer than four distinct allegorical levels: it can be enjoyed at face value as an expertly realized sci-fi action adventure, but it is also a dystopian satire of the genre, a coming-of-age parable, and a treatise on confronting loneliness and uncertainty in the adult world. And while I subscribe to all four of Crandol's proposed allegories, Evangelion is more importantly a social commentary on Japan's

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economic recession (known as the ‘Lost Decade’ (Figure 1.0) during the early 1990s to early 2000s) as well as Anno’s interpretation of the human condition².

Anno was using Evangelion as an outlet for his own depression and suicide ideation, and to construct a 90's saviorist narrative to tear to shreds the socially dysfunctional (non-interactive) communities in Japan that were socially reclusive and inept due to the recession, and to the people who were influenced by Japan’s anime-frenzy zeitgeist. The dangers of extreme fantasizing and resorting to escapism from reality dates back to the epic of Don Quixote; Anno had become a proponent advocating against its hazards and wanting to provide a rude awakening to these debilitated communities who had regressed as a result of the recession.

Evangelion is therefore also a sociopolitical-didactic work that served as a wake-up call to these “otakus” (although the term nowadays is used in a pejorative sense). At its core, Evangelion aimed more toward the heart and feelings of its audiences—its audience was able to relate to it vicariously. People who shared Anno’s predicament or who were able to glean his intention would claim that the work’s cerebral themes and stellar cast of characters is to be considered brilliant. What Evangelion was to the anime industry was what *2001: A Space Odyssey* was to modern cinema. As a metafictional, deconstructionist narrative, it broke the conventions of anime similarly to the way Kubrick broke the conventions of film with *2001*. At its heart, Evangelion is not just a post-apocalyptic science fiction series that deals with a bunch of anguished, deeply-troubled children, sprinkled with philosophical and psychological trite and glibness, but is actually the reverse: it is a scholarly, masterful psychodrama that portrays the

² The human condition encompasses the unique features of being human, particularly the ultimate concerns of human existence. It can be described as the unalterable part of humanity that is inherent and innate to human beings and not dependent on factors such as gender, race, culture, or class. It includes concerns such as the meaning of life, the search for gratification, the sense of curiosity, the inevitability of isolation, the awareness of the inescapability of death and the capacity of humans to be good as well as evil and whether or not this makes us worthwhile beings (Wikipedia, human condition).

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frailty of human relationships and the precarious nature of human beings. Most of my close friends probably have heard me speak of Evangelion once (or twice), and I have mentioned, time and time again, what makes this work so vast and aesthetically profound is elusive if you decide to view it from only one or two angles (e.g., characters and narrative); then you will miss out on all it has to offer. Multiple viewings of the series is the required minimum, and a basic understanding of human psychology, existential philosophy, cinema and literature is warranted and will exponentialize the viewing experience and its appreciation.

Evangelion's Plot and Themes

I would not think of quarreling with your interpretation nor offering any other, as I have found it always the best policy to allow the film to speak for itself.

—Stanley Kubrick, speaking on 2001

For the sake of fluency and cohesion, I will cite Hoffer (2012) to summarize for me the plot of Evangelion:

...Evangelion takes place in the year 2015 in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event called Second Impact, which killed half of world's population fifteen years earlier. Second Impact was caused by failed contact with and experimentation on a creature called an Angel [Adam] [shito in original Japanese which literally means "messenger"], though the public has been told that Second Impact was triggered by a meteorite landing in Antarctica. Second Impact also changed the tilt of the Earth, resulting in an endless summer for many of the remaining habitable regions and the destruction of the ecosystem. In 2015, the world has finally begun to stabilize. The paramilitary organization NERV [under U.N. jurisdiction] has been formed under the direction of a mysterious [illuminati-like] group called SEELE, which predicts the coming of new Angels using the Dead Sea Scrolls and deploys NERV to destroy the Angels under the guise of protecting mankind. SEELE's real intention is attain (sic) immortality through Human Instrumentality, which will bypass human evolution by merging all human consciousness into one [perfect] entity. The series opens with the arrival of the third Angel in the city of Tokyo-3.

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Fourteen-year old Ikari Shinji, son of NERV commander Ikari Gendo, arrives at NERV and reluctantly agrees to pilot EVA-01, a giant biomechanical [machine rivalling the prowess of the angels thus is the only way to defeat one]. Though never having seen an Eva, he syncs with EVA-01 easily and defeats the Angel. It is later revealed that his success is because EVA-01 contains the consciousness of his mother Yui, a researcher for NERV whose soul was absorbed [intentionally, but unbeknownst to everyone including Gendo] into the Eva during early activation experiments. Shinji begins living with his supervisor [and surrogate mother] Katsuragi Misato and meets the pilot of EVA-00, the mysterious Ayanami Rei. He is inexplicably attracted to Rei, who turns out to be a [biological] clone of his mother and the catalyst of Human Instrumentality. A third pilot arrives at NERV from Germany, the self-possessed Soryu Asuka Langley. *With Misato and the three pilots in place, [Evangelion] alternates between the Eva's battle sequences against the Angels and the daily struggle of the central characters to overcome [although not always] their personal [deep-seated traumas and tumultuous upbringings]. Each of the main characters must cope [or learn to cope] with a variety of social and emotional problems as unresolved sexual tensions, injuries, deaths, and defeats deal blows to their psyches.* The final two episodes deviate from the series as they are set entirely inside of the minds of the main characters and happen after the implementation of Human Instrumentality. *Each character is forced to examine their doubts and self-worth through flashbacks, [traumatic incidents, surrealist imagery] montages, black and white photographs, and depictions of possible alternate realities. Shinji, who has remained hopelessly isolated and self-deprecating through most of the series, is the primary focus of this examination [and by extension, Anno's and the viewer's].* He concludes that life is worth living and rejects Human Instrumentality, and he is surrounded by a vision of the cast, both living and dead, who congratulate him on his choice. The real-life fates of the characters in the physical world are never revealed. (p. 9-11, italics added)

Superficially, Anno's Evangelion resembles a dozen other Japanese animations of the time—kitschy portrayals of humans and creatures with wide eyes, expressive faces, futuristic technology and gadgets, and most typical of all, huge robots (commonly nicknamed 'mecha')

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piloted by gallant adolescent protagonists (Kraemer 2). These, however, are mere adornments that hardly explain Evangelion's overwhelming popularity in Japan and its substantial critical acclaim worldwide. As explained previously, it is in the relatable psychological complexity of its characters and the philosophical examination of the nature of relationships and the self.

Evangelion takes viewers on a hellish ride of existential crisis and brutal worldly and cosmic violence, climaxing in an elaborate Hegelian-like return to an idyllic, primordial state of oneness and singularly (Kraemer 2). Through this striking concatenation of allegories, metaphors, motifs, symbolisms, labyrinthine exposition and profound characterization, the series' pivot point of discussion is in the complex examination of oneself, and a death-rebirth narrative that consciously exists in the shadow of the Lost Decade recession (Kraemer 2).

The title of the series illuminates the plot and major theme. Neon Genesis Evangelion, originally in Greek, can be transliterated in English as "new century gospel." The title, alluding to Judeo-Christian soteriology (Figure 1.1), suggests that the narrative offer a new origin myth for humankind as well as a new possible ending or rebirth. The word Genesis, in particular, is a word that strongly resonates within the narrative; 'Genesis,' as referred to in Evangelion is not just a beginning, but *the* beginning. Any person who has given considerable amount of time and thought studying Evangelion might glean that this beginning not only refers to the beginning of the ending of the plot, but to Shinji's life and, self-referentially, to the life of the viewer; Evangelion attempts to peruse the viewer's personal life inception. People's lives begin when they are born into the world: the psychological theories of attachment, object relations, life stages of psychosocial development, and the shaping of one's ego and personality all factor in when individuals are born and begin to grow in the world. These factors are ostensibly shaped by the covert, and at times overt dueling forces of 'nature' and 'nurture,' whose invisible hands subtly

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but surely craft the individual. Although epistemology and ontology endeavor philosophically to answer questions of existence and theory of knowledge, most people grow and develop completely oblivious to the effect these elements are having on us. Every single person is thereby a byproduct of families, racial histories, social class, ethnicities, education, employment, personal and collective traumas, and the concatenation of myriad other factors.

Although issues of child negligence, poor parenting, and lack of attachment and love are portrayed eloquently in Evangelion through multiple developmental theories (which I could expound upon in another essay), the psychological theory that Evangelion is most deeply rooted in is Karen Horney's theory of neurosis. This theory, put simply, states that all individuals, to one degree or another, perceive the world as hostile, and are perennially associated in the act of wanting to receive affection and approval, gain power by controlling and manipulating, desire social recognition and self-sufficiency, and aspire to perfection (Karen Horney, neurotic needs). Horney's theory of neurosis, in my opinion, most articulately and univocally describes Anno's interpretation of the human condition via Evangelion; it is also my own take on the human condition. Humans, from the beginning of time, are volatile, precarious beings searching constantly for meaning and purpose in life. Humans are inquisitive from the moment of birth. Curiosity, or questioning "why," is man's greatest gift, which has helped him achieve the greatest feats in technology and in human civilization, yet simultaneously is perpetually haunting, and leads inevitably to the existential crisis.

Shinji Ikari: An Analog of Our Personal Selves

*Civilization has made man, if not always more bloodthirsty, at least more viciously, more
horribly bloodthirsty.*

— Dostoyevsky, *Notes From Underground*

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Horney's theory is most aptly grounded and expressed through Evangelion's protagonist, Shinji Ikari (Figure 1.2) (an iconic, literary character who puts trademark characters like Holden Caulfield to shame). During the first few episodes, we learn that Shinji Ikari had a boisterous upbringing that has resulted in a neurosis that hinders his everyday interactions. He is an insecure, self-loathing, motherless fourteen-year-old who is estranged from his politically powerful father, Gendo Ikari. Though Shinji's impulses are essentially good-hearted, the result of mal-nurturance and lack of motherly attachment leads him desperately to seek for the approval and affection of others, which he rarely receives, and which leads him to accede to depression when his talents are most needed (Kraemer 4). Having hung his sense of identity on the reactions of unresponsive and similarly broken others, Shinji lives in a constant state of uncertainty and fear, and almost always convinces himself that he is hated and worthless (Kraemer 4). He is in perpetual conflict with his father and is locked in an Oedipal-complex with the memory of his dead mother, whose presence lingers hauntingly around both the machine 'mecha' he pilots, dubbed 'Evangelion' or 'Eva' and his fellow-pilot Rei Ayanami, who unbeknownst to Shinji, is a clone of his dead mother.

In the original TV series' fourth episode, titled "Hedgehog's Dilemma (Figure 1.3)," viewers learn that Shinji suffers from a type of avoidant personality disorder that prohibits him from forming relationships because of his deep-seated insecurities and at the thought of rejection. The hedgehog's dilemma was originally a term coined by Arthur Schopenhauer, who used it as a metaphor to describe the challenges of human intimacy. Similar to Horney's theory, he describes humans as being like a group of hedgehogs who all seek to become close to one another but who cannot avoid hurting one another with their sharp spines. They all share the same idyllic intention of a close loving, reciprocal relationship, but this may not occur, for reasons they

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cannot avoid. This metaphor translates in Evangelion to one of the most eloquently portrayed metaphors I have ever seen in fiction. The notion of the A.T. field (Figure 1.4) (Absolute Terror Field) is revealed during the first episode of Evangelion as a defense shield barrier that the angels possess to repel any form of physical attack (including nuclear weapons and biochemical weapons). During the latter portions of the series however, the audience learns that humans possess an A.T. field analogous to that of the angels: it is what allows humanity to retain their separate forms and remain as by nature as fractured, incomplete individuals. It is essentially the wall within one's mind that fosters a sense of incompleteness, and is therefore the cause of loneliness and pain, and thus is the root cause of mankind's suffering (Evageeks, A.T. Field no page). Most works of fiction gives the audience a sense of hope, and inspirational messages can be gleaned either from the heroic main character overcoming his struggle or from some subtext. In Evangelion however, Anno refuses to feed you this lie; human relationships are bitter and are often times unreciprocated and sycophantic; they are far from perfect, and people who rely solely on human relationships will undoubtedly come to realize their frequently nihilistic and uncertain nature. Human beings are fallible and inherently flawed creatures, and so is their ability to create bonds and affinities with one another. Moreover, the idea of the conquering hero who faces trial after trial and returns a chivalrous and immaculate person harkens over millennia to the Greek epics of Homer—these truisms have been recycled ad infinitum through every culture in every period since antiquity. The fact is, Anno wants audiences to know that this is a nice illusion to delude ourselves with. What Anno depicts in Evangelion is the anti-premise of the basics of heroism, which is learning how to live no matter how harsh and bleak life may turn out to be.

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Early Psychological Trauma & Theory of Attachment

We may not be able to prepare the future for our children, but we can at least prepare our children for the future

— F.D. Roosevelt

Evangeliion ingeniously reinterprets elements of Christian eschatology and Jewish mysticism and combines them with Freudian and Jungian imagery to construct a painful but ultimately liberal narrative of personal and social self-revelation (Kraemer 2). It accentuates the primitive and crucial stages of childhood and adolescence and the negative associations it has with early traumatic experiences and the lack of proper motherly (if not parental) attachment or a moral exemplar to follow early on in life. The implications of inadequate upbringings are reflected via Evangelion's characters, namely through Shinji, Asuka, Rei and Misato. Anno foreshadows that early life contributes momentarily in forming the trajectories of people's fundamental attributes, behaviors, personalities, and temperaments; his emphasis on the importance on childhood and adolescence cannot be understated. During Japan's Lost Decade recession, Anno begrudgingly describes the status quo of Japan's young adult communities as stripped of a grown-up moral compass and as socially reclusive; he states that they are not able to discern the roles and responsibilities of that of a child and an adult. This parental and caring inadequacies become evident in a scene in the film in *End of Evangelion*: Misato (Shinji's commanding officer and surrogate mother), who suffers from borderline personality disorder, holds a personal vendetta against the angels for killing her father whom she was never appreciated by, thus has had a sexual relationship with a man who resembles her father; she surrounds herself in denial until reality sinks in, decides to deep-kiss Shinji (Figure 1.5) as a way to "console" and "encourage" him during a time of desperation. Here lies a major social

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commentary targeted to Japan's young adults. Although physically attractive and intellectually brilliant, all the adult and parental figures in Evangelion are simply self-indulgent beings who live by the pleasure principle and for self-preservation. They can be portrayed as a collective tapestry of brokenness, defense mechanisms and psychological traumas who need long-term therapy with Sigmund Freud himself. Misato suffers from alcoholism and acts of sexual perversion, Gendo has had sexual relations with brilliant scientist Naoko Akagi merely to keep her at work at NERV, and after her suicide becomes sexually involved with her daughter Ritsuko Akagi; Ritsuko, who has never had a loving and reciprocated relationship with her mother, knowing full well of her mother's surreptitious affair, eventually succumbs to dalliance with Gendo which she misinterprets as a form of affection she never received; Yui, not considering the ramifications of her purported death, leaves Gendo and Shinji as a way to thwart SEELE's ultimate objective which leads Shinji without the faculties to adequately live life and prompts Gendo to collaborate with SEELE on the Human Instrumentality Project; and Asuka's mother commits suicide because of her mental instability that precipitated as a result in her divorce only to result in the toddler Asuka walking in on her mother's dead, hanging body.

As such, one of the most recurring themes in the series is the attachment between a child and his/her mother. The Eva itself (which one NERV scientist refers to in a dramatic moment as "she") also serves as a symbol of the mother (Kraemer 6). The short version of its name is Eva, which evokes the proverbial Eve of Judeo-Christian teachings, the biblical mother of humankind. Although the Evas are initially introduced as robots, it is revealed later that they are organic creatures covered over with metal armor, only to restrain certain capabilities and to conceal the truth of their origins. There is also infantile and even fetal symbolism that permeates not just the Eva Units and pilots, but also the narrative structure of the entire series. The obvious symbolism

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is the fact that the Eva mechs are attached to an “umbilical cord” and need to stay attached to function, as a power source. Further, the Eva’s entry plug, or removable cockpit, fits into a cylindrical womb-like opening and encases the pilot in a placental-like amniotic fluid (dubbed LCL) (Figure 1.6) “Shinji, in one episode notes that the cockpit smells like blood, much as a woman's womb holds an unborn fetus in a blood-rich liquid. Also of note is Asuka’s seemingly out-of-place, yet relevant retort to Shinji as he climbs into his Eva: ‘Hey, Shinji, what's it like? Mom's breast? Or inside her womb?’” (Kraemer 6). Though Asuka’s intent is merely mischievous, her comment demonstrates that she too has subconsciously picked up on the motherly role the Eva plays for Shinji – the same role, in fact, “that her Eva will play for her when she has a near-death vision of her own mother in *End of Evangelion*” (Kraemer 6). Shinji also harbors semi-romantic feelings for Rei Ayanami (another Eva pilot), who is the biological clone of his mother, and is able to feel motherly sentiments from Rei when in one of the early episodes he accidentally touches Rei’s exposed breast (Figure 1.7). While piloting the Eva, Shinji often recollects his childhood memories of his mother. “The visual sequences evoke the safety and love of the mother-child relationship: an infant nursing at its mother's breast, the tranquil rocking motion of ocean waves, Yui's silhouette with outstretched arms against a bright background, a glowing woman caressing Shinji's face as he floats nude in a fetal position” (Kraemer 6). The three Eva pilots, Shinji, Rei and Asuka all unconsciously resort to the Eva as a source of refuge and a safe haven, and it is by this association and attachment (or the lack thereof) that they later recognize their inner potential or innate insufficiency. Unfortunately, most of these characters break down psychologically and emotionally as the show progresses under dire conflicts. Significantly, they lack the faculties of conflict management and interpersonal communications, which stems from missing attachments and bonds.

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Evangelion goes further by adding a Freudian side to the series. Shinji's Eva Unit-01, is literally and figuratively his own mother. Due to events too complicated to summarize here, Yui soul was absorbed into Unit-01 in a contact experiment during her son's toddler years. As previously mentioned, Shinji feels a comforting unconscious inclination towards his Eva and is able to synchronize with it unwillingly; he is also dependent on it for survival. Shinji begins both to resent his Eva because of its burden of responsibility and dependence and at the same time is afraid to leave the comfort and safety it provides—his natural longing for a mother's caress. It has even been suggested that Shinji's entering into Unit-01 in *End of Evangelion* is a Freudian as well as a Judeo-Christian "return to the womb (Figure 1.8)," concept and that his struggle to be free of the Eva is his "rite of passage" into manhood and maturity (Crandol, no page). In *End of Evangelion*, Shinji must learn to let go of his Eva (which metaphorically depicts his mother) before he can grow and hope to attain bonds with others, and particularly a loving relationship with the girl he cares for. Not surprisingly however, a lack of early parental guidance and role modeling cripples his ability to socialize with others to the point of being seemingly autistic—disregarding or misinterpreting the others' feelings and emotions entirely. This goes all the more true for all the other Eva pilots.

One of my favorite scenes in the film speaks to the voluminous underpinnings of this mother-child attachment is implied in the movie finale. Using various semiotics and surrealist imagery, and taken place in a time that may seem arbitrary (during instrumentality), Anno displays the toddler Shinji surrounded by a set of swings, two curving mountains—evidentially resembling a mother's breast—with Shinji placed inside a rhombus-shaped sandbox located in a position which may signify the mother's uterus. As this scene progresses, Shinji builds from the sand a pyramid castle but soon breaks down out of spite and frustration (Figure 1.9). This

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pyramid portrays two things: foremost, it depicts the collective of Shinji's temperament, personality, and secondly, the relationship with his mother. After seeing the other two peculiar children leaving him in the playground with their mother, he realizes he is not like them—he is missing something fundamental and essential. Developmental psychologists claim that the mother acts as a first port of guidance and human interplay, and have claimed for decades that a child's ability to adequately function on biological, psychological and emotional levels may be entirely contingent on this primitive and indispensable relationship. Young Shinji realizes he does not have a motherly figure he has grown to love and respect; he does not have a mother-child attachment like the other children. Thus, he discovers that he is with a disadvantage; his affect is therefore fragmented, has a tendency of being sequestered, does not fare well with other people, particularly women, and is essentially misguided in the cesspool of social interaction in which he perceives as chaos and disorder. Further, Anno goes far as to title some of Evangelion's original sound tracks with names like "Mother is the first Other," "Infantile Dependence, Adult Dependency," "Separation Anxiety," and Splitting of the Breast." It also goes to say that it is exactly because of the lack of parental guidance and support that leads most, if not all characters in Evangelion unable to cope in the face of adversity, ultimately resulting in them breaking down both emotionally and psychologically, unable to compose themselves after an ordeal. Another interpretation of the sand pyramid can be attributed to Maslow's hierarchy of needs in conflict resolution and in human motivation. Due to the lack of rudimentary establishments (i.e., safety, love/belonging and esteem) required to achieve the highest of the hierarchical needs or self-actualization, Shinji, in a fit of uncontrollable rage demolishes said pyramid realizing that he may never reach his fullest potential or aspiring to become the most that one can be.

Absolute Idealism: Human Instrumentality, the Singularity, and Divine Self-Actualization

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No Social Stability without Individual Stability.

— A. Huxley, *A Brave New World*

The series culminates in a climax when Shinji is dramatically crucified on a cross/Kabbalistic Tree of Life (Figure 2.0) by an event that has been orchestrated by SEELE and Gendo. The goal of Human Instrumentality is to break down the aforementioned A.T. fields that inherently cause loneliness and pain within humans. In the end, Shinji gains the power to put an end to human suffering and individuality. The best definition of the Instrumentality comes from Misato's monologue within the first five minutes of *End of Evangelion*: "So, mankind, a race of flawed and incomplete separate entities, has reached the end of its evolutionary potential. The Instrumentality Project will manufacture the evolution of man's separate entities into a single consummate being" (Vaughan 10). The concept of instrumentality alludes to Hegel's concept of divine self-actualization and of Clarke's notion of Singularity in his novel, *A Childhood's End* (Figure 2.1). However, even after the imperfections of humanity are consolidated and a state of theosis is achieved, Shinji's remains discontented and disheartened. Shinji's begins to recognize that his cessation of pain and suffering through total oneness—something he sought for throughout the entire series—is basically equivalent to nothing existing at all, with no frame of reference, no interaction, no individuality or freedom, the Hegelian concept of negative liberty. Although Shinji's insecurities and neuroses had been done away with and an ideal form of himself is formed, he is no longer himself; he is without an identity (Figure 2.2), "In a state of no ego, Shinji can do nothing but exist, undefined, identityless, and unself-aware" (Kraemer 8).

With his increased awareness and insight of the barriers between the minds of others, Shinji at last begins to understand his own role in constructing himself in the total nothingness of existence (Kraemer 9). In this dénouement, Shinji convinces himself of the importance of

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interacting with others in order to perceive himself and in forming his own identity. However, he has yet to realize his own responsibility to shape and direct that exchange until a voice—Yui’s or that of his mother—tells him during his process of reemergence (Figure 2.3). "The angle of view and the position from which you view your reality will change your perception of its nature. It is all, literally, a matter of perspective” (as cited in Kraemer 9). It is due to these words of insight and acknowledgement that Shinji is able to realize his plasticity in how his self-identity is dependent on the reactions of others. He realizes that he previously focused primarily on his negative aspects, which was an arbitrary choice, which was engendered by his turbulent upbringing (Figure 2.4). He recognizes that though praise and affection were offered to him, his fear led him to ignore them in favor of indulging in self-pity and denying his responsibility for who and what he was:

At last, the purpose of Evangelion's apocalypse becomes clear, and Shinji fully understands the revelation that he destroyed the world to obtain. In a melodramatic but nevertheless touching climax, Shinji rises from the interrogation chair and declares, "I hate myself... But I could love myself! With the walls of his mental prison breaking all around him (symbolized visually as shattering glass), Shinji ends the series triumphant, understanding at last that his self is his own. (Crandol, no page)

The Gospel of a New Century

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change

— Carl R. Rogers

At its core, Evangelion is about being alone, about feeling alone and coming to terms with loneliness. But viewers soon realize that the other characters and Shinji are not alone in feeling alone. Thomas Wolfe said, “Loneliness is and always has been the central and inevitable experience of every man” and we, the audience, to one extent or another, escape from the exact

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same fears and uncertainties; the entire cast of Evangelion and we just have different methods of coping with them—we are certainly better off than them. The final two episodes are devoid of any structural animation and formality and instead delve into the psyche and minds of the four protagonists. A set of existential, purposive inquiries such as "What do you fear?" and "Why do you pilot Eva?" (Figure 2.5, 2.6, 2.7) are asked to Shinji and company as they, as well as the audience struggle to answer them (Crandol, no page). The very last episode focuses exclusively on Shinji, as the animation that complements the show is deconstructed into its most simple and basic parts. Animation comes to a halt as black-and-white Shinji is floating in a white void in suspended animation, seemingly free of all worldly restraints and uncertain of his own existence (Crandol, no page). After the voice of Yui obligingly offers consolation and encouragement, Shinji is able to reorient himself, and from the innermost recesses of his mind is told he can create whatever reality he desires for himself: "This bleak series comes to a close its ultimately positive message is revealed: Our world is what we make of it, truth is subjective, and one must learn to love oneself before they can love another. Shinji chooses to face his fears and return to the world he knew, and the other characters welcome him back" (Crandol, no page) (Figure 2.8, 2.9).

Evangelion recurrently poses one of life's hardest questions: "Who am I?" is a question that haunted philosophers and common man alike since time immemorial. Although Anno does not attempt to resolve this question for viewers, he implies that most people stop asking this pivotal existential question and never move towards answering it for themselves. It is perhaps because, like Shinji, we live in a world filled with vagaries and insecurities, and we ourselves as primordial beings delude ourselves of these harsh truths. Anno comments on the complacency and self-indulgence that haunt humanity and the tendency for humans to want to live

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comfortably, being merely a part of the whole, and not in need of individualization. But it is for those that do make a move towards self-actualization, where there will be a rebirth in consciousness and rational thinking.

Schopenhauer said, “a man can be himself alone so long as he is alone... if he does not love solitude, he will not love freedom; for it is only when he is alone that he is really free.” This is the central message of Evangelion, and it speaks volumes not because of its vivid and candid philosophical and aesthetic portrayal, but because of its gamut of relevance in the reality of every person’s life. The reason why I think Evangelion is comparable to masterworks like Beethoven’s 5th, Bach’s Goldberg’s Variations and Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel is because it acts as a mirror that reflects the truth of reality, including all its unpleasant smudges, cracks and imperfections that are revealed under scrutiny; in essence, it touches the core of human existence. Uncertainty, suffering and loneliness ultimately define the human condition and inevitably seep into everyone’s life.

Experience tells me that the best works of fiction touch the heart of human emotion and intellect. The maelstrom of conflicts Shinji Ikari and company face are conflicts that are relatable on every plane of existence—these characters are truly the ones we can relate to and see our reflections in. However, Anno does not want audiences to vacillate and delude ourselves in false pretenses of staying complacent of indulging in escapist fantasy to the point of becoming infatuated and considering them as alternate realities (Figure 3.0). We should find comfort in how we feel because we are not alone in feeling this way; we must not remain self-satisfied or run away from answering the existential and daunting question of self-identity and life’s purpose. To elude these questions is to avoid and deny human existence and life itself, and as Shinji put it numerous times throughout the series, “I [we] mustn’t run away!” (Figure 3.1).

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Afterword

My experience of suffering and despair led me to severe despondency and depression; this personal struggle, at the time, seemed insurmountable. It would not be hyperbolic to say that Evangelion, with its layers of psychology, existential philosophy and expository characterization handled with adroit cinematic direction and precision, acted as a psychological panacea and helped me overcome my suffering and existential crisis. My physical and psychological degradation, which led me to self-denial, seclusion, hostility, and angst was mirrored profoundly in Shinji, Asuka, Rei and Misato. And it was due to this association that I related to, that I began to care about them and their nihilistic behaviors, which had been instigated by their own harsh upbringings and circumstances. Most importantly, their discovery, throughout the series, for meaning in life paralleled that of my own struggle and search for consolation.

Although Evangelion's aesthetically visceral imagery and seemingly esoteric parlance may seem too pretentious to swallow at first, its ultimately liberal and self-revelatory narrative reaches the deepest recesses of its characters, and to the viewer's consciousness. The types of relationships and events Shinji experiences helps him determine to accept the totality of his identity and individuality as a flawed human being living in a precarious, virulent world. Although the series does not conclude with an endearing dénouement or with a jubilant, happily-ever-after ending, this ambiguity shows Anno's ability to comment on the indeterminate nature of life.

There is an old maxim that states, "A truly wise man always has more questions than answers." Evangelion's uplifting narrative and exponentially profound subtext pose more questions than it provides answers. It is because of this resounding feature that I deem Evangelion a tour-de-force that rivals the best works of fiction from any era. There have been

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very few, if any, fictional works that have impacted me so intellectually, emotionally and psychologically. And to viewers who do not relate to my sentiment vicariously cannot deny its sociopolitical influence and the impact it has had on animated motion pictures. For the reasons stated above, I cannot refrain from deeming it as a work of artistic genius.

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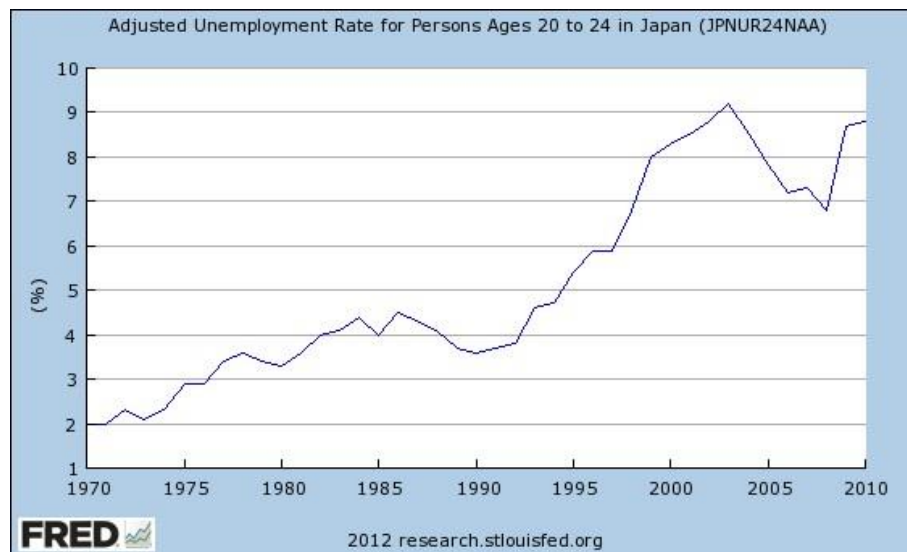
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Figures

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(Figure 1.0) Japan's 90s Lost Decade: Unemployment rates skyrocket in 1990-2000.



(Figure 1.1) Judeo-Christian Symbolism; the Cross is portrayed whenever an angel is defeated.



(Figure 1.2) Ikari Shinji, insecure and disheartened shown escaping reality and responsibility.

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(Figure 1.3) The Hedgehog's Dilemma.



(Figure 1.4) Angel Sachiel's A.T. Field.



(Figure 1.5) Misato kissing Shinji in End of Evangelion.

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(Figure 1.6) LCL; the liquid that syncs the pilots with their Evas. Also the primordial soup for all life on Earth.

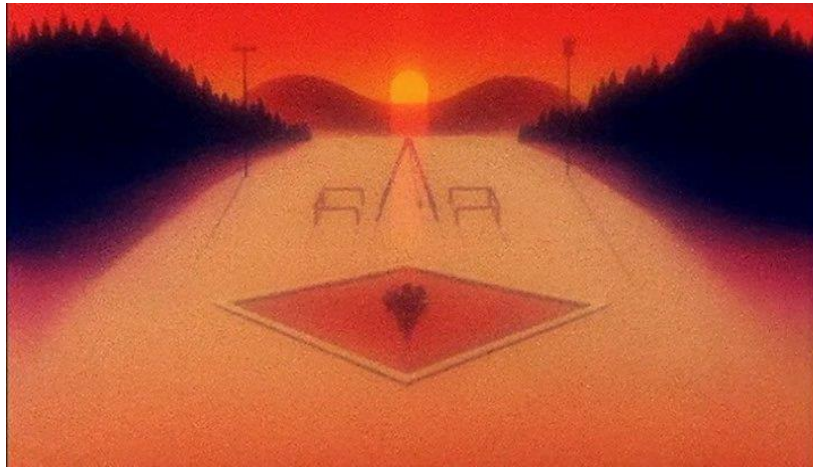


(Figure 1.7) Shinji accidentally touching Rei's Breast.



(Figure 1.8) Yonic symbolism; Judeo-Christian and Freudian, "Return to the womb" imagery.

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(Figure 1.9) Anno's brilliant use of semiotics; the symbolic portrayal of a mother's legs, breasts and uterus; the sand pyramid found in the sandbox represents Shinji's temperament, personality and attachment with his mother, Yui.



(Figure 2.0) The Kabbalah/The Tree of Life; the Path to Sepirot that bridges human depravity with divine singularity



(Figure 2.1) The Human Instrumentality Project is achieved by SEELE and Gendo and the Adam-Lilith hybrid, Evangelion's embodiment of a god is actualized.

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(Figure 2.2) Shinji and Rei bathed in a sea of LCL; all beings are merged into one, complementing each other's' deficiencies and insecurities - total oneness is achieved.



(Figure 2.3) Shinji, in distress, is at a crossroads: choose either A) Being an individual who faces the risk of being insecure and alone or B) Being part of a flawless collective where one is without suffering but is deprived of identity and individuality.



(Figure 2.4) Shinji listening to his music player - indulged in escapist fantasy.

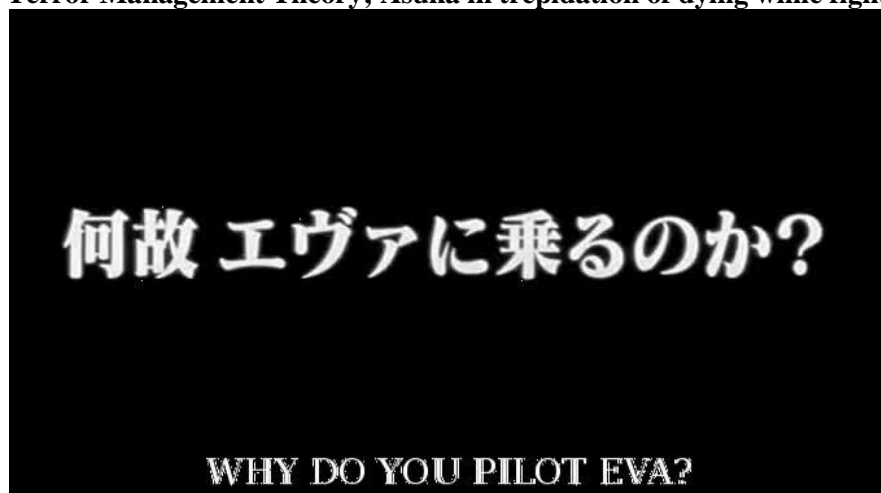
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(Figure 2.5) Existential and purposive questions are raised by Shinji, Rei and Asuka - and are essentially presented to the audience.



(Figure 2.6) Terror Management Theory; Asuka in trepidation of dying while fighting an angel.

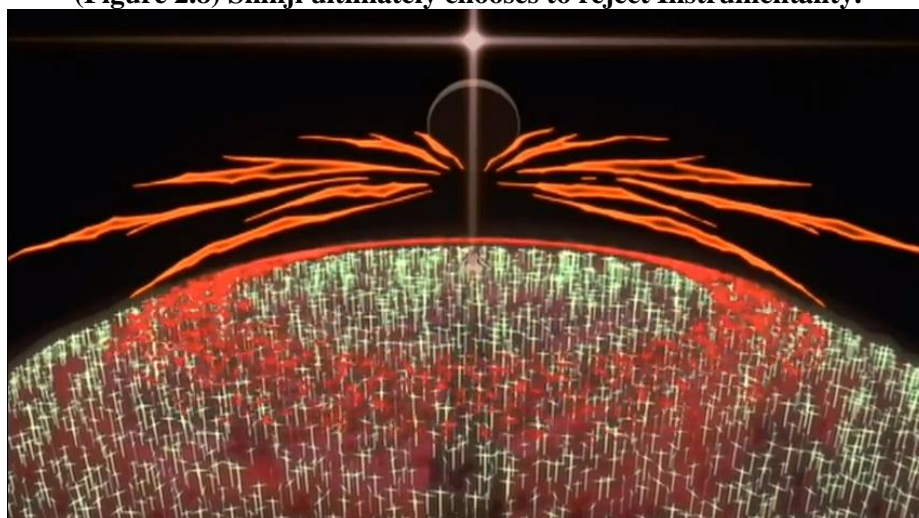


(Figure 2.7) "Why do you pilot the Eva?" vis-a-vis, "Why do you live? What is your purpose in life?"

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(Figure 2.8) Shinji ultimately chooses to reject Instrumentality.

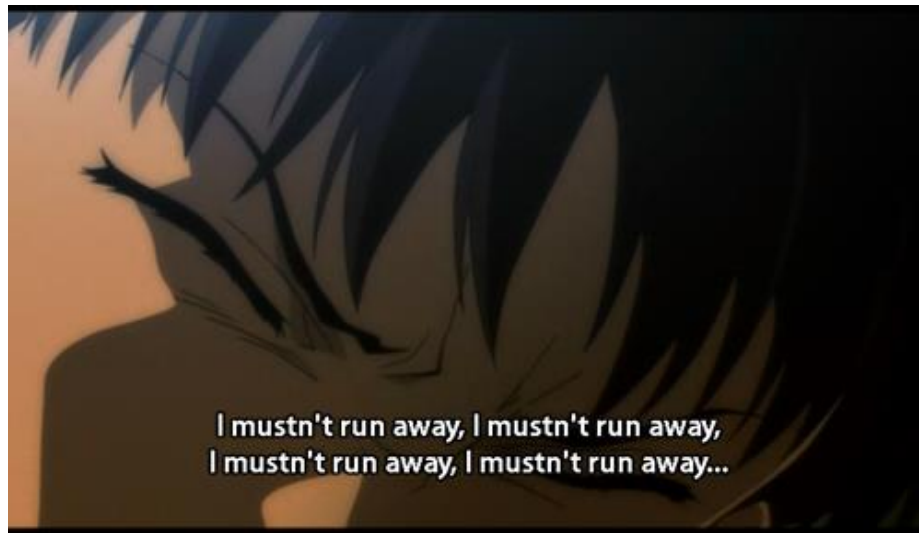


(Figure 2.9) Souls of all humans are re-disseminated; their future state of being is unknown to the audience.



(Figure 3.0) The harsh truth of human intimacy and relationships.

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(Figure 3.1) Shinji reaffirms to himself, "I Mustn't Run Away!" and Anno speaks to us through Shinji.