

Nuclear Metaphors: Derrida and Kato on Nuclear Discourse

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On July 20, 1962, *Life Magazine* ran an issue featuring three main stories: an attack piece on the union leader Jimmy Hoffa, a story about an expedition to examine indigenous cave art in the Baja desert, and finally, the cover story of an H-bomb weapons test of an aerial detonation in the Pacific sky.¹ The juxtaposition of these three stories – capital interests, the lost indigenous periphery, all framed under the image of the bomb – reflect what Masahide Kato calls the “strategic gaze” in his article critiquing nuclear discourse. Kato’s criticism is applied at two levels, first, to the military, technological, and political elites that organize national nuclear policy, and second, towards nuclear critics such as disarmament advocates, theorists like Jonathan Schell and Robert Lifton, and lastly, towards the 1984 issue of *Diacritics* entitled “Nuclear Criticism” which featured (and is referenced by Kato) the article, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” by Jacques Derrida.

This paper will engage with this indirect critique of Derrida, claiming that Kato’s argument works best when read as a Derridean challenge. In other words, the argument I propose is that Derrida’s focus on the “fable of nuclear war” falls prey to his own critique of the problematic engagement with metaphor offered in the essay, “White Mythology.” This problem arises due to the overemphasis and primacy of place Derrida offers to “extinction” in nuclear discourse which leads him, as presented by Kato, to succumb to the metaphor’s conceptual social organization and omits the material harm perpetuated on the periphery through nuclear testing, mining, and waste disposal. To demonstrate this argument, this paper will first summarize Derrida’s theorization of language and the metaphor applying it specifically to the nuclear case, second, it will show how a Derridean reading of Kato’s critique applies to the fable of nuclear war as a metaphor, and finally, offer a potential Derridean counter to Kato’s argument.

1. *Thought, Word, & Deed: The Fabulous Fable of Nuclear War*

The threats, both spoken and just hinted, were tough to take. That useful instrument, the telephone, can also be a tool of calculated torture. You can’t fight back at it and you are helpless even to defend the innocent against it. – *Life Magazine* article attacking Jimmy Hoffa²

Signifier, Supplement, & Metaphor

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida problematizes and inverts the conventional theory of signification and language. Taking the Aristotelian model, as Derrida does, the experience of the object-referent in the mind (the internalization of the sensing of the thing combined with the production of the “thought” of it) is symbolized as language.³ In the phonocentric tradition, the first manifestation of this language is spoken – the vocalized as the first symbolic representation of the mental experience.⁴ In turn, the phonemes of this vocalization are again represented in written form – a derivative of a representation of a representation for the thought of the thing itself. A logocentric metaphysics holds the meaning of the thing as derived from its presence and signified in

¹ *Life Magazine*, July 20, 1962.

² Sam Baron, “I Was Near the Top of Jimmy’s Drop-Dead List,” *Life Magazine*, July 20, 1962, 69.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2016), 11.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

speech and only afterwards as text as an expression of the experience and conception of the thing itself.⁵

Derrida's criticizes three facets of this story. First, the temporal linearity that assumes and assigns primacy to the referent over the signifiers.⁶ Second, and corollary to the first, is the notion that phonetic or spoken language had precedence to the textual or graphic writing and thus a greater proximity to meaning.⁷ Lastly, Derrida rejects the externalization of meaning outside of language onto the referent.⁸

Rather, Derrida argues that signs operate within a network of other signifiers and that meaning is tethered to, or exists within, that network of signification.⁹ Thus, rather than a metaphysics of presence, the referent was always already signified. This is not to say that the current signification was always the formulation of the signified referent – here Derrida introduces arche-writing and the trace – but rather that there never was an asigned referent. Having mentioned arche-writing and the trace, it is incumbent to define these terms, however, as they are not central to this paper, I will suffice it to borrow the description offered by Derrida:

If the trace, arche-phenomenon of “memory,” which must be thought before the opposition of nature and culture, animality and humanity, etc., belongs to the very movement of signification, then signification is a priori written, whether inscribed or not, in one form or another, in a “sensible” and “spatial” element that is called “exterior.” Arche-writing, at first the possibility of the spoken word, then of the “*graphie*” in the narrow sense, the birthplace of “usurpation,” denounced from Plato to Saussure, this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing.¹⁰

Engaging with Rousseau, Derrida then develops his theorization of the “supplement.” Having rejected the metaphysics of presence, the simple definition of the supplement as the external element of the sign that allows it to remain in the absence of the referent no longer suffices. Rather, Derrida articulates the supplement as something always already tethered to the thing. While an external addition, it is something already inscribed within the thing by its need for the supplement.¹¹ He borrows from Rousseau the example of the need of the child for external (supplementary) support to survive and grow until it can be self-sufficient.¹² The external aspect of the supplement reveals its social quality as exemplified in the childhood example. Supplements of language – the gesture, the “*graphie*,” and so on – enable its social utilization.¹³ However, the danger of the supplement is its social perversion which arises when the supplement, “insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*.”¹⁴ In other words, when the lack within the referent becomes its essential and defining characteristic and the supplement then takes the place of the thing itself.

One last concept remains for this discussion, Derrida's notion of metaphor as described in the essay, “White Mythology.” The traditional construction of the metaphor holds that we begin with the referent which undergoes signification gaining its supplementary conceptualization which, in turn, enables its abstraction to draw comparisons (such as analogies) with other concepts and

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2016), 13 & 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 76-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹¹ Robert Bernasconi, “Supplement,” in *Jacques Derrida: Key Concepts*, ed. Clair Colebrook (New York: Routledge, 2015), 19.

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2016), 159.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

significations.¹⁵ The problem identified by this formulation is the obscuring of the original signifying relationship when the metaphysical conceptualization is taken as primary.

However, for Derrida, this formulation still assumes the problematic metaphysics of presence holding a temporal arrangement of the referent to signifier to metaphor. Instead, Derrida reconceptualizes the metaphor as always already present – tethered intrinsically to the network of signs within which operates the signified referent.¹⁶ In other words, as signs gain meaning from their interaction with the larger network of signs that is language, the metaphorization of the sign – the comparison and definition of the sign via other signifiers – occurred immediately with its use as signifier.

There are two elements that I would like to emphasize from this discussion of metaphors. The first is something that Derrida makes explicit, that there are numerous forms of metaphor and that while *a* metaphor always already existed with the relationship between the sign and the network of signifiers, new metaphors can always be added on to update, clarify, or change the meaning of signs.¹⁷ Chief amongst these types of metaphor for this paper are fable and myth; two types of metaphor used to socialize concepts such that they can be used more broadly to organize or arrange social formations.¹⁸ “White mythology,” the concept Derrida is critiquing and not the essay itself, operates as such a metaphor in its attempt to construct the West as the home of *logos* and reason and the orientalizing of the East as uninterested and focused only on figurative expression.¹⁹

The second aspect of metaphors is less directly proclaimed by Derrida – that metaphors are themselves a type of supplement. Though he does not make this connection explicitly, Derrida does use the term “supplement” frequently throughout the “White Mythology” essay. Theoretically, we can see that it is necessarily the case that metaphor is a type of supplement by the relative definitions Derrida offers. If supplement is the external element added to satisfy that which the signified referent lacks, metaphor is that component in the connection (a form of socialization) of the signifier with the network of signs that is language. Additionally, just as the supplement may be perverted by the essentialization of the thing by its lack and the satisfaction for such by its supplement, so too can the metaphor corrupt or pollute significations by drawing bad connections such as imperfect metaphors like the heliotropic,²⁰ or when metaphor is taken as *logos* such as with the West’s “white mythology.”²¹

The Bomb’s Metaphor, the Metaphorization of the Bomb

Having developed the concepts of signified referent, the supplement, and metaphor, I will now turn to the “No Apocalypse” article to draw them out as they pertain to nuclear weapons as explicitly identified by Derrida or through my own analysis. Derrida begins this project by identifying two ways in which nuclear weapons and war are “fabulously textual.”²² First, in their development and use, nuclear weapons more than any other weapon depend on textual systems

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 211.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 248-9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 269-70.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 250-1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 213-4.

²² Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2, trans. Catherine Porter & Philip Lewis (1984): 23.

including communication, information, and coding infrastructures,²³ to say nothing of the political superstructures that govern their use. The second textualization regards nuclear *war*, something that remains textual as no such war has, for Derrida, ever occurred.²⁴ Of course, Derrida is not oblivious to the use of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, rather, he articulates that the dropping of the bombs in World War II marked the conclusion to the age of conventional warfare and not the new nuclear war as no reciprocal exchange of nuclear weapons occurred.²⁵

This offers us an interesting conundrum. On the one hand, “nuclear conflict can only be the signified referent, never the real referent.”²⁶ On the other, we live with the “reality” of nuclear weapons.²⁷ Thus, as Derrida states, “the ‘reality’ of the nuclear age and the fable of nuclear war are perhaps distinct, but they are not two separate things.”²⁸ We can understand the divide between nuclear weapons and nuclear war via their relationship to their respective realities. Nuclear weapons are signified referents that have with them, as Derrida states, a real referent or “reality.”²⁹ Nuclear war, however, lacks this “reality” and, as such, its textual supplement is not merely additional but vicarious. In this way, we can understand nuclear war as a “floating” signifier, one which lacks its center enabling it to be “filled” with an infinity of substitutions as formed by its social utilization.³⁰

Derrida tackles this specifically when engaging with nuclear war as a *fable*. He claims that its textual nature is not merely that it has never occurred (which would be better suited by a term like “fantasy”) but because it removes the distinction between *épistémè* and *doxa* – science and belief. The fable of nuclear war only leaves space for opinion.³¹ Derrida demonstrates this in two ways, first, because the entire military and political “logic” of nuclear war depends on the rhetorical strategy of “deterrence” – or, as more aptly put in the French, “dissuasion.”³² Secondly, the rhetorical and belief structure of nuclear war is also reflected in its ability to be transformed, where the power of nuclear weapons can be supplanted not by technological innovations but by belief in their power. Derrida notes a shift that occurs with the Reagan administration where nuclear war becomes winnable – a violation of the “logic” of the deterrent strategy – purely due to the “resolve” of the American public.³³

This quality is essential for the connection I seek to make – that nuclear war functions as a metaphor. We could simply make the assertion with the recognition that Derrida refers to nuclear war as a fable³⁴ and that fable is listed as a type of metaphor in “White Mythology.”³⁵ However, I think we can be more substantive than two terms – one used passively. The supplemental element necessary to fill the lack within the floating signifier of “nuclear war” is entirely dependent on the social *doxa* which engages it. Not only is this necessarily metaphorical by connecting the signifier

²³ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2, trans. Catherine Porter & Philip Lewis (1984): 23.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 289-90.

³¹ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2, trans. Catherine Porter & Philip Lewis (1984): 24.

³² *Ibid.*, 24.

³³ *Ibid.*, 24-5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁵ Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 215.

within a network of signs – language as always already metaphorical – but it does so as a substitution of its center.

All this is to say that nuclear war is a floating signifier with a vicarious supplement. What moves it to not only a “dangerous supplement,” but a “dangerous metaphor,” is how its analogical function comes to organize the whole of society. In other words, how the fable of the nuclear war comes to define all aspects of life. As Derrida states:

It is the war (in other words the fable) that triggers this fabulous, this senseless capitalization of sophisticated weaponry, this speed race in search of speed, this crazy precipitation which, through techno-science, through all the techno-scientific inventiveness that it motivates, structures not only the army, diplomacy, politics, but the whole of the human *socius* today, everything that is named by the old words culture, civilization, *Bildung*, *scholē*, *paideia*. “Reality,” let’s say the encompassing institution of the nuclear age, is constructed by the fable, on the basis of an event that has never happened (except in fantasy, and that is not nothing at all)...³⁶

2. *Sights, Sounds, & Letters: The Strategic Gaze and the Erasure of the Fourth World*

It is a relatively shallow cave, an eroded area underneath the rocky overhang which gives shelter from the dazzling rays of the sun in summer and the pelting rain of occasional winter storms. Yet in this cave and a few small ones nearby a race of people had lived and died and then vanished into oblivion. Until we discovered these caves, scientists knew virtually nothing about this long-lost race. – *Life Magazine* article on the Baja expedition³⁷

In 1993, Masahide Kato offers his critique of two “opposite yet complementary regimes of discourse,” the strategic variant used by nation-states and the extra-nation-state discourse of nuclear criticism.³⁸ Kato’s argument is done in two halves, the first shows the subordination of the Fourth World and indigenous peoples via a new mode of perception – the strategic gaze – which dominates national thought and, the second half, which reconstructs or translates this discussion into a discursive construct to be levied against nuclear criticism, including Derrida’s “No Apocalypse” essay.³⁹ This first half, I will discuss via my take on a Derridean refutation or rebuttal, the second, through how Kato’s rearticulation retains the relevancy of his critique to Derrida.

Briefly put, Kato’s initial argument is that the invention of satellites and the production of the “absolute” image of Earth from the epitome of the strategic vantage point led to a reconceptualization of the planet by First World nations.⁴⁰ Additionally, a new First World techno-subjectivity arises where, due to a globalized viewpoint of a world without restrictions, the developed world (as the most capable) attains new modes of domination.⁴¹ Of course, this all conforms to the classical signifier-referent relationship which Derrida refutes. Starting with a referent, an image of the world, a conceptualization is formed. A “globalized” world is signified with added social elements – relative power and capacity – that enables the supplementary fable of the First World’s “right” to have dominion over the Earth.

The weight of Kato’s criticism, the omission of the ongoing nuclear war against the Fourth World and indigenous peoples, is the natural consequence of the “strategic” quality of this new vantage point. Nuclear deterrence requires weapons testing, mining, and the dumping of nuclear

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2, trans. Catherine Porter & Philip Lewis (1984): 23.

³⁷ Erle Stanley Gardner, “The Case of the Baja Caves,” *Life Magazine*, July 20, 1962, 56.

³⁸ Masahide Kato, “Nuclear Globalism: Traversing Rockets, Satellites, and Nuclear War via the Strategic Gaze,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 18, no. 3 (1993): 339.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 339-40.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 340-1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 345-6.

waste. The erasure of the underdeveloped regions as mere spaces of resources – one of which being “emptiness” – makes them the logical site for any First World power to engage in these deterrence practices.⁴² This omission follows the classical metaphor logic; the initial experience of the weapons – the testing and physical maintenance of the referent – is lost amongst the larger metaphorical contexts of the strategic gaze, deterrence, and nuclear war.

However, Kato makes an interesting shift in the second half of his article. When engaging nuclear criticism, including the issue of *Diacritics* and Derrida directly, he restructures his argument. Rather than engaging with the strategic *gaze* as such, he reconstructs the “vantage point” discursively:

The elevation of the discursive vantage point deployed in nuclear criticism through which extinction is conceptualized parallels that of the point of the strategic gaze: nuclear criticism raises the notion of nuclear catastrophe to the “absolute” point from which the fiction of “extinction” is configured. Herein, the configuration of the globe and the conceptualization of “extinction” reveal their interconnection via the “absolutization” of the strategic gaze. In the same way as the fiction of the totality of the earth is constructed [by the satellite image], the fiction of extinction is derived from the figure perceived through the strategic gaze. In other words, the image of the globe, in the final instance, is nothing more than a figure on which the notion of extinction is being constructed.⁴³

Here, Kato specifically rearticulates his position to avoid the classic signifier-referent orientation. Rather than an image leading to a conceptualization, Kato argues that the nuclear critic’s centering of extinction (a fiction) in the floating signifier of nuclear war (another fiction) constructs and incorporates within it all the characteristics of the strategic gaze. These elements – the logic of deterrence, capital interests and productive excess, exploitation and domination – reside not only in Kato’s strategic gaze but the Derridean fable which organizes the “techno-scientifico-militaro-diplomatic,” apparatuses towards the same ends.⁴⁴

However, Derrida not only recognizes this centering of extinction in the fable of nuclear war, but he engages in it himself for his own project. For Derrida, the extinction of nuclear war includes the loss of humanity with the textual component of this being the loss of any post hoc discourse of the event. However, extinction also includes the total loss of the collective archive of humanity.⁴⁵ Conceptualizing literature as the *trace* of humanity, the erasure of the archive shows a unique precarity that Derrida holds as the basis for the possibility of deconstruction – it “belongs to the nuclear age.”⁴⁶ Thus, not only does Derrida recognize the centralization of extinction in his nuclear criticism, he actively engages in it and articulates it as essential to his broader philosophical project.

While the center of extinction does not restructure the map into empty spaces of resources, it also does not escape the omission of the eradication of the Fourth World and indigenous populations described by Kato. Necessary for the focus on extinction is the novelty of nuclear war and its theorization as “total” in a global sense. By orienting discussions on the global scale, Derrida and other critics ignore the ongoing nuclear wars, the petite extinctions of Fourth World and indigenous peoples, and the total erasure of their archives – their traces. At the risk of being reductive, Derrida has fallen prey to the hastiness of which he warned in his opening discourse on

⁴² Masahide Kato, “Nuclear Globalism: Traversing Rockets, Satellites, and Nuclear War via the Strategic Gaze,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 18, no. 3 (1993): 344, 348-9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2, trans. Catherine Porter & Philip Lewis (1984): 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

speed in “No Apocalypse.”⁴⁷ It seems starting the discussion of nuclear war with its conclusion remains too hasty of an approach.

3. *Texts, Tales, & Fables: A Derridean Response*

As tests go, the man-made inferno was supremely successful. It was a crucial part of our effort to deter a nuclear war by keeping our nuclear superiority. The Pacific blast may lead to better weapons for us – and perhaps even a defense against enemy missiles. It came at a time when we seemed to be triumphing wholesale in tests of strength and skill with nature: digging canyons in the earth with other nuclear blasts in Nevada; orbiting an intricate star which brought pictures from one side of the Atlantic to the other with the speed of light... (to be concluded) *Life Magazine* on the nuclear test⁴⁸

Avoiding the critique of the classic signifier-referent construction does not preclude Derrida from any potential response to Kato’s challenge. In this section, I will offer two separate though reinforcing responses, first, that Kato himself is subject to the strategic gaze/nuclear fable, and second, that the totalizing quality of global nuclear war and extinction is impossible to escape thus rendering Kato’s criticism as no longer a refutation or challenge but simply a call for an amendment to be added to the Derridean analysis – another supplement to the omitted lack.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida offers a critique of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s, “A Writing Lesson.” In the chapter of *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss provides a self-reflective chastisement of his interference with the Nambikwara tribe by way of his introduction of a Western style of writing. Lévi-Strauss theorized this also introduced a new type of violent exploitation to the tribe. As such, his actions corrupted the “original innocence” of the indigenous population.⁴⁹

This uninterrogated implied innocence,⁵⁰ is what Derrida targets with his response. First, Derrida rejects the idea of the tribe’s total lack of writing under the same challenge to logocentrism already described.⁵¹ The second challenge flows from the first. Having always already had some form of writing at the moment of the occurrence of language, there was never a moment without the supposed exploitative capacity Lévi-Strauss claims was manifested with the writing lesson. Thus, the true ethnocentrism in Lévi-Strauss is not the introduction of writing, but the projection of purity and innocence upon the Nambikwara.⁵² In this fashion, we see what Derrida means when he speaks of “ethnocentrism *thinking itself* as anti-ethnocentrism.”⁵³

The same formulation can be made in response to Kato’s challenge to nuclear criticism. Fourth World and indigenous populations are not innocent of, or external to, the strategic gaze/nuclear fable. For one, global extinction effects them too, and thus, they have the same vested interest as the developed world in its prevention. Additionally, some of these populations engage, more or less, with these structures – benefitting from the protections of nuclear umbrellas, free trade and open shipping access, and so on (sometimes explicitly sought). This is not to imply that these populations are deserving of the suffering thrust upon them. Rather, it simply problematizes the omission of any mention of the “local nuclear war” as a folly of the global orientation. Like Lévi-Strauss, Kato overly represents the assumed innocence and detachment of the Fourth World and indigenous peoples from the organization of the world under the fable of nuclear war.

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2, trans. Catherine Porter & Philip Lewis (1984): 20-1.

⁴⁸ “It Was as if Someone Had Poured Blood on the Sky,” *Life Magazine*, July 20, 1962, 29.

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2016), 129.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 130-1.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 131.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 130.

This inescapability from the fable offers the second Derridean response to Kato. Perhaps it should be no surprise that the fable is unavoidable. After all, Derrida argues that there is nothing beyond the text,⁵⁴ and the unique quality of the textual fable of nuclear war is that it is total and all-encompassing.⁵⁵ Additionally, we know that this “text” is not limited to the ink and paper of the literal book but includes the political,⁵⁶ and, in the case of the techno-scientifico-militaro-diplomatic engagement with nuclear war, the very organization of “reality” and the “*socius*.”⁵⁷ How then is it possible to find a properly exterior position either for Kato to levy his critique or for the Fourth World and indigenous populations to maintain their “innocence?”

The short answer is that there is no such space that escapes the totalizing fable. Instead, we are forced to operate from within it. Perhaps, this is why Derrida offers no alternative construction or theorization of the nuclear age from the one identified in “No Apocalypse.” As a project, deconstruction exists within and, in part at least, due to the implications of the organizing metaphor or fable. Thus, the aporia of Kato’s position reveals not the fallaciousness of his criticism – the exploitation of the Fourth World and indigenous peoples ought to be recognized and addressed both critically and materially – but if the starting point of this “liberation” depends upon the rejection of or escape from the nuclear fable, the effort is always already doomed to fail. Instead, we must recognize and adopt this and the inevitable other omissions, to incorporate them into the projects of nuclear criticism like that of Derrida’s.

4. *Yes Apocalypse, Right Now: A Conclusion*

(To conclude) “...But the scientific and technical importance of the events seemed to pale in the bright fury of the blast which climaxed them. There were prayers all across the Pacific last week – prayers across the world – that man’s headlong mastery of his universe would always stay as wondrous, and as safely remote, as on the awesome night when we set the sky on fire.” – *Life Magazine* on the nuclear test⁵⁸

Derrida’s “No Apocalypse” article provides a captivating story on the quality and nature of the fable of nuclear war. However, it is necessary to draw out what is meant by fable beyond simply the fiction of the yet to be invented war. This paper began with this attempt, drawing the connection between the fable of nuclear war and the role of fables as a type of metaphor used to organize sets of social relations. Drawing out this vocabulary also allows for a specific application of the second critique offered in the Kato article which is rearticulated specifically to engage the discursive analysis of nuclear criticism, such as Derrida’s *Diacritics* article. The centering of the supplement of extinction within the metaphor of nuclear war confers upon it the same problematic structures of the perspectival shifts that occur via the strategic gaze. The focusing on the novel “total” or “global” nuclear war omits and obfuscates the ongoing nuclear war committed against Fourth World and indigenous populations, perpetuating these harms by removing the very voices that would offer dissent from within the dialogues of the developed world.

However, rather than a complete criticism or rejection of the Derridean analysis, we should take Kato’s recognition as an additional facet of the fable and use it to supplement our analysis

⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, “But Beyond... (Open Letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon),” *Critical Inquiry* 13, no. 1, trans. Peggy Kamuf (1986): 169.

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2, trans. Catherine Porter & Philip Lewis (1984): 23.

⁵⁶ Jacques Derrida, “But Beyond... (Open Letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon),” *Critical Inquiry* 13, no. 1, trans. Peggy Kamuf (1986): 169.

⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2, trans. Catherine Porter & Philip Lewis (1984): 23.

⁵⁸ “It Was as if Someone Had Poured Blood on the Sky,” *Life Magazine*, July 20, 1962, 29.

positively. As no position, including Kato's and the Fourth World's, totally escapes the nuclear fable – there is no avoiding the totality of the extinction story – no alternative remains available. The fable of nuclear war is the inescapable text.

Returning to the *Life Magazine* story of the atmospheric detonation weapons test, indeed prayers that night were answered – and have remained so insofar as *total* nuclear war remains entirely textual. But we must always remember that some prayers went unheard, for some the fire was and is not remote, for them, a nuclear blast is not a spectacle but a shuddering dawn.