

Graphic Nonsense and Historical Trauma in Fred Chao's *Johnny Hiro*

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Jin Lee,

"Graphic Nonsense and Historical Trauma in Fred Chao's *Johnny Hiro*"

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Abstract: Jin Lee introduces the concept of "graphic nonsense" in her "Graphic Nonsense and Historical Trauma in Fred Chao's *Johnny Hiro*" to explain nonsense in Chao's graphic narrative, which features figures of monster (Godzilla and King Kong) as well as real U.S. political figures (Michael Bloomberg and John P. O'Brien). Focusing on transpacific trauma, Lee articulates a counter-history using Fredric Jameson's terms to expose the process of silencing the other and "retextualizing" history. She claims that the nonsensical elements in the graphic narrative can prompt the reader to find out historical allusions in *Godzilla* and *King Kong* to make sense out of nonsense. The reader eventually can understand "graphic nonsense" as a peculiar but effective mode of representation for the underrepresented historical trauma. Lee revisits Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth, and claims that nonsense is at the heart of trauma.

Jin LEE

Graphic Nonsense and Historical Trauma in Fred Chao's *Johnny Hiro*

Fred Chao's graphic narrative *Johnny Hiro: Half Asian, All Hero* (2012, henceforth abbreviated as *Johnny Hiro*) limns the adventures of a Japanese American busboy Johnny Hiro and his Japanese girlfriend Mayumi who live in Brooklyn and struggle to make ends meet. Apart from the day-to-day challenges that a New Yorker working in a sushi restaurant or an office might have, this young adult couple encounters bizarre incidents which at first sight do not seem to make sense at all—they are seemingly nonsensical. These nonsensical incidents involve, as reviewer Jerry Dear notes of Chao's signature style, "elements of magical realism and fantasy," such as in the episodes featuring a large lizard, a giant gorilla, and samurai warriors. For example, a monster named Gozadilla (not Godzilla! Or "a riff on Godzilla") kidnaps Mayumi. The reader soon learns from the monster's traumatic flashbacks that he came to twenty-first century New York City all the way from Japan to get revenge on Mayumi's mother, who defeated him in 1978 in Japan. The monster, however, suddenly collapses because of jetlag: when he is about to kill Mayumi, he feels too tired and falls asleep as it is his bedtime in Japan Standard Time. Mayumi calls Mayor Bloomberg for help, and his team nonchalantly cleans up the mess because they are used to monsters' appearances in the city. Subsequently, a King Kong-type figure briefly appears outside Mayumi's office, and the monster curiously never returns in the graphic narrative, which could puzzle the reader about the purpose of his presence. While seemingly nonsensical, Chao grounds his situations in interesting trans-Pacific amalgamations by intentionally contrasting real U.S. political figures (Bloomberg in *Johnny Hiro* and Mayor John P. O'Brien in its sequel) and imaginary/nonsensical popular culture figures, one of whom transcends U.S. borders (Gozadilla), with Japanese and Japanese American characters.

As I will discuss later, Gozadilla, Bloomberg, and a King Kong iteration with Japanese and Japanese American characters, reference historical traumas. For example, Godzilla points us to the atomic bombings of Japan, the U.S.'s occupation of Japan, the arms race between the U.S. and the Soviets; and King Kong, channeling racism and colonialism.¹ Through nonsensical incidents, those characters and monsters in *Johnny Hiro* also show how they are implicated in one another's trauma through monsters. Chao inextricably weaves the historical traumas referenced by the monsters with the current microaggressions that Mayumi and Hiro confront in the city. Their landlord sues them for the damage Gozadilla causes to the apartment, but it is revealed during the trial in Judge Judy's court that the couple has suffered from Mayor Bloomberg's harassment. Two chapters after King Kong's appearance, Mayumi is falsely accused by her customers for cheating as there is a minor mistake in the contract that she and her customer have been working on. Her colleagues impute the customer complaint is due to her English proficiency, revoking the account from her because she is not a native English speaker. As a result, the reader can view Hiro and Mayumi as what Michael Rothberg calls "implicated subjects" who are neither the victims nor the perpetrators of historical trauma, but still involved, even if anachronistically, in historical events. Rothberg uses the word, "implication," so that he could "gather together various modes of historical relation that do not necessarily fall under the more direct forms of participation associated with traumatic events, such as victimization and perpetration" (Rothberg 40). In addition to Rothberg's observation of ways in which certain moments can evoke or reference historical events, Chao employs what I call "graphic nonsense" to highlight how we might find ourselves entangled and implicated in historical traumas in a surprising, unexpected, nonsensical way. As the word "graphic" in graphic nonsense signals, the way bleeds, panels, captions, and certain images are structured plays a significant role in creating nonsense, and helps us to unravel the nonsense, which, as we will find out, is at the heart of trauma.

Although *Johnny Hiro*, unlike the first Japanese Godzilla film *Gojira* (1954), does not directly mention the historical traumas of the Japanese, the derivative Gozadilla, through its reference to the initial Godzilla, seems to gesture to these historical wounds. Godzilla is a known metaphor for the continuing presence of historical trauma among the Japanese, particularly the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, US occupation, and the following arms race. Chon A. Noriega argues that the U.S.'s 1954 test of a H-bomb, which affected Japanese tuna boat "Lucky Dragon" and caused one death as well as the entire crew's radiation sickness, reignited the issue of nuclear victims in Japan almost a decade after

¹ *Johnny Hiro* does not reveal the big gorilla's name, but in the sequel *Johnny Hiro: The Skills to Pay the Bills* Mayor Bloomberg specifically mentions the film *King Kong*.

the nuclear bombings (65-66). The "Lucky Dragon" incident is the historical context for when *Gojira* was released in 1954.

While the first Godzilla film is known to be inspired by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, scholars curiously have not recognized or pursued connections between Gozadilla in *Johnny Hiro* and historical events. Shan Mu Zhao briefly mentions that "the original Godzilla is created by American nuclear science and is a reminder of Japan's history," in her chapter on *Johnny Hiro* in *Drawing New Color Lines*, but does not further pursue what exactly Gozadilla signifies (308). This lack of scholarly attention could be due to the fact that Gozadilla has a different history than *Gojira*. *Johnny Hiro* does not mention anything related to the nuclear bombings, and the monster has a slightly different name; and unlike the original Godzilla, Gozadilla abducts Mayumi to take revenge on her mother. Furthermore, *Johnny Hiro* addresses Bloomberg's political effort to cover up the aftermaths of the trans-Pacific trauma of Gozadilla, whereas *Gojira* only depicts the appearance of the monster as the by-product of the bombings of Japan. Gozadilla, or "the return of the repressed," which dates back to the year of *Gojira* (1954) and that of the atomic bombings of Japan (1945), carries so much otherness in *Johnny Hiro* that the monster (what is repressed) is not recognizable.² Indeed, not only scholars but even the characters in *Johnny Hiro* including Bloomberg, Hiro, and Mayumi do not recall Godzilla (let alone, the metatextual message of the monster) when seeing Gozadilla. Thus, it seems nonsense to introduce Gozadilla in twenty-first century New York City until we connect the historical dots by means of graphic nonsense. In this sense, *Johnny Hiro* is different from the graphic narratives discussed in Martha Cutter and Cathy J. Schlund-Vials' edited collection *Redrawing the Historical Past: History, Memory, and Multiethnic Graphic Novels*, in that graphic nonsense in the former renders history almost invisible at first sight whereas the latter shows their overt historical mindedness and engagements with historical pasts.

Similar to Gozadilla's fate, *Johnny Hiro*'s King Kong has not yet received any scholarly attention either, which further demonstrates the close relationship between trauma and nonsense: trauma is in a way nonsensical. The adventure plot in the film *King Kong* (1933) reflects the history of European colonialism, and the ambivalent status of Kong, situated between man and animal, may find resonance in the history of American popular culture where Asians were portrayed as ape-like figures.³ As my reading of *Johnny Hiro* will demonstrate, it is such historical traumas that contextualise Chao's graphic narrative and that implicate his characters. Because of such complicated relationships between the graphic narrative's characters and historical traumas, King Kong as "the return of the repressed" seems only nonsense at first even to scholars. This kind of scholarly amnesia, by which the significance of both films' allusions in *Johnny Hiro* go unnoticed, confirms Cathy Caruth's claim about the enigma of the otherness that testifies to a truth about historical trauma, thereby showing how trauma and nonsense can be related. That is, beyond our frame of references, trauma can return in the form of nonsense. Thus, the characters in *Johnny Hiro* do not recognize the historical traumas that Gozadilla alludes to—the bombings of Japan and other related events (Godzilla) or Mayumi's mother's experience fighting Gozadilla in Tokyo, let alone the trauma of the colonized that King Kong references.

This phenomenon in *Johnny Hiro* is beyond Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which is about "the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they 'remember' only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right" (2001, 9). While Hirsch's definition assumes children who know about their parents' trauma, Mayumi and Hiro do not know about their parents' (or ancestors') trauma, and thus do not recognize what haunts them as 'the return of the repressed' in popular cultural icons such as Godzilla or King Kong. Rothberg's implicated subjects indeed includes the postmemory generation (Rothberg 40), and Chao's graphic narrative highlights how implicated modes of historical relation can exceed the comprehension of generations after the postmemory generation.⁴

The characters, including Mayumi and Hiro, do not recall any of what Gozadilla refers to, being at two or three generations remove from the original films and historical traumas. Furthermore, as depicted

² Following Robin Wood's claim that "the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses" (Wood 10), Noriega notes that the post-World War II Japan went through socioeconomic and political change, which "required repression in order to succeed" (Noriega 65), and in this context, along with the US's experiments with H-bombs, he further views *Gojira* as "the return of the repressed."

³ See *Coming Man: 19th Century American Perceptions of the Chinese* edited by Philip K. Choy, Lorraine Dong, and Marion K. Hom (University of Washington Press, 1955) for a cartoon image of the Chinese as ape.

⁴ Mayumi belongs to the postmemory generation in that her mother's generation experienced Gozadilla's attack in 1978. Simultaneously, Mayumi is at a two or three generational remove from the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

in the text, they are unaware of Gozadilla due to the seemingly aesthetic but political efforts behind the scene: to erase Gozadilla's presence by Mayor Bloomberg is a structuring of the narrative for public consumption that serves him and the real estate market. Bloomberg makes every effort to keep the existence of the monsters secret so that no one else in the city except his team knows about them to protect property values. On the one hand, Bloomberg has his team work on the monster damage to roads as if nothing has happened. On the other hand, he asks Hiro and Mayumi not to tell anyone about Gozadilla, the lack of which information causes their landlord to sue them later for the damage to their apartment. This strategy of making historical trauma invisible and rendering it in the form of nonsense peculiarly parallels the way in which the U.S.'s adaptation of *Gojira* eventually deflected the audience from the political message in the Japanese film, thereby leading the audience to believe that *Gojira* is a Japanese version of *King Kong*. As Noriega points out, as an advertising effort, the film's adaptation had a new title *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* and included "additional dialogue about young women sacrificed to Godzilla by Micronesian Islanders" (69). Thanks to the strategy of the erasure of historical traumas, the graphic narrative does not remember what is repressed but repeats the repressed material in the form of Godzilla and King Kong, as in the case of trauma victims that Freud describes (19). Yet, Chao's graphic nonsense strategically makes the historical trauma visible.

Graphic Nonsense

The type of nonsense that Chao uses in *Johnny Hiro* follows certain "rules" that scholars of nonsense have observed. In *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, Wim Tigges is one of the first scholars who studies nonsense as a genre. He examines a corpus of nonsense as opposed to previous studies on nonsense, which focus mostly on the works of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll. For Tigges, having a nonsensical device does not necessarily mean the work is a nonsense, as a blank page in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* "does not make the novel 'a nonsense'" (2). For him, nonsense "cannot, however, be a satire or a burlesque or a parody (other genre labels), since it is the prime characteristic of nonsense not to make a 'point' or draw a moral, not to satirize, to ridicule or to parody, and not even primarily to entertain" (50). For Tigges, the most essential characteristic of nonsense is "the tension between presence and absence of meaning," because of which, "any suggestion of an emotion is at the same time withdrawn, so that puzzlement is all that remains" (52). For instance, Tigges introduces Lear's limerick, where there is "an Old Man with a nose," who claims that his nose is not too long (qtd. in Tigges 52). Here, he points out the "unresolved tension" between the presence and absence of meaning, in that despite his claim that there is no evidence in the text to prove whether the old man's nose is too long or not, the speaker still considers him "remarkable" (Tigges 52). Although Tigges does not highlight the missing information in this example, I think the missing information is significant to determine whether there exists tension between the presence and absence of meaning. That is, for one who knows what the missing information is, the tension between the presence and absence of meaning is resolved, and nonsense starts to make sense. This missing information is related to another aspect of nonsense: nonsense shows "its playlike character" in not only that "the 'game' of nonsense has its own rules or laws, but that it adheres to its self-appointed rules only voluntarily" (54). That is, on the one hand, the "game of nonsense" is not absolutely nonsense at all since it has its own rules or laws; on the other hand, these rules or laws do not apply to the game all the time but only when it wants. Therefore, in such condition, this missing information, a threshold to determine the presence or absence of meaning, could be a key to figure out the rules or laws in the "game" of nonsense. In other words, if the information were present, the rules or laws would be understood and therefore the writing would not be nonsense any more. Discovering "rules" in the "game of nonsense" in *Johnny Hiro* is significant because they could help the reader recognize historical traumas, which seem like nonsense at first, and thus make sense out of "nonsense."

Although graphic nonsense in *Johnny Hiro* can cause puzzlement to be "all that remains" in Tigges' terms, once the reader cracks the code of "the game of nonsense," unlike as in Tigges' definition, the seemingly nonsensical incidents can make "a point." Thus, while Tigges' nonsense has "the tension between presence and absence of meaning," the tension between presence and absence of meaning in *Johnny Hiro* works in a different sense. Without recognizing the historical references, the reader may perceive the nonsensical moments as signifying an absence of meaning. They are only puzzling, if not funny or silly at best. However, the nonsensical scenes have meaning once the historical references are identified, by tracing what Cathy Caruth calls "the textual itinerary of insistently recurring ... figures" (5) among the films and real life alluded in *Johnny Hiro*. In this sense, recognizing the historical references is similar to finding out the missing information to figure out the rules or the laws of the "game" of nonsense in *Johnny Hiro*.

Graphic Nonsense and Trauma

Graphic nonsense in *Johnny Hiro* shows that nonsense seems to have a closer rather than distant relationship with trauma. In particular, repetition compulsion is, via Sigmund Freud, at odds with "common sense" in that it is, as Freud innovatively discovered, against the pleasure principle, the *common-sense* assumption of mental processes that seek "an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure" (3). In this vein, nonsense is at the heart of repetition compulsion, one of the trauma symptoms. According to Cathy Caruth, the most general definition of trauma is "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often, delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). In repetition compulsion, trauma survivors unwittingly and repeatedly revisit the traumatic events through dreams, flashbacks, and reenactments. This traumatic symptom seems inexplicable and in my view even nonsensical at first sight because it "overrides the pleasure principle" (Freud 24), which is believed to regulate the course of mental events to avoid "unpleasure" and produce pleasure (Freud 3). At odds with this 'common sense' (i.e. the pleasure principle), trauma survivors may have repetition compulsion to re-experience the traumatic events although it will only cause "unpleasure" with no possibility of pleasure (Freud 21). To explain such traumatic neurosis, Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* discusses Tancred in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, who mysteriously repeats the murder of his beloved Clorinda twice. First, he kills Clorinda by mistake, and then he stabs a tree from which Clorinda's voice cries out his crime that he killed her once again (Freud 24). Such an incident in Tasso's romantic epic is enigmatic and even *nonsensical* not only because of what Caruth observes as Tancred's "inadvertent and unwished-for repetition" (2). It is also because of the "otherness ... from the wound" (Caruth 3) in that the voice comes not from Clorinda but from the tree. In other words, how come Tancred killed Clorinda twice by slashing the tree regardless of and against his will? Why does the tree claim to be the late Clorinda? Moving from a repeated *action* to an enigmatic *voice*, Caruth departs from Freud's theory of repetition compulsion and focuses on how literature can express traumatic wounds.⁵ Unlike Freud, Caruth highlights "the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know" (3). In addition to repetition compulsion at odds with the "common-sense" pleasure principle, I thus recognize nonsense in the otherness of the voice in Tancred's traumatic experience. To me, Freud's and Caruth's reading of Tancred's story is a parable of cracking the code of 'the game of nonsense' for a traumatic experience. That is, Tancred's traumatic experience was nonsense, causing tension between the presence and absence of meaning until Freud and Caruth found its meaning respectively as a "dramatic illustration of repetition compulsion" and "a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*" (2, emphasis in the original). Thanks to Freud and Caruth, repetition compulsion is understood as an attempt to understand one's own traumatic experience, which in Caruth's terms "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (4). Thus, the nonsense is at the heart of repetition compulsion while the enigma of its 'game' is better understood by Freud and Caruth.

Caruth's reading of Tancred can further connect nonsense to the enigmatic "otherness" in trauma. Caruth views Tancred's story as "the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (8). The voice from the wound that Tancred hears is not his own, but of another. Through this listening, Caruth asserts, "trauma may lead ... to the encounter with another" (8). The examples I analyze in this essay will show ways in which a voice from the wound can be embodied as "the other" to the trauma victims and even to their descendants; and how, through this "otherness," one's own trauma is "tied up with" that of another. Thus, in the graphic narrative, the unsettling "otherness" in the form of Gozadilla cries out from historical trauma and witnesses a truth that the characters cannot fully know. Caruth's observation of the "otherness" of a voice from the tree, neither from the victim Clorinda, nor from Tancred, may shed light on the case in *Johnny Hiro*. That is, while Gozadilla may refer to Mayumi's mother's traumatic experience in fighting the monster, which could be equivalent to the voice of Clorinda in Tasso's epic poem, Gozadilla's appearance itself, like the tree which does not resemble Clorinda at all, is misleading—and even nonsense—and not very helpful for Hiro and Mayumi to recognize Mayumi's mother's trauma. Like *Gerusalemme Liberata*, *Johnny Hiro* thus portrays trauma's enigmatic otherness in a nonsensical way.

⁵ Caruth claims, "If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (3).

Significantly, nonsense can provide a safe context to bring the repressed collective trauma to the surface. While the therapeutic aim of psychoanalysis is that "what was unconscious should become conscious" (Freud 18), nonsense can bring about the same effect, as Susan Stewart points out when the unconscious is made conscious: "[nonsense] threatens the disintegration of social interaction that would occur if the unconscious was made conscious" (88). That is, what nonsense can bring about also could be the psychoanalysis's desirable result—what the unconscious made conscious could do. Stewart further notes that "such a disintegration is ... restrained to domains of the impossible context" such as play, and fictions in which "[a]esthetic activities ... take place on the interface between the conscious and the unconscious" (86). What nonsense can do in aesthetic activities can parallel what certain films can do. Drawing on Claude Lévi-Strauss's notion of myth, James Snead views films that continue to be popular as those with "quasi-mythic status" and claims that these films "give vent to an unspoken component, a repressed content" (53). Following Robin Wood, Snead also argues that the repressed content in films helps contemporary society deal with its repressing desires "through the figure of the monster" to protect its stability because otherwise its stability would be at stake (53). That is, the figure of the monster is a surrogate which provides "a safe outlet for such desires" and through which the audience have "a vicarious experience—pleasurable and horrific—of the chaos" that the monster could cause if it were real (Snead 53). For instance, King Kong running amok in New York City helped its audience in the 1930s, who were traumatized by the Great Depression, "'release ... pent-up anger and frustration'" (Walker 2; qtd. in Snead 62). Furthermore, the figure of the monster is a kind of nonsense in that it is beyond our frames of reference and scientific understanding. This aspect makes it clear to the audience that their vicarious experience through viewing monster films obviously is an "impossible context," therefore "a safe outlet" for their repressed desires. While providing an impossible context and thus a safe outlet for repressed desires, *Johnny Hiro's* monsters may pose a complicated, seemingly nonsensical, riddle to the reader as the repressed content is a collective trauma that precedes the birth of the characters to whom the historical trauma returns. By using the monsters of the films of "quasi-mythic status," *Johnny Hiro's* compulsive repetition of Godzilla and King Kong seems to be an attempt to claim not only Hiro and Mayumi's survival of the monster, but also that of others whose traumas are forgotten in history, whose revelation could threaten the social structure if made conscious.

Pointing to the nonsensical aspect of trauma, graphic nonsense can prompt the reader to search for missing information to make sense of the seeming nonsense in graphic narratives. The strange happenings of Gozadilla are so enigmatic and nonsensical that they incite the reader not to be satisfied with surface reading, just as the enigmatic incident in Tasso's epic encouraged Freud and Caruth to think about repetition compulsion.⁶ Significantly, as Caruth cracks the code of the game of nonsense in *Gerusalemme Liberata*, so does the reader of *Johnny Hiro* when they "decode" the cultural and historical references nonsensically inscribed in the episodes with Gozadilla and King Kong, an example which this article demonstrates in the following sections.⁷

Graphic Nonsense, or Textuality of History

While scholars have noted that graphic narratives call attention to their constructedness, graphic nonsense in *Johnny Hiro* calls attention to the very frames of the graphic narrative, thereby revealing the process of history-making.⁸ The graphic narrative deliberately highlights what is selected and how it is written for the public record, such as in Mayor Bloomberg's effort to erase Gozadilla's story from history. The way in which gutters, bleed pages, and captions are deployed ultimately shows how

⁶ As Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus explain, "surface reading" is a reading practice that finds meanings in the surfaces of texts or what texts say, in contrast to "symptomatic reading," which attends to what is repressed in texts.
⁷ See Said and Spiegelman for their use of the term "decoding" to discuss comics, and Chute's "Comics as Literature?" for her discussion of Said and Spiegelman.

⁸ As Charles Hatfield claims, "self-reflexive commentary" that brings the materiality of texts to the reader's awareness is "quite common in comics" (64). To name a few who discuss graphic narratives' representations of their own constructedness: Marianne Hirsch among others shows how Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, by means of using the medium of comics, animal fable, and photos, lays bare its multiple mediations to come to terms with challenges for artists when representing the Holocaust ("Family Pictures"); Hillary Chute notes that nonfictional graphic narratives by Lynda Barry, Alison Bechdel, Phoebe Gloeckner, Aline Kominsky-Crumb, and Marjane Satrapi represent not only events but also "how we frame them," which is well captured in Spiegelman's own word "materialize" for representing his father's testimonies in *Maus* (GW 2-3, emphasis in original); Michael Chaney expounds on how autobiographical graphic narratives' textual and graphic practices including meta-pictorial commentary enable them to approximate further to the Lacanian Real by revealing their limits of representation; Kate Polak also points out many graphic memoirists' "habit of metacommentary on the form ... communicated to readers that the artist was not 'merely' illustrating but also actively negotiating representation and meaning" (3).

Gozadilla's story—more expansively, the history of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the U.S.'s occupation of Japan, and the H-bomb tests—is superseded by Mayor Bloomberg's erasure of the monster's footprints in the city. That is, Americans do not want to remember that past, for it implicates them in the trauma of Others/Japanese. It is easier to erase the footprints, hence making the average (American) reader immune to the trauma encapsulated by Gozadilla.

Significantly, the constructedness/textuality that graphic nonsense highlights counteracts Mayor Bloomberg's history-making, thereby bringing forth a counter-history. Notably the panels of Gozadilla's traumatic flashbacks are placed on the bleed pages (bleed is a page congruent with a single panel in it) highlighting Gozadilla's point of view. It is important to note here Gozadilla's point of view because this is something that Chao does which is new to the monster in *Johnny Hiro*, in comparison to *Gojira*. While the original Godzilla references the bombings of Japan, or, as Noriega suggests, how the Japanese projected their trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on Godzilla, *Gojira* does not let the audience be privy to the monster's thoughts. In this sense, Godzilla was an Other to the Japanese in 1954, akin to what they had repressed since 1945, and so is Gozadilla to Mayumi's mother as well as to Mayumi and Hiro. An Other to the Japanese or to the characters in *Johnny Hiro* could mean in Caruth's terms "the other within the self that retains the memory of the 'unwitting' traumatic events of one's past," which shows "the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past" (8). In this vein, Mayumi's mother's defeat of the monster or Bloomberg's effort to pretend as if Gozadilla had not appeared in the city could be equivalent to the patient's resistance to repetition compulsion, "which emerges during the psycho-analytic treatment of neurotics" (Freud 20). This repetition compulsion "can only express itself after the work of treatment has gone half-way to meet it and has loosened the repression" (Freud 20-21). If Gozadilla, representing both the U.S. and Japan as Noriega claims for Godzilla (68), is an Other to the Japanese, and/or their trauma, which is also an Other to the Japanese and Chao's characters, then, Gozadilla's traumatic flashbacks are Chao's attempt to let the trauma (the repressed) speak for the Japanese, serving as a counter-history.⁹

⁹ According to Noriega, Godzilla symbolizes not only the U.S., but also Japan. First, following the Freudian concept of transference, Noriega argues that, "The [Godzilla] films transfer onto Godzilla the role of the United States in order to symbolically re-enact a problematic United States-Japan relationship that includes atomic war, occupation, and thermonuclear tests" (68). Thus, Godzilla plays a therapeutic role for the U.S.. Second, Godzilla also stands for Japan, which was "in 1954 a transitional monster caught between the imperial past and the post war industrial future, aroused by United States H-bomb tests" (Noriega 68). This dual position is possible due to Japanese language and culture in which there is less "sharp division between self and Other," in contrast to its Western counterparts (Noriega 68).



Figure 1

Gozadilla's flashbacks as a counter history are structured so as to create a sense of puzzlement, a non-sense moment while reflecting the way traumatic memory works in trauma survivors. In the first scene of the graphic narrative Chao uses match cuts, as Zhao points out, to portray, "the transition from Gozadilla in New York to Gozadilla in Tokyo" (309; see Figure 1). "[I]n film, match cuts are often used to provide a sense of continuity between two shots" (Zhao 309), and these first two panels reflect on Gozadilla revisiting his traumatic memory at this present moment. Here, Gozadilla flashes back to his traumatic experience in Tokyo in 1978 when his plan to destroy the city was frustrated by Mayumi's mother, who challenges him and thwarts his efforts at destruction. In close-ups of the pensive Gozadilla, the first two panels seem "almost identical" (Zhao 309), except for the surrounding buildings. The reader might not recognize that the second match cut panel takes place in Tokyo in 1978, until they see the entire bleed page following the match cuts. Simultaneously, because the bleed page also works like a gutter between the two panels by providing the information for the transition between the panels, the sense of continuity gives way to that of puzzlement as there seems to be more than one dimension of time. Gozadilla's reflection on the past, takes place *now* in the two panels. As is the case with traumatic flashbacks through which trauma survivors revisit their experiences to work through their trauma, this traumatic experience is 'timeless' in Gozadilla's mind in that "the monster still plays the scene over and over in his head" (Chao 32). Therefore, to reflect his psychological state of repetition compulsion, his flashback takes up the whole bleed page, where, as Scott McCloud explains about bleeds, "time ... hemorrhages and escapes into timeless space" (103). This bleed page also becomes a gutter for the two panels, both graphically and symbolically, as the bleed page helps the reader with closure by explaining why Gozadilla comes to New York. In other words, while placed behind the two panels

describing Gozadilla's past and present experiences and also situated in between the panels where the gutter is supposed to be, the bleed page also functions as the background story of Gozadilla's visit to Mayumi, explaining the transition between the panels. That is, about three decades ago, Gozadilla's plan to destroy Tokyo was frustrated by Mayumi's mother's team, and now he is after Mayumi for his long-awaited revenge.

This puzzling moment brings the reader's attention to the frame of the graphic narrative as well as its dizzying dimensions of time. While the bleed page functions as a gutter for the two panels, it also seems to be their frames, which can add another dimension to the time of the page. The bleed page on the traumatic experience connects the two Gozadilla panels, both past and present. Also, later in the same chapter another bleed page on Gozadilla's flashback "sutures" the panel on Mayumi's mother's triumph over Gozadilla and the panels on Mayumi in the latter's grip. If the bleed pages on traumatic flashbacks connect the panels on past and present, representing Gozadilla's compulsively repetitive mind, and become the frames of the panels, what do these panels on past and present signify within the frames of Gozadilla's recurrence of traumatic flashbacks? Imposed on the bleed pages, the panels of the present moment are situated within Gozadilla's reflection. Can the past contain the present? Or does this page suggest that even these panels of the present are in the past as a reflection of someone? Then, whose voice narrates the captions? The three panels on the bottom in Figure 2 seem to progress from Gozadilla's retrospect to his current action and further to his prospect of taking "the greatest revenge the world would ever know" (33). Meanwhile, the hyperbolic metanarrative—"For Gozadilla, this [his attack on Mayumi] is a story of revenge.... A revenge to be remembered throughout history" (32)—calls the reader's attention from Gozadilla's mind to this meta-moment to remember that this is a graphic narrative, *a story*.¹⁰ Not only does this metamoment draw the reader's attention to its fictionality, but also it highlights whose story it is: Gozadilla's. Given that it is a graphic narrative, it is not too odd to hear Gozadilla's point of view. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, it is clearly a rewriting of the first Godzilla film *Gojira* (1954), which does not let the monster speak for himself. This metanarrative points back to the two panels within the frame of Gozadilla's traumatic flashbacks in Figure 1.



¹⁰ Hilary Chute points out that "comics narrative ... calls overt attention to the crafting of histories and historiographies" (*DD* 2).

Figure 2

Physically, the two panels seem to be what Michael Chaney might call *mise en abyme* in *Reading Lessons in Seeing*—panels within a panel for “a reflection within a reflection” (20). At the same time, Gozadilla brings the reader’s memory back to what the monster alludes to, i.e. *Gojira* (1954), which further points back to the nuclear bombings on Japan and what Japan experienced after World War II. Thus, two more dimensions of time are added to the scene in Figure 1. Indeed, “It is the Object itself which is the mirror” (qtd. in Chaney 19) as Chaney quotes Jean Baudrillard to explain *mise en abyme*. On the one hand, Gozadilla in the panels represents the monster in the graphic narrative. On the other, Gozadilla also reflects the historical trauma of the Japanese in 1945, that historical trauma. And as King Kong in the following chapter intimates, Gozadilla is not the ultimate referent in this chain of mirrors (signifiers).

As Chao nonsensically messes with time in the aforementioned bleed pages, these bleed pages allow for questions that the graphic narrative poses to the reader. If Godzilla refers to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, what could Gozadilla in twenty-first century New York City symbolize? Why does Gozadilla attack only Mayumi, unlike Godzilla, which does not have a specific target in the first film of its own genre, *Gojira* (1954)? And while we understand Gozadilla’s desire to take revenge on the woman who defeated him in 1978, she’s also Japanese—why not also attack Americans, the creators of the bombs dropped on Japan? In a sense, the bomb (that is, Godzilla, rose from the ashes of the bomb) is a second attack on the Japanese—on Mayumi. What do we make of the fact that Mayor Bloomberg, who in real life got elected right after 9/11, takes care of Gozadilla in *Johnny Hiro*? To tackle these significant questions, I will turn to Bloomberg’s role in the retextualization of history and *Johnny Hiro*’s narrative strategy for a counter-history.

Gozadilla, or History in the Gutter

As Noriega explains, the monster’s characterization throughout the film history of Godzilla changed over time, which reflects the films’ tracking of contemporary historical contexts. For instance, in *Godzilla 1985*, the monster “attacks a Japanese fishing boat and then a Soviet submarine” (Noriega 72). The Japanese uses the monster to “name (textualize)” the trauma in the face of the arms race between the U.S. and the Soviets (Noriega 72). For Fredric Jameson, history is “inaccessible to us except in textual form, or ... can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization” (82). As Noriega claims, the Japanese needed to make the Godzilla films to (re)textualize history in Jamesonian terms and work through their historical traumas because we can neither represent nor get access to the totality of what happened in Japan. Thus, history is not equivalent to the Godzilla films, yet history becomes accessible in textual form in the Godzilla films, i.e. the results of the (re)textualization of the historical traumas.

If Godzilla, as Noriega claims, is (re)textualized history, I argue that Gozadilla’s traumatic memory in the gutter emblemizes history’s traumatic memory, or the historical trauma of the Japanese since 1945. As Jameson claims, we do not have any access to the totality of history except such as in the form of Godzilla. Thus, Godzilla reflects something about history, but not its totality. In this vein, like Gozadilla partially shown through the window frame in Figure 3, Gozadilla in the gutter (which is also part of the bleed page in Figures 1 and 2) symbolically illustrates history in the gutter. While the totality of history is not available to us, we approach it through its (re)textualized versions where we need to imagine to fill in the gaps between available yet fragmented information like we figure out the transition between panels in the gutter.¹¹ Similarly, it is significant that Gozadilla’s traumatic flashbacks in *Johnny Hiro* encompass the gutters in the two aforementioned bleed pages. Likewise, images of the bomb from cameras in the *Enola Gay* such as the mushroom cloud are also retextualized versions of history. Thus, Chao makes visual this intellectual process to make sense of history via Gozadilla in the gutter in Figure 3.

¹¹ Chute views the gutter as “a kind of Lacanian Real” (DD 17).



Figure 3

Chao shows such Jamesonian retextualization of history later in the same chapter, thereby exposing the textuality of history. Through Gozadilla's thinking or remembering process, as the captions (or the metanarrative) on the verso suggest and as the panels record, he collapses and falls into sleep due to jetlag on the recto, which coincides with the collapse of narration from Gozadilla's perspective: the end of the metanarrative from Gozadilla's side of the story.¹² Thus, Gozadilla's story disappears, thanks to Mayor Bloomberg's effort to conceal the monster's footprints from the city and thus the entire monster-related incident. That is, after Mayumi calls Bloomberg for help, he works with his team on the damages that Gozadilla caused. Without any further metanarrative, this scene with the mayor introduces his version of historicizing, or retextualizing Gozadilla (historical trauma). Bloomberg says that although "many unnaturally large reptiles and gorillas" (Chao 39, original emphasis) often attack the city, it is his job to clean up the mess and "mak[e] it appear as if nothing out of the ordinary happened" during the night (38).¹³ To cover up what monsters have destroyed, Bloomberg prioritizes taking care of the aftermath of monster attacks, which results in the endless construction going on in the city. He also asks Hiro and Mayumi not to mention "the whole giant monster thing" (49) to anyone to protect the city's property value and real estate market, which will help him win reelection.

¹² For her discussion on "the collapse of narration" or "the end of storytelling," see Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, Harvard UP, 2002.

¹³ Films that have monsters in New York City include *Cloverfield*, *Q the Winged Serpent*, *V. the Miniseries*, *C.H.U.D.*, *Ghostbusters*, *Mimic*, and *Godzilla* (1998). Films where monsters destroy New York City include *King Kong*, *Cloverfield*, *Independence Day*, *Godzilla*, *I Am Legend*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Armageddon*, *A.I.*, *Deep Impact*, etc.

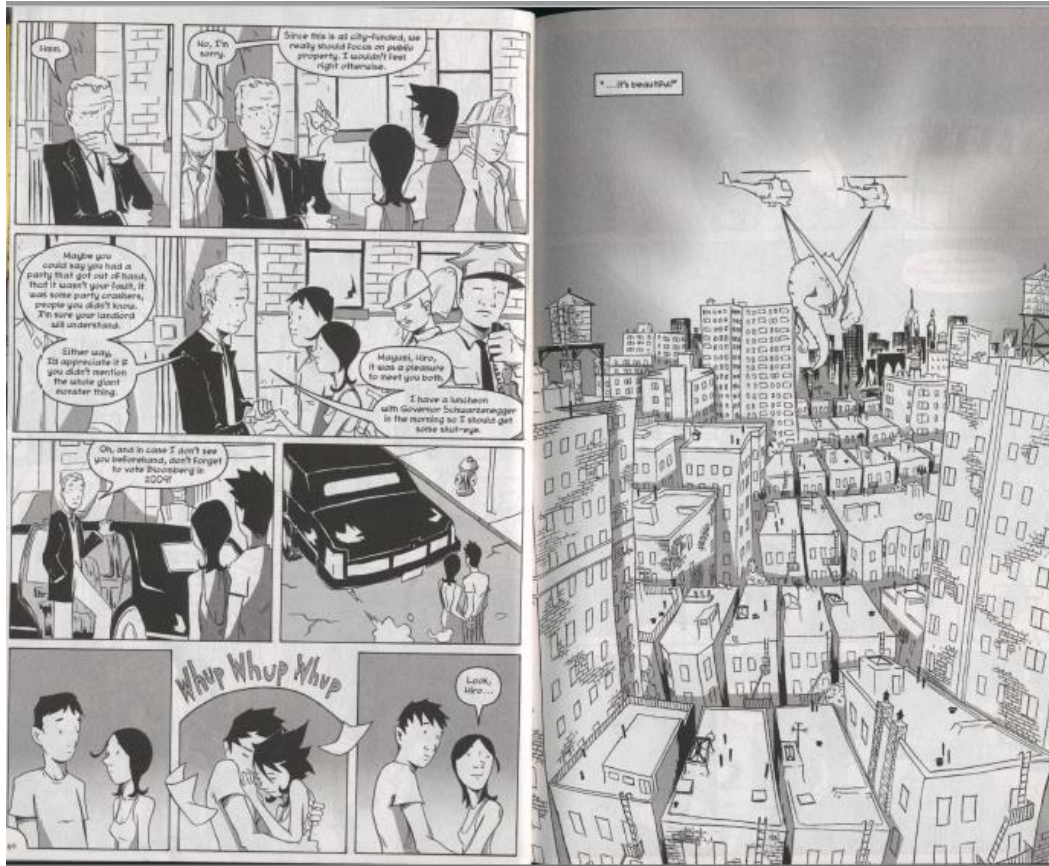


Figure 4

Although Bloomberg's retextualization of the incident thus takes over the previous metanarrative of Gozadilla's story, graphic nonsense in the last scene of this chapter troubles the mayor's version of the (hi)story. The mayor's effort to erase Gozadilla's traces in the city is juxtaposed against the previous bleed pages, which are Gozadilla's version of the story. In Figure 4, as the mayor exits the scene and Gozadilla is being taken away, the quotation marks on the recto surrounding Mayumi's words in a single caption somehow unsettles her very words, "... it's beautiful!" (40). It seems reasonable for Mayumi to be relieved after seeing Gozadilla captured. However, in what ways is it *beautiful*? Furthermore, why are her words in the caption as well as in quotation marks? Does Chao suggest that this is Mayumi's words, as she is the only one talking in the previous panel? Or, *who* quotes her words? While quotation marks in captions can be used to indicate the absence of the speaker in the frame, these quotation marks in the caption, particularly vis-à-vis Bloomberg's erasing of Gozadilla's story on the verso and Chao's heretofore use of the captions only for metanarrative, seem to question Mayumi's comments on the situation. Furthermore, Mayumi's comments in the caption are more than her words given that until near the end of the chapter (Figure 4) there are no more captions (metanarrative) after Gozadilla's collapse, as if a U.S. narrative overtakes the Japanese one. This unsettling retextualization of the incident becomes *nonsensical* when the reader remembers Gozadilla's flashbacks, even if silly, since this "nice" closure does not give justice to Gozadilla in that it only reflects one side of the story. Moreover, if the reader knows what Godzilla signifies to the 1954 Japanese audience, concluding this chapter on Gozadilla with this closure, "it's beautiful!", becomes more unsettling. Mayumi's unsettling comments appear to echo the U.S.'s reception of Godzilla films in the eighties, which reflects their failure to perceive history in the films, while approaching them only aesthetically.¹⁴ This film history parallels Bloomberg's

¹⁴ Godzilla films "received critical and popular attention in the United States in the fifties and early sixties, when they contained state-of-the-art special effects. But by the eighties, these films were considered to have fallen behind in a special effects race similar to the nuclear arms race.... The evaluation according to Hollywood standards de-historicizes the text, assuring an ethnocentric reading" (Noriega 74).

"aesthetic" maintenance of the city to counteract Godzilla (and King Kong in *Johnny Hiro's* sequel) on the one hand and Mayumi's inability to recognize historical references in Gozadilla on the other. Significantly, Chao's rewriting of *Gojira* also problematically echoes the U.S.'s adaptation of the film in that both added the damsel-in-distress trope to the original plot in *Gojira*. In so doing, Chao acknowledges his own situatedness, distanced from the historical trauma by time and space, as well as his work as a version of retextualized history, which includes his contemporary events nonsensically entangled with other historical traumas. Furthermore, the two helicopters flying through New York City's skyline might remind the American reader of the 2001 World Trade Center catastrophe, and the quoted words, post-9/11 concerns about aestheticizing the terrorist attacks.¹⁵ Then, Mayumi's words in quotation marks appear to suggest that if from American's perspective the 9/11 catastrophe is not beautiful, what happened to Gozadilla and what it references in Japanese history are also not beautiful for the Japanese.¹⁶ As is often the case with unknown historical events, and as Mayumi never learns why she was attacked by the monster, which is also reflected in the aforementioned scholarly amnesia, the reader can decide to move on, without questioning these nonsensical juxtapositions of panels and bleeds, and words and images. Yet, Chao uses the moments of graphic nonsense in *Johnny Hiro*, such as those with Godzilla (and King Kong as I will explain later), to help the reader recognize their historical references, thereby forcing the historical insight from them.

King Kong

Seemingly random and for no reason, King Kong's cameo appearance outside Mayumi's office after the Gozadilla incident is, however, no coincidence: King Kong connects Mayumi's current experience of being the victim of microaggressions to the history of racism in the U.S. (if not the world). While King Kong never returns until Chao's sequel, *Johnny Hiro: The Skills to Pay the Bills* (2013), Chao's placement of Gozadilla and King Kong with Mayumi in *Johnny Hiro* (2012) recalls the history of the Godzilla films in the U.S. That is, "the United States release of Godzilla ... was renamed *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* in an effort to link the film with *King Kong*" and unlike in *Gojira* (1954), the U.S.'s adaptation included "[a]dditional dialogue about young women sacrificed to Godzilla by Micronesian Islanders" (Noriega 69). Considering this American re-presentation of *Gojira*, the reader can connect Gozadilla's kidnapping of Mayumi (despite the absence of the monster's interest in any female character in *Gojira*) and the iconic image of Mayumi in his grip with *King Kong*, whose original version also featured King Kong holding a (white, blond) woman in his grip. Significantly, unlike *Gojira* (1954), which does not include a damsel-in-distress, *Johnny Hiro* begins with a scene in which Gozadilla snatches Mayumi away from Hiro in their apartment as if picking up from the last scene of *King Kong* (1933) where King Kong kidnaps Ann Darrow in a similar way.

Indeed, there are more parallels between *King Kong* and *Johnny Hiro*: they have "silenced plots," or silenced historical traumas which King Kong and Gozadilla respectively allude to. First, they both allude to colonialism: while Gozadilla (and Godzilla) reference the atomic bombings, which frustrated the aspiration of the Japanese to colonialize the world, *King Kong* also shows, as James Snead asserts, "the metaphorical connection between the journey [of the expedition's leader Carl Denham] and the European-American trade in African slaves" (59). According to Snead, Denham's journey in the film, trekking to west of Sumatra to take pictures of spectacles (including King Kong) and eventually to take King Kong with him to New York, is "an allegory of the slave trade ... and of various other forms of exploitation and despoilment" (59). The fact that Denham's ship loaded with explosives will turn into one transporting "black cargo" (Snead 60) can remind the reader of the slave trade along with the frequent identification of blacks with "ape-like creatures" in Western literature and history (Snead 61-62). Second, those who capture the monsters definitely have consequential economic benefits in mind: for slave traders, it was to make money from black people; for Bloomberg, it is to protect the real estate market by cleaning up the city as though nothing happened during the night, which could help him with reelection; and for the expedition's leader, it is to generate money from King Kong exhibitions. Third, those who capture the monsters provide problematic closures after getting rid of them, thereby writing history for their own benefits: although it is the expedition's leader who brings King Kong to the city and thus causes his unfortunate premature death, he "stands over the fallen ape's corpse delivering the

¹⁵ One relevant question could be, "How do you make a movie of a day that already played out like a movie?" (Randell 142).

¹⁶ I am thankful to Michael Chaney for his insightful comments on the helicopters in Figure 4 and 9/11 during the *Fourth Annual Dartmouth Illustration, Comics, and Animation Conference* in May, 2018. See also, Georgiana Banita, who connects the image of two Sarajevo tower blocks in Joe Sacco's *The Fixer* to that of the Twin Towers to show how Sacco evokes empathy in the reader's mind (58).

final lines: 'It wasn't the airplanes. It was beauty killed the beast'" (Snead 57); as discussed earlier, Bloomberg's retexualization of the Gozadilla incident and the *closure* in the caption ("... it's beautiful") are unsettling as they only tell one side of the story. Fourth, there are silenced histories in both the film and the graphic narrative. Although reminiscent of "forays by Europeans to non-European nations" and "the European-American trade in African slaves" (Snead 59), *King Kong* "silenc[ed other] plots" such as "the entire slave trade, the voyage, and the 200 years of slavery in the New World" by omitting those histories (64). In other words, *King Kong* focalizes on "the danger that the girl seems to be in" which distracts the audience from "the actual dangers to which Kong (blacks) are being exposed" (64). In *Johnny Hiro*, "silenced plots" are what Gozadilla alludes to: the bombings of Pearl Harbor, the internment, the atomic bombings of Japan, the U.S.'s occupation of Japan, and the H-bomb tests. Thus, *King Kong* and *Johnny Hiro* resonate with each other.

Yet, the subtle but significant difference in silenced plots between *King Kong* and *Johnny Hiro* is that the latter exposes and witnesses the process of silencing Gozadilla's story in the form of graphic nonsense, and thus leads the reader to see the silenced plots, i.e. the historical traumas, not settling with what is given on the surface. The sequel of the graphic narrative, *Johnny Hiro: The Skills to Pay the Bills* (2013), further shows King Kong's fate as similar to Gozadilla's. King Kong and his mother's stories have been silenced in a similar way to how Gozadilla's story was erased by Mayor Bloomberg. As he cleans up the mess King Kong created in contemporary New York City and keeps the incident secret like he did after Gozadilla's attack, the mayor further reveals that *King Kong* (1933) was produced to cover up a giant gorilla's (i.e. King Kong's mother's) visit in the city, and to convince people that the gorilla was not real, but a prop for the film. Thus, Bloomberg and his predecessor Mayor John P. O'Brien efficiently eliminate King Kong and his mother respectively from the historical scene.

This narrative strategy is similar to what King-Kok Cheung calls "double-telling—conveying two tales in the guise of one" in Hisaye Yamamoto's "Seventeen Syllables" and "Yoneko's Earthquake" where "the overt 'action' is narrated from the perspective of a young girl; the covert drama concerns the conflict between the girl's issei parents" (29). That is, in these short stories, the main plots revolving around the narrators can distract the reader from the other embedded plots about their parents, which the reader can still figure out through their nuanced reading of Yamamoto's "elliptical style" (Cheung 29). The muted plots eventually emerge at the end either through a character's direct telling of her story ("Seventeen Syllables") or through masked but implicit hints at another character's adultery and abortion ("Yoneko's Earthquake"). Similarly, *Johnny Hiro* does multiple-telling, or double-telling and further showing, to be exact. First, the graphic narrative does double-telling: after the reader first sees Gozadilla's attack on Mayumi, they also learn about why Gozadilla is after her through his traumatic flashbacks—he wants revenge on her mother. In addition come more plots (thus multiple-telling), but only through *showing* allusions to Godzilla and King Kong. While graphic nonsense incites the reader's curiosity, the reader needs to piece them together: what are the connections between Gozadilla and Bloomberg, Gozadilla and King Kong, King Kong and an Asian woman (not a white woman as in the *King Kong* film)?¹⁷ These questions may not be completely answered as neither one's trauma nor history itself can be completely understood. Yet, Chao's narrative strategy of graphic nonsense through silenced plots serves its purpose to show there always can be more important stories to know behind the historical scenes.

Conclusion: Graphic Nonsense for Historical Trauma

As my reading suggests Hiro and Mayumi find themselves implicated in historical traumas in such a nonsensical and complicated way that Gozadilla not only references the historical traumas of Japan and the U.S., but also signifies the microaggressions that they face on daily basis. Significantly, in the last chapter of the graphic narrative, Hiro and Mayumi find themselves in court with Judge Judy because their landlord sues them for the damage Gozadilla inflicted on their apartment building. The couple calls Mayor Bloomberg to the court because the excuses they make to keep Gozadilla's attack secret fail to

¹⁷ As for King Kong and an Asian woman (Mayumi), Chao does double-telling by replacing a blond beauty with an Asian woman. First, Chao places an Asian couple in the position of white protagonists, thereby revising the rhetorical problem of *King Kong*, which privileges the white male viewers by helping them vent their repressed desires such as "abduct[ing] a white woman in the guise of a phallic black male" (Snead 65). The white male viewers of *King Kong* would identify themselves with Carl Denham and Jack Driscoll, who successfully defeat King Kong, rescue the beauty, and gain the fame, while vicariously and safely releasing their repressed desires through King Kong, whose eventual death cleanses their sense of guilt. In addition to this rhetorical situation, having a couple of Asian descent troubles this European colonialism inscribed in the film: now the Asian couple are the center of the story, helping to capture Gozadilla and being happily reunited. Simultaneously, by replacing white protagonists with the couple of Japanese descent, Chao also points to Japanese colonialism in the early-twentieth century.

convince the judge. As the mayor suppresses Gozadilla's story, he brings to the surface by chance what Hiro and Mayumi have suffered from their landlord, including tenant harassment such as not taking care of plumbing issues or making it so difficult for them to renew the lease. This incident does not necessarily compliment Bloomberg's work. Rather, it demonstrates how difficult it is to suppress historical traumas: while you suppress one, another will be brought to the surface, thereby confirming "the return of the repressed." At one point, the landlord chimes in, "I never liked these *kids* from the start," with Judge Judy's comments, "You *kids* are digging yourself in deep, you realize" (157, emphasis added). While the word "kids" may evoke an Asian American stereotype, which is, as Min Hyoung Song points out, that "all Asian Americans are childlike" (42), the tenant harassment could be viewed as a microaggression against Hiro and Mayumi. Right after this court scene, the reader learns that the customer's false accusation against Mayumi's English proficiency was disclosed and she regains her damaged reputation at work. This is a scene of victory, but also bitter sweet one as the reader remembers how difficult it was for Mayumi to defend herself.

Thus, Mayumi and Hiro find themselves once again implicated as neither perpetrators nor victims among the historical traumas. Although it seems nonsensical the way that their relations to historical traumas are represented through Gozadilla and King Kong, Chao employs graphic nonsense to unravel the complicated positions that these Japanese and Japanese American characters find themselves in. Living in twenty-first century New York City, they are still affected by and implicated in the historical traumas caused by European, American, and Japanese colonialisms as well as the atomic bombings of Japan and their aftermath. Seemingly nonsensical and even confusing, the incidents involving the monsters encourage the reader to keep searching for meaning to make sense out of nonsense. Therefore, rather than silencing historical traumas as *King Kong* (1933) and the U.S.'s adaptation of *Gojira* (1954) did, *Johnny Hiro* effectively highlights and exposes such underrepresented stories through graphic nonsense. Gozadilla and King Kong thus become a common language for Hiro and Mayumi to communicate their own traumatic experiences as well as their implication in the history.

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