Environmental Disaster in Japanese Literature

Narrativizations of Time and Space in Ōe Kenzaburō's *Somersault*

MA Thesis

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Abstract

In recent years, in the field of contemporary literature, greater attention has been put on literary productions dealing with environmental pollution or destruction, prompting the surge of environmental criticism – ecocriticism – to a well developed and independent discipline within the environmental humanities. Nevertheless, the field, as Karen Thornber correctly noted, has been mainly focused on issues raised by western literary works. Environmental fictions – or ecofictions – produced in East Asia, despite their preoccupations with pollution and environmental disaster, are usually excluded from the analyses of ecocritics. In Japan in particular, after the Fukushima disaster of March 3, 2011, varied literary works – from short stories to novels and poems – have addressed topics of nuclear pollution and environmental disaster. Therefore, it becomes paramount to focus on this gap in ecocriticism and start to develop more comprehensive studies of ecofictions expanding beyond literary production in English or western languages.

This thesis, presenting as a case study the novel *Somersault* (1999) – by the Japanese author Ōe Kenzaburō, tries to address this gap by focusing on the narrativization of nuclear disaster in relation to the representations of time and space. After the introduction of an analytical tool comprehensive of various theoretical concepts, this study endeavors to demonstrate the importance of accounting for those elements revealing deeper environmental concerns that are often overlooked by critics in literary productions. My study of narrrativizations of time and space, as they take shape in this Japanese case study, shall prove productive also for the analysis of other ecofictions produced in different languages and arising from varied cultural traditions. Furthermore, an analytical tool linking together temporality and space could enable comparative studies between East Asian and Western ecofictions. This study could thus contribute to the field of ecocriticism by allowing for a diversification in the understanding of perceptions of time and space in literary works from different literary and cultural traditions dealing with the threat, or in the aftermath, of an environmental disaster.

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Additional Note

In this study, the modified Hepburn system has been used for the romanization of Japanese names. Long vowels have been indicated by a macron – e.g. ā, ō, ū – while the Japanese syllabic ん, *n*, is rendered as *n* before labial consonants and as *n'* before vowels and y. An exception has been made for name of common places. Names such as Tokyo, for example, have been rendered without a macron. Furthermore, Japanese names of authors have been reported following the Japanese order according to which the family name precedes the first name, e.g. Ōe Kenzaburō.

For this analysis, the 2003 English translation by Philip Gabriel of Ōe Kenzaburō's *Somersault* has been used. All the quotes have been taken directly from the translation. The Japanese original version, 『宙返り』, *chūgaeri,* has been used as a further reference.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reassessing the Focus

Since the Fukushima triple disaster in March 2011, fictions dealing with the possibility of environmental collapse have been receiving a renewed attention. When the coast of the Tohoku region in Japan was hit first by an earthquake and then by a tsunami, The Fukushima Daiichi power plant was flooded causing three nuclear meltdowns. The effect that this disaster had on both the Japanese and international public was enormous. The memories of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were immediately recalled. Many writers publicly discussed the disaster and its effects on people and on the environment. "We have learned […] how destructive a nuclear weapon can be, and how deep the scars are that radiation leaves behind in this world, in the bodies of people" (Murakami 4). The Fukushima disaster quickly became a literary theme often narrativized in novels and short stories published only some months after the accident. Despite the different approaches in the description of 3.11 – as the Fukushima disaster is popularly known – these literary productions are considered to be part of "a set of texts that constitute the emerging genre of *shinsai bungaku* (earthquake literature), or '(post-) 3.11 literature'" (Tokita 227). The theme of nuclear disaster becomes a productive tool revitalizing the creative dialogue in Japan (Tokita 227). As in the case of the *genbaku bungaku* – 'literature of the nuclear bombing' – different and varied texts have been classified for their expression of feelings of fear and loss engendered by the disaster.

Although these categorizations allowed for a clear focus on Japanese specific experiences of nuclear disaster and their aftermaths, they have also often prevented the positioning of Japanese literary productions within more global movements of analysis. As Karen Thornber repeatedly notices, Japanese literary works generally deal with the theme of environmental pollution or degradation – such as in the case of the 'post-3.11 literature' – but have seldom been studied as instances of environmental fiction. Ecofictions and ecocriticism as a generic classification and a theoretical framework respectively, appear to be mostly applied to English literary production, therefore overlooking what could be a productive object of analysis. As Thornber mentions, this would be particularly true in the case of East Asian fictions that, despite being often branded as the expressions of cultures that have been living in harmony with their environments for centuries, regularly

narrativize instances of environmental pollution. In the specific case of Japan as well, it is easy to detect a wide gap in the study of environmentally oriented literary productions. Despite the renewed interest generated by the Fukushima disaster, and some sporadic texts – e.g. *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease* (1969) by Ishimure Michiko – that received both national and international attention and have been explicitly named as ecofictions and nature writing, still many novels dealing with environmental degradation are not accounted for from the perspective of ecocriticism.

This analysis shall try to address this gap by moving the focus on a Japanese case study. The novel that will be discussed is *Somersault* (1999) by the Japanese Nobel laureate Ōe Kenzaburō. Although this is not a novel interpreted as an instance of ecofiction, priority in this analysis has been given to the environmental subplot narrativizing the possibility of a nuclear disaster and describing its consequences on both the present and the future of the characters. The subplot is interpreted through a set of concepts from different disciplines. This multi-concept analytical approach, accounting for the various renegotiations of the perceptions of time and space in the aftermath of a natural disaster, shall prove productive in the analysis of the novel as a way of highlighting environmental elements often overlooked in fictions.

In chapter two, a theoretical base for the analysis of the novel will be laid. Through an engagement with theoretical perspectives drawing from environmental criticism, study of time in narrative, and anthropological definitions of the space of disaster, I tried to define this analytical approach as a way to describe the various and multifaceted interactions between narrativizations of time, space, and environmental disaster in the case study under scrutiny. In chapter three, the approach defined in chapter two has been applied to the novel *Somersault* as a way of highlighting the less visible environmental elements presented in the subplot.

This analysis describes an approach that could help open up the study of novels rarely considered as ecofictions by creating a framework that considers the interactions between descriptions of time and space as intertwined with narrativizations of disaster. This method could indeed prove productive especially in addressing East Asian novels – and more precisely Japanese literary productions – finally accounting for their environmental concerns and allowing them to be considered within the broader and global field of ecocriticism.

1.2 Ecocriticism and *Somersault* as an Ecofiction

In this section, the attention has been focused on the positioning of the case study – *Somersault* (1999) by the Japanese author Ōe Kenzaburō – within ecofictions. I shall try to demonstrate how this novel, with a subplot dealing with the possibility of a nuclear disaster, can be identified as an ecofiction. In order to do so, first a brief outline of the field of environmental criticism is presented, followed by highlighting in the novel the elements of what can be identified as the environmental subplot. Since this section is only focused on situating the novel as ecofiction, a more detailed analysis of its characters and plot lines is left for Chapter 3 where *Somersault* will be dealt with in depth.

The field of environmental criticism – or ecocriticism – emerged only very recently as a "self-conscious movement" (Buell 1). This new way of relating to the 'environment' grew with particular rapidity in the fields of literary and cultural studies. According to Lawrence Buell, this fast development probably came to be when "public concern about the state and fate of "the environment" took increasing hold" (4). As Jim Dwyer argues, "ecocriticism arose from the development of a greater understanding of ecological processes, [and] concern over the intensification of global environmental degradation […]" (1). Over the years since its first development, ecocriticism has dealt with many disparate sets of problems concerning the environment and its artistic and literary representations. The field is today thriving and it is facing, as Buell argues, a compelling need for further growth and self-definition, in particular in relation to the generation of new "models of critical inquiry, and the challenge of establishing their [environmental criticism] significance beyond the academy" (128). Yet, as noted by Thornber, much of the work done in the field of environmental criticism – and more broadly in environmental humanities – is still "limited […] almost exclusively to creative texts written in Western languages, and English-language American literature in particular" (*Afterword* 239). What seems to be lacking in the field of environmental criticism is attention to what is produced outside the English speaking western world. Although there is a vast production of East Asian literary works addressing environmental problems, the focus of critics who study these literatures has mainly been on discussing an idealized and controversially harmonious relationship between human and nature (Thornber, *Afterword* 242). "In the coming years, ecocritics will need to address a broader range of literatures. […] East Asian literatures are fertile soil for twenty-first century ecocritical research" (Thornber, *Afterword* 242).

Nature has always been a prominent topic in Japanese literature but only since the Meiji Era did the writing about the environment take on a more critical stance regarding issues of pollution and natural destruction. Some scholars and authors, both western and Japanese, started to pay more attention to these issues especially after the Fukushima disaster in 2011. Luisa Bienati in one of her

essays about literature post Fukushima describes the catastrophe as a social capsizing, and discusses natural disaster as embedded in Japanese culture and literature due to the geographical position of Japan that makes it a country very subjected to tsunamis and earthquakes. Bienati affirms that in a disaster "rich becomes poor, and everybody shares the same destiny that makes them beggars deprived of their houses" (33 translation mine)[1]. Environmental catastrophe in every epoch destabilizes social structures and perceptions of our relation with our surroundings. Murakami Haruki, in a speech given for the acceptance of a literary prize in Barcelona in 2011 also discusses the relation between Japanese culture and perceptions of disaster. After the meltdown at the Fukushima power plant Murakami links the catastrophe – the Fukushima disaster in particular, but more broadly every disaster – with the Japanese concept of *mujō* – 'impermanence'. According to Buddhist teachings, *mujō* describes a perpetual state of change and underlines the impermanence of every reality (Bienati 31). According to Murakami, *mujō* is deeply rooted in Japanese culture and it evolved from a Buddhist concept to a broader feeling of acceptance towards the many natural disasters that Japan faced because of its geography (2). This sentiment of acceptance however, allows the Japanese to also discover "sources of true beauty" (Murakami 2). In the case of the nuclear disaster of Fukushima however, this sense of *mujō*, the feeling that "faced with the overwhelming power of nature, humans are helpless", became intertwined with a shared responsibility towards environmental destruction caused by people. "In that we are threatened by the power of the atom, we are all victims. At the same time, in that we are the ones who uncovered the power of the atom, and we have failed to stop the use of that power, we are all perpetrators as well" (Murakami 4). Murakami stresses that, although Japanese culture is often perceived as in complete harmony with nature, the most recent nuclear disaster – but also other instances of environmental pollution and contamination in the name of economic development – is the result of people's negligence. "We set the stage, we committed the crime with our own hands, we are destroying our own lands, and we are destroying our own lives" (Murakami 4). Many Japanese authors took a stand after the Fukushima disaster and started narrativizing their fears and emotions in the aftermath of the disaster, giving shape to what is now referred to as 'post 3.11 literature' or 'post Fukushima literature'. Yet, this attention to nuclear disaster and the ruin of the environment in Japanese literature has not been systematically analyzed within the larger field of ecocriticism.

[1] In Italian in the original "i ricchi diventano poveri e tutti sono accomunati da un medesimo destino che li vede mendicanti privati delle loro dimore.""

The figuration of nuclear disaster in Japanese literature however, is not only a recent subject, as the case study presented in this thesis shows. This study, bringing literary and ecocritical theory to bear on a case study from Japanese literary production written in 1999, tries to make a start towards filling the above-mentioned gap in environmental criticism. I believe that in much of Japanese modern and contemporary literature it is possible to trace a serious attention to natural destruction and pollution.

Dwyer, in the first chapter of his book *Where the Wild Books are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction*, brings together a wide range of approaches and critics, in an attempt to define what makes a fictional narrative *ecofiction.* He defines this kind of narrations as "fiction that deals with environmental issues or the relation between humanity and the physical environment, that contrasts traditional and industrial cosmologies, or in which nature or the land has a prominent role" (2).

In *Somersault,* nature has a constant and prominent presence throughout the narration. The descriptions of nature can be divided in two kinds respectively belonging to the first part of the narration or to the second. In the first part of the novel, set in Tokyo, descriptions of nature are sporadic and limited to images of nature visible in a huge metropolis like Tokyo. The reader gets a glimpse of the rare trees growing in the city, e.g. the elm in front of the window of one of the characters, but the descriptions are often brief and undetailed, such as the following: "his gaze was drawn to the lush foliage of the three, for it was swaying and shaking with unusual force. Soon he saw a pair of squirrels leaping about on a bare branch, disappearing in the shadows" (Ōe *Somersault* 43). Descriptions of nature or of natural elements are scarce. The first part of the novel does not seem to have any particular concern with any kind of environmentalism. However, after a closer reading, what appears to be much more present is a sense of catastrophe and disaster looming over the characters. The descriptions of living and thriving natural elements are outnumbered by a nature that is degraded, polluted and irreversibly destroyed by human intervention. The world that characters are inhabiting is perceived as corrupted and dead, the incessant approach of the "end of the world" is mentioned repeatedly. The leader of the religious sect in the main plot line says, "we live in a fallen world. [...] Everything in the world is fallen – from the earth, to the oceans, to the air itself" (Ōe *Somersault* 269). In another passage, a vision by the leader of the church is reported and the scene clearly describes a city left to die in the aftermath of a nuclear disaster. The scene depicts a desolate place where no animals are wondering around and people are only quietly waiting for death. In this kind of descriptions the serious matter of pollution of the earth is painted in a very dark tone; people are left without any strength to live and the city appears to be a wasteland where only death awaits. What descriptions like this one hint at is the possible effect of a catastrophic nuclear disaster. In the

novel, both in the first and in the second part, the topic of 'the end of the world', often linked with a nuclear catastrophe, is a recurrent one. The characters are often wondering about a nuclear disaster that has been avoided, but the perception of the possibility of a catastrophe is still present and vivid. Characters often speak about 'apocalypse' and feelings of a violent ending of the world are made explicit and pressing.

In *Somersault*, a large number of Christian references are employed. Christian religious imagery is a tool often deployed by Ōe in his narrations. As Yasuko Claremont points out, especially when it comes to references of biblical stories, these are used specifically for their mythological value (106). In Ōe's literary productions, Christian stories are dissociated from their religious and spiritual meaning. Endō Shūsaku, renowned Japanese Christian author "once remarked that Ōe's works 'are characterised by the quest for salvation without God'" (Endō as quoted in Claremont 106). The Christian scenes of destruction and 'apocalypse' are particularly useful in the context of an environmental narration dealing with the possibility of a nuclear disaster; "the use of mythology" continues Claremont, "allows […] to present […] human existence and how it relates to nature" (106). The biblical tradition, referenced as a set of myths becomes a valuable tool to include into the main plot narrating the establishment of a new religious movement called the Church of the New Man, images of environmental destruction – of "apocalypse". Often, the terms 'apocalypse', 'end of the world' and 'repentance' – terms of explicit Christian memory – are associated with references to the nuclear disaster avoided as a result of the intervention of the two leaders of the religious movement. Mostly in the first part of the novel, an explicit link is created between the Christian sounding terminology and the threat of a nuclear accident. The disaster alludes to the Christian apocalypse, and thus evokes the religious meaning of "crisis" as Final Judgment, resulting in a moment for repentance with the approach of the end of the world. Another recurring Biblical reference is that of the story of Jonah. Here the analogy is between the city of Nineveh that was spared by God after people repented and the avoidance of a nuclear disaster in Japan by the two leaders of the religious group.

In the second part of the novel however, images of destruction give way to a different kind of descriptions. Nature – with natural descriptions and a stronger presence of natural environment – seems to replace the feeling of doom pervading the first part of the novel. Half way through the novel the characters move to a hollow in the forest of Shikoku to establish their new religious movement. Thus, the environment in which they move is more strongly defined by the presence of natural sceneries. Although not completely free from human intervention, the landscape is described in a more quiet tone, seemingly not affected by fears of a possible catastrophe. In this second part this

kind of descriptions are frequent and the green of the foliage is a regular character almost framing the development of the events.

In these two complementary narrativizations of the environment and of the natural landscape, it is indeed possible to see elements that, according to Dwyer's definition, constitute an environmental fiction. The concern for a possible annihilation of the human and non-human life due to a man-made disaster and, at the same time, the presence of a luxuriant and thriving natural landscape, are the details that constitute what shall be designated as the environmental subplot in this novel.

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

『祈りは無力だっただろうか？』

大江健三郎

朝日新聞、2011 年 7 月 20 日

"Have prayers been powerless?"

With this title, Ōe Kenzaburō opens his article published in the *Asahi Shimbun* on July, 20th 2011. The article, coming out after the triple Fukushima disaster of March 3rd, 2011, addresses the issue of the use of nuclear energy both in Japan and on a global scale. Starting from the 1960s and up to the mid-1990s, the Japanese government promoted the "'peaceful' application of nuclear power" for energy production, prompting a "steady increase in the number of nuclear power plants" (Hara 23). The realization of new nuclear power plants in different prefectures of the Japanese territory was part of the rapid development of the Japanese economy. Additionally, power plants were built in "rural areas short of employment and financially disadvantaged" where the energy production sites would have brought a growth in workplaces and opportunities for business (Hara 25). This technological and *economic* expansion, however, came at a huge cost, for both people living near the sites chosen to build new nuclear power plants – or polluting industrial compounds – and for the natural environment surrounding them.

For many centuries, nature has been an essential topic in Japanese literature. Representations of natural elements have always been central in both poetry and prose; it can even be argued that "whenever we read a [Japanese] literary work, we find some reference to nature in it" (Ikuta 277). Nevertheless, Japan came to be one of the countries in the world with the highest number of environmental disasters and cases of industrial pollution. Shogo Ikuta defines the current condition of nature in Japan as "deplorable" (279). This condition forced writers to redefine their relation with

the classical way of representing nature known as *ka – chō – fû –getsu*, "flowers, birds, winds and moon", as well as to question the validity and pertinence of such stylistic depictions in this present of environmental pollution (Ikuta 279). However, what is striking within a literary production that for centuries has been narrativizing natural elements and seasonal changes is the absence of a "genre corresponding to American nature writing. […]. In other words, Japanese literature writes, sings and even dramatizes nature, but it is not about nature itself" (Takahashi et al. 290). 'Flowers, birds, winds and moon', may be major topics in Japanese literary production, but they are neither addressed critically, nor do writers engage with them in more profound analyses of their relation with the human (Takahashi et al. 290).

Yet, as pointed out by Takahashi et al., since the Meiji Restoration (1868) some writers or activists started dealing with issues of industrial pollution and environmental degradation (290). A well-known case is that of author Ishimure Michiko's *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease* (1969); an account of the contamination by methylmercury of the Minamata bay and the resulting symptoms now known as Minamata Disease. In recent years, particularly after the Fukushima disaster, not only non-fictional publication, but also novels or poems dealing with environmental disasters have risen sharply. Particularly famous is the rewriting by Hiromi Kawakami of her novel *Kamisama* (1998) into *Kamisama 2011* (2011), in which the plot was left unvaried but details relatable to a life in an environment polluted by nuclear radiations were added – e.g. the two characters are taking a walk for the first time after the (nuclear) 'incident' without wearing protective clothes, or use a Geiger counter to check their own radiation level after their stroll. Another well-known example is *In the Zone* (2013) by Randy Taguchi, a collection of short stories describing life in the zone after the Fukushima disaster (Masami 57).

What is foregrounded in all these narrations of disaster is the temporal element. Perceptions of time change in relation to the disaster, time often stretches out and changes into something similar to a long temporality characterized by the effects of the catastrophe. Environmental disaster allows for shifts in the perception of time and, simultaneously, it modifies humans' relation to a place. It challenges people's perceptions and, as a result, generates a sense of displacement, both spatial and temporal. An environmental catastrophe thus becomes an active force engendering an altered understanding of time and space. In order to come to terms with natural destruction, people first need to reassess their relation with time – before, during and after the event – and their sense of belonging to a specific place. Literary nature writing and ecofictions, that deal with dramatizations of environmental disasters, especially in the case of post-Fukushima Japan, have increased. However, in the field of Asian studies – especially in the study of literature – a systematic engagement with

environmental pollution and disasters is still lacking (Thornber, "Literature and the Anthropocene" 989 – 990). Therefore, in order to fill this gap, this study proposes the introduction of a different approach. It tries to provide a useful set of concepts as an analytical tool for the study of Japanese literary works whose particular mode of engagement with environmental concerns have been overlooked by critics and readers alike. The approach delineated in this paper will prove particularly effective in the study of fictional representations of environmental disaster, specifically for the way in which they stage the relations and interactions between time and space. Furthermore, the theoretical concepts applied to the case study shall help to account for the profound sense of displacement – both spatial and temporal – resulting from the need for a redefinition of the concepts of time and space after an environmental disaster.

In this analysis, the theoretical concepts highlighted in the following section will be applied to a Japanese case study – the novel *Somersault* (1999) by Ōe Kenzaburō – in which this multi-concept approach allows for the taking into account of the need of spatial and temporal renegotiation in the face of natural destruction and nuclear disaster.

2.2 Anticipation

Time is inherent to every form of existence. "Time is the very dynamic of existence, the pulsating drive of the unceasing transformation of being itself" (West-Pavlov 3). Time is intangible; nevertheless, it has been the object of study of philosophers and scholars. Its nature is problematic, but our understanding and definition of time are significant in relation to many aspects of daily and social life – not least the "unsustainable world order in which we live" (West-Pavlov 4). Our world is a temporal world, and so are the narratives produced about it. As Paul Ricoeur argues, "the world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world" (*Time and Narrative* 3). There is no narrative or fictional work without temporality; time is embedded in every narration, and it is impossible to separate narratives from their temporal aspects.

As time is an essential part in human – and non-human – life, "it is important to see all novels as novels about time" (Currie 4). Focusing on the temporal characteristics of every novel allows the reader – and the critic – to highlight aspects important for the categorization of a novel within ecofictions. Time and its narrativizations are an essential feature of ecofictions and narratives more broadly. Mark Currie, in his book *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time,* focuses on the relation between past and present in narratives, and explores how the fictional past and present differ from the human experience of the two. He offers the idea of *about about time* to emphasize that often narratives are dealing with "the subject of the backwards motion of time" (4 – 5). In fictions, what the readers experience as the narrative present is nothing less than a fictional past, already

realized in the narrative world. By the same token, the narrative future has also already taken place, therefore losing its characteristic of openness and unpredictability (Currie 18). The present becomes the "object of a future memory" (Currie 5), and, Currie argues, the use of prolepsis in contemporary novels assumes a "performative function which produces in the world a generalized future orientation" (22). Therefore, according to Currie, it seems that in contemporary narrations, the narrative future – already past and realized when we read the novel – produces a certain consciousness that the future will one day be the past, generating a feeling of anticipation. In his definition of a *perfomative prolepsis*, Currie stresses the element of meaning; these prolepses prompting a *future orientation* allow for a much stronger focus on the meaning of the present, and on what it will mean in the future (22). Prolepses become performative because in the act of envisaging the future, they also shape the present itself in way that makes the realization of that future possible: "performative prolepsis produces the future in the act of envisaging it, so that the possible transforms itself into the actual" (Currie 44). This interdependence of present and future, and their mutual shaping is what *about about time* comes to represent; a continuous movement between present and future that produces both present and future themselves, what Currie calls a "reversal causation, in which this future retrospect causes the event it looks back on" (73).

This particular connection between present and future is also involved in many fictional representations of environmental disaster. In literary nature writing there is often a sense of anticipation, of expectation; frequently, in ecocfictions a possible future scarred by the consequences of a disaster is outlined. The act of imaging a future environmental destruction becomes, following Currie, a performative act, one that changes the present by making the realization of the imagined future a possibility (Currie 43 – 44), and also highlights a feeling of anticipation. In this context, the concept of protention proposed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, becomes useful to underline the feature of anticipation that can be highlighted in the novel used as a case study. Protention is "a part of the present which is future oriented" (Husserl quoted in Currie 43). Jack Blaiklock, in his article "Husserl, Protention, and the Phenomenology of the Unexpected", explains it as "an anticipated consciousness of the future" (Blaiklock 470); an anticipation given by the experience of an object in the present, which provides an orientation towards the future (Currie 43). Blaiklock refers to the metaphor of the melody proposed by Husserl himself to define protention; when listening to a melody we are able to 'apprehend' the tone that will come next based on our perception of the series of previous tones constituting that melody.

> Protentions are anticipations continually undergoing change […]. A futural horizon is continually awakened, even if it is obscure and relatively indeterminate; a future is constantly constituted, namely, as an ever newly altered future just about to arrive (Husserl quoted in Blaiklock 473)

Therefore, it is possible to argue that, although the consciousness of the future could be 'indeterminate' – the anticipation can change if the present temporal object changes – the perception in the present of an object, as Husserl puts it, gives us the ability to anticipate what the future might look like. As Blaiklock states, "protention can be found in almost every perception of a temporal object" (472). In the theoretical approach proposed in this paper, what can be seen as the Husserlian temporal object – that is, the experience in the present that allows for an anticipation of the future – are both the environmental disaster or its causes.

Before going further into the analysis of this anticipation of the future it is important to make a distinction between what will be called a 'realized' and an 'unrealized' disaster. A 'realized disaster' is when the events narrativized take place after the catastrophe. A sudden, dramatic incident changed 'the world as we know it' before the narration, and now the characters find themselves in a disrupted environment enduring the consequences of the cataclysm. In this case, the anticipation is understood as a sense of expectation for what the future may hold for those characters living in a polluted and damaged environment. When talking of an 'unrealized disaster' – as in the case study presented in this analysis – the catastrophe is an event yet to come. The narration develops a sense of anticipation of a possible disaster. The characters' lives and their perceptions of time are shaped by a sudden, disruptive event that has yet to be realized, an event that might become actual in the future or remain unrealized. The 'unrealized disaster' can be seen as similar to a 'catachronism', a re-characterization of "the present in terms of a future proclaimed as determined but that is of course not yet fully realized" (Aravamudan 8). According to Aravamudan, catachronism is symmetrical to anachronism but rather than redefining the present in terms of the past, interprets the here and now based on a future possibility. This concept appears to be opposed to Husserl protention that gives a consciousness about the future based on a present perception. In chatachronism, the present is repackaged in terms of a possible disaster that might happen in the future and this repackaging, this reassessment of the meaning of the present, might lead to the realization of the disaster or to its avoidance. In both the realized and unrealized disaster narratives, the characters might perceive a sense of anguish and instability towards the future. Both a 'realized' and 'unrealized' disaster might engender feelings of loss and displacement as well as anxiety towards the future, and, although with different outcomes, the characters often need to readdress their relation to space and time. In the case study proposed in

the next section, for example, time seems to be stretching out and it appears to be slowing down, generating the impression of a future that looms over the characters' existence but that is still far from realization.

Considering the division made above between 'realized' and 'unrealized' disaster, what Husserl called 'temporal object', can be identified with the realized disaster, where the catastrophe becomes a well-determined 'object' – an event – from which an altered experience of temporality stems. When discussing 'unrealized disaster' narratives, the 'temporal object' might assume different characteristics. As in the case study presented in this paper, the catastrophe that is outlined as a future possibility, seems to be seen as the result of a perceived – maybe more figurative – 'object' in the present. The knowledge of a possible realization of a disaster comes from the awareness of specific circumstances – e.g. the threat of a nuclear disaster, environmental pollution – that generate a sense of 'anticipation' for the feared catastrophe to materialize. In conclusion, depending on which narrative we are taking into account, the role of the Husserlian 'temporal object' could be identified either by the catastrophic event, the disaster – usually realized before the beginning of the narration – or by the conditions observed in the present that might engender the *possibility* of a future disaster. Therefore, when analyzing literary works dealing with some kind of environmental pollution, in order to highlight the presence of the sense of anticipation derived from Husserl's concept of protention, the distinction between the realized and unrealized disaster could be useful. In Ōe Kenzaburō's *Somersault,* the characters' experiences of present conditions – e.g. environmental degradation - become the 'objects' from which a consciousness of a possible future disaster originates. In the case study, it will be proved that this consciousness engenders a sense of loss and fear towards the future, resulting in both temporal and spatial displacement.

2.3 Time of crisis, time of violence

A catastrophic event is generally perceived as a rupture, a sudden moment bringing a crisis into being. The disaster itself is often addressed as an instance of crisis, of violent rupture, but its long-lasting consequences on people – and on the environment alike – are often forgotten. These long-lasting consequences, however, often shape the framework of a *chronic crisis*. In his theorization of the concept of chronic crisis, Henrik Vigh suggests moving away from the common conception of crisis as "an isolated period of time […] a temporary disorder, a momentary malformation in the flow of things" (5) to a new understanding of crisis as a context (8). In this approach, crisis becomes an "ongoing experience", a *chronic crisis* that forces "people to make lives in fragmented and volatile worlds rather than waiting for a normalisation and reconfiguration" (Vigh 8). Although this understanding of crisis shifts from an interpretation of crisis as a 'rupture', as a sudden and sometimes

unexpected moment breaking the continuum of life and time, Vigh's approach to crisis as a long ongoing mode of being is useful especially in the case of environmental disaster. At the exact moment of a disaster a "loss of balance" (Vigh 5) occurs, the flow of time and existence is fractured forcing a reassessment of relations to time and space. In the aftermath of a disaster what needs to be addressed are its consequences, its effects on people and the environment. Although they are not as dramatic and sensational as the images of disasters usually presented in the media (Nixon 6), the aftermath is as violent as the sudden catastrophic event itself but prolonged in time. This stretching in time of the effects of a disaster is what Rob Nixon defines as 'slow violence', "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space , an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2).

In Nixon's notion of *slow violence,* the prolonged chronic crisis, as laid out by Vigh, meets the effects of environmental disaster that stretch out in time creating a "different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive" (Nixon 2). Slow violence defines the impact that the long-term violence of a disaster has on people and the environment; it "foreground[s] questions of time, movement and change however gradual" (Nixon 11). It is a concept that engages environmental violence giving to it an "explicitly temporal emphasis" (Nixon 11), positioning the aftermath of a disaster not as a separated event but rather as a continuum of "delayed effects" (Nixon 3). In this context, what are generally called 'consequences' of the disaster change into something different. Slow violence is a violence that is dispersed over time (Nixon 3), it is stretching after the disaster and it seems to be repeating endlessly. The violence of the catastrophe is prolonged in a lengthened time often not suitable for human understanding; "in the long arc between the emergence of slow violence and its delayed effects, both the causes and the memory of the catastrophe readily fade from view as the casualties incurred typically pass untallied and unremembered" (Nixon 8-9). The natural destruction, often dramatically showed in the media, easily obscure its more durable effects on people and the environment. In slow violence, the aftermath of a disaster gets unnoticed together with its human and natural victims; they become 'unremembered'. The dispersion of slow violence over a long period of time tests our current understanding of what constitutes a disaster and what does not, and how we relate to it. The catastrophe is vivid and clear in memory also after a long time has passed since the accident; the aftermath of the disaster, however, turning into a "pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects" (Nixon 3), is quickly consigned to oblivion. The dispersion over time of slow violence forces us to rethink our perception of time and its duration, of environmental disaster and its 'consequences'. Slow violence creates a temporal displacement because it exceeds "clear boundaries of time and space"

(Nixon 7); victims of slow violence – those who endure the long lasting effects of environmental disaster – find themselves facing a new temporality engendered by the catastrophe. The dramatic event is not over – the crisis it brought became chronic, and the violence it engendered is intensified with time.

Both Vigh's chronic crisis and Nixon's slow violence compel us to rethink certain categories through which we made sense of the world. They force us to readdress our understanding of the boundaries between human and nature and to redefine our relation to time. These two concepts proves particularly productive in the analysis of the case study. In a chronic environmental crisis, the characters' perceptions of time are challenged and they are compelled to engage with a revised vision of a world in which both chronic crisis and slow violence have become ordinary. The multi-concept approach outlined here helps to highlight the strong experience of crisis perceived in relation to a disaster, the latter understood as a prolonged condition – both realized and unrealized. Therefore, an approach similar to the one used in this study might prove productive in its application to the analysis of East Asian literatures dealing with natural pollution and devastation. In fact, by bringing together various theories this approach becomes a valid tool to frame the feelings of anxiety and fear that might be narrativized as engendered by the possibility of living in a prolonged environmental crisis as a result of a catastrophic event.

2.4 Space of Disaster, Space of Time

Not only time but also space is integral to the comprehensive approach delineated for this analysis. Ursula Heise, in the introduction to her book *Chronischism*, affirms that although the interest of "postmodernist culture" has shifted from the analysis of time to "spatial categories", the two need to be seen not as opposites but rather "as complementary parameters of existence" (1). Time and space relate to each other and are both necessary elements in describing how a prolonged time of catastrophe can be represented and dramatized in East Asian fictions.

In the concept of the *chronotope* introduced by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, time and space are 'intrinsically' united in the "temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84). According to Bakhtin, the chronotope is a form constitutive of literature (84), and it can take different characteristics according to the literary genre and the time of literary production. Every genre has its specific chronotope, and as genres developed historically – from the Greek romance to the Rabelaisian *Gargantua and Pantagruel* – they gave rise to many different chronotopes that became genre-specific. Bakhtin explains the relevance of chronotopes for narratives as follows: "they are organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied. […] to them belongs the

meaning that shapes narrative" (250). The chronotope is the focal point to understand spatial and temporal relations – and their dramatizations – in a novel. Liisa Steinby interprets the chronotope as a definition of "time and place not in the physical sense but in the sense of the (right) moment for certain kinds of human action" (116). This interpretation points out the intrinsic relation between time, space and action in literature. "Chronotopes are not merely forms given to the materials by the author, or even 'consummating' forms of the experience content; rather, they also crucially define the space – time of experience and action *in* the represented world of the novel" (Steinby 117, emphasis in original). The presence of the action *in* the world of the novel is made more explicit by Steinby's interpretation of Bakhtin's chronotope, which seems to define 'action' as the third unmentioned characteristic of the time – space relation. In Ōe's *Somersault,* the interactions between narrativizations of time and space, and the characters' possibility for action are deeply connected with representations of disaster. Thus, the chronotope, defining a relation between time, space and action, might become a productive tool also in the analysis of other ecofictions.

Shogo Ikuta, writing about the state of modern Japanese nature writing, also touches upon the idea of space, but culturally characterizing it. Ikuta affirms that all Japanese people share an "emotional attitude […] wherein they are intuitively confident that they belong where they can obtain a self-containedness by establishing an intimate relation with nature. Here lies […] the Japanese sense of place" (277). It is probably an overstatement to say that 'all' Japanese people feel they belong where they can achieve self-control by establishing a deep relation with nature, and at the same time this feeling might not be characteristic only of the Japanese population. Nevertheless, the idea of 'sense of place' is something worth engaging with. The idea of belonging to a place, of feeling at ease in that specific place, and the sense of connectedness with nature is indeed essential in the analysis of much environmental literary production, and in Ōe's *Somersault* specifically, as I will show.

In the event of a disaster, our perception of time, space and action needs to be reassessed and redefined. As Tobias Menely argues, disaster "requires us to recalibrate our philosophy of […] time" (85), and by the same token, the ability and desire to act are drastically modified. In addition, the characters' relation to space and their perception of it is fractured. The sense of belonging and membership to a place, easily gives way to feelings of loss. According to Mieke Bal, it is the gaze, the act of looking over a landscape, that "binds character to space" (124). In *Somersault,* as I will show in the next section, this binding appears to be interrupted. The gaze of the character meets only destruction and death. The landscape presented is generally an unfamiliar one, and the connection that would generally be established by the act of looking, cannot be achieved. Disasters generate a sudden and unexpected change in those elements of the familiar landscape that were necessary to

orient ourselves in the world (Ligi 125). "The experience of disaster arises because the ability of the subject to think of themselves *in* the world is one and the same with the ability to think *the* world. […] Therefore, the profound change of the external context engenders a crisis of the subjectivity that is linked affectively to the world" (Ligi 125 translation mine)[2]. This inability to find again a sense of belonging that was felt before the disaster is what generates a sense of displacement. In environmental disaster, both time and space are unhinged, and in order to cope with this feeling of disruption, a renegotiation of our sense of belonging is necessary. Nixon considers the need for a continuous revision of the concept of place and time after a disaster as another sign of slow violence (18).

> I want to propose a more radical notion of displacement, one that, instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable (Nixon 19)

This is the broader meaning of spatial displacement that shall be used in this analysis. It is a displacement derived from an environmental disaster that severed the sense of attachment to a place – what Ikuta describes as 'sense of place'; similarly, linear time is unsettled through temporal displacement.

In conclusion, in many narratives of environmental disaster the relation between time – space – action shifts; the characters' sense of attachment to a place and their perception of time need to be continuously redefined. As it will be shown in the analysis of the case study, in the fear of a disaster, the flow of time is fractured and the 'sense of place' is annihilated. As a result, a new chronotope that could describe the altered relations between time, space and action could be defined in *Somersault*. This chronotope is characterized by a perpetual process to reassess perceptions of time and space, and redefine the ability to act in a disrupted environment towards which no feelings of attachment are felt.

[2] In Italian in the original "L'esperienza del disastro sorge perché la capacità del soggetto di pensare se stesso nel mondo è un tutt'uno con la sua capacità di pensare il mondo […]. Dunque il mutamento profondo del contesto esterno provoca una crisi della soggettività che si lega affettivamente al mondo" (Ligi 125)

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the theoretical framework for the analysis of the novel *Somersault* has been outlined. The various concepts that will be used in the novel analysis have been introduced as a set that will prove productive for the study of the narrativizations of time and space in relation to environmental disaster. The approach used here on a Japanese case study could prove useful also in the analysis of other East Asian literatures because it helps to focus the many dramatizations of environmental pollution and disaster that often have been overlooked.

CHAPTER 3
NOVEL ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the analysis shall move to the specific case study. As showed in the introduction to this thesis, the novel *Somersault* (1999) by the Japanese Nobel prize Ōe Kenzaburō can be positioned within the genre of ecofictions by virtue of the environmental subplot narrativizing the possibility of an environmental disaster due to a nuclear accident. After introducing the theoretical concepts forming a composite analytical approach, focusing the analysis on a case study highlights how this approach can be appropriate to describe the complex relations and interactions between time and space in relation to environmental disaster.

Since March 2011, many scholars, both in Japan and abroad, revealed a renewed interest in Japanese literary productions presenting environmental issues. Nevertheless, this attention has mainly been limited to the most recent works dealing with the 3/11 disaster or older but well-known works – such as the aforementioned case of *Paradise in the See of Sorrows: Our Minamata Disease* (1969) by Ishimure Michiko – often overlooking a huge number of novels whose analysis would prove productive in the framework of ecocriticism. The case of *Somersault* becomes emblematic of this selective attention. The novel has been described as "extremely long" (*The Guardian*), "full of irrelevant details" (*Independent*), on the side of critics not many efforts have been made to improve this reputation, and few studies took the work into account. This lack of analysis however, I believe, led to the neglect of important details such as the environmental subplot. Therefore, the use of *Somersault* as a case study serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it proves that it is productive to engage with novels narrativizing environmental disaster and pollution written before the Fukushima disaster as they often demonstrate a consistent – and often ignored – attention to environmental issues. Secondly, an analysis focusing on the environmental aspects of a work considered as one of Ōe's least successful works, might prove a productive tool to start readdressing *Somersault* from a different and more productive perspective.

This chapter has been divided into four subsections. The first one is a detailed introduction to the plot and characters of the novel. Here the events of the novel are presented following the order in which they are narrated in the story – not their chronological order in the fabula – and the characters are introduced through their relations to each other. The second and third section are centered on the narrativization of time and space respectively. These two sections, by way of a close reading of the

novel, deal with the different and elaborate ways in which narrativizations of time and space interact with and influence descriptions of an environmental catastrophe. For this analysis, mainly two characters have been taken into account, Kizu and Patron, as they often have lengthy dialogues through which specific notions of time and space become intertwined with the notion of environmental destruction. In these two sections, through the theoretical concepts introduced in chapter two, the sense of displacement engendered by the altered perceptions of time and space in the aftermath of a disaster will be highlighted. The last section concludes the chapter and epitomizes the findings of the analysis.

3.2 *Somersault:* Characters and Plot

Somersault is a lengthy novel, and in its roughly six hundred pages, the main plot covers the events leading to the reestablishment of a religious movement. The book is divided into two main parts – Part I and Part II – preceded and followed by a prologue and an epilogue. In each section, different characters are introduced and events are presented by a heterodiegetic narrator, whereas the character of Kizu becomes the main internal focalizer. In the English translation of *Somersault* the past tense is used throughout the narration, without any further differentiation within different times of action. The following subsection shall give a clearer overview of the events and characters presented in the novel.

3.2.1 Prologue

The plot begins with a prologue – "some fifteen years before" (Ōe *Somersault* 6) the main events – introducing three major characters. Kizu, a painter "already in his late thirties" (Ōe *Somersault* 2) is a judge at "a public exhibition of imaginary landscapes of the future created from small plastic block" (Ōe *Somersault* 2) in Japan. There, he witnesses a strange encounter between a boy named Ikuo, described as having "forehead, mouth, and ears protruding like those of a dog – yet with a strangely beautiful gaze" (Ōe *Somersault* 1) and a young girl who for the rest of the novel will be known only as Dancer. The plastic model created by the boy for the exhibition was caught in the tutu of the young dancer. Ikuo was unable to rescue the model entangled in the girl's gown and "a flash of determination swept across the boy's doglike face and he flung his structure straight down, scattering hundreds of multicolored plastic pieces" (Ōe *Somersault* 1). After describing this brief encounter, more details are given about Kizu, the witness to the destruction of the model. A Japanese recipient of a prestigious American scholarship, he studied in the US where he was then offered a position as assistant professor. However, suspecting a return of the colon cancer he was operated for,

Kizu decided to move back to Tokyo and started trying to get in touch with the grown up Ikuo and Dancer.

3.2.2 Part I

The first part of the novel is the part in which all the main characters are introduced and converge together around the two charismatic leaders of a religious group, identified only as Patron and Guide. Part I begins fifteen years after the destruction of the plastic model by the young Ikuo, and shortly after Kizu moved back to Tokyo. Kizu, finally able to meet Ikuo again, starts a sexual relationship with the younger man. Together they manage to meet Dancer, who is now working as an assistant for Patron and Guide. Another character who is working for the two elderly men is Ogi, who was employed by a foundation but then decided to leave his position and started helping the religious leaders. During this first part of the novel, the characters develop different relationships with each other and, for one reason or another, they all come to be part of the small group of people helping with the first steps of the establishment of a new religious group. Kizu and Ikuo as well, after meeting Dancer, decide to meet the two men and start to get involved in their life. Patron and Kizu develop an intellectual bond, inasmuch as one entire chapter is dedicated to the reading and analysis of the poems of R. S. Thomas by the two characters. Ikuo, Dancer and Ogi become those involved with the more practical and organizational details necessary to begin the process of creating a new church. In addition, the relation between Guide and Patron is clarified. The two characters are interdependent and they appear as complementing each other, especially in the matter of their religious teachings. Patron was the charismatic leader of the religious movement but he states "without Guide, my words are nonsense. Looking back now on our life together, I see with great clarity how true that is. Even if I were to write my memoirs, without him I couldn't say a thing. The same holds true for the Somersault. Guide put everything in order and created memories for me" (Ōe *Somersault* 15). Patron is the one who is able to reach what, in the terminology of the church is called 'the other side', he has trances but when he comes back, he is not able to put the visions he had into words. Here is where the role of Guide comes into play. He is the one who is able to understand and interpret the visions Patron had and to put them together in a coherent manner so they could be presented to the followers. However, the close relation of the two leaders is abruptly cut when some members of the radical faction – known as The Technicians – kidnap Guide. As a result of the rough interrogation he was subjected to, Guide suffers a stroke that will lead to his death. It is at this moment that a further development in the relation between Patron and Kizu takes place. Patron finds himself on the verge of a new beginning for his religious movement and yet he is deprived of the only voice who was able to put his visions into words and make them intelligible for the followers. Therefore, he asks Kizu, a

painter who is attentive and perceptive to what surrounds him, to succeed Guide in his role as intermediary between his visions and the followers; "you can be a Guide who just paints! […] You can express things in a way I cannot. Your paintings can clarify what my visions mean" (Ōe *Somersault* 132).

With Kizu as the new Guide of the church Patron is ready to announce to his followers, gathered at Guide's memorial, his intention of building a new religious movement. From here on, the characters proceed with the last arrangements for the moving of the group the facilities that will become the church's headquarters situated in a forest in Shikoku. It is during his trip from Tokyo to the new offices that Kizu has a lengthy discussion with Dr. Koga, a former member of the radical faction. During this conversation – which makes up the last chapter of Part I – Dr. Koga, after introducing his story, gives Kizu, and the reader, a more inside perspective on the Somersault. This is an essential element of the main plot and it is the justification for the presence of the environmental subplot. The Somersault is what Ogi calls 'the accident'.

Ten years before – five years after the events narrated in the prologue – Patron and Guide, in order to prevent a catastrophic plan organized by the radical faction of the church, The Technicians, did what is known as the Somersault. That is, the sudden renunciation of all their religious teachings that led to the end of their church. By ridiculing themselves, and discrediting their doctrine predicting the end of the world, they nullified the theological base that would have justified the Technicians' plan. The radical faction wanted to accelerate the destruction of the world to create a millennial reign of repentance. The tool to achieve their goal would have been the *Threshold Crosser* device, a device able to transform nuclear power plants into "nonportable nuclear bomb[s]" (Ōe, *Somersault* 157). Although this calamitous event was avoided, and part of the radical faction was arrested, the reminder of a possible environmental disaster is still much present in the minds of the older characters and looms over the entire narration.

A causal relation connects the threat of a nuclear catastrophe and the Somersault; as the memory of the possibility of destruction brought about by a nuclear catastrophe is still vivid, so is the recollection of the Somersault and its perception as a betrayal by Patron's old followers. In the first part of the novel, these two instances are often intertwined and associated with images of destruction and environmental pollution. However, a different tone is set in Part II, although the fear of a disaster and the looming annihilation are still perceived.

3.2.3 Part II

The second part of the novel starts with the arrival of the characters in the buildings in a remote forest in Shikoku where the new headquarters of the church will be established. Here they will meet a group of local boys, guided by a self-appointed leader called Gii, known as The Young Fireflies. Young Gii – as he is sometimes referred to – is the son of the founder of another religious movement – the Church of the Flaming Green Tree – that was established in the same location[3]. Gii will slowly start to get involved in the activities of the newly arrived group of followers until he becomes an active member of the church in the epilogue of the novel.

After moving to the new location in Shikoku, a name for the religious movement is found: it shall be called The Church of the New Man. Kizu, in his role of guide of the group, is entrusted with the portrayal of a scene representing the foundation of the church. At the same time, two of the more extremist groups of the church join Patron in the new headquarters, simply called, the Hollow. The first group is that of the Quiet Women, who decided to stay loyal to Patron and Guide also after the Somersault and who conducts a life of silence and pray. The second group is composed by the members of the radical faction that planned the nuclear attack; the Technicians. Those who decided to join the church again are starting to move to a farm near the new headquarters, where they will seemingly lead a quiet life far from the research center in Izu where the preparations for the realization of the Threshold Crosser Device started ten years earlier.

In this second part, the characters are oriented towards the organization of a summer conference that should officially start and present to the wider public Patron's new church. The culmination of the narration – and its conclusion – comes at the end of the conference, when Patron, after delivering his last sermon, immolates himself on a bonfire staged for the visiting crowd.

3.2.4 Epilogue

The last chapter of the novel is the epilogue describing the life of the characters one and a half year after the main events. Ogi goes back to the Hollow and, through his visit, the reader learns that Ikuo has married Dancer and they are in charge of running the church. Gii has also joined the movement and seems to be increasingly "drawn to the same concept of a postinsurrection millennial

[3] *The Flaming Green Tree* is a trilogy written by Ōe Kenzaburō between 1993 and 1995. The novels appear to be in a dialogue, as the location chosen in *Somersault* for the establishment of the new church seems to have a direct connection to the preceding trilogy. This overlapping of themes, characters and locations is typical of Ōe's works where often references to other novels can be found (Sanroku 10).

reign of repentance that the Izu radical faction had had before the Somersault" (Ōe, *Somersault* 567). Kizu had started an art school for the junior high students of the small city neighboring the headquarters of the church, but he died of cancer sometime later. The novel ends with Ikuo affirming that Gii is indeed a New Man and therefore able to lead the church when the moment will come. In this closing section, the use of religion as a myth typical of Ōe's narration is shown once again; Kizu's last words before dying seem to acknowledge the freeing of Ikuo – and therefore of Patron's church as Ikuo took over the role of interim leader – from the need of God. "Is it really bad that you can't hear God's voice? You don't need God's voice, do you? People should be free" (Ōe *Somersault* 569).

3.3 Narrativizations of the Time of Disaster

In this section, the focus shall move to the analysis of the different narrativizations of time in *Somersault* and how these influence – and are influenced by – descriptions of environmental pollution. As mentioned above, mainly the perceptions and thoughts of two characters have been used for this study; these are Kizu and Patron. These two characters, in addition to being the older characters and therefore having witnessed the Somersault – in some way or another – are also those who, through their interactions, often present different perceptions of time and space. Furthermore, with Kizu – the main focalizer of the novel – we often have access to his perceptions of time and sense of loss, and he even comments directly on the possibility of a future nuclear disaster affecting Japan.

Time in the novel is not a linear continuum, indefinitely moving forward at the same speed, but it takes different forms in the ways the characters relate to the nuclear threat, in the way they perceive the relation between the environment and the possible catastrophe. The narration itself is developed in such a way that memories of the past, narration of current events, and visions of the future are all seamlessly intertwined. Especially in the first part of the novel, recollection of past events becomes a characteristic element. Characters remember the circumstances that led to the "scandalous religious incident they called a Somersault" (Ōe *Somersault* 9). Memories appear to be in a crescendo, from the just mentioned brief comment on the Somersault, to the more detailed description given by other characters, such as the one offered by Dr. Koga during a dialogue with Kizu. When describing the Somersault, the characters do this from different perspectives, a more inside one given by characters who were members of the church – e.g. Patron and Dr. Koga –, and a more objective and external one when Kizu is giving his account. Patron looks at the Somersault as a moment in which he had to deny everything he believed in to save Japan from a nuclear holocaust. Conversely, Kizu, the main focalizer of the novel, not being directly involved in the events of the Somersault, has a more objective perspective but, at the same time, he is less prone to accept any motivation behind the decision to realize the end of the world by means of a nuclear disaster.

Patron recollects the Somersault on many occasions during the novel and he describes that moment as a 'fall into hell'; for him the Somersault represented a drastic change and a turning point in his life. Since the Somersault, Patron has not been able to fall into trances leading him to 'the other side', and during one of the readings of a poem by R. S. Thomas with Kizu, he describes how this event changed his perception of time. He affirms:

> I have been letting time flow from my heart – the movement the poet compares to tides. These past ten years I have been doing nothing, merely observing the flow of the tides in my own heart. […] When it flows out of my heart, what does time inscribe? Even if it could be deciphered, I know it would be meaningless. There would be nothing to quarrel about (Ōe *Somersault* 68 – 69).

After preventing a nuclear disaster from happening and destroying many cities, Patron's perception of time was drastically altered. For him, time became something impossible to understand, and if it were to be clarified it would have revealed itself as deprived of meaning. The Somersault generated in Patron a "loss of balance" (Vigh 5), and since that event, he has been unable to relate to the flow of time as he knew it. Certainly, his feelings of a descent into hell after renouncing his religious beliefs are linked with his role as the leader of a church. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice how a charismatic leader, whose teachings were based on an apocalyptic end of the world, became an apostate. He decided to renounce his beliefs to spare people, cities and the environment from a nuclear disaster that was meant to bring about the long awaited end of the world.

Likewise, the other leader of the church, Guide, in an early discussion with Dancer examines how the perception of time can change and become subjective. "A hundred years, though, *is* a long time. […] I agree we should preach that a mere century separates us from inevitable destruction, nevertheless, if you actually live through a hundred years, it *is* a long time" (Ōe *Somersault* 21). In this quote, there are two main points that are worth noticing. The first one is the knowledge of an 'inevitable destruction'. Although many times in the novel the destruction that is bound to happen in a hundred years is characterized in religious terms – e.g. the end of the world, apocalypse – here it lacks that specific characteristic. Guide speaks of a 'destruction', but this word is rather neutral compared to the religious vocabulary used in other dialogues in the novel to describe 'the end of the world'. Furthermore, the more objective macro-perspective of the duration of a hundred years is contrasted with the micro-perspective of actually lived time. If the macro-perspective is taken into account, the span separating the characters from an inexorable catastrophe is 'merely' a century but, if those hundred years are positioned in a smaller scale perspective – that of an actual human life – they shift to be perceived as long lasting. Although Guide is mentioning an indeterminate destruction,

there is already a distinguishable sense of anticipation towards a possible future. The impending catastrophe is regarded as certain and this perception is based on what Husserl defined 'temporal object' – that is an experience in the present that allows for the anticipation of the future. The temporal object in *Somersault* – a novel dealing with an unrealized disaster – comes to be represented by the state of nature and the environment. Patron, during his sermon at Guide's memorial service, proposes a 'new theology' for the new church based on the acknowledgement that "nature, which makes up the totality of this planet – the environment we humans live in, in other words – is steadily falling apart. We've gone way beyond the point of no return" (Ōe *Somersault* 217). He then continues affirming that "the ones who made this happen, who destroyed the natural world, who destroyed God and gave him an incurable disease, are none other than *mankind itself*" (Ōe *Somersault* 217 emphasis in the original). Patron acknowledges the collapse of the natural world due to human careless actions and he is foreseeing an unavoidable end. This awareness that "everything in the world is fallen – from the earth, to the oceans, to the air itself" (Ōe *Somersault* 269) represents the basis on which the anticipation – the Husserlian protension – is generated. Therefore, for now, it is possible to argue that in *Somersault,* a general anticipation towards a future disaster deriving from the acknowledgement of the pollution of bodies and of the environment can be identified.

The character of Kizu, who witnessed the Somersault from his position as a professor in the United States, offers some of the most interesting insights both on the Somersault and on the anticipation of a catastrophic future. Kizu, with his role as the main focalizer of the novel, becomes the character who introduces Ikuo – and through him the reader as well – to a more detailed account of the events that led to the Somersault. He describes what he heard about it in a newspaper article published by an American journalist in *The New York Times.* At the end of his recollection of the article, Kizu quotes directly the ending passage written by the journalist:

> Through the Somersault of this false savior and false prophet, […] it is possible that several cities were spared a nuclear holocaust. The authorities insisted it was impossible for a nuclear power plant to be invaded and said a bunch of young amateurs would never be able to convert it into a stationary nuclear weapon. *But how true was this*? (Ōe *Somersault* 58, emphasis mine)

The doubt of the journalist about the impossibility for a religious group to take over a nuclear power plant and transform it into a nuclear bomb seems to mirror Kizu's own concerns. Was it true that the authorities would have been able to prevent a nuclear accident from happening, or was the disaster still looming over the characters? For Kizu, the fear of a possible disaster affecting Japan appears to be more real than for other characters. In fact, in the novel, it is through Kizu that an

evident crescendo in the idea of destruction is presented. Descriptions of disaster are often descriptions of a future, yet unrealized event. The future that Kizu can foresee is not an open one, but rather it is a time characterized by the presence of a disaster. Kizu appears to be future oriented as his thoughts often revolve about a feeling of doom and a sense of anticipation towards a catastrophe that will take place in the time yet to come. Already in the prologue, the possibility of an imminent calamity annihilating life is troubling Kizu, yet still in vague terms. Although his name is yet to be mentioned to the reader, a Kizu in his thirties is a witness to the events developed at the competition of imaginary landscapes. After seeing Ikuo crashing the model city he carefully constructed over a year, a reflection – that might be attributed to Kizu – is presented to the reader:

> Did destroying the model city he'd taken a year to create afford him a precocious, lawless sense of confidence – this boy who often fled from the center of Tokyo? Did seeing his creation as something whose sole purpose was to be broken to pieces make him wonder if *even this huge metropolis could be razed if one wanted it to?* (Ōe *Somersault* 2, emphasis mine)

In this example, the future orientation of a novel, as defined by Mark Currie becomes clear. This example is the first of many showing how the consciousness of a future annihilation is ingrained in the narration itself. The novel is oriented towards a future disaster, and the consciousness of a future catastrophe that could raze an entire metropolis is engendered by the acknowledgement of the environmental conditions of the narrative present.

Before proceeding further with the analysis, it is important to clarify the relevance of the religious element of the main plot of the novel. The main plot, with its religious characteristics, is strongly related to the environmental subplot that constitutes the focus of this study. In order to highlight the interdependence between the two plots, the concepts of prolonged crisis proposed by Vigh will prove a useful analytical tool.

Patron's church, proclaiming that the end of the world is fast approaching, constitutes an important factor in the generation of a sense of expectation towards a future disaster. Patron, in his sermons before the Somersault often mentioned that "*those who can envision the end of the world, the end time, will, in the near future, create an actual crisis that will be a productive opportunity for repentance*" (Ōe *Somersault* 120, emphasis in the original). In this quote, the crisis is a sudden event, a moment of rupture that will break the stream of 'normal life'. According to Patron, this unexpected moment of crisis would have created an opportunity for repentance; would have brought about a 'millennial reign of repentance'. If the disaster itself could be seen as a crisis, it is however important to acknowledge that in the novel an idea of crisis closer to Vigh's is the more permeating. Dancer

affirms that "mankind faces a cruel future, it is at a dead end, staring at a wall; as long as people don't have a way to scale that wall, they'll never understand the depths of the crisis they are in" (Ōe *Somersault* 121). People are living in a period of crisis and they are not even able to realize it. The crisis is an ongoing and prolonged one; a crisis in which the environment and the totality of the planet are falling apart (Ōe *Somersault* 217). Therefore, the idea of crisis proposed in the novel appear to be twofold. The first crisis is the disaster itself. The realized nuclear accident that would have turned a nuclear power plant into a non-portable nuclear bomb, bringing about the end of the world. The second crisis is Vigh's prolonged and chronic crisis; is the crisis of the environment, of the world that is polluted and slowly dying. "Great many people find themselves caught in prolonged crisis" (Vigh 8), but often they do not realize it as the crisis has become normalized. Patron was preaching that humankind was already living in a period of crisis, a crisis so deep and persistent that people were not even aware of living in it, but needed to *see* it; therefore, the nuclear disaster planned by the radical faction assumes two meanings. Firstly, it is a moment of sudden crisis that should have engendered an opportunity for repentance. Secondly, it would have been a moment of realization and acknowledgement of a state of chronic crisis already in place. Yet, the disaster was never realized, never came to be because of Patron and Guide intervention. The crisis that should have been laid bare by the disaster is still ongoing in the narrative present and some of the characters seem to have consciousness of it. This awareness forces them to live in the awaiting of an inevitable catastrophe that will destroy the world. The crisis has been protracted into the narrative present and the characters are experiencing it as the context in which their lives develop.

> When we look a bit closer into the phenomenon of crisis it becomes clear that conflict, violence […] can become so embedded in the social fabric that they become indistinguishable from it (Das 2006: 80) making crisis chronic and forcing people to make lives in fragmented and volatile worlds rather than waiting for normalisation and reconfiguration. (Vigh 8)

The context of crisis that has become the norm for the characters is a reality of temporal displacement that compels them to make sense of existence in a temporality that it is defined by the wait and anticipation of an inescapable disaster. In the novel under scrutiny, this element of anticipation in the main plot is combined with the environmental subplot. Thus, the religious expectation of the 'end of the world' is related to the theme of environmental destruction and nuclear disaster.

With the development of the novel, it is again through Kizu as focalizer that another scene of destruction is introduced. Once again, the city facing a future of destruction is Tokyo. "In the kitchen, too, this thought had arisen in his mind – a mental image of Tokyo hit by some catastrophe, too many dead bodies for anyone to do anything about, a favor only for the crows […] the leftover bodies rotting, shriveling up, and himself among the dead" (Ōe *Somersault* 77 – 78). This image of a future destruction becomes more concrete than the previous one. Now Kizu is able to see the bodies left by the disaster, and himself within them. As the events proceed, the imagination of a looming disaster, as well as its influence on the characters' perception of time, seem to reach a climax during one of the many interactions between Patron and Kizu. Patron gives a description of one of his visions describing a "medium-sized provincial city [here] in Japan" (Ōe *Somersault* 145) where life has been drained out and people and animals are left to an unavoidable death.

> It's a picture of a medium-sized provincial city here in Japan. The afternoon is shining down on the scene, but it's entirely desolate. No dogs wandering around, no napping cats. The streets are filthy with garbage, but the amount remains the same; no garbage has been freshly discarded. All manufacturing facilities have stopped. The people haven't been completely eliminated yet but are living off the remains of what's been manufactured and not replacing them once they're used up. There's no electricity, no running water, no public transportation. Everyone's waiting for death in inconspicuous corners of this city, lying around there, curled up. Helpless babies once again, bereft of the skills needed to live. (Ōe *Somersault* 145)

He then continues to ponder over the possible cause of the disaster and about its possible extent:

> […] Was it a neutron bomb dropped that spared the buildings but is killing the people through radiation? […] It would still have been fine if this was just one medium-sized city that the outside world kept isolated, waiting for the radiation […] to run its course. But if the exact thing is happening everywhere around the globe, doesn't this scene show us the human becoming extinct? (Ōe *Somersault* 145)

Once again, in this quote, a future disaster it is imagined to have been realized and in its aftermath people are left to endure a slow but certain death. The cause of the catastrophe is again identified with a nuclear accident – or a bomb – whose radiation is slowly depriving the city of life. Two elements engender a sense of anticipation and simultaneously show the consequences of the chronic crisis in which characters in the narrative present have been living in. The first element is the mentioning of radiation. Through that, a sense of doom and of inevitability is created. Both Kizu and

Patron know that life will be completely eradicated from that 'medium-sized city' and they are anticipating the inescapable death the inhabitants are facing. The waiting for the apocalypse becomes at the same time the anticipation for the realization of an indisputable end of all life in the world. The second element is the extension of the disaster. Not only a medium size city in Japan has apparently been affected, rather the disaster appears to Patron on a global scale. After the realization of the nuclear disaster that might have brought about a general awareness of the deep crisis mankind was living in, people – and the environment alike – shifted to a different context of crisis. In the aftermath of a disaster, the reality is again one of perpetual and endemic violence that will only lead to the 'end of the world'. In the aforementioned quote, after the critical moment of a sudden disaster that we can imagine took place, people find themselves in a different and prolonged crisis; a chronic crisis defined by the steadily and inevitable deterioration of life. People are not dead yet, but are surviving off the "remains of what's been manufactured" (Ōe *Somersault* 145); they are waiting for dead in what appears to be normalized situation of daily passive survival.

From these examples, it becomes evident that the novel has a strong future orientation turning into the anticipation of a catastrophe through descriptions of nuclear disaster. This sense of Husserlian anticipation towards a possible future disaster is expressed by the characters' awareness of being living in a "fallen world" (Ōe *Somersault* 269). These prolepses showing the aftermaths of possible disasters mirror the acknowledgement of the potential realization of a tragic future and seem to reflect the developing consciousness of the characters that their present – with its destruction and pollution of the world – might become "the object of a future memory" (Currie 27) in the wake of a disaster. The characters, divided between the present they are living in and experiencing, and the anticipation of a catastrophic future, are obliged to experience a continuous temporal displacement. They find themselves in a chronic – environmental – crisis leading to an inevitable disaster and this feeling of doom inflicts on them something similar to Nixon's slow violence; "[…] in the domain of slow violence 'yes, but not now, not yet' becomes the modus operandi" (Nixon 9). The crisis preceding the realization of the disaster, the wait before the end exercise on the characters an "insidious, yet unseen or imperceptible violence" (Nixon 15). It is a chronic and endemic violence that is positioned in the temporal displacement between the 'now' and the 'future'.

According to Russell West-Pavlov, there has been a tendency to identify human existence as streaming down a linear and continuous temporality and this "has repressed and elided other possible structuring of individual and global existence" (6). *Somersault* however, as mentioned above, shows a combination of different temporalities. This continuous splitting between the narrative present, images of a potential future, and memories of the past generates a superimposition of multiple

temporalities – often presented as flowing smoothly into one another other – that have "consequences for a radical critique of the unsustainable world order in which we live" (West-Pavlov 3 – 4). The use of different temporalities and their continuous overlapping in *Somersault* become tools apt to represent the consequences the characters might be confronted with in the case the pollution of the surrounding environment and of bodies were to progress in the narrative future. The theoretical concepts presented in the previous chapter proved to be useful tools in dealing with the specific components of anticipation and future orientation in the case study here presented. In *Somersault,* the aforementioned set of concepts, helped to account for the relations between past, present and future in the narration. These different temporalities are all connected through the element of the nuclear disaster; both the one that was avoided in the past and whose memory is still vivid in the characters, and the one that might possibly be realized in the future as a result of the context of crisis in which the characters live in the narrative present. In the novel, the narration of disaster is characterized by a future orientation and a sense of temporal displacement; memories of the past and averted nuclear accident are linked with the present chronic crisis of the characters, creating a sense of anticipation toward a possible future catastrophe.

3.4 Narrativizations of the Space of Disaster

This second part of the analysis shall move its focus from the narrativizations of time, to the descriptions of space as a locus of disaster. This section shall mainly be looking at two important aspects. The first is the correlation between action and the space of disaster, while the second one is given by the feeling of displacement generated by the impossibility of defining a relationship to space and to perceptions of the natural environment.

The analysis of the characters' ability to act in a space annihilated by environmental disaster draws on the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope, relating time, space and action in the novel. However, in the visions of a future disaster people appear as unable to act, they are either dead or left to die in a polluted environment. What seems to become able to act is the space itself. According to Bakhtin, the chronotope is the best tool to describe the intrinsic connectedness between time and space in literary works (84). Space and time interact so that the "action itself 'make use of' time to become reality" (Steinby 116). According to Steinby, for Bakthin space and time are connected to action as they are the right moment for "certain kinds of human action" (116). Mieke Bal however, in her study of the possible functions of space in literature proposes a more intriguing perspective. She writes: "space itself can become an acting place rather than a place of action" (139). In her discussion space in literary texts, she argues that space need not be only a 'frame' where actions are carried out, but it can also become an active element influencing the narrative events themselves (139).

In the first part of the novel, the space of disaster is mainly identified through images of a possible future. The descriptions of a future catastrophe that will exterminate life in the world influence the characters' perceptions of space, destabilizing their ability to create a connection with the imagined scenes of catastrophe. The space described in the vision of future disaster is not merely a frame to represent the inability of survivors to act, it rather becomes an "acting space" (Bal 139), affecting the characters' actions in the present. The representations of a potential future disaster not only affect the characters' fears and actions in the narrative present but also seem to prevent the characters from establishing any emotional connection with the space where the imagined disaster took place. In the visions of a future disaster presented in the novel, the relation between characters and space that Mieke Bal designates as generated through the gaze is unattainable. The characters see only destruction and inevitable death, therefore their gaze is not a 'linking gaze' anymore. Many scenes – especially those reported by Kizu – clearly identify Tokyo as the destroyed city that succumbed to the disaster, but the character does not show attachment to the place; rather, those descriptions suggest a separation from the foreseen future, as if Kizu is unable – or unwilling – to relate himself to the destroyed space. By contrast, in the second part of the novel, the images of future destruction seem to be absent from the narration and an apparently stronger connection with the natural environment is represented. Nevertheless, despite describing thriving natural surroundings and the transformations the environment is subjected to during the year with the passing of the seasons, it is only in this part of the novel that a sense of displacement is clearly evoked. The characters – above all Kizu – start a life in the newly found headquarters of the church in the remote forest of Shikoku but they still seem incapable of creating an intimate connection with their settings.

According to Gianluca Ligi, every space that people cross, however small and insignificant it might appear, is never only a geographical place, but rather becomes part of the complex web of experiences that life is (122). Every place assumes significance inasmuch as it is constructed and interpreted by those experiencing it (Ligi 122). However, in the event of a disaster, this deep connection between the space and the people is lost. "Sometimes, extremely serious circumstances arise, in which the profound link between human community and natural environment, between ecological knowledge and social practices, is fractured" (Ligi 124, translation mine)[4]. In the experience of a catastrophe, people find themselves unable to relate to their surroundings, they are no longer able to inscribe their experiences in the framework of the environment. The connection that

[4] In Italian in the original: "Talvolta si verificano delle situazioni estremamente gravi in cui il nesso profondo fra comunità umana e ambiente naturale, fra saperi ecologici e pratiche sociali, salta e si spezza" (Ligi 124).

guided people in their 'places' is lost and displacement arises. This inability to relate to the natural surroundings is relatable to the loss of what Ikuta defines as 'sense of place'. The sense of displacement the characters are experiencing in *Somersault* is related to grief for the possible disappearance of the world as they know it. The characters experience what Nixon calls "displacement without moving," or "stationary displacement" a threat of being "simultaneously immobilized and moved out of one's living knowledge as one's place loses its life-sustaining features" (19).

The sense of displacement related to the expectation of destruction starts to be shown as early as in the description of the first reencounter of Kizu, Ikuo and Dancer. Dancer mentions that the world is "on a path to destruction" (Ōe *Somersault* 53), and Ikuo affirms that he has been thinking about the end of the world for a long time as he wishes he could be able to witness it. Kizu, breaking in the conversation between Dancer and Ikuo, despite acknowledging that the younger man has indeed been pondering the idea of the end of the world, says: "he's the child who destroyed the plastic model of the megalopolis he'd so carefully constructed. After he smashed that model to bits, isn't it understandable for him to have a vision of the destruction of Tokyo? Though I suppose you could label it just a child's game" (Ōe *Somersault* 54). Kizu here seems to be trying to negate the possibility of destruction, he is limiting the event narrated in the prologue to a "child's game". The disaster is only vaguely defined as a 'destruction of Tokyo', but for him even the mere idea of destruction is inconceivable. Kizu, in opposition to Dancer and Ikuo, seems to be unable to accept the prospect of a future destruction. In the successive descriptions of disaster together with the sense of displacement, what becomes even more evident is the association of the space of disaster with an inability to act. The space imagined as destroyed by a catastrophe in visions of the future – towards which the characters cannot form any emotional attachment – turns into a space of inactivity. What seems to become an active agent is the polluted and destroyed space itself. In the image of a Tokyo razed by a catastrophe described by Kizu, the space is characterized by death. Dead bodies are the center of the descriptions, left to decompose in a city "hit by some catastrophe" (Ōe *Somersault* 77). In this space, there is no action at all. Everything appears to be dead and rotting, slowly dying in what appears to be an abandoned metropolis. "'Well, maybe that's a kind of sign?' Kizu said aloud, as if to make certain that these thoughts were *ingrowing* within him" (Ōe *Somersault* 78 emphasis in the original). In this comment, a different attitude seems to emerge. Kizu allows the idea of a future catastrophe to develop in his mind and he takes it as a kind of sign. As a result, the space of future destruction, despite being characterized by inactivity in the vision, becomes an 'acting space' when it starts to influence Kizu's actions and thoughts in the narrative present. The following image of destruction

showing an inactive space in the future is the vision of a "medium-sized provincial city" (Ōe *Somersault* 145) in Japan that could have been hit by a nuclear bomb. As Patron proceeds with the description, it is clear that, despite the good weather on a shining afternoon (Ōe *Somersault* 145), the city is once again consumed by inactivity. No dogs or cats are wandering around, the garbage is accumulating in the streets, and people are "waiting for death in inconspicuous corners of this city, lying there, curled up, helpless babies once again, bereft of the skills needed to live" (Ōe *Somersault* 145). Once again the space of the city in this vision of the future appears as completely inert, neither people, nor animals have the strength to act in the space of disaster. In this case, however, after detailing the scene for Kizu, Patron asks almost to himself: "How was this going to take place? Could it be halted?" (Ōe *Somersault* 146). Patron wonders if it could be possible to prevent such a disaster. In this case, the imagined space of disaster sparks in Patron the thought of maybe having a possible way to prevent the space in the narrative present from becoming a future space of disaster. It is interesting to notice at this point that Patron – together with Guide – is the only character in the novel who already acted, motivated by the possibility of a future nuclear accident, to prevent it. In that instance – the Somersault – the foreseeing of a future space of disaster coming closer to realization, influenced the characters to act, therefore turning into what Bal describes as an acting space.

In the second part of the novel, when images of destruction relent in favor of more descriptions of the natural environment, the sense of displacement becomes further specified. In the first part of the novel it was mainly narrativized through the inability to relate to a future space of disaster influencing the sense of connection to space in the narrative present as well. However, in the second part displacement is finally clearly characterized as a feeling identifying the narrative present. This sense of displacement emerges from the opposition between a living world and a dead one. The characters perceive themselves as living in a limbo, in-between life and death as a result of the acknowledgement of a possible future disaster. As already mentioned by Patron earlier in the novel, Guide and him, after doing their Somersault, felt as if they fell into hell. They were "driven into a corner – like living dead" (Ōe *Somersault* 125). Kizu, during a dialogue with Mayumi – the woman Gii is living with – discusses the feeling of displacement he apparently shares with Gii, the young leader of the Fireflies. Mayumi explains that the future that "Gii envisions is one in which the outside world has died out and the world constructed by the Fireflies is all that survives" (Ōe *Somersault* 349). The outside world is, according to Gii, everything that is outside the Hollow and the valley where Patron's church has been established. Mayumi further describes Gii's conception of the world: "since the world has died, the people living in it are, of course, dead themselves. They are just pretending to be alive, […]. But sometimes, very rarely, you'll run across someone who is truly alive

[…] who stands opposed to the *already dead* world" (Ōe *Somersault* 349 – 350). In this quote it seems that the character of Gii is perceiving what Nixon describes as 'stationary displacement' (19); a displacement in which the characters are immobilized in an already dead environment, from which the elements necessary to sustain life have been stripped away. Everything left in the world is dead and there is nothing left to live, all the people existing in a perished world are of course dead themselves, but, according to Gii, sometimes there are some people who are able to perceive this displacement. Kizu is one of them. He expresses his own perception in reply to Mayumi, further elaborating on this feeling of living in a dead world. "'I've felt the same thing,' Kizu said, 'that there are two coexisting worlds, one already dead, the other living. The two worlds overlap, and the world we know is a mix of the living and the dead'" (Ōe *Somersault* 350). According to Nixon, space "is a temporal attainment that must be constantly renegotiated in the face of changes" (18). When the perception of time is altered, also the experience of space has to be revised. Kizu perceives a world generated by the overlapping of a dead world and a living one. The world he is living in is as if the space of a future total annihilation of the environment exists together with a world where life is thriving. This description engenders a feeling of displacement in the character. He is perceiving his life as being constantly in-between death and life but never fully one or the other. One of the two worlds is dead but it still overlaps with the living one, and this is what generates the feeling of loss of balance in relation to both time and space. For Kizu, there is no defined space – world – in which life can be identified. Kizu lives in an in-between society (the community of the church) established in apparent harmony with the environment of the valley in Shikoku. According to Ligi, the experience of disaster arises when the relation 'I-world' is broken (124). The disaster is what breaks the relation between a person and her familial spaces (Ligi 124). For Kizu, the relation between himself, the society he is living in and the surrounding environment is lost. In the experience of the dying world – of environmental disaster – the character experiences a loss of ability to relate to space and this leads to a profound sense of displacement. "The traumatic experience of disaster paralyzes the ability to use words"[5] (Ligi 125). For Kizu, this experience of loss of words is made explicit in the way in which he is carrying out his role as Guide of Patron's Church of the New Man. "You don't need to say a thing. You can be a Guide who just paints!" (Ōe *Somersault* 132)

[5] In Italian in the original: "L'esperienza traumatica del disastro paralizza la capacità di parola" (Ligi 125).

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, after delineating the main characters and events in the plot of the novel, the focus has been shifted to the analysis of temporal and spatial narrativizations of environmental disaster. Time in *Somersault* seems to be deeply related to memories of a past, avoided disaster and intertwined with future images of destruction. Throughout the narration, the characters experience a loss of balance due to their perception of living in what Vigh defines a chronic crisis. Characters exist in between the present acknowledgement of being living in a dying and polluted world, and the future images of a possible catastrophe. The Husserlian sense of anticipation that is therefore generated, contributes to the novel generalized future orientation. The disaster becomes the tool to connect together strains of past, present and future temporalities. It is in the disaster itself that a sense of temporal displacement is generated. Through the theoretical concepts presented in chapter two, it was possible to highlight in the novel the different ways in which narrativizations of the temporal chronic crisis affecting the lives of the characters are related to the sense of displacement engendered by the possible future realization of a catastrophe.

By the same token, the space of disaster in the novel has been analyzed in relation to the characters' experiences and their impossibility to create an affective connection with a destroyed environment. In the event of a disaster – as Ligi argues – the human ability to establish a connection with the surroundings is interrupted and as a result, the experience of disaster arises. In *Somersault,* the characters perceive a spatial displacement in the event of the future disaster as the environment they envision is a space to which they are incapable of relating. The other spatial displacement, and maybe the more evident, is given by the actual perception of the present conditions of crisis. The characters, and above all Kizu, realize that they are living in a dying world. For him the spatial and temporal sense of displacement is given by the ability to see that there are two superimposed worlds. One of them is dead and the other one is alive, the world of the characters is created by the relation between these two worlds, therefore it is neither dead nor alive. Consequently, Kizu is unable to relate to the space around him and this engenders in him a sense of loss of balance.

In the novel, the use of various concepts from various disciplines allows for the highlighting of these two characteristics – the temporal and the spatial – in relation to the realization of an environmental disaster.

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

4.1 Towards a Productive Inclusion

This analysis, focusing on a Japanese case study – the novel *Somersault* (1999) by the Japanese author Ōe Kenzaburō – tried to demonstrate how a multi-concept approach could prove productive in the process of emphasizing environmental elements in literary works not generally associated with ecofictions. This study wanted to display the possibility of dealing with subplots of disaster and environmental destruction often overlooked by scholars and critics alike. The theoretical concepts introduced in chapter two proved productive in the identification of the spatial and temporal renegotiations that characters face in relation to an environmental disaster – both realized and unrealized.

Through this analytical approach bringing together, within other elements, the temporality of Nixon's slow violence, Vigh's chronic crisis and the sense of Husserlian anticipation towards a plausible future, this study proposes a tool that might help to highlight hidden environmental elements. This analysis tried to demonstrate the strong and varied interrelations between space, time and disaster itself in the novel under scrutiny. Consequently allowing for the identification of the dynamics of interaction between the characters and their perceptions of time and space as figurative sites where the disaster manifests itself. In the second part of this study, through the novel analysis, the various dramatizations of time, space and disaster have been connected. In particular, it was highlighted how in the event of environmental disaster – or in the fear of a future possible catastrophe – the narrativizations of time assume a strong future orientation engendering a sense of temporal displacement in the characters. Similarly, when the space of disaster is taken into account, a sense of impossibility to connect with the surrounding environment was highlighted.

The use of a novel such as *Somersault* for this analysis proved productive from two different perspectives. On the one hand, this study tried to bring together theoretical concepts from different disciplines in order to develop an analytical approach that could account for the many different nuances in narrativizations of disaster. On the other hand, the focus on a Japanese case study could bolster a shift in perspectives when dealing with environmental issues in Japanese literary productions. Despite the many instances of novels or literary works dealing with environmental destruction, Japanese literature – and East Asian productions more broadly – struggles to be included within environmental literature. By using a case study that it is not generally acknowledged as an example

of ecofiction, this paper tried to exemplify the importance of engaging varied literary productions. The example here shown demonstrates that the presence of environmental subplots can be identified through the study of the characters' perceptions of time and space. In conclusion, this study tried to propose a multi-concept analytical approach in order to reassess the focus in the study of many Japanese literary productions whose environmental elements have not yet been accurately scrutinized. This shift in perspective might help proceeding with the inclusion of East Asian literatures into the more global field of ecocriticism.

This study is of course only an initial step in the process of bringing East Asian literatures to the attention of a generally English writing and speaking ecocriticism. In the field of ecocriticism, too often English literary productions have been the main focus of analysis. A field that has been characterized for too long by a restrictive attention to a specific language of production needs to further develop to include other expressions of environmental pollution and disaster. Especially in the case of East Asian literary works, this inclusion might also represent a way to shift to a more objective and less stereotyped image of East Asian cultures. Too often they are still identified as being living in complete harmony with their environment and their surroundings despite the numerous and serious cases of environmental pollution and disaster affecting people and nature alike. A stronger attention form ecocritics on East Asian literary productions would help to deconstruct the widespread understanding of those literatures as harmonious.

In order for these literatures to receive a more critical attention, there is indeed necessity for a stronger cooperation between scholars in the various fields of Asian Studies and ecocritics. The lack of translations is of course contributing to the barrier that prevents literatures written in various languages to be included in a field generally dominated by English. Therefore, a stronger collaboration between scholars dealing with ecofictions and those working on East Asian literatures is needed. In addition, this cooperation might prove productive as it could help to focus on cultural specific issues and narrativizations of environmental pollution and deterioration that in a field characterized by English productions might be lacking. It is clear that working towards a bigger inclusion of East Asian Literatures within ecofictions will require time. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that the inclusion of a broader variety of literary productions dealing with environmental issues in their cultural specific ways will greatly enrich the possibilities of the field of ecocriticism.

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