

## Hope between Inside and Outside: "Freeters" in Japan

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### What is Freeter?

“Freeters” are increasingly attracting attention as a topic of discussion in analyses of Japanese economy and society today. Who are these “freeters”? According to the definition in the White Paper on the National Lifestyle published by the Japanese government, freeters are young part-time workers and unemployed people with the will to work aged between 15 and 34, who are neither students nor housewives. There are estimated to be 4,170,000 freeters in Japan.<sup>1</sup> These young people have dropped out from the system that supported the postwar Japanese economy, namely the system of recruiting university graduates as formal staff with lifetime employment. They have also strayed away from the course of career improvement from part-time to regular employee, recently introduced in Japan as European and American models. They remain as part-timers and hop from one job to another.

The *Japlish* term (English word coined in Japan) “Freeter” was originally created by a recruitment agency during the “bubble economy” of the late 1980s to suggest a free lifestyle of getting an income without being tied to a company. However, as the long-term economic depression of the 1990s led to declining employment opportunities for young people and inevitable increase of the freeter population, the term came to have a negative meaning. It is now associated with young people who spend day to day living a free and easy life without an aim, and those who have dreams but keep procrastinating without making any effort for a career. Thus, freeters have even come to be seen as a source of great anxiety for the future of the Japanese state.<sup>2</sup>

There are many explanations regarding the emergence of freeters. On the one hand, freeters are said to be an unwelcome product of wealthy society, or a result of disappearance of forward-looking and positive modern values. On the other hand, they are said to be an outcome of young workers becoming exhausted from overwork forced upon them by the globalized economy. It is even pointed out that Japan **are on** too is experiencing the growth of what is called “social exclusion” in Europe and America, and freeters the other side of the “incentive divide”.<sup>3</sup> None of these discussions, however, include an adequate analysis of the

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<sup>1</sup> This definition was officially made in the *White Paper 2003*. According to the paper, of the 15 million “informal employees” in Japan, which essentially means part-time and out-sourcing workers, more than 30% are then freeters whose number has more than doubled in the past ten years.

<sup>2</sup> One of the earliest publications on freeters was a journal edited by a Muraka popular writer, Ryu mi, and given the subtitle “Crisis of Young Workers”. The “problem” of freeters broke soon after. Now articles on this topic can be found daily in newspapers and periodical. Freeters are regarded as people who have missed the suitable age for becoming skilled, and are also linked with anxiety over the approaching aged society in Japan which all the more needs young capable workers. Not a few writers consider them as the cause of the country's decline. The government has been drawing up budgets and plans for the problem of freeters, but so far these do not seem to have been effective.

<sup>3</sup> Class differentiation as well as incentive divide among the youth has become a popular topic today. After

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cultural aspect of the category “freeter”. That is to say, they do not scrutinize the generally accepted idea in Japan that being a “formal employee” [*seishain*] is proof of being a proper adult, and a person can only become a formal employee up till around the age of 30 in most cases even now. We need to pay more attention to the fact that young people in Japanese society tend to feel the pressure of their entire personality being determined by employment success.<sup>4</sup> We should focus on the fact that it is under such pressure that many freeters are trying to find a job that really suits them.

Another problem with previous analyses of freeters is that they consider them within the context of a narrow means-end relationship. Freeters try to find a lifetime job matching their personality in a limited period of time. To put it simply, we can see in many situations that freeters “don't know what they want to do, but are trying to find what they want to do”. However, most theorists tend to just emphasize the freeters' negative attitude and lack of sense of reality, without taking into consideration that people have so many ways of finding “what they want to do”.<sup>5</sup> If we sincerely accepted the multiplicity of searches for “what they want to do”, we would reconsider the treatment of NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) – non-working people of the same age group as freeters who neither go to school nor engage in housework. There would be less reasons to distinguish NEET from freeters, and since there is ambiguity in where to draw the line between these people and freeters, we could define them as freeters in a wide sense.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, among freeters, who “don't know what they want to do, but are trying to find what they want to do”, there are indeed many who act in ways that can hardly be called positive or constructive. How can we interpret their behavior? Let me give three examples as a means of illustration. X (27 year old, male) studied at a sports university in western Japan. He wanted to become a sports teacher and obtained a teacher's license but failed the examination for an appointment. He lost his enthusiasm to become a teacher and went to stay with his girlfriend in Tokyo. Eventually he started to look for a job. He was informally accepted by two companies, but he rejected their offers, feeling uneasy about deciding his occupation so swiftly. He stopped looking for a regular job and began to work part time on a

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Yamada [2004] created a heated discussion on this issue, Miura's book [2005] attained the bestseller lists for weeks.

<sup>4</sup> Normally “freeter” is not a designation one proclaims oneself to be. Freeters realize the negative image attached to such a designation and more than 70% of them hope to one day become “formal employee” [Kohama 2004:32].

<sup>5</sup> This point is most exemplified by the typologies of freeters. The *White Paper on National Labor 2000* published by the government attempts to classify freeters into four groups. Type 1 are those who have definite goals for the future, Type 2 hold ambiguous anxiety about the future, Type 3 prefer to remain in their present situation, and Type 4 are categorized as “others”. This typology leaves no proper space for the freeters who “don't know what they want to do, but are trying to find what they want to do”. The same point should be made to the typology of Yuhuko Sato who classifies freeters into “easy-and-free”, “seeking what they want to do”, and “has-to” types. Kosugi, one of the pioneering researchers on freeters, presents a much more adequate typology [Kosugi 2003]. Her type 1 is “moratorium”, 2 is “dream-seeker”, and 3 is “<has-to>”. In her typology, the freeters we mention are divided into type 1, who defer their choice, and type 2, who know what they want to do. Kosugi, however, draws negative aspects for each of them after all.

<sup>6</sup> A British government report in 1999, *Bridging the Gap*, made NEET widely known. Compared with the British case, Japanese NEET are characterized by their similarity to freeters and *hikikomori* (self-seclusionists) rather than with juvenile delinquents.

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daily wage basis. When the director of the company he was sent to work for took a liking to him and asked him to join as regular staff, X declined the offer. He felt, “may be I can do something more interesting.” He married his girlfriend and realized that he had to “push himself”. He decided to go to an acting school. In the meanwhile, he did not leave his part time job and continued to participate in seminars for job training skills, thinking “may be there is something else I can do” [Genda and Maganuma 2004:75-88].

Y (24 year old, female) applied for jobs in several publishing houses just before university graduation but failed. She realized her lack of preparation and lost her will to look for a job. She gave up job hunting before graduation and got a part time job in a television station because she thought “it might be interesting”. She then decided to look for a regular job because there were not enough working days. She studied accounting hoping to get an office job. She went to an employment agency where one of the staff encouraged her saying she would be fine if she “really wants to do something.” Unfortunately, however, this encouragement led to her to worry and wonder “what do I really want to do?” [Kosugi 2004:32-51][Hori 2004:74-5]

Z (34 year old, male) graduated just before the “bubble economy” burst. He worked in a securities company listed on the first sections of the three major stock exchanges in Japan but left his job just after two years due to adjustment problems. He traveled in Asia for half a year and on his return began to work part time in a temping agency. He refused an offer to become a regular employee and broke up with his girlfriend whom he had been seeing since university days. He again traveled for several months in Asia. He was thirty by the time he returned to Japan, so he felt pressure from those around him and started to look for a regular job. He became a contract worker in a travel agency, but left the job as he was unable to bear the harsh working conditions. Later he worked part time in restaurants, but hopped from one job to another due to lack of physical strength and will power. When he is in a good mood, he thinks, “There can also be professional freeters, so I’ll aim to be a top freeter.” But when he is depressed he thinks, “What did I really want to do? When it comes down to it, I’m just an idler, aren’t I?”

The above three examples show how young people seeking jobs truly suited to them carry on their quest with an introverted and passive attitude rather than in a bold and positive manner, though they do take unusually daring actions now and again. However, from these descriptions, we do not get a sense of “what they really want to do” actually means.

In order to shed light on this black box, let us consider Lacan’s concept of “desire”. According to Lacan, the subject tries to identify with a particular *significant* in order to fill the void within and fails perpetually. There is an irredeemable time lag between “I” and the self which talks of that “I”, and this reproduces desire and failure. Lacan’s analysis is a severe blow to freeters whose ultimate goal is “self realization”. This analysis provides no scope for deliverance. But there is no guarantee that it is absolutely correct. In fact, this view that takes the impossibility of fulfillment of desires for granted excludes the possibilities and pluralities of the impossible.

Can we then not turn to Derrida’s theory, and take up the idea that something is constructed the moment the possible is destructed and transformed into the impossible? In other words, can we not say that the possibility of a new outside arises when freeters sense the disintegration of the dichotomy between “what they really want to do” and “what is unsuited to them” each time they fail?

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However, it does not seem that freeters constantly experience this kind of deconstruction. After all, they wish to encounter the real outside directly. In the words of Ernst Bloch, they look towards “the place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy” [1998:341] and aspire to achieve the “Not-yet”. Having said that, the Not-yet for the freeters is very vague; moreover their attitude in approaching the Not-yet seems precarious and their intention rather unreliable. The way freeters seek “what they really want to do” can be better described as “waiting” than heading positively towards the Not-yet. Their manner of “waiting” should throw an interesting light on the nature of hope in the contemporary world that has no outside?

## Types of Waiting

Not a few ethnographies have been published about peoples who “wait”. Outstanding, among them, are that of Crapanzano [1986] which describes South African whites in the 1980s, where “waiting” is complicatedly compounded by fear and anxiety, and of Reed [2004] about inmates in a Papuan New Guinea's maximum security prison, whose “waiting” concedes the orienting value of being bossed by time. In this paper, however, in order to analyze the freeters' manner of “waiting” I'd like to take up the other three types of “waiting”. The first type is the “waiting” of families that often appeared in Japanese television dramas depicting family life during the period of high economic growth. Steady and hardworking urban salary men, who could expect annual pay rises, arranged for mortgages and life insurance in instalments, “waiting” some decades for the day when their mortgages would be paid off and their insurance policies mature. Even if unexpected misfortunes or incidents occurred, they tried their best to overcome them.

In contrast, the second type of “waiting” is that of a gambler in a casino. He has a tall pile of chips and watches the roulette as it spins, “waiting” for it to slow down. It goes without saying that capitalism is supported not only by scrupulous people who like to plan, but also by brokers, dealers and investors who dream of quick money. Their stake on “waiting” is not solidly accumulated effort but one-in-a-million luck. Young Italians from Rudolf Valentino's hometown, on whom cameras turned during a film shooting, “waiting” for Hollywood to scout them also come under this type. This kind of “waiting” is often flamboyant and attracts people by its hidden thrill of living only for the pleasure of the moment.

In Jacopetti's masterpiece *Mondo Cane*, such young Italian “louts” make an appearance in the opening and are contrasted with a third type of “waiting” at the end [Lindstrom 1993:179]. The film shows a cargo cult of the people of New Guinea Highlands who wait for the spirit of their ancestors under an airplane made of leaves, tree trunks and fibre. We know that this kind of “waiting” does not contribute to capitalism and that there is no possibility of its fulfillment. It is much closer to the “waiting” of the colonel in Garcia Marquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel* than that of the man – Nicky Ferrante played by Cary Grant in *An Affair To Remember* – who keeps waiting on top of the Empire State Building not knowing that the woman he is waiting for has had an accident. The retired colonel in Garcia Marquez's story goes to the post office at the dock every Friday in his finest suit and tie to collect the letter with details of his pension which will never arrive. He resolutely maintains his dignity in spite of being the laughingstock of the whole town.

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When compared with the above three types of “waiting”, we can see that the “waiting” of freeters is less likely to attract people’s sympathy. Their “waiting” lacks drama and has little power to draw the audience. What I refer to as drama here includes tragedy, comedy, romance and satire pointed out by Hayden White as plot structures for historical narratives[White 1987]. These plots all draw the audience into the story by showing how characters accept difficult realities and try to reconcile with the state of affairs. The characters face the reality in earnest, constantly experiencing both sadness and happiness as they are sometimes betrayed and other times saved by reality, and proceed to the conclusion together with the audience. The three types of “waiting” presented above each differ in the stakes wagered for the fulfillment of desire and in the possibilities of realization. Nevertheless, we get the feeling in all three that the characters sincerely confront reality to achieve their aims. The audience may be attracted to or repulsed by these characters, but they cannot help witnessing the success or failure of the characters’ aspirations.

In the case of “waiting” by freeters, however, we do not get the sense that they are doing their best to materialize their wishes. We cannot see how they face the harsh realities that stand in their way and overcome them, or are overtaken by them. In order to be captivated, the audience must know how serious the freeter’s gamble is and how much possibility there is for success. Neither aspect can be seen clearly in the “waiting” of freeters.

We need to refer to Bloch’s argument on hope to analyze the “waiting” of freeters. In Bloch’s analysis, the seriousness with which people challenge and the degree of possibility for success are not important aspects of discussion. According to Bloch, hope exists “where the darkness brightens” regardless of how people face it and “[hope] is in the darkness itself” [2000:201]. Hope is “the half-opened door” containing mystery and anxiety [1995:335]. The important point is not in “the objectively existing possibility” of whether this door will actually open, but in how “the possible subjectively and idealistically” leads people to action. If we say that the lure of drama is drawn from the success or failure of human will, we can see that hope suggested by Bloch belongs to a different terrain from the hope we find in drama. It is not a question of how much effort is made for success or failure, but how much people are “oriented” to “the half-opened door in the darkness”.

So, we may ask, how strongly are freeters oriented in this direction? Freeters do indeed undergo some trial and error in their attempts to discover “what they really want to do”; but they spend most days in a state of inertia without knowing what to do. They repeatedly wonder what they should do, end up making very inappropriate decisions and spend days of anguish as a result. It is indeed difficult to infer directly from their behavior how much they are led by “the half-opened door in the darkness”.

Let us then return to the issue of lack of drama and investigate the nature of the freeter’s “Not-yet” by analyzing what actually constitutes drama. As I have already pointed out, a drama structures events according to a pre-existing plot. By doing so, it domesticates events and enables the audience to experience them as natural. The audience watch the drama, feel how the characters face up to and negotiate with difficult realities, and reconcile with their own everyday life. If that is the case, the “waiting” by freeters, no matter how vague and slack it may seem, can be understood as resisting the structuralization of events and denying the pre-existing frameworks of reconciliation with reality. As White points out, a drama is made up of a combination of several plots, and shows the reality from multiple points of view before presenting the group of events as a whole to the audience. It is a device

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for manifesting “one story as a single object”, just like perspectivalism pointed out by John Law[2002] that constructs an airplane as a single object. The “waiting” of freeters does not yield to this device and irritates the audience by appearing as a rambling “mess”.

This “mess” cannot be analyzed by applying fashionable terms such as multiplicity, heterogeneity and hybridity directly. It is indeed multiple, heterogeneous and hybrid, but it is too complex to be determined by these single terms. If we borrow Law's expression, we cannot contrast this kind of “multiple” with “singular”, for example, and understand it in terms of “either multiple or singular”. “Rather it [the contrast] is both a both/and *and* an either/or” [ibid.:115]. In other words, the condition of freeters cannot just be described as multiple and reduced to “a happy pluralism”. It is as difficult to explain as satisfying the conditions of “both/and” and “either/or” simultaneously. A freeter's life cannot be reduced to “a singular story” or “dramatic perspectivalism”. It is open-ended and beyond existing nomenclature. Freeters seem halfhearted and appear as an eyesore. Nevertheless, they do give the impression that they never compromise with the existing reality, rejecting all kinds of criticisms people heap upon them and proclaiming “the Not” as they seek the gargantuan. If so, the “waiting” of freeters reminds us of the fundamental nature of hope that cannot be reduced to preexisting values. “Because the Not is the beginning of very movement towards something, it is precisely for this reason by no means a Nothing” [Bloch 1995:306]. Indeed “the Not” is the point of departure for hope and the proof of its very existence.

The “waiting” of freeters differs from the previously mentioned three types in another respect. Not only are the sincerity of freeters and the potential of their challenge difficult to ascertain, but their attitude of “waiting” *per se* is also very modest. New Guinea Highlanders who sit and wait under an airplane made of leaves, tree trunks and fiber, and the colonel who goes to the post office every Friday in his suit draw attention precisely because they are “waiting” for something that will never come. Also in cases where the possibility is less hopeless, the big gamblers and youths posing in front of film cameras assert themselves positively as waiting for something. The same goes for the salary men who count the years till their mortgages are paid off and insurance policies mature.

Ironically, the taciturn manner of waiting by freeters is closest to the most marked kind of waiting out of the three types. Just as the New Guinea Highlanders who sit under an airplane that will never fly, freeters hope for the moment they achieve “becoming-oneself” and the world becomes complete. This is when the real self and the world as it is supposed to be are realized simultaneously, and the major problems in reality are solved all at once. When there is congruity between the “Not-yet” and the “Here and Now” at the cosmic level, freeters achieve immediacy which is their ideal and enjoy what could be called “the trice of perfection”[ibid.:292].

This kind of complete solution of the world, however, is often related to the millenarian motif of “death and regeneration”. As Bloch quotes Goethe's verse “the Die and become” [ibid.:309-10], most people under these circumstances wait for rebirth with determination to die. If so, why is it that the “waiting” of freeters seems to have little to do with “death and regeneration” and lack positive concern with the achievement of the world of immediacy?

Here again, Bloch comes to the freeters' rescue. In *The Principle of Hope*, volume 1, part 2, verse 20, he describes several ways in which a decisive moment like “the trice of perfection” fleetingly appears and disappears again. This moment is likely to be so

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unexpected that it is to be expressed as the “deepest astonishment” [ibid.:290] and differ from any kind of presupposed expectations. That is to say, just as Faust cried in spite of himself, “Stay awhile, you are so fair”, the manifestation of immediacy comes about in an unanticipated form. If so, exaggerated ways of waiting, like sitting under an airplane that will never fly or continually going to the post office in a suit and tie, are not necessarily appropriate. Not only that, such kinds of waiting reveal a deliberate intention to dramatize the flow of time from the past to the present to the future and to adapt time as a material for narrative. We can assess this as an effort by human beings to arrest time by anticipating it in order to resolve temporary incongruity. However, we should also point out that it involves a coercive eradication of the indeterminate and undecidable nature of the “Not-yet”. In other words, people who wait in these exaggerated ways make do with “waiting” as a supplement, precisely because they cannot bear the precariousness of the “Not-yet” and do not have the patience to wait for it. In contrast, freeters wait for the “Not-yet” in its pure original form as the “Not”?

### **Self-elusiveness of Not-Yet**

The characteristics of “waiting” by freeters expose the “Not” which is the point of departure for hope, and thus this kind of “waiting” is far more indeterminate and open-ended than other types of “waiting”. In spite of this, the passive and somehow incoherent attitude of freeters seems to defy being treated as hope. Let us then see whether we can interpret their condition from a totally different perspective. We have already mentioned, in line with Bloch’s argument, that hope is “the half-opened door in the darkness” that leads people to the “Not-yet”, the entrance and content of which are indeterminate and undecidable. However, a similar kind of situation can be expressed in a completely different way.

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique.[Adorno 1974:247]

For Adorno, breaking out of the intellectual occlusion of failure to represent the object does not entail moving towards the “Not-yet”. Instead he tries to analyze by viewing the world from the standpoint of redemption. He does not propose this as a methodological hope, but as a means of dealing with despair. According to this analysis, we can see that the “waiting” of freeters is not an attitude that forthrightly declares the “Not” in a manner somehow difficult to ascertain as hope. It may be rather an earnest attitude of dealing with despair. Unfortunately, however, freeters are not necessarily people seeking redemption out of despair. That is to say, they keep a distance from both hope and despair.

There are various studies on the Bloch’s influence on Adorno and on Adorno’s critical assimilation of Bloch’s ideas. No matter how we analyse the differences between them, we can say that both leave a common impression today. Bloch positively emphasizes the indeterminacy of the “Not-yet”, but maintains his trust in science and realism. Adorno takes up as subject matter the non-identical and the ungraspable, namely the other, but cannot completely abandon rational and monolithic discourse. Both wish to break down the given closed world, but do not destroy the metanarrative of the Enlightenment. Hence, as we

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have lost trust in the metanarrative today, we need to rediscover the inconclusive, the non-identical and reconsider the meaning of “waiting”.

Let us turn to the works of Levinas in order to investigate the undecidable and the non-identical in today's context of the metanarrative's fall from power. As Derrida criticizes, Levinas has the tendency to absolutize the other. As we have already mentioned, freeters themselves do not try to imagine the outside of the real world through deconstruction. They wait for the arrival of the other from the outside. In the same way as Bloch, Levinas problematizes the temporary incongruity of human consciousness and looks for a means to get out of the retrospective kind of thinking characteristic of philosophy. However, whereas Bloch presupposes a motivated human being who strives for congruity with the self, Levinas's “I” is introspective, passive and has the tendency of being threatened by the other which has no congruity with itself. Levinas's “I” tries to be liked by the other, or on the contrary attempts to subdue it by violence. For such human beings, the future is not the “Not-yet” that guides them, but something that they can never grasp or that may attack them suddenly. In other words, it is the other [*autrui*](Levinas 1979:69). Future for me might increase fear or hatred toward the other which is not congruent with me. On the contrary, however, it contains the possibility of bringing about my concern for and harmony with the other. Such concept of the future reminds us of how the freeters, who should be attracted by hope, give observers an impression of passivity and lack of coherence. Perhaps the passivity and fragility of the self are deeply inscribed on the freeters aiming for self-realisation.

Maurice Blanchot's *L'attente L'oubli* provides further hints for understanding the “waiting” by freeters. Blanchot gives an example of a man and woman couple who are well aware of “the future as the other” analysed by Levinas. The couple live in one room. The woman tries to tell the man all about herself, but she always thinks her words are superfluous and is not sure whether the man is listening properly. The man is listening to her, but both of them feel that they are just listening from afar and neither of them is really there. “There is no true dialogue between the two. A certain relation between what she says and he says is only maintained by their waiting” [Blanchot 1962:52].

The couple talk about their condition of inability to be together even when they are. They continue to question what it means to get out of this situation. But they show no sign of actively trying out anything in search for the “Not-yet”. The future is purely an “unintelligible other” for the couple, so they cannot have an image of the “Not-yet”, nor should they. But, if they do not know what they should be waiting for, what does it mean to wait anyway? Blanchot illustrates the ubiquitous paradox of “waiting” by using the double meaning of the French word *attendre*---noun form *attente*--- as wait[-ing] and expect[-ation]. For example, he says “*Attente*[waiting]----, *attente*[waiting] is the refusal to *attendre*[expect] anything”[19]; “the impossibility to *attendre*[expect] essentially belongs to *attente*[waiting]”[51]; “Since s/he *attendait*[waited] for something, s/he *attendait*[expected] less”[22]; and “Since when did he start *attendre*[waiting]? Since he became free from *attente*[expectation]”[51]. In other words, as long as the future is the other, *attente*[waiting] is to forget what the *attente*[expectation] is for and should be understood as behaviour which “ignores and destroys what it *attend*[expects]”[52]. Moreover, the characteristic of *attente*[waiting] is self-elusive as it withdraws itself from all forms of question imagined by *attente*[106].



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Blanchot's complex representation is a warning against equating "waiting" with "expectation". The word "waiting" fixes its object in a black box and the action is forced into a closed framework of means and ends, concealing the following kind of situation. A person "waits", even though s/he does not know what to wait for, what s/he wants to do with it or what s/he will get from it. S/he keeps waiting obstinately, yet nonchalantly, for an unexpected something, not pining, but nevertheless earnestly. Blanchot repeatedly employs the paradox of *attente* precisely because he is aware of this overwhelmingly indeterminate and open-ended condition. We can accept this representation as an emphasis of the power of the other on the self, that is to say, as a sign of passivity of "I"?

The "waiting" of freeters does not reach the level of the couple described by Blanchot. Freeters watch the something inside the black box from afar and wait for the future "Not-yet" without being particularly conscious of the fact that this something might bring about unexpected consequences for them. However, their waiting is closer to the couple's *L'attente L'oubli* than the other types of waiting are. Whereas paying off the mortgage, a huge win in gambling, the advent of ancestors, and a pension notice all involve concrete images of the "Not-yet", what freeters "really want to do" is much more inestimable. Furthermore, since it is linked with "self-realization through work", its undecidable and unintelligible character is emphasized even more. It is not at all uncommon that freeters do not know what they are waiting for, or what they should be waiting for. They are also sometimes anxious that they will be betrayed by the expectation for the "Not-yet" and that the "Not-yet" might exist in unforeseen dimensions. When we see how freeters become easily hurt, depressed and brood over things, but also make startling decisions suddenly and fall into anguish again, we must admit their passivity that makes them be shaken and moved by the other. The indeterminate and open-ended character of the "waiting" of freeters discussed in the previous section is related to the passivity of the "I". Whether or not this will improve their image, it definitely provides a convincing explanation for their passive and incoherent attitude to some extent.

### ***Their Hope, Our Hope***

Freeters, who are unfortunately analyzed as obstacles rather than hope in Japan today, are indeed outside the preexisting social frameworks. They are neither independent adults nor social deviants. They neither aim for nor abandon rational life planning. They neither go forward bravely to realize their dreams nor throw away their dreams. They just hop from one job to another. They are variously interpreted as the cause of the country's decline, wheedling dreamers, self analysis phobia, or victims of social paradoxes. In all cases, they are seen as unwanted in Japan. It is to some extent understandable to seek the disappearance of people who are vague, irritating and out of place. However, this paper has shown that the kind of uneasiness demanding the disappearance of freeters is due to their open-ended and indeterminate character, and the nature of passivity of the "I" thrown in amongst the other.

Needless to say, freeters experience and often endure a variety of working conditions, some of which may overwhelm them to such an extent that they lack the energy to contemplate their future, and criticism may be directed at this paper, saying that my argument ignores such issues. As a response, I must emphasize again the importance of understanding the passive character of freeters. If their existence could be simply reduced to

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social divide or unemployment of the youth, it should gradually disappear as “regular employee culture” in Japan withers.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, by elucidating the passive character positively, the issue of freeters broadens our view on the other similar syndromes of contemporary Japan, which all concern non-(re)productive beings such as NEET, as already mentioned, *hikikomori*, [self-seclusionists] and *parasite singles* [unmarried men and women who financially depend on and mostly reside with their parents].<sup>8</sup>

In the end, what we should be asking here is whether we can refer to the way the freeters “wait” for the “Not-yet” under such conditions as “hope”. Would it be at all possible to posit their problem in terms of hope rather than impediment? Hirokazu Miyazaki argues that contemporary anthropology is charged with an aesthetic to make not only the world to be analysed but also its analysis temporary, indeterminate and open-ended. This forecloses “the possibility of achieving congruity between knowledge and its object” and does not give scope for hope and its method [2004:138-9]. Miyazaki’s point is poignant. Have we indeed created a hopeless situation for both ourselves and the freeters by projecting our own aesthetic upon them? Since the legitimacy of our analysis is based on the realities of the freeters themselves, we must ask again whether or not there is really hope for freeters.

It is not necessarily accurate, however, to say that a condition of overwhelming indeterminacy and passivity forecloses the hope of uniting the self and the other, or the present and the future. This point can be seen in the attitude of a girl depicted by the Japanese author Osamu Dazai. In the tension, anxiety and loss of self confidence brought about by the beginning of the world war, the girl, who was afraid of people, cannot hold herself back and goes to a small railway station every day to wait for someone she even does not know exists.

Who on earth am I waiting for? It’s no one specific. It’s just something fuzzy and vague. But, I am waiting. . . . Someone is smiling and calling me. Oh, I’m scared. Ah, leave me alone. I’m not waiting for you. Then who on earth am I waiting for? Husband? No. Lover? Certainly not. Friend? No thank you. Money? Surely not. Ghost? Oh, no, please.

It’s something more calm, bright and wonderful. Well, I don’t know. It might be something like spring. Well, not exactly. Green leaves. May. Spring water flowing in a field. No, it’s none of these things. Ah, but I am waiting. I am waiting with a yearning heart.” [Dazai 1974(1942): 284. my translation.]

What distinguishes this girl, who seems rather vacant and almost carefree, from freeters is the complete no-mindedness of her “waiting” and the vitality born from transcendence of even the anxiety of destruction. Surprisingly, this vitality is related to the point Adorno makes just after stating the conditions of philosophy in the face of despair when he declares,

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<sup>7</sup> Genda subtly suggests this point by saying, “The coming age will be very tough for the people who cannot be but *seishain* [regular member of corporations] ...Freeters won’t be our problem anymore. What we must rather consider seriously is what each of us can do while witnessing the increasing number of NEET” [Genda and Yuminuma 2004:240-1]. Actually, the NEET population is statistically predicted to reach one million in 2010 [Ashahi Shinbun 22/10/2004].

<sup>8</sup> The correlation of freeters, NEET, *hikikomori*, and *parasite singles* has been pointed out by many analyses. The correlation will cause serious problems as parents become aged and weaken in their economic power. As for the aging of freeters, “middle aged freeters” were estimated at 460 thousand in 2001, and will swell to 2 million in 2021 [Asahi Shinbun 21/5/2005]

country's ruin > country's decline — space before brackets

“But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters” [ibid.:247]. In the face of the magnitude of the demands entrusted to “waiting” and “philosophy”, possibility of actualization is insignificant beyond comparison. The strong and pure determination to go outside the reality transcending the anxiety and despair of destruction is refreshing. What is lacking in freeters is this kind of determination – the no-mindedness that declines to question any of the precariousness of the “Not-yet”, including the significance of effort. In other words, hope for freeters will appear when they accept in good grace what Bloch calls “the condition of defeat precariously within itself”[1998:341] as they take on with passivity the overwhelming burden imposed by the “Not”. In this way, they would no doubt become an entirely new symbol of hope in today’s world where efficiency reigns supreme and everyone stresses the importance of making rational effort towards achievement of objectives.<sup>9</sup>

Freeters deviate from the ordinary scenario of hope due to their anti-drama, non-identical character and passivity, and have difficulties in negotiating with reality within the frame of reality. Yet, they still have not developed the no-mindedness of breaking through to the outside of reality in defiance of fear and anxiety of destruction. We as researchers can well sympathize with this condition. We struggle for a breakthrough by invoking such concepts as “deconstruction”, “performance” and “multitude”, but we cannot go outside of reality to analyze the “Not-yet” for the inside. We are yet to know how we can prepare for the conditions of going outside and how they will appear to us as possibilities. All we know is that freeters stop and wager the remaining decades of their lives on the dead end inside reality and the difficulty of stepping outside. Perhaps they are standing not so far away from the critical point where the no-mindedness of stepping outside manifests. This critical point is where hope appears as hope in its most profound sense and probably shines in all its glory. As we researchers persist in our quest for the possibility of the outside, we long to witness this glory more than anyone else.

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<sup>9</sup> Understanding freeters from their own point of view is now rapidly being related to “hope”. While Yamada [2004] elucidates the indulgence in unrealistic dreams of young people in their hopeless situations, Genda and Kohama [2004] parallel this issue with freeters and contend that the creation of hopeful situations for them is a necessity. Futagami [2005] presents a view that freeters as well as NEET can be a hope for our society by exploring an alternative way of life and work style. Regarding these approaches, I’d like to emphasize again that none of them give insight into the passive character of “waiting” and remain unable to evaluate the positive aspect of/in itself. They dissolve the otherness of the future by connoting positive subjects in freeters.

country's ruin > country's decline — space before brackets

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