CHAPTER 3

IDENTITY IN CLASSIC AND JAPANESE CYBERPUNK

3.1 Introduction and Scope

While cyberpunk focused on its explorations of limits of humanity and the nature of identity in a postindustrialised, postmodern and posthuman world, its familiar near-future setting also assumes a cultural-political setting reflective of the cultural conundrums plaguing the world. In a world striving to understand and define cultural identity amidst the fast-paced changes in migration, labour and political equations between countries, classic cyberpunk found its future in an American city taken over by a homogeneous Japanese culture, or in Japan itself.

This chapter looks at the role of "oriental" imagery in classic cyberpunk works, and explores the genre as a projection of political-economic-cultural triangle of relationship between America and Japan from the post World War II era to the present. In the years since its initial publication, *Orientalism*, by Edward Said, transformed the way we looked at "The West and the Rest" (Hall, 1992). To define it in Said's own words, Orientalism is:

> A distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological text a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power (12).

The idea of the Orient has been reinforced by a simplifying two-fold approach by the West. On one hand, all Eastern cultures, irrespective of their distinguishing features, have been marked as un unchanging, unchangeable homogenous mass, and on the other hand, this "Orient" has been broken down into, in Lisa Lowe's words, "manageable parts" (119-123). Decontextualized, these "manageable parts" are reordered to complete the subordination of the said cultures, and the Western gaze in cyberpunk is made to get accustomed to the stereotypical Oriental figures, such as the Geisha (sophisticated whore with a heart of gold), the martial arts killing machine, the Yakuza, the kawaii school girls, or the heartless zaibatsus as markers of Japaneseness that has infiltrated the global economies and landscapes.

Orientalist strategies have always been a part of Western mental map of the world, being situated in a conflict of interests. cyberpunk, however, claimed to be a future that dealt exclusively with class, capitalism, technology and corporeal misgivings as the old-world strife built on classifications of gender, race, sexuality, imperial history and culture were erased, and subsumed under the power-hungry structures of cyberpunk.

Ultimately, cyberpunk allegedly erased all contemporary social concerns to project the strife between homogenizing capitalist brutes and the marginalized loner hackers, while still engaging with Orientalist, especially Japanese cultural markers to locate their future in Japan. However, in cyberpunk, this specific sentiment emerges from the revolutionary rise of Japan from the ashes of the World War II defeat to a superpower in technology, with a hold on the robotics market as well as commercial products, and then an expansion into the entertainment sphere. Referred to as the Yellow Peril, this paranoia of Asians taking over the West has been widely studied in American cultural and legal discourse. William Wu states,

> The fear of this threat focuses on specific issues, including possible military invasion from Asia, perceived competition to the white labor force from Asian workers, the

> alleged moral degeneracy of Asian people, and the potential genetic mixing of Anglo-Saxons with Asians, who were considered a biologically inferior race by some intellectuals of the nineteenth century (1).

Beginning first in the revulsion to Asian ethnicity, this peril extended to the economic and cultural sphere with Mitsubishi acquiring American companies and the soft power explosion of the anime market breaking Disney's monopoly in the USA, prompting a series of cultural representations of Japan in American cultural and literary productions, termed as *techno-orientalism* by David Morley and Kevin Robbins.

This paranoia plays out particularly well in classic cyberpunk, and Morley and Robbins argue that cyberpunk's obsession with the "cool Japan" was a projection of the hegemonic fears of the West, which seemed "to be transcending and displacing Western modernity" ("Spaces of Identity" 168).

Techno-orientalism, along with gender, thus became major areas of criticism levied against the genre.

While many cyberpunk works continue to be set in urban sprawls resembling Japan, the shift to postcyberpunk, discussed in terms of gender in the earlier chapter, also marked the surreptitious removal of Japan as the mise-en-scene, prompting a renewal in the discussion of cultural identity in cyberpunk. Lisa Nakamura's *The Bohr Maker* is set in Indonesia, Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* is set in Thailand, McHugh's *China Mountain Zhang* and *Nekropolis* are set in communist China and theocratic Morocco respectively. The dispersion of the location poses several questions – one, why was Japan suddenly no longer at the centre of the cyberpunk universe? Two, what does this explosion of places, all arguably Third World countries, signify in cultural and political terms? Three, does this explosion

signify a greater movement in Techno-orientalism as it targets newer countries, pitting the Third World against the West in a similar equation for the future?

While studying American cyberpunk for its treatment of non-American futures and identities, the study also analyses Japanese cyberpunk in its imagination of the Self in a cyberpunk future, vis-à-vis the construction of Japaneseness in American cyberpunk. Japanese cyberpunk, in its most prominent and popular form (anime and manga), has always been located in its own cultural and geographical space, in a futuristic landscape so neutral culturally speaking, that the urbanscape represented no cultural community in particular, not even itself.

Anime and manga in cyberpunk have hardly seemed to take note of the world outside America, in that the location has always been Japan itself, and the concerns of global threats to the humans in the wake of AIs barely figure in them. Shaped by its own tumultuous history, the post-Occupation manga and anime deal with the of construction of a harmonious nation and community, specifically in response to the challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence.

Thus, the construction of Japaneseness, as well as that of a near-future, differs greatly in both these cultural productions, despite the fact that they have been massively influential on the development of each other.

Moreover, video games have remained static in their approach to technology, despite the renegotiations in the literary and cinematic fields. The chapter also deals with the reasons behind this static representation of Japan in cyberpunk games.

3.2 The Japanese Discourse in America

> Every western politician has either actual or cinematic experience of the brutalities Japan inflicted on its prisoners-of-war. No one, whether in Asia or beyond, has fond memories of Japanese expansionism. Which is why, as Japan's economic power expands anew, the Japanese would do better to face up to the darker aspects of their past. (Leader article in The Economist, 24 August 1991)

> Today, the modern era is in its terminal phase. An awareness of its imminent demise has made Americans, the most powerful Caucasians since World War II, increasingly emotional, almost hysterical, about Japan. (Ishihara 1991)

Japan, for most of the Western world, has been divided into two worlds: the exotic Orient, characterized by *zen, geishas, kabuki*, mesmerizing in its alien, yet charming aesthetics; and, the ruthless enemy, characterized by *zaibatsus, samurai, kamikaze*. For more than a century, Japan has been a complex friend and a foe to the West. The former French prime minister, Edith Cresson, publicly declared that "the Japanese have a strategy of world conquest". The Japanese, she said, are "little yellow men" who "stay up all night thinking about ways to screw the Americans and Europeans. They are our common enemy" (Drozdiak).

This particular fascination with Japan in the last five hundred years has much to do with the aura of mystery surrounding the nation. Japan is both 'the chrysanthemum and the sword':

> The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways. (Benedict 2)

Yet, the West has always tried to symbolically homogenize, simplify and control the image of Japan. As Mark Holborn writes:

> The dialogue between Japan and the West is frequently described in terms of Japan's absorption of the West. The pattern of imitation, absorption and finally reinterpretation of Western ideas is explicit. … In contrast, the West's absorption of Japan is inconclusive and rarely described. Japonisme was the first stage in the imitation of a Japanese aesthetic. It was primarily decorative and involved the borrowing of Japanese motifs and design elements. Oriental views provided the West with spectacle (18).

With the publication of *The Japan That Can Say No*, by the Liberal Democratic politician and former Minister of Transport, Shintaro Ishihara (1991), Japan publicly accused the USA of racist attitudes towards the Japanese while sparing Germany of the same in the World Wars, "because we are Japanese" (28). Crediting the Caucasians for much of the modern civilization (107), Ishihara commented on the rise of Japan as the hub for technology, while the West sank in its creativity in this regard.

> Technology gives rise to civilization, upon which, in time, culture thrives. Nations decline when they self-indulgently let life-styles become more important than workmanship and neglect their industrial and technological base. That is the lesson of history (57).

Commenting upon the Japanese superiority in technology and the West's increasing dependency on the former for nuclear supplies, Ishihara declares Japan to be "on the verge of a new genesis" (29), locating Western development in its terminal phase at present, saying:

> Americans should realize the modern era is over. Their cherished beliefs in materialism, science, and progress have borne bitter fruit. The defeat in Vietnam, despite raining Napalm and Agent Orange on the countryside for ten years, showed the futility of military power. America harnessed science and technology and spent a fortune to get to the moon, only to find a barren rock pile. All that money and effort and what does the nation have to show for it? (123)

While Japan may have been defeated in the past, it has surpassed the West in becoming the vision for the future, reshaping everything that the West has developed so far, in the name of civilization, modernity, ethics and commerce.

Commercially, the same sentiment is renewed as one notes the explosion of Japanese products in the Western markets, or worldwide, thereby competing with the West. As Akio Morita, ex-chairman of Sony, in *The Sunday Times* of 29 October, 1989, said that, 'they have the feeling that strangers, or something foreign, has entered their midst. This gives them strong feelings of fear and anxiety' (Morley 149). A strong anti-Japanese sentiment grows in response to what is perceived as Japan's invasion of "the symbolic strongholds of the West" (Morley 149). Nippon Television Network renovating the Sistine Chapel ceiling (1980s), and Mitsubishi Estate acquiring the Rockefeller Centre in Manhattan (1989) have raised Western concerns about the Japanese infiltration in what was once a Western monopoly.

A strategy of "synergy", as described by Matsushita and Sony, in acquiring major Hollywood companies, so that they controlled different media products over different distribution channels, these commercial manoeuvres were considered "most potent and symbolic" (Aksoy).

These anxieties of Japan controlling the reins of modernity, coupled with a widespread sentiment that Japanese ethos were out of sync with American ethos in their singular focus on efficiency, conformity and social harmony, are reverberated in much of techno-orientalist tendencies in maligning Japan in American cultural productions. The vision of a near future world in charge of the Japanese is echoed as Baudrillard says,

> power will belong to those peoples with no origins and no authenticity, who know how to exploit that situation to the full: Look at Japan, which to a certain extent has pulled off this trick better than the US itself, managing, in what seems to us an unintelligible paradox, to transform the power of territoriality and feudalism into that of deterritoriality and weightlessness (76).

Japan's modernity had flowed into postmodernity, and its future became the parameter on which all other cultures, predominantly America, measured its own worth. This paranoia naturally reflected itself in American cultural productions living in fear of a Japan that was already becoming the future. A slew of representations, reflective of this fear, featured in books, movies and animated films.

Regarding such monolithic representations that had enshrined the four Japans in the American mind, a *friend,* a *foe,* a *model* and a *mirror,* it is worth revisiting Said's premise in *Orientalism*:

> as both geographical and cultural entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such locales, regions, geographical sectors as the 'Orient' and the 'Occident' are man-made…. Therefore, as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West (4-5).

Naoki Sakai adds further,

> the Orient does not connote any internal commonality among the names subsumed under it, it ranges from regions in the Middle East to those in the Far East. One can hardly find anything religious, linguistic or cultural that is common among these varied areas. The Orient is neither a cultural, religious or linguistic unity. The principle of its identity lies outside itself: what endows it with some vague sense of unity is that the Orient is that which is excluded and objectified by the West, in the service of its historical progress. From the outset the Orient is a shadow of the West. If the West did not exist, the Orient would not exist either (Modernity 499).

As Morley and Robbins put it, "The 'Orient' exists because the West needs it; because it brings the project of the West into focus" (155).

In inviting a similarity between the anti-Semite feelings and the anti-Japanese sentiment, Ben-Dasan writes that, (the Japanese), "known to the great masses of the non-white peoples of the world for the excellence of their products and services, are in a position similar to that of the Alexandrian Jews. They are honorary white men as the Jews were once, in a sense, honorary Greeks in Alexander's city" (Ben-Dasan 164–165).

A similar parallel has been drawn between the Jewish and the Japanese involvement in establishing Hollywood. Major founding figures included Adolph Zukor (Paramount Pictures), William Fox (Fox Film Corporation), Louis B. Mayer (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) and Benjamin Warner (Warner Bros), who were all from Eastern European Jewish families. As Gabler puts it: "the American film industry…the quintessence of what we mean by 'America', was founded, and for more than thirty years operated, by Eastern European Jews, who themselves seemed to be anything but the quintessence of America" (Gabler 1).

It was now the Japanese who held the reins of Hollywood. In 1989, the Japanese superseded the Russians as the most-feared nation in American eyes, in opinion polls. The 'official' explanation of this was given in economic terms. As McKenzie Wark (1991) says, this shift reflected the loss of American control, whereby "manifest destiny" leads "from Fordism to Sonyism", thereby, leading to a premature death of American power. Moreover, this is not seen merely as an economic act, but a symbolic capture of entities considered to be quintessentially American, such as the Rockefeller Centre. The act is seen as strangers stealing in the American Dream. And the Japanese are, as Waldemar Januszczak says, the "ultimate 20th century strangers". As he observes:

> if the Canadians (rather than the Japanese) had bought Columbia Pictures or Mickey Mouse or the Rockefeller there would have been no point in an outcry. Canadians, after all, are just like Americans, only less so. The Japanese, according to the occidental popular imagination are aliens from the East who are probably trying to take over the West (Januszczak).

Modernity, then, for the non-West began when the "superior" West invaded, defeated and controlled it, and the non-West became subservient to the West. On realizing that if Japan had to survive the post-WW II defeat, it would have to excel in technology, the Japanese began to create a technological revolution that ultimately resulted in futuristic technology becoming synonymous with the country, out of which, a new techno-mythology is being woven. Japan came to be projected as "the greatest 'machine-loving' nation of the world", where"machines are priceless friends" (Kato 1).

"The Japanese are not altering the way we see the real world, they are doing something far more radical," writes Charlie Leadbeater (1991), "They are taking us further and further into a different world of electronic images and sounds…. In future, the line

between the real and the electronic will probably blur even further to the extent that it may not be fully recognisable" (Leadbeater). Artificial or Virtual Reality, in the form of Pachinko, computer games, and other technology, has altered our view of human-machine interaction. Japanese technologies are "blurring the line between the real and the simulated…producing the sensation that reality is only part of a world of simulation" (Isozaki 6).

3.3 Japan in Classic Cyberpunk

However, far from being simply seen as manufactured, controlled and perfected by the Japanese, technology has become synonymous with the aestheticism and identity of Japan. Japan, thus, is not merely the new economic capital of the world, but simultaneously the new cultural capital as well. Tokyo is symbolic of "postmodern tourism": "the paradigm of the modern decentred metropolis. It's not so much that [it] disorientates you—rather that you never get orientated in the first place" (Thackara 35).

This disorienting motif has heavily influenced and directed typical cyberpunk aesthetics of exoticization, and Gibson's *Neuromancer* sets the benchmark for an authentic Japanese urbanscape. William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, as Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro observes, combines "futuristic high-tech images of contemporary Japan and anachronistic images of feudal Japan still widely circulating in the popular American imagination" (18). Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* that, as Gibson admitted, was a startlingly exact visualisation of his idea of the future, does the same. Stephen Beard describes this as "the re-invention of Japan as a land of high-tech enchantment":

> manga, techno-porn, high-density urbanism, mobile fashion, hyperviolent movies, video-phones, fax cameras, hand-held televisions, video-games, disposable buildings, even a new breed of 'radically bored' teen information junkies, otaku, who shun body

> contact and spend all their waking hours gathering data on the most trivial bit of media (25).

While this spew of technophilic images of a postmodern cyberpunk future facilitates a sort of cultural amnesia and alienation, it also reinforces the old stereotypical image of Japan as the ruthless, inhuman machine that undoes the achievements of Western civilization in less than three decades. The *otaku* provides an appealing parallel in its disassociation with the real world and obsession with the hyperreal, in that they "despise physical contact and love media, technical communication, and the realm of reproduction and simulation in general" (Grassmuck 201); they are characterized by a kind of 'vacuousness' and by 'self-dissociation in hyper-reality' (207), further adding,"In the age of cyber-medialism with its emphasis on simulation, the hi-tech media become the condition for survival…. The media cyborgs in their electronic womb are also called aliens…it's an empty, content-less joy of technology that drives them (213)."

Otaku, then, in Western eyes, is more than a young population addicted to virtual reality – it is a symbolic mutation of man and machine, the erasure of the human, and thus, of the Enlightenment ideals of uniqueness, rationality and human superiority. Japan, on the whole, is represented as a sophisticated barbarian of the future, and fear is the only lens through which the West will be able to view Japan.

Postmodernism, in such a literary context as a discussion of cyberpunk and the location of Japan in its narratives, hinges on multiple levels of thought. From "everybody's favourite bete noire" that has only resulted into a "view-from-nowhere", it has nevertheless served "the function of shifting the paradigms in cultural studies" and "inevitably provokes controversy and protest" (McRobbie 1-2). With its 4 Cs, cyberpunk, in its backdrop of a hypercapitalist urban narrative, fulfils Frederic Jameson's analysis of postmodern culture as

"the logic of late capitalism", where cyberspace is its infrastructure and the hacker is the epitome of the cyberspace disillusioned citizen. More importantly, postmodernism allows for the critical gaze to be shifted to "sociological play between images and between different cultural forms and institutions" (McRobbie 4).

Produced on the cusp of the digital revolution, where Gibson first tapped the potential of cyberspace narratives as he already saw them interact with the world, he notes that cyberspace is where "the really interesting penetration is, with these emerging media (Interview, Sandbox 1996). However, as Chow notes, it is impossible to depict a future devoid of current cultural anxieties, given that cultural studies is "a field in which representations of our others are a regular and unavoidable practice" (Chow 54). The point of interest is "how stereotypes are or can be reproduced, the special relation they have with graphicity, the potential cultural transitions they mobilize, and the lingering questions of power that ensue therefrom" (61).

A recurring motif of this postmodern cyberpunk sentiment is the location of the centre of power in *zaibatsu*, the "multinational corporations that control entire economies", the blood of which is "information, not people" (Gibson, "Burning Chrome," 103), where the "hybrid representations of the Orient now roam the culture" (Said, "Orientalism,"285), Orient here being Japan as a fixed cultural, if not geographical location for the future.

Classic cyberpunk turns out to be a fertile place to investigate and practice Jameson's view on postmodernism, whose task is, according to Jameson, "coordinating new forms of practice and social and mental habits… with the new forms of economic production and organization thrown up by the modification of capitalism – the new global division of labor – in recent years" (Cultural Logicxiv).

Japan, in particular, represents Jameson's lack of "depth", a term that characterizes much of postmodernist culture, as much as the cultural representation of the villains of cyberpunk, as "postmodern depthlessness", where "the notion of psychological depth no longer characterizes late-twentieth-century human beings" (Sanders 11). Vivian Sobchack notes that our depth perception has become "flattened by the electronic 'dimensionality' of movement experienced as occurring on – not in – the screens of computer terminals, video games, music videos and movies like *Tron*" (Screening Space 230-231). This "electronic dimensionality" has fragmented and rearranged our perspective of space and created a "new world geography" (232) where traditional notions of "location" no longer hold validity.

Sobchack argues that this new depthlessness, ahistorical attitude and the new world order "constitutes the features of a new Science Fiction aesthetics, one representative of the changed values and logic of late capitalism" (253). Situated in such a postmodernist discourse that is at once literary and visual, apolitical and entrenched in politics, and dislocated from geography yet entangled in cultural locatedness, Japan is enmeshed in a "textual representation of otherness (and of course, representation in general) which cannot but depend on the absence of what is represented" (Forsdick 194). This Japan, Gibson says, is "a sort of fractal coherence of sign and symbol", "a wonderful Japan that doesn't exist. A Japan of the mind." (Japan's Modern 16).

The foremost and primary image of Japan in cyberpunk lies in its *zaibatsu*, in a "world dominated by technology and the corporations that control it" (Brummett 97). Darko Suvin finds that they are "well symbolized by the Japanese name *and* tradition of *zaibatsu"*, the "ruthlessly competing corporations" and "the power-systems dominant in our 1980s world" (Suvin 142).

Jameson notes, “the now obligatory Japanese reference also marks the obsession with the great Other, who is perhaps our own future rather than our past, the putative winner in the coming struggle – whom we therefore compulsively imitate, hoping that thereby the inner mind-set of the victorious other will be transferred to us along with the externals (Seeds 155). It is “therefore Japan that is somehow the ‘end of history’ in store for us – and Japanese space, now obscurely valorized by our own anxieties, would seem to share in the general fascination” (156).

In Gibson’s *Neuromancer,* as with many of his other works, scattered references to Japan abound, both real things (Sony, Honda, Kirin beer, Hitachi) and imagined (Nikon eye transplants, Hosaka computers), and real places (Chiba, Tokyo, Shinjuku) and imagined (Ninsei, Baiitsu). The characters have been depicted as surgeons, scientists, sarariman, Yakuza, shopkeeper, boys and girls, and mostly, also “the crowd…. mostly Japanese”, who converse “in Japanese.”

Chow notes this stereotypical delineation of the Japanese as “an encounter between surfaces rather than interiors” (157). Particularly, Chow engages with “how stereotypes duplicate and imitate and what they can tell us about the negative acts that are often attributed to them… and the assumptions that support such attributions” (54), specifically the Eurasian and the Yakuza assassin.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is not merely “reading cultural representation for their positive or negative (authentic or inauthentic) portrayals”, but also how “these representations function to reiterate, challenge, transform, and/or create cultural norms” (Dave, Nishime and Oren 8).

Coming back to *zaibatsu*, Jameson deems this as "*Blade Runner* syndrome", he refers to the "interfusion of crowds among a high technological bazaar with its multitudinous nodal points, all of it sealed into an inside without an outside, which thereby intensifies the

Figure 3.1: Blade Runner "zaibatsu"

Figure 3.2: Blade Runner "gomi"

formerly urban to the point of becoming the unmappable system of late capitalism itself" (Seeds 157).

Thus, the First World in classic cyberpunk is never neatly cleaved from the Second or Third world – they, rather, are found in each other. Conveyed through the concept of *gomi*, or garbage, the various urban sprawls scattered across the high-tech city are reminiscent of poverty-stricken Third World dumps that characterize the grime of an unequal dispersion of capitalist benefits.

As to why other countries that could have better fit the description of a spatial entity driven by technology and held back by the chasm of poverty were ignored over Japan, Gibson states that, "all cultural change is technologically driven, you pay attention to the Japanese." Further, "Japan is the global imagination's default setting for the future…. they live in the future" ("Japan's Modern" 16).

Thus, Japan's role in classic cyberpunk is ambiguous. While Morley and Robbins note that "Japan has become synonymous with the technologies of the future – with screens, networks, cybernetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, simulation" (169), and Giddens notes that the "dark side" of globalization, which mean "world-wide networks involved in money-laundering, drug-running and other forms of organized crime" (Runaway World, xvi), Manuel Castells has described the global criminal economy as "perverse" in the complicity of local criminal networks with global multinational entities to create a glocal economy (Castells). Thus, the Yakuza in Gibson's short story *Johnny Mnemonic* are "the world's wealthiest criminal order…so powerful that it owns comsats and at least three shuttles…a true multinational" (Gibson 4).

Gibson had never stepped into Japan before writing *Neuromancer*, though he made some visits post-Neuromancer and began to write and talk more about Japan; moreover,

Gibson notes that "I didn't know where Chiba was when I wrote *Neuromancer"*, that it evolved from "bits of Japan" that he could observe in Vancouver, and that Chiba was "a fantasy of Detroit" (McCaffery, "Interview," 285). Upon this, Darko Suvin comments, "Gibson's views on Japan are inevitably those of a hurried, if interested outsider who has come to know the pop culture around the Tokyo subway stations of Shibuya, Shinjuku, and Harajuku", maintaining, however, that "there is a deeper justification, a geopolitical or perhaps geoeconomical and psychological logic" (Storming 353).

Regarding the postmodern form of orientalism, Said says,

> If the world has become immediately accessible to a Western citizen living in the electronic age, the Orient too has drawn nearer to him, and is now less a myth perhaps than a place crisscrossed with Western, especially, American interests. One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there is a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information in more and more standardized molds (26).

Secondly, Said further notes that representations of the Orient "vacillate between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its…delight in – or fear of – novelty", owing to which, "a new median category emerges…that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing…[It] is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things" (59).

Moreover, a point that Said misses is the factor of "receiving", more than just "controlling", "the strong feeling among many Orientalist scholars that in some respects Eastern cultures were superior to the West, or the widespread feeling that Orientalist

scholarship might actually break down the boundaries between East and West" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 70).

Complicating the stereotypical profiling of the Asian, and specifically Japanese identity in classic cyberpunk, some Japanese critics have supported it (Ueno), reworked it (Tetsuo), or dismissed it altogether (Tatsumi). Ueno sees it merely as a valid vision of the future, contending that "the techno-Orient has been invented to define the images and models of information capitalism and the information society" (97), while Tetsuo renegotiates the focus from the "liminal order" to the place of culture in tandem with technology (10), and Tatsumi employs multiple positions ("post-", "beyond-" Orientalism, counter-Orientalism, Occidentalism and Japanoid) to reframe the Orientalist strictures.

Along with an Orientalist limiting of image and impressions by the repeated motif of the Japanese landscape, much of Gibson's work employs a wider range of Oriental landscapes including, but not limited to Japan. His short story "New Rose Hotel" situates the landscape in Morocco, evoking an urban area thronged by Moroccans, Portuguese, Japanese, and Chinese, primarily marked as *gomi*, a trashy, sinister underground of black-market spurious inventions such as, "(in Marrakech) a heroin lab that had been converted to the extraction of pheromones" or the marketplace at Djemma el Fna "thick with jugglers, dancers, storytellers, small boys turning lathes with their feet, legless beggars with wooden bowls under animated holograms advertising French software…bales of raw wools and plastic tubs of Chinese microchips" (Burning Chrome 108). The locations frequently jump from Yokohama to Marrakech to Vienna.

In consonance with Suvin's locating of Science Fiction in "cognitive estrangement", in that Science Fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an

imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Metamorphoses 7-8), and Carl Freedman's observation in *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* that Science Fiction is determined by "the *dialectic* between estrangement and cognition" (16), Gibson attempts to throw the reader in a flurry of unfamiliar, exotic, disorienting images of scattered places in an urban metropolis that is reminiscent of much of the old world, and yet signifying nothing but extreme disconnection and estrangement, a pastiche of the remnants of the past habits and cultures.

Drugs, apart from the urban architecture, is the second hallmark of cyberpunk narratives, upon which much of its counter-culture feel rests. The cyberpunk generation, clarifies Larry McCaffery, "who had grown up immersed in technology but also in pop culture, in the values and the aesthetics of counter-culture associated with the drug culture" (Storming 12), adding further, it is "no accident that speed is the drug of choice in cyberpunk narratives (292). References to synthetic drugs, over organic drugs, as they conflate with technology in the form of "wavelength of amphetamine" in *Neuromancer* (26), or Mona's addiction to drugs in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* among other repeated motifs point to Jameson's definition of "dirty realism" and the continued literary legacy of diving into "the lower depths, the forbidden spaces" (Seeds 150). This also coincides with the rise of the drug problem in the 1980s, the underground punk movement and the threat of LSD as the latest

Figure 3.3: *Blade Runner*. Geisha popping drugs

drug, a "chemical prosthesis" (Ronell 50) that further blurred the lines between reality and imagination.

However, as Sterling notes, this projection of the Japanese underworld of corporates as pushing "designer drugs" into a Japanoid American future bears little connection with the real drug scene in Japan, where "drugs are still essentially unheard of" (Tatsumi Interview, "*Science Fiction Eye,"*35). Yegenoglu situates this within the Orientalist discourse as he notes that these are symptomatic of "the cultural representation of the West to *itself* by way of a detour through the other" (1). While Japan maintained a strict ban on opium in the post WW II era, morphine did creep in, however, under highly regulated circumstances, so that drugs never really penetrated the social fabric of the common Japanese home or school or workplace the way it did in America. To this point, Japan sees drugs primarily as a Western product, unlike classic cyberpunk, that sees it as a symbol of Japanese depravity.

Vic George notes, "In theory all cultures can appear on the world's cultural stage and transmit their traits across the globe. In practice, it is mainly Western culture in general and American culture in particular that is beamed across the globe today" (21-22). To this, it is worthwhile to remember the evocative scene in *Blade Runner,* the iconic movie that stunned Gibson precisely because it was similar to his own imagination of a cyberpunk future, where a Geisha-like creature on a giant billboard seduces and interpellates the onlooker to "pop pills", which posits Japan in a congruous cultural relationship with drugs, exotic women and technology.

A description of the "black clinics" where Case in *Neuromancer* goes to de-addict himself as "nameless, expensively appointed" against the backdrop of a serene Asian garden "white boulders, a stand of green bamboo, black gravel raked into smooth waves" eerily evokes the stereotypical Japanese coldness airbrushed with aesthetic beauty.

Drugs, however, since long, have been seen as an Oriental vice, ranging from references to opium as an Asian problem, not a European one from 1751 (when Britain became involved in the opium trade) to 1900. China was a leading producer and consumer of the cultural practice of smoking opium, an act looked down upon by Westerners for its apparent unsophistication.

A third Orientalizing tendency is apparent in the characters in cyberpunk themselves, a kind of cross-cultural hybridity of ethnicities and symbolism. The Yakuza assassin in *Johnny Mnemonic* and Molly Millions in *Neuromancer* are both figures of cross-ethnic representation, with a fetish for weaponry such as prosthetic tips and razorblade fingernails. While a certain degree of stereotypical representation is inevitable to establish familiarity with the symbolic tropes delineated in the texts, Lisa Nakamura observes that tropes like "samurai", "geisha" constitute a "darker side of postmodern identity", because the "fluid selves" they project are essentially oppressive gender and racial stereotypes. The figure of the cyborg, then, has become "tropological currency for describing a vague and shifting constellation of relationships among bodies, technologies and subjectivities" (Sobchack, "Carnal," 207).

Akin to drugs as a synthetic technology in the hands of the Japanese, cyborg prosthetics in classic cyberpunk, often gross to the organic imagination of a wholesome body, are traced to Japan. Eyes, specifically, one of the most delicate and necessary human body parts, recur as various grotesque, "fetishized commodity" (Lee 195). Molly Million's mirrored glasses which are "surgical inlays" that sealed her organic eyes in her sockets, or Rikki Wildside's desire for "Zeiss Ikon eyes "available in Chiba, Josef Virek's blue eyes that were "inhumanly perfect optical instruments, grown in a vat in Japan" (*Count Zero*) are a

reinforcement of a direct symbolism between the Japanese polite exterior covering a brutal, ruthless competitive streak.

Chiba city becomes the location for all cybernetic transformations, technological success measured by "an ever-stronger tendency towards the miniaturization of technical objects. The emphasis on miniaturized form is also a "typically Japanese" achievement, inherently "a Japanese characteristic", "like their people and their Bonsai trees" (Springer 206).

The Yakuza assassin is described purely in terms of threatening anatomy, as the "little tech sidles out of nowhere, smiling…", "state of the art. Factory custom. He's a Yakuza assassin" (8), without any references to the impact of such cybernetic prosthesis on the restructuring of human, or racial identity, solely marking him as a "ninja assassin" and later, in his death, the Japaneseness is re-inscribed in "a defeated kamikaze on his way down" (Burning Chrome 20-21). The final comment, "he died of culture shock", in caricature form, refers to Japan in the WW II period.

Molly, in *Neuromancer*, walks a double-edged sword as a "street samurai" who happened to be a "working girl" before she enlisted herself as one of the assassins. Often upheld as a "masculine" woman, a figure of empowerment who finds her way out of prostitution, kills her former client, and propels herself into a more "useful" male world order, "a progressive reimagining of the feminine in this world: masculine and feminine are brought into closer contact" (Freccero 109), Carla Freccero also questions if she bears any resemblance to "women" at all, or if they enact a masculine feminization, making them "men in disguise"?

As characters, they demonstrate how classic cyberpunk "seeks to classify and navigate landscapes by reducing others to their markers of difference" (Chun 249), and techno-orientalism becomes a strategy that seeks to "orient the reader to a technology-loaded present/future (which is portrayed as belonging to the Japanese or other Far Eastern countries) through the promise of readable difference" (250).

3.4 Japan in its Own Eyes

While technology in the hands of the Japanese, in American eyes, is reduced to a grotesquely amoral capitalist expansion, the Japanese itself have a very different equation on technology. Going back to Gibson who elaborates on Japan's affection for intelligent machines, the Japanese are "the ultimate Early adaptors… If you believe…that all cultural change is technologically driven, you pay attention to the Japanese. They've been doing it for more than a century now and they really do have a head start on the rest of us" (Clarke 9).

Industrial robots, friendly pet robots and the idea that robots can be integrated harmoniously in the Japanese future, the way the cell phone is a "prosthetic limb over which you wield full and flexible control, and on which you eventually come to automatically rely in formulating and carrying out your daily goals and projects" (Clark 9).

Timothy Hornyak, in his book *Loving the Machine: The Art and Science of Japanese Robots* argues that the Japanese differ in their relationship with robots, and even though there are popular and critical dystopian imaginations of the same, robots are not unequivocally looked upon as threats. This is evident in the general tendency towards robots in some of the most popular cultural artefacts like *Terminator*, and *Astro Boy.* Japan in classic cyberpunk is thus a cultural artefact of a brutal samurai consciousness masquerading as the dainty geisha, in the act of conquering a civilized Western world.

Contradictory to the emphasis on difference and a hyper-exoticizing exercise to impress upon the readers that the location, and the culture is Japan, Japanese cyberpunk has attempted to make its productions, particularly manga and anime "culturally odourless" (Iwabuchi 27-28). Knowing that its appeal lies in "its non-self-assertive mukokuseki nature" (Iwabuchi 78), it has rebranded its products culturally to appeal to Western, and global audiences by effects such as enlarging the eyes of characters, or colouring their hair pink. *Mukokuseki* refers to a common tendency to suppress Japanese cultural ethnicity in the appearance of its characters in manga, anime and video games, as part of a global soft power strategy.

Finding a way to exhibit its uniqueness without compromising its own values for a global audience:

> No people has been more obsessed with internationalization than the Japanese. Since opening its doors to the outside world in the mid-nineteenth century, Japan has evolved into a Western-style nation state, first as an autocratic imperialist and then as a U.S.-modeled industrial democracy, chronicling struggle after struggle for international acceptance. Kokusaika, as the Japanese call internationalization, has been a buzz word that evokes the sense of progressivism, as opposed to tradition-bound nationalism. The country's path to modernity is punctuated by frequent clashes between the two modus operandis, between future-embracing metamorphosis with a touch of self-denial and the reactionary defense of independence and uniqueness (Ishikawa).

However, the point of difference in identity, therefore, does not lie in the reinforcements of culture as they do in American cyberpunk, but in pushing to the foreground issues of Otherness generally avoided by classic cyberpunk. Sharalyn Orbaugh in 'Sex and

the Single Cyborg,' explores how Japan's relationship with the West may have influenced this:

> When Japan re-opened to the world in the mid-nineteenth century after more than 250 years of isolation, one of the most powerful messages of Western discourse the Japanese absorbed was the "scientifically proven" racial and cultural inferiority of the "Asiatic" race. Less than fifty years later, Japan had replicated every aspect of Anglo-European modernity with astounding success… Nonetheless … Japan was once again relegated to the position of anomalous Other by the other founding nations' refusal to incorporate a statement of basic racial equality in its charter. (438)

Thus, Japanese cyberpunk becomes an "exploration of the hybrid, monstrous, cyborg subject from a sympathetic, interior point of view rarely found in North American cultural products" (440).

In order to understand why cyberpunk, in its parallel history in both the West and Japan, assumed such distinct forms, one must look at the defining features that mark cyberpunk themes in anime and manga. The discussion of tropes shall be in consonance with classic cyberpunk discussed so far, so as to enable a worthy, fair comparison between the evolution of the two national productions.

One element was the *cityscape* and the *crowd* – while classic cyberpunk invariably delineated a grim, dark cityscape unmistakably dotted by Oriental imagery, such as billboards or neon lights in Japanese, a crowd made up of Japanese faces, a crowded urban dump lined with Oriental eateries, names and faces, while the protagonists were clearly white and the antagonists clearly non-white, or ambiguous persons of Japanese manufacturing, the cityscape in Japanese cyberpunk is rarely grim or oppressing, and set in Japan, yet not

determined to litter every minute detail with the stamp of Japaneseness. While the characters are undoubtedly Japanese, references to American authority/technology are rare and oblique, with little or no bearing on the central themes/outcome of the anime/manga.

The cityscape in Japanese cyberpunk, more of often than not, rests in its familiarity to the audience's eyes – there is a conspicuous lack of overbearing, mammoth capitalist structures reminiscent of Tyrell-like *zaibatsus*, or the oppressive absence of flora or fauna. More than the black leather-clad cyberpunk with neon lights and cyborgean flashy gear, the Japanese cyberpunk world is contained in balanced juxtaposed images of familiar structures like homes, schools, farms and companies or sophisticated intelligence/military units, reflective more of a war-torn era than a futuristic one.

Japan's crushing defeat in the WW II following the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki gave rise to a new question in Japanese society, and consequently, in Japanese literature and cultural productions. A section of intellectuals, politicians and citizens supported the view that Japan must utilize the same science that destroyed it, to build itself back to respectability and sustainability, while another section believed that science, an inherently western invention, was a harbinger of destruction. For years, intellectuals debated on the path Japan should take to regain its position, and emerge out of the national crisis. While ultimately a decision was made in favor of adopting science to its advantage while simultaneously recognizing a need for caution and wisdom, images of war, other technological disasters, and the fragile nature of human life in the aftermath of potentially destructive technology have forever become a central theme for Japanese intellectual introspections in literature, anime and manga.

Jerome Shapiro, author of *Atomic Bomb Cinema: The Apocalyptic Imagination on Film*, explains it as a coping mechanism for Japan, noting:

> The first responsibility of any community or any leader that's experiencing a catastrophic event is finding hope. Without hope there is no change. When you look at the scholarship on ancient apocalyptic literature, rather than, say the nuclear crisis we're experiencing today, what we find is that so and so agrees that this a hopeful literature. Yet it describes painful events that will come, it describes suffering and oppression that is taking place. They're saying that if we get through this, there's a possibility of rebuilding communities, finding greater meaning in life, and finding happiness. . the first responsibility of any literature is to encourage people to survive and self-actualize in themselves, and then only is the possibility of restoring community possible...In the Japanese tradition the world comes to a complete end and a new one starts over (Interview 2002).

Along with a renewed hope of productivity after destruction, Japanese cyberpunk tends to avoid the binary of the good/bad, where good ultimately restores the world order by eliminating the bad. The subject matter is not just 'non-American," but, as film scholar Susan Pointon emphasizes "uncompromisingly non-American". Anime references "indigenous Japanese culture but its narrative structures, style, pacing, and emotional tone differ from American animation and cinema". Many American movies have a tendency to produce "dynamics of reassurance" with happy endings, where all on the side of good usually live, whereas Japanese animation is usually more "emotional, complicated, sometimes melancholy, and frill of mass destruction" (Napier, "Peek-a-boo," 14).

The post-World War II Japan's economic development, as expressed in the animated version of the *Bubblegum Crisis* saga elaborates on the haunting images of war and destruction:

> Even from the viewpoint of world history, there are few cities as prone to disaster as Tokyo. The city was completely destroyed in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and the carpet-bombing of Tokyo at the end of World War II, as its name suggests, reduced the city to a smoking pile of rubble. But each time, Tokyo rose again from the ashes. And it is MegaTokyo of the future which is the setting for this story. The time is the year 2032. Tokyo is the world's most overcrowded city - the heart of industry, culture, information, and conflict.
>
> The Second Great Kanto Earthquake, only seven years before, dealt the city a devastating blow. Presently, the capital is a city of confusion, in the midst of recovering from the ruins, physical and political, which were the result of the colossal earthquake. Cars running on gasohol and batteries crowd the streets, and a scar of the earthquake remains: a huge fault running through Tokyo, 50 meters wide at its widest point, separating the city into East and West. A gigantic tidal power plant has been established, and the world's first solar power plants have been founded, supplying this megalopolis with the electricity it consumes. Even now, clumps of office buildings, with rooftop-mounted independent photovoltaic collectors, await the sun's first rays, and the start of another day in MegaTokyo (Hedge).

The technophilia and Japan's "first-hand experience of their devastating effects at the end of World War II has influenced the tone and attitude of anime.", contrasting it with the "more optimistic tone of American animation" (Wong).

Akira, features a futuristic metropolis in Neo Tokyo, in the post-World War III milieu and is nowfalling apart, with "scientists and the military jockeying over a super-human with exceptional telekinetic powers while biker gangs and violence run rampant on the streets" (Lin and Landow).

Fig. 3.4: Akira

Akira, at its point of release, created massive interest with its radically unconventional plotline, the blurred line between reality and virtual networks, nationalistic purpose, and the cyberpunk feel, and a relatable such as postnationalism, transnationalism, garage-punk nihilism and anticorporate apocalypse (Bouissou).

Toshimichi Suzuki, the creator of *Bubblegum Crisis*, elaborates in an interview with *Animerica* magazine. Focusing on the future of a human society where interactions between humans and machines would be the order of the day, also estimating what contributions man would "make to Earth in the midst of pollution and environmental destruction" and how "civilized society" would "interact with machines" (qtd. in Horibuchi 6-9)

He specifically pointed to the universality of the setting, which, though currently was Tokyo (that could be any other place, he noted), 38-50 years from now, where humanity would have more progressive "values but... greater pressures. This is where I wanted to.. .focus, while.. .introducing the Knight Sabers as a personification of the strain of this new society.. .from their perspective: they would act as 'shadow assassins' seeking to resolve those pressures" (Horibuchi 6-9).

Suzuki further elaborates on the series, calling *Bubblegum Crisis* a "premonition against a chaotic future", adding that the vision of "foreigners in public agencies" was "intentional", hinting at "giant corporations" and the meaning of our choices on our future, posing a pertinent question that reverberates through much of anime as its central theme: "Are we on the right track?" (Horibuchi 4-11)

The dropping of the atomic bombs was only the first in the series of scientific calamities for Japan. While the bombs were thrown by an identifiable, external enemy, 1995 saw a Tokyo subway attacked by a domestic cult group Aum Shinrinkyo, releasing sarin gas and affecting largely 5000 people, in what has been termed as the deadliest incident in Japan since the end of World War II. The Fukushima reactor disaster, the 1970 Osaka gas explosion, have been similar extensions of Japan's uneasy equations with technological engagement.

One might also detect a longstanding fascination for technology and strong women in "anime's frequent fascination, even obsession, with extraordinary weaponry, combat robots, and other military prostheses that amplify the powers of diminutive and often feminine or feminized characters" (Lin and Landow). The women in*Bubblegum Crisis* seem to transcend traditional gender roles by "making the prosthetically enhanced young women succeed when

Figure 3.5: Bubblegum Crisis Girls

macho police fail... these young women, the Knight Sabers, appear coded as Japan, whose new technological superiority permits it to surpass larger, more physically powerful rivals" (Lin and Landow).

> Again, Japan, in the form of these female characters, is seen here as a powerful country able to outdo its rivals by flexing its technological prowess over others, perhaps serving as a metaphor for Japan's need to prevail on its own and detailing its perseverance in overcoming difficult conflicts (Fuller 76).

Initial American perception of Japanese cyberpunk, and anime/manga in general, was far from appreciative. David Lubich in his article "The Stylishly Violent Akira Made the West Sit Up. Are We Still Toonstruck?" notes, that despite American contempt for and dismissal of the genre as "Voomer Madness and Geno Cyber as boys-shoot-em-up fantasies, these are light years ahead of American garbage that fills kids' TV in the UK. While 'big guns sell', the best is subtle, intelligently plotted, and give us insight into Japan's obsession with technology" (Lubich).

Chrys Mordin of *Forbidden Planet* has observed that "Technology is part of their everyday life...it has been the making of post-war Japan - so it's natural that anime explores all possibilities, all possible futures," (ibid) leading Lubich to note that "This fascination with the darker side of technology, bio-technology and mutation, reflects the more mature relationship the Japanese have with technology. Like it or not, it's the future" (ibid).

The cyborgs of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) show an uncanny fluidity between the meat and the machine, and reality and authenticity, in that many of them are "planted with false memories" and "not told of their unnatural creation. They do not believe their own histories until they see direct evidence that their private memories have been forged" (Hutson).

"Perhaps the most striking example of tech life in *Ghost in the Shell*are the artificial intelligence robot Fuchikomas: acting as individuals but also possessing a hive mind [potential to make its own decisions], the Fuchikomas have the potential for revolt but are nevertheless kept in check by the human' opposition of cyborgs" (Mescallado 114). Kusanagi, the protagonist, is "highly cynical about the idea of a human essence, of the 'ghost' that may or may not inhabit her shell." When she is approached by an artificial intelligence truly capable of sentience, growth and creating an identity, "her sense of identity and her role in society lose what measure of stability she had assumed they had" (ibid).

Reminiscent of the aftermath of the WW II in its lost sense of a stable identity or identification with a community, or even a sense of reliance on authority. In *Ghost in the Shell,* "we encounter beings that challenge definitions of life and of consciousness. Human characters interact with other, human-engineered, characters, and the division between the two fades," furthering"the fears. desires, and questions many have about the future of our relationships with artificial intelligence and technology in general," (ibid).

While Susan Napier "reads Oshii Mamoru's *Ghost in the Shell* as foregrounding a desire to use technology as an escape from the limitations of the body and the social categorizations organized around it" (Silvio), Oshii, the creator of *Appleseed,* along with *Ghost in the Shell* manga says:

> Creating humanoid robots involves seeing how much you can replicate human structure, which in turn involves understanding what it means to be human… some people say that emotions can be explained through chemistry, so then the question becomes, if emotions are chemical, what are we? The fact that we *think* there must be something more than chemicals at work may indicate that there *are* other factors. So in that sense there's room for a lot more research. When we add something using

> chemical reactions-- such as some sort of new bio computer-- to robots, then we'll be getting a lot closer to humans...
>
> I don't know why, but the heroes Japanese children first identify with in manga and animation all seem to be robots. This is true of characters like Doraemon or Arare-chan, and many others. As a result, most people have implanted in their heads the idea that robots are all-powerful friends, or pals. And that's probably reflected in my manga. Also, if you go to factories in Japan today, the workers are almost all robots and this has a big impact on people, too. People here don't seem to feel much stress from science and technology (Schodt).

Noticeable here is the absence of any reliable authority figure, whether in the form of a person, an institution, or a moral code, that has the power to provide a sense of stability and belongingness to the characters, and to the people in general. A major difference between American productions and Japanese works was the absence of any censorship in Japan, combined with a lack of trust in any pre-existing authorities to navigate the country to safety.

> America’s code of comics explicitly says:
>
> (Part A Standards):
>
> 1. Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals
>
> 3. Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority...

> 9. Instances of law enforcement officers dying as a result of a criminal's activities should be discouraged...
>
> 10. The crime of kidnapping shall never be portrayed in any detail, nor shall any profit accrue to the abductor or kidnapper. The criminal or the kidnapper must be punished in every case (Daniels 1).

Meanwhile, not only did Japan have no censorship on its content, the loss of a reliable authority in real life led to a disintegration of social structures along generations, and a disenchantment in general regarding the efficiency of the Japanese government in freeing itself from vested American interests led to a panic summarized as follows:

> The otaku panic also reflects many of the contemporary concerns of social scientists about Japanese society. These are powerful concerns about social fragmentation and the contribution of the mass media and communications infrastructures to this change. Since the 1970s, intellectuals have linked their concerns about the decay of a close-knit civil society to the growth of individualism amongst younger generations of Japanese. Individualistic youth culture has been accurately associated with either the failure or the stubborn refusal of contemporary Japanese to adequately contribute to society, by carrying out their full obligations and duties to family, company and nation. The absorption of youth in amateur manga subculture in the late 1980s and 1990s was perceived by many intellectuals as a new extreme in the alienation of Japanese youth from the collective goals of society. Otaku became another rejuvanated and modernised version of the aging concept of 'youth'.
>
> Otaku came to represent a younger generation who were so intensely individualistic they had become dysfunctional. A generation of "isolated people who no longer have

> any sense of isolation." The dysfunctionality of otaku proved the unhealthy nature of individualistic lifestyles. Otaku represented new Japanese who lacked any remaining vestiges of social consciousness and were instead entirely preoccupied by their particularistic and specialist personal pastimes. Like generations of youth before them otaku were also diagnosed as suffering from Peter-pan syndrome, or the refusal to grow-up and take on adult social relations. Ueno Chizuko, the leading feminist theorist, pressed this theory that amateur manga genres reflect the infantilism of young people, asking "Do the yaoi girls and Lolicom boys really have a future?" Without social roles, otaku had no fixed identities, no fixed gender roles, and no fixed sexuality. Ultimately, otaku represented a youth who had become so literally anti-social they were unable to communicate or have social relationships with other people at all. The independence of amateur manga subculture from the rest of society, and its growth on the back of new media technologies available to the public, made it an appropriate focus for this sense of chaos and declining control over the organisation and communication of younger generations (Kinsella).

Resistance to American involvement in Japan has also taken the form of a reverse portrayal of the former in anime. Unlike American projections of paranoia that result in villainizing the Japanese, Americans are reduced to buffoonery in many anime, including the notable *Patlabor,* whereAmericans are made fun of, although subtly. *Patlabor II,* a mecha movie by Masami Yuki centres on a group of police officers who use giant manned robots, called “Labours”, for heavy construction, where the protagonist Tsuge Yukihito leads the Japanese forces against hostile forces, who kill all Labours and gravely injure Tsuge. The final scene shows Tsuge crawl out of the hatch of his ruined machine, apparently being the only survivor, in the backdrop of a giant stone Buddha, cracked and overgrown by vines, a reminder of the end of al great civilizations with time.

Patlabor II was produced in the wake of a political debate in the mid-1980s, that put Japan in an uncomfortable position regarding its role in the post-war era. Now technologically advanced and prosperous in the wake of hard work in the pursuit of national goals and under the peace of American-Soviet Cold War, Japan was asked by the United Nations to reevaluate its responsibilities towards the world, which called for a renegotiation of an assortment of issues, such as American dependency on Japanese technology, Japanese trade deficit with the USA, and a possibility of Japanese participation in the UN Peacekeeping forces, along with putting an increased responsibility on Japan for maintenance of its own Defence Forces, which it had been forced to so far denounce after its defeat in WW II.

This naturally prompted a discussion of the role of Japan in WW II, where many Asian countries egged Japan to publicly discuss its military past, an area Japan was uncomfortable with. However, this was demanded as a price by other Asian countries in exchange of economic cooperation (Finn 125, Pyle 133-134). Moreover, the USA and Europe found it convenient to selectively remember Japanese war history in order to contain its economic prowess, and forget it when required for purposes like convincing Japan to the UN initiative (Tamamoto 6-8).

In *Patlabor II*, Oshii engages with this reflection and critique of Japan's post-war international position in the wake of concurrent political events, employing a strong anti-American rhetoric, as it discusses the necessity of Japan's increased participation in global affairs and taking charge of its own military, and ending in a nationalist stance. Oshii's works are, at best, ambiguous towards pinpointing specific answers, within a central theme he raises. Known for his sophisticated camera techniques, his treatment of Tokyo is particularly noteworthy in its ambiguity, as in one scene, the shot of white birds flying over Tokyo's

desolate urban areas suggest the chasm between humans and nature, while in another scene, Tokyo is the object of fascination, full of intensity, promise and life. As with his cinematographic technique, there is ambiguity in the questions raised thematically as well.

As opposed to the human-machine identity conflict raised in *Ghost in the Shell*, the identity under question in this futuristic cyberpunk narrative is that of a national identity fraught in a political debate, centred in a monologue reflecting on war, asking "Why do we fight?" Far from a jingoistic national instinct to protect its honour, the anime introspects on war without either condemning or glorifying it. The war scenes themselves, though ambiguous in its moral tone, has no heroic figures, and Tsuge's final efforts result in a

Figure 3.6: Patlabor II: Goto and the Yokohama Bay Bridge

physical and ideological paralysis, reminiscent of Japan's oscillation between guilt and fear in the post-war period.

Evocative of the war-torn Japan, the narrator's monologue in the backdrop of Goto and the damaged Yokohama Bay Bridge in response to Arakawa's comment that the war has already begun, and the question is how it will end, is reflective of this paralysis:

You as a policeman, Goto, me as an SDF officer, what is it that we are trying to protect?

[Image of Goto standing solemnly against the background of the bombed bridge and gray skies]

It's been half-a-century since the last war and you and I have never had the experience of real war since we were born. Peace? Is it peace we should protect?

[Image of gray skies with industry in the background]

If so, what in the world is peace for this country, for this city?

[Various images of dilapidated industry]

Once we put all our strength into war only to be defeated. Then the Americans came with their occupation policy. And then there was the Cold War and wars by proxy under the nuclear deterrent. Even now in most of the world there are civil wars again and again. There are also ethnic clashes and armed disputes. We live in a bloodstained economic prosperity that is comprised of and supported by numerous wars of this kind. This is the contents of our peace!

[Images of grain elevators and silos]

It's a peace that we maintain at any price, no matter what it's really like, just because we fear war. Our peace is an unjust peace. We simply supply the money while other countries pay the real price for war. And we continue to divert our eyes from the truth of this foul [kinakusai] peace.

What this monologue achieves is not a questioning of war, but a questioning of the nature of peace in Japan, and the expression of guilt of the price other countries have to pay for Japanese peace, interrupted by Goto's pacifist proclamation that "unjust peace is still better than a just war", followed by Arakawa's monologue,

I understand your dislike of "just" war. Only a fool would support a just war. Our history libraries are full of examples of people who have been deceived by their leaders into fighting so-called just wars.

[Image of the sea against gray skies with a solemn buoy and industry in the background. Immediately followed by an image of an airplane against gray skies]

But as you probably already know, the line between just war and unjust peace is not very clear. And since the word peace has become a lie, we cannot believe in our own peace. War is born of peace and still peace is born of war. This is simply a passive and empty peace just because there is no war at the moment.

[Image of seagulls flying over the sea on a gray background with a ship on the horizon]

But before long the world will be filled with real war. Haven't you ever thought about that?

[Again, images of steel industry against gray skies]

We've shrewdly enjoyed the benefits of war, contained within our television screens in which the front line is simply a game of offense and defense, while pretending to forget that it is real war. If we continue with this self-deception, sooner or later we will be greatly punished.

In this city everybody can be like a god. From our armchairs we can know all kinds of reality through the media even while we can't really touch it. We are in fact very ignorant gods. If God can't do something, humans will try. If we can catch up to him [Tsuge], we will understand this before long.

[Image of heron flying over ocean]

Implicit in this monologue is a sense of contentment, as well as interrogation of the value of Japan's technological achievements, and a call for action. This is especially important in the wake of later events, when the conservative politician Ozawa Ichiro opposed the pacifist ideology and reframed the role of Japan in the international scene to make it more responsible for global peace, towards greater openness.

Moreover, Tsuge, towards the end, recites a passage from the Bible, which also happens to be the computer code program that he releases over Tokyo:

> Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth?
> I tell you, Nay; but rather division:
> For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided,
> three against two, and two against three.
> The father shall be divided against the son,
> and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter,
> and the daughter against the mother;
> the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law,
> and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

The passage is Jesus's prophetic warning to the Pharisees,against narrow beliefs, exhorting them to open their eyes.In a way, the anime centres on creating a sense of unity nationalism and national identity for Japan, based on its imagined Other, the USA, in the context of the Japanese-US political relations, which Naoki Sakai calls "a schema of co-figuration" (Sakai, "Translation," 51-52).

Built upon Zen, Shinto and Buddhist philosophies, Japanese cyberpunk rarely, if ever, expounds upon a global future, instead ruminating over the ways in which old frameworks of thought would be juxtaposed with new frameworks of existence.

The notion of transience, one of the 'three marks of existence' in Buddhism is time and again visible in Major Motoko Kusanagi's philosophical ramblings in *Ghost in the Shell* (1995): "[t]here are a remarkable number of things needed to make an individual what they are…. And simultaneously confining 'me' within set limits." She further claims to see 'hope' within the darkness of the sea: "As I float up to the surface I almost feel as though I could change into something else", culminating in the profound message delivered by the Puppet Master, "to be human is to continually change. Your desire to remain as you are is what ultimately limits you."

Religious, or spiritual motifs in cyberpunk often point to a hope of "regeneration", in the form of philosophical ramblings, or plot devices. Appleseed shows "artificially augmented human clones (bioroids) are created to harmonize warring homo sapiens but are themselves positioned to be... inheritors of Earth once humanity is 'euthanazed'." This end, in anime, is not necessarily an external/sub-human entity to be battled and conquered, but an exposition of human purpose and evolution on earth.

Anime and manga show remarkable complexity in their perspective on life, where "sometimes the good guys get killed off, too", "the good guys have bad qualities and the bad guys have good", and most poignantly, "the characters in anime are human". Further, Napier says,

> Whereas American cinema participates in what I call a "dynamics of reassurance" in which happy endings are virtually guaranteed and no "good" character can die,

> Japanese animation is remarkable for its often downbeat emotional tone, emphasizing painful complexity over easy closure, grief over sadness, and world-destroying events over world-affirming ones. (Peek-a-boo 16)

This blurring of the lines of good and evil is a deeply-rooted in the cultural institutions of Japanese life, where evil, rather than an antagonist to good, is often seen as another side of the coin of life. (Price 159-160)

This interspersing of a mostly familiar, un-estranged cityscape with complex, introspective characters in a reflective stance on high technology and the social/individual repercussions of it makes it a fertile ground to engage with its central theme, the refracted anxieties of science in a country that has seen scientific disasters with a lasting impact on the individual, communal and national psyche, prompting an individual ethos that is diametrically opposite to the American values of individuality, so often glorified in classic cyberpunk, and a welcoming, yet cautious outlook on science.

Yomota notes that the themes of death and rebirth recur in Oshii's works, such as in the *Patlabor* and *Ghost in the Shell* series, with "constructions of the high capitalist era [but] are at the same time spaces brimming with the nostalgia particular to ruins" (78).

Identity, in Japanese cyberpunk, has also been characterized with a sense of alienation, or nihilism, or estrangement. Whether in *Ghost in the Shell, Patlabor II, Bubblegum Crisis,* or any cyberpunk anime, it is marked by an anxiety over the question of identity, both intrinsic, and with reference to the world around them. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is evocative of identity at multiple levels simultaneously – it is reflective of feminine identity, the changing role of women in post-war Japan, the rise of Buddhist and

Christian narratives in Japanese life and philosophy, male identity in a hypermasculine country of *samurai* and *sarariman*, and the tone of existentialist identity.

Andrew Wells Garnar observes that "Neon Genesis Evangelion is all about anxiety" and further notes that "[t]he most obvious example is Shinji's angst about his relations with his father, his mother, women in his life, friends, and EVA Unit 1" (Garnar 290). He does this as a reference to the internal anxiety, out of context with the external anxiety discussed by Tang Zhenzhao regards the uncertainty of the Angels as symbolic of the Japanese anxiety after two major incidents of the time – the Great Hanshin earthquake and the Tokyo subway sarin attack by Aum Shinrikyo, as he summarizes Japanese critic Eiji Otsuka (Zhenzhao 243). From 1985, following an economic depression from which Japan failed to emerge, the earthquake and the attack triggered a nationwide panic, while simultaneously opening up a new market overseas for manga and anime, a phenomenon which greatly profited the universal acclaim of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.

Timothy Iles concludes, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* "is an extended and powerful exploration of the individual and society, informed by Existentialism and wrapped in a post-apocalyptic 'techtopia'" (1). This techtopia, he says, can be interpreted as either a utopia where Japan can resolve critical situations through judicious use of advanced technology, or a dystopia where only the subjective mind can bethe sole authority capable of turning around the situation. In Episode 7, Akagi Ritsuko, a scientist of NERV is asked by military personnel, "Do you really think that science and the willingness of a person can suppress that monster?" She said, "Sure."

A core part of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* was the 'Human Instrumentality Project', that aimed to emancipate humans from their bodies by merging their consciousness. Garnar comments that it was an attempt to resolve a situation where "humanity can no longer

evolve," and "humans will remain sad, isolated organisms" and "are faced with the hollowness of the human endeavor" (293).

Consequently,

> Humans lose their individual bodies, which is the ultimate form of falling in to Heidegger's "the They." Everyone is forced into this "single, consummate being," without any possibility of escape, either in the sense of opting out or retaining the capacity to be anxious. [...] Faced with pain and alienation, SEELE opts, in a very undemocratic manner, to end a distinctive human sort of evolution in favour of a collective existence (Neon).

While on one hand it offers a chance to free oneself of all human conundrums and yet be one with the whole of humanity in a symbiotic manner, Garmar notes that it is simultaneously an organization whose leaders have no interest in the autonomy of the said subjects. Shinji, who is finally in charge of making the decision for himself and the whole of humanity, regards himself as "less than heroic", in the words of Susan J. Napier (Machines 425). In Laura Taylor's interpretation, "Shinji is the hero who longs not to be the hero" (79).

Mary Warnock asserts that Sartre's existentialist thought is marked by "treatment of the concrete and the particular," a "matter of method," and "treatment of the key concept of human freedom." (Being and Nothingness xi).

Both Sartre and Anno have, at the centre of their works, a deep reflection on nothingness, or emptiness, which becomes the basis of their concept of "human freedom." The ruminations of the characters are often more nihilistic, than existentialist, as they contemplate on the meaninglessness and emptiness of existence. For instance, in Episode 14, Rei Ayanami says,

> What is human? Is it something that God created? Or is it something that human created with each other? What I own are life, something in my heart, and a cockpit. They are the seat of soul. Who is this? This is me. Who am I? What am I? What am I? What am I? What am I? I am the self. I am a self, such an object, and am the appearance that the self constituted through itself. I can see me, but I don't think it is me. There is a weird feeling that my body begins to dissolve. I am nearly unable to figure it out. My appearance gradually elapses. I can feel someone who is not me.

Rei, it is important to note, is a pilot of the EVA, as well as a clone made from Shinji's mother. Anno further develops the note of the question of identity in the characters:

> Who? Is it me? The me in EVA? No, I feel that that person is not me, but someone else. Who are youindeed? An Angel? The object that we call Angel?Do you want to be a one with me?No. I am me, but not you.This's true, but you cannot get on time.I will share my heart with you. I will share this feeling with you. Painful? Isn't it? Your heart is painful?Painful? No, no. Lonely?Yes, you are lonely.Lonely? I don't know.You don't like being on your own, right? Because there are so many of us, you hate being on your own.This is called "loneliness"?This is your heart – the sorrowful heart that is yours.

The monologue starts with Rei questioning her essence, gradually developing into a conversation with her split self.

Shinji is made to realize the importance of self-existence, after Shinji's vision of an ideal world is narrated, pointing to the director's call of creating a self that is in touch with the realities of the world without blindfolding it with imagined selves:

> Yes. It is also a world. It is the possibility in me. The "I" at present is not me. It is possible to have a different self to exist. Right. I can exist even though I am not a pilot of Evangelion. If it is so, the real world is absolutely not bad. Perhaps the real world is not bad, but I just hate myself. [...] I hate myself, but maybe I can like myself. Maybe it is good for me to stay here. Right. This can just be me. I am me. I want to be me! I want to stay here! I can stay here.

Shinji eventually chooses to reject the "Human Instrumentality Project", which could make him lose any perception of individual existence by merging with the consciousness of scores of other similar beings, when he sees possibility of finding meaning in existence. His choice to "be" an individual, leads to the eventual failure of the project.

Neon Genesis Evangelion, in its depiction of this existential angst and emphasis on freedom, reflexivity, human autonomy and the universality of hopelessness, weakness, emptiness, and the possibility of self-discovery in an existential crisis, resounded allegorically to a vast number of Japanese struggling through a period of crisis for both personal, and national identity.

Japanese cyberpunk, hence, seems to have a markedly different view of itself in a cyberpunk future than American cyberpunk. It is clear that except for a few markers of cyberpunk, such as the setting of a near -future, advanced technology that complicates the wholesomeness of the organic body and prompts a restructuring of our understanding of life, and an overhaul in the known aspects of human life and identity, such as the self, the community and humanity itself, the two cyberpunks have very little in common.

Apparently, the four Cs on which Bonner's definition of cyberpunk rests, is rendered invalid, and yet, the works are unarguably cyberpunk. This prompts a new question regarding

the canonization of the genre cyberpunk as the West has defined it. The question arises, therefore, whether the common definition of cyberpunk as delineated in the introductory chapter, on the internet, as well as the one commonly agreed upon by eminent scholars, is nothing but a Western hegemonic definition of the genre, in which Japan and its contribution to the genre have yet again been Othered? A more detailed discussion of this shall be taken up in the final chapter.

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