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Global Cyberpunk: Reclaiming Utopia in Japanese Cyberpunk Film

Special Issue of SFFTV
Screening Utopia in Dystopian Times
Edited by Leimar Garcia-Siino and Sean Guynes

Abstract

This article examines the connections between 1960s student protests, particularly the occupation of The University of Tokyo in 1968-1969, and 1980s cyberpunk film in Japan. I argue that these films, while critical of the student movement, aim to reclaim and transform the utopian spirit that motivated them. Using the global 1960s framework, I situate Japanese cyberpunk film within the wider debates of this decade, particularly those concerning personal liberation and affluence. Using Tom Moylan’s concept of the critical dystopia, I demonstrate that utopian thinking does not disappear after 1968 in Japan but undergoes metamorphosis in these films.

Keywords: global 1960s, cyberpunk, utopia, critical dystopia, Japan, *Tetsuo*

> Why are those who wish most to be human regarded as those who are the most inhuman? Let us put up a good fight until the revolution.
> – Slogan written on a wall inside Yasuda Hall during the 1968 occupation (Sawara 160)

> We understand utopia as a method rather than a goal […] Utopian acts do not, for us, exist solely in an imagined future. These acts are acts of imagination but they are also acts of protest, resistance, occupation, organisation and solidarity - acts which insist on the possibility of another world in the present. (Stone and Kabo 1)

Introduction

In Japan, the 1960s was a decade of intense struggle. The decade began with the 313-day Miike Mine strike, where workers protested against massive job cuts, and simultaneous widespread protests against the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty (often abbreviated as Anpo) (Gordon 276-278). As the decade progressed, there were several more of what Marxist theorists would call ‘revolutionary ruptures’ (see Harrison). The peak of these occurred dramatically in 1968, as Students from the University of Tokyo formed a Zenkyoto (All-Campus Joint Struggle Council) and barricaded their university, declaring it a liberated zone (Oguma 3). Originally stemming from a dispute over the internship system in the medical department, the number of occupiers grew into the thousands and protests spread to hundreds of campuses around Japan (Sawara 136; Oguma 3). Accordingly, the demands of the protesters grew in scope as they began critiquing the purpose of education in society, the consequences of rapid economic growth and calling for outright revolution (Sawara 142-143). Students armed themselves with construction helmets and metal pipes or bits of wood while barricading the campus with furniture, barbed wire, and bamboo stakes. As the occupation progressed, student factions began to fight against each other as violently as they did the police. The situation continued for almost a year before the government pressured the university administration into allowing riot police onto the campus. After an 11-hour, highly televised battle with the police, protesters were finally dislodged from Yasuda Auditorium, a famous landmark symbolising the prestige of the university and the students' last holdout (Sawara 146-147, 148, 158; Oguma 4-5).

These events can be viewed as forming part of the global 1960s, a term that emerges from recent scholarship and historiography surrounding the 1960s. As Timothy Scott and Andrew Lison point out, the concept of a 'global 1960s' aims to move beyond a previously narrow academic focus on '1968' by acknowledging that the events of that year were the 'tip of the iceberg' in a longer decade of 'antiauthoritarian upheaval' where the 'peaks and valleys' of notable activity varied in different countries (Scott and Lison 2). Reflecting on the origins of the term at the turn of the twenty-first Century, Martin Klimke and Mary Nolan acknowledge that it builds on the work of previous historians who have expanded the focus from 1968, a single moment, to the 'long sixties' encompassing a wider series of events (Chen et al. 5). Furthermore, citing Eric Zolov, they argue that the term 'global 1960s' attempts to understand 'local change within transnational frameworks', examining global links and encounters both real and imagined (Chen at al. 4). Similarly, Tamara Chaplin and Jadwiga Pieper Mooney argue that the term 'de-centres' events within Europe and the United States during the 1960s and constitutes a challenge to 'traditional understandings of centres and peripheries' (Chaplin and Pieper Mooney 2). In short, the term aims to challenge Eurocentric approaches to the 1960s. It seeks to examine both the events of the 1960s in other national contexts and aims to map the global networks of connections, encounters and influences within which protesters, artists and individuals existed. Not only does this approach examine how the centre influences the periphery, but it explores the ways in which periphery talks back to the centre, blurring the boundaries between the two. This article places itself within this framework, considering the events of the Japanese 1960s, and later responses to them in 1980s sf film, within both a local and global context. While my familiarity with the Japanese language is very limited, and my bibliography reflects this, I follow this global history approach to demonstrate how these events and films encounter and interact with global influences and debates.

As with other protest movements of the global 1960s, in Japan the 1970s saw a decline in mass activism. By 1985, the 25th anniversary of the 1960 Anpo protests, questions were being asked over the long-term legacy of the 1960s demonstrations (Krauss 95). In 1985, Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had been in power throughout the 1960s, remained in government and had only shifted further to the right. On the surface, Japan in the 1980s had become more conservative, more technologically developed, and more middle-class (95). While, as Ellis Krauss argues, very few articles within the Japanese intellectual and popular publications reflected upon or commemorated this anniversary (95), I would argue that the imperative questions and energies of the 1960s radicals were taken up by a new generation of Japanese sf (SF) film directors in the 1980s. Specifically, my analysis focuses on *Burst City* (Ishii, Japan, 1982), *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (Tsukamoto, Japan, 1989) and *√964 Pinocchio* (Fukui, Japan, 1991). These films support the aims and assertions of this special issue: utopian thinking did not disappear with the emergence of post-1970s neo-liberal globalisation and neither is such thinking exclusive to the West.

To explain this shift, from mass, violent street protest to cultural resistance, I turn to Howard Caygill and his philosophy of resistance. As Caygill asserts there is 'never a pure moment of resistance, but always a reciprocal play of resistances' with 'resistance and counter-resistance responding to each other in surrendering or seizing the initiative' (5). Thus, resistance and activism take a different form when the state appears dominant and hegemonic—during

Japan's economic boom years in the 1980s—than when it appears illegitimate or unstable, following the questions of legitimacy and sovereignty raised by the Anpo treaty in the 1960s. Therefore, these films might be read, using Caygill's words, as part of a dynamic resistance 'in terms of the preservation or enhancement of the capacity to resist' (4). Coming largely out of the newly emerging, largely student-led, Japanese punk scene, the SF films these directors made seek to critique, transform and preserve the utopian activism of the 1960s throughout the more conservative 1980s. In a period of renewed hegemony, they work to maintain the motivating utopian impulse of street protest through cultural means. The breakdown of unity between the student-youth and unionised workers at the Miike Strike and the utopian demands for social change that fuelled the university occupations—along with dramatic images of these events which were reproduced and circulated by the media—find echoes in these three films.

Ishii, Tsukamoto, and Fukui, as directors, are often associated with Japanese cyberpunk. In the West, cyberpunk is a mode of sf most commonly associated either with the works of authors such as William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and Rudy Rucker, or films produced by large studios, such as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott US/HK 1982) and *The Matrix* (Wachowski Siblings US/Australia 1999). A few films from Japan, most prominently the anime *Akira* (Otomo Japan 1988) and *Ghost in the Shell* (Oshii Japan/UK 1995), have also formed part of the cyberpunk canon. One of the most comprehensive works on Japanese cyberpunk film and TV is Steven Brown's book *Tokyo Cyberpunk* (2010), in which the author writes extensively on cyberpunk film in Japan. Brown's work mainly focuses on media produced through the studio system, overlooking, outside of *Tetsuo*, the contribution of numerous independent filmmakers to the cyberpunk movement. Indeed, *Burst City* one of the earliest Japanese cyberpunk films, was released in the same year as *Blade Runner* but is much lower budget and relies heavily on a do-it-yourself punk aesthetic. Other films, including *Tetsuo, Death Powder* (Izumiya, Japan, 1989), and *√964 Pinocchio* were likewise made with a small budget and found limited domestic commercial success. In some regards, these works might be considered outliers within Japan's 1980/90s sf culture, especially when compared with the more commercialised Otaku subculture that emerged in the same period.[1] However, certain key themes from these films—including metamorphosis; the tension between individualism and collectivism; and the boundary between the self and the other—find resonance in several more prominent works of Japanese cyberpunk, particularly in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Japan 1995-96), *Serial Experiments Lain* (Japan 1998) and *Paprika* (Kon Japan 2006).

While cyberpunk often portrays spaces of decay and the subcultures who inhabit them on the margins of technologically advanced societies, the boundaries of what constitutes cyberpunk are notably fluid and diffuse. In a re-appraisal of the genre, Carlen Lavigne writes that the 'borders and affiliations' of cyberpunk have always been 'indistinct' producing a 'fragmented' and 'multi-faceted sub-genre of sf' (9). Furthermore, in more recent scholarship, Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink quote Thomas Foster's argument that cyberpunk has become a 'cultural formation' and should be regarded as 'a historical articulation of textual practices', or cultural mode, rather than a subgenre (2). Their approach aims to study 'cyberpunk's diversity and far-reaching influence', moving beyond the canonical definitions of writers such as Sterling (2). Likewise, Victoria Blake argues that cyberpunk was 'never really about a specific technology and or a specific moment in time' but was an 'aesthetic position… an attitude towards mass culture and pop culture… a way of living' (10). This approach allows the themes and debates of cyberpunk to be identified in varied texts from a range of different cultural contexts. Meaning, the films under discussion here can be interpreted as part of the wider cultural mode that cyberpunk constitutes.

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[1] The emergence of Otaku subculture in Japan, and to a lesser extent in the US, is detailed comprehensively in Hiroki Azuma's book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (2001).

As with the framework of the global 1960s, we can speak of cyberpunk as a global phenomenon, rather than one limited to Europe and North America. The recent *Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture* (2019) offers significant support for such a claim, examining Cyberpunk media and movements from Japan, India, Latin America and Germany among others. Along with Steven Brown, the writings of cultural critic Takayuki Tatsumi also move towards a global perspective on Japanese cyberpunk. In a 1992 essay titled 'The Japanese Reflection of Mirrorshades,' and in his book *Full Metal Apache* (2006), Tatsumi examines the links and encounters between cyberpunk writers and artists in Japan and the Anglosphere. Tatsumi's work details not only the thematic connections between cyberpunk writers and artists, but he also provides details about how their works travel, transmit and are translated across cultures. However, while Tatsumi does acknowledge *Tetsuo*, independent film is largely absent from his analysis. Within the West, the influence of the events of the 1960s in Europe and North America on cyberpunk is well documented. Bruce Sterling in *Mirrorshades* (1986) cites the New Wave writers (e.g. Samuel Delany, J.G Ballard and Michael Moorcock) and the counterculture of the 1960s as being formative influences on the cyberpunk writers he anthologises (x, xii). Similar points are made in Scott Bukatman's *Terminal Identity* (1993) which links cyberpunk's literary and visual style to the Vietnam War and Michael Herr's account of the conflict in *Dispatches* (1977) (146).

From Japanese cyberpunk as a genre, I have specifically selected *Burst City,Tetsuo* and *√964 Pinocchio* not only due to their resonance with the events of the 1960s but because as films, while on the surface bleak and dystopian, they are strong examples of what Tom Moylan terms 'critical dystopia.' Moylan describes the critical dystopia, drawing on the works of Raffaella Baccolini and Lyman Tower Sargent, as a work that 'reject[s] the conservative dystopian tendency to settle for anti-utopian closure' (189). Instead, such dystopias 'adopt a militant stance that is informed by a utopian horizon that appears in the text—or at least shimmers beyond its final pages' (196). A critical dystopia is a dystopian text which does not end with resignation or capitulation to the status quo. Instead, the critical dystopia aims to indicate the strategies and practices which might move us beyond dystopia and open a path towards utopia. In other words, the critical dystopia is process orientated and rejects any textual or political closure. Using this definition, Moylan argues that the works of Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, and Lewis Shiner—all considered key cyberpunk authors—are dystopias of resignation, capitulating to the logic of neoliberal capitalism rather than 'blasting through it' (197). Instead, Moylan highlights the works of Emma Bull, Sherri Lewitt, and Laura Mixon, all feminist cyberpunk writers who have received less acclaim within the genre, as bearers of cyberpunk's potential radicalism and as textual predecessors of the critical dystopia (198). Moylan then charts the progress of the critical dystopia as a genre through the cyberpunk-inspired works of Kim Stanley Robinson, Octavia Butler, and Marge Piercy.

My analytical framework is also inspired by a recent special issue of *Studies in Arts and Humanities*. In their editorial, the guest editors, Katie Stone and Raphael Kabo follow the arguments of Ruth Levitas in *Utopia as Method* (2013), viewing utopia as process and practice, something immediate, rather than a distant goal. Furthering Levitas's ideas, Stone and Kabo argue that there is an intimate connection between utopia and activism: the two exist in a mutual symbiosis—without action utopia is unthinkable; without the vision of a better world there can be no action (1). It is this provocation that inspires the aim of this article examining the connections between 1960s student protests and 1980s cyberpunk in Japan. Drawing on Moylan, Levitas, and Stone and Kabo, this article views utopia as both a mode of thinking and a moment of disruption or insurrection. Utopia is a means of thinking beyond the constraints of the present, it is prefigurative, and shows us the possibility of a better world. In this sense, I aim to further our understanding of the critical dystopia by focusing on texts that not only offer us the 'shimmering' promise of a utopian tomorrow but actively seek to manifest utopia within

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their dystopian presents. I argue that these Japanese cyberpunk films attempted to reclaim and transform the utopian demands of 1960s activists. These films also explore ways of living, being and relating to others in the present that demands lived utopia *now* rather than as a future or abstract political project.

The Insurrections of *Burst City*

The first and earliest film I analyse is Sogo Ishii's 1982 film *Burst City*. This film solidified many of the motifs and techniques that characterised Japanese cyberpunk. His third feature film, *Burst City* was, at the time, Ishii's most ambitious film drawing on several years of short film-making. Ishii's path towards being a director was itself disruptive. Most Japanese directors rise gradually through the studio system, first taking on roles as assistant directors before climbing the ranks to director. By the late 1970s this studio system was beginning to break down and assistant directors were rarely hired, creating a significant barrier to entry for aspiring film-makers (Mes and Sharp 67). In response to a lack of opportunities in mainstream commercial film, many young directors turned to independent cinema (Mes and Sharp 67). Ishii, for example, began directing films while still a student and became a regular figure in the emerging Japanese punk music scene, directing music videos for several bands, including The Stalin and The Roosters, both of which appeared in Burst City (Mes and Sharp 69).

Ishii's punk influence is on full display in *Burst City*. The film is set in an apocalyptic looking near future which was largely shot in disused warehouses and abandoned factories. This visual aesthetic of urban and industrial decay responds to anxieties over pollution and environmental degradation caused by rapid industrial growth, which had become a persistent part of Japanese social consciousness since late the 1960s and continued throughout the 1970s (Tipton 187; Gordon 283). This aesthetic uses the imagery of dystopia to create a vision of the future that appears, on the surface, bleak and hopeless. In an interview, Ishii cites the work of J.G. Ballard as an influence on his films (Mes and Sharp 72). The *mise-en-scène* of *Burst City* evokes the landscape of Ballard's experimental novel *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970). *Burst City* visualises Ballard's 'landscape of highways' in a 'deserted city: terrain of shacks and filling stations' with 'overhead wires like some forgotten algebra of the sky' (28, 67). The film follows two rough narrative threads. In one, a subculture of punks live in the wasteland of these industrial ruins by day and hold energetic concerts and drag races by night, often clashing violently with the 'battle police'. In the other, a biker, dressed in metal armour with a metal cyborg hand, rides through city streets and Ballardian abandoned highways. The biker, and his companion with whom he seems to have a close, almost homoerotic relationship, are later forced to work on the site of a new nuclear power plant, the construction of which is being opposed by the punk subculture.

Burst City revels in its portrayal of grime and violence with long fight scenes and equally drawn out shots of the punks' daily life squatting in the ruins of old factories. Along with the concrete novels of Ballard, this focus on the outskirts of the post-industrial city also prefigures the work of William Gibson in *Neuromancer* (1984) with its 'hundred-year old industrial parks ringing the old core of Atlanta' (57). *Neuromancer* was not published in Japan until 1985, however Ishii noted the affinity or, in Tatsumi's words, 'simultaneous happenings' between his and Gibson's work (370). Furthermore, Ishii met with and discussed a potential collaboration with Gibson during his trip to Japan in 1988 (370). This indicates that Ishii was engaged with the Western cyberpunk movement and demonstrates the convergent development of cyberpunk in Japan. In this sense, although Ishii's *Burst City* predates the formalisation of cyberpunk into a movement in the West, it still functions as a cyberpunk text. For example, in *Burst City* Ishii shifts the focus of sf onto those who live out of the decay and rubble of advanced industrial societies, an approach similar to that taken by Scott in *Blade Runner* and Gibson in his famous Sprawl Trilogy.

Figure 1. Punks live out of an abandoned building in *Burst City.* Discotek Media. 2006

Beyond aesthetics, there are two other immediately striking aspects to *Burst City*'s visual style. By using this unique visual style, Ishii pushes the boundaries of what is traditionally considered cyberpunk, and it is this style that allows us to draw out *Burst City*'s radical politics. Firstly, it is notable just how many people are often on screen at once. In the riot and party scenes each shot seems crowded with people who almost seem to spill out of the frame. To highlight the collaborative nature of the film, the names of all these extras are listed in the closing credits (Mes and Sharp 77). Secondly, during such scenes the camera is shaken and spun, disorientating the audience. The perspective of the camera, and the viewer, is placed directly within the crowd as the image begins to blur into a kaleidoscope of colour and sound. This use of shaky-cam with fast cuts, furthers echoes the aesthetics of *The Atrocity Exhibition* and its rapid series of, what Ballard described as, condensed novels that cut and shift quickly. As Tom Mes and Jasper Sharp identify the combination of these techniques gives the film a 'carnivalesque atmosphere' (77). As Mikhail Bakhtin writes, the carnival allows its participants, 'for a time,' to enter a 'utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance,' providing 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order' (9, 10). This offers one way of interpreting the punk-concert scenes in *Burst City.* As the camera quickly shakes during these scenes, individual faces blur and become lost representing a rejection of individualism and an embrace of community and collectivism. The film also explicitly puts itself in conflict with the ideology and values of consumer capitalism. During an early scene in the film, shots of everyday life and violence on dark, run-down and neon-lit streets are juxtaposed with shots of dancing as characters chant: 'Everything is so abundant, it only makes us grow fatter… Everything is so abundant, it makes nothing stand out… suffering from no worry is painfully luxurious. Everything is too dull.' These lyrics explicitly critique the economic policy of Japan's post-war economic miracle and the perceived boredom that arises as neoliberalism atomises individuals, replacing community with the abundance of consumer goods. In response, *Burst City* portrays groups of punks living outside the boundaries of dominant society, literally living out of the waste and wreckage of capitalism.

This image of a new community 'emerging out of the shell of the old' provokes connections with Hakim Bey's concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (often abbreviated as TAZ) (111). Bey describes the TAZ in a 1991 book of the same name and the concept attained popularity in the 1990s. Like the carnival, the TAZ is temporary in nature. As Bey describes, the TAZ is a tactic for historical periods where direct confrontation with the state can only lead to violence and martyrdom. In response, the TAZ seeks the temporary liberation of 'an area (of land, of time, of imagination)', which then 'dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen before the state can crush it' (99). Rather than privilege failed attempts at revolution which often provoke violent state repression, like the events at Tokyo University in 1968, Bey privileges moments and forms of 'insurrection' and uprising, into which he categorises bands, festivals and 'urban nomads' (98-100, 102-104).

Burst City, at first, seems to follow this shift away from revolutionary politics. The late-night parties of *Burst City*'s punks constitute a form of TAZ, momentarily offering freedom from the constraints of consumer capitalism, before disappearing to hide in factory ruins once the police or daybreak arrives. The film attempts to capture what Bey describes as 'the essence of the party: face-to-face, a group of humans synergise their efforts to realise mutual desires' (104). This sense of revelry in the moment of insurrection is most strikingly demonstrated when the lead singer of The Stalin, a punk band who appear in the film, throws a pig's head at a group

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of riot police. An almost surreal image, the throwing of the pig's head represents a violent rejection of the fat and abundance of capitalism. As he throws the head, Michiro Endo's face is twisted into an almost demonic expression of anger, pleasure and glee representing a carnivalesque moment of inversion alongside the new desires and freedoms offered by the TAZ.

Burst City's focus on these temporary and carnivalesque spaces of autonomy within a world characterised as dystopian is significant. As Lyman Tower Sargent argues, within the critical dystopia as long as one 'eutopian enclave' still 'holds out' there is hope 'that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with eutopia' (qtd Moylan 195). Such enclaves within dystopia function to preserve the capacity for hope and insist on the possibility of change. This indicates that, despite the film's bleak aesthetic, *Burst City* seeks to find a utopian way of being within dystopia as well as a way beyond it. With their focus on pleasure and Carnival, these punk enclaves are not only future orientated but also are an example of what Davina Cooper terms utopian prefiguration. Cooper defines this as a form of political practice where groups or individuals act 'as if the world sought, or some aspect of it, was already in place', rather than 'channelling political energy into the operations of government' (Cooper). If we interpret the activities of *Burst City*'s punks and their subcultural enclave through this framework, we can see that they insist upon and actively seek to perform a different way of living within a dystopian present.

Figure 2. Michiro Endo throws a pig's head in *Burst City*. Discotek Media. 2006

The tensions between individualism and collectivism highlighted in *Burst City* also relates to the legacy of Japan's 1960s student politics. In his writings on the legacy of the 1960s protests, Ellis Krauss quotes from an interview with a student leader who sought to distance the student politics of the 1960s from those of pre-war communist movements in Japan. The student argues that the 'primary motivation' of the pre-war left was the 'spirit of martyrdom' while, in contrast, post-war protesters were more concerned with the 'emancipation of themselves as human beings' (qtd Krauss 97). Krauss follows this thread and examines how the students of the 1960s often rejected or adapted orthodox Marxism through the incorporation of existentialism. This move away from collectivism echoes the students' critique of the education system as being too rigid, focusing too much on preparing students for either university entrance exams or the workplace, and repressing individuality.

In 1970 a collection of essays by left-wing students involved in the Zengakuren and Zenkyoto movements was edited and published by Stuart Dowsey.[2] In an essay on the history of the Japanese student movement, Kazuo Ikeda repeatedly criticises education that is designed not for 'the benefit of the student', or individual, but for 'the state' (14). Within his chapter notions of academic and individual freedom are emphasised as the most important aspects of education. Likewise, Yukiko Sawara, within her essay, highlights that some of the more radical, or 'Anti-Yoyogi', student factions took issue with forms of education that aim to prepare students for 'industry' and turn individuals into 'specialised slaves' (142-143).[3] The individualism of the 1960s students stood in opposition to the conformity and state-imposed collectively of the Japanese state, the education system and the authoritarian communism espoused by more mainstream left-wing groups such as the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). As Sawara writes, the JCP were highly critical of the student demonstrations, believing that they provided the state with an excuse to supress left-wing activities (173).

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[2] Zengakuren, meaning 'National Federation of Student Self-governing Associations', was the collective term for the various and diverse factions that made up the 1960s student movement.

[3] The Anti-Yoyogi factions of the Zengakuren were those who defined themselves as being radically left wing and anti-capitalist but also in opposition to the traditional Japanese Communist Party, who's headquarters was located in the Yoyogi district of Tokyo (Yutaka 100).

As historian Chelsea Szendi Schieder notes, the Zenkyoto movement ‘empathised a radically democratic organisational structure’, providing ‘an attractive alternative to the strict and hierarchical sectarian method of organizing student activism’ (145). The values of the Zenkyoto, according to Schieder, were heavily influenced by the writings of student activist Mitsuko Tokoro. Advocating ‘endless debate’, her work promoted the ideals of non-hierarchical organisation (145). However, Krauss argues that the embrace of individualism counter-intuitively played a role in the decline of mass student protest in the 1970s. Krauss posits that the fragmentation of the Zengakuren movement after the 1960s was a consequence of these individualistic values. While the students of the 1960s protested the ‘collective will, discipline, authority and self-sacrifice’ promoted within the education system, it was paradoxically these same values that led to the large-scale, dramatic and highly organised protests of the late 1960s (114). Such observations did not escape Tokoro in the 1960s: as Schieder notes, her work increasingly came to grapple with the need for collective action while retaining personal desire (145). These events and debates within Japan also reflected broader global trends. As Odd Anne Westad writes, mythologised ‘in the global imagination’, 1968 ‘was about autonomy, very often personal and individual rather than collective’ (xxii).

Figure 3. Punks and workers clash with police in *Burst City*. Discotek Media. 2006

It is these tensions and contradictions, between the individual and the collective, that *Burst City* responds to. *Burst City* recognises a need for collectivism, but also seeks to transform it. *Burst City* more fully embraces utopianism—understood as the prefigurative practice of building political alternatives—in its finale, which pushes the film into the territory of Moylan’s critical dystopia. Towards the end of the film, the two narrative threads converge and the exploited workers, led by the metal-handed cyborg, and the punks unite to battle against the battle-police and the managers behind the power plant’s construction in a climactic riot scene. This unity of youthful punks with the working class could be interpreted as a commentary on the failure of the Miike Mine strike, during which tensions emerged between the strikers and the Zengakuren students. When the Zengakuren sent a group of students to support the strike, the mine workers became frustrated with the student’s ‘provocative activities’ and were ordered out of town by the strikers (Martin 29). Within *Burst City*, Ishii portrays the police as a common enemy of both youth and worker, being both corrupt and complicit in oppression and helping to maintain poor working conditions. This takes the politics of *Burst City* away from tactics and evasions and towards confrontation. These scenes, which depict punks and workers wielding wooden batons and clubs against walls of uniformed police behind riot shields, bear a striking resemblance to photos of the 1968-9 protests. Using a sheer mass of bodies, along with improvised explosives, the rioters in *Burst City* overwhelm the ‘battle police’ and their sophisticated, futuristic-looking weaponry. In these scenes, Ishii uses his characteristic fast moving shaky-cam technique. The screen is filled with extras to the point that individuals get subsumed by the crowd. By the end of the film, the nuclear power plant’s construction is halted as the exploited workers take their revenge and the police are driven back from the city streets.

In these moments *Burst City*, to use Moylan’s terms, ceases to be a conventional dystopia where a ‘singular misfit finds allies’ and finds out ‘the ‘truth’ of the system’, but the film becomes a critical dystopia as these ‘misfits’ enter ‘collectively into outright opposition’ (xiii). The alliance between the workers and the punks moves towards embracing Moylan’s ideal of a ‘political opposition’ based on difference and multiplicity’: ‘alliance politics’ is revived within a ‘diverse collective’ (190). It is through such multiplicity that *Burst City* attempts to navigate the tensions between collectivism and individualism raised by the 1960s protests. Instead of arguing for a return to a rigid hierarchical form of collectivism, it aims to transform it through multiplicity. The diverse alliance that emerges almost spontaneously between the punks and workers, with all its on-screen chaos, echoes the hopes of 1960s activists for collective action which respects individuality (Schieder 145). Ishii's camera techniques embody a non-hierarchical spirit and attempt to enact Tokoro's endless debate, presenting the events on screen as chaotic and leaderless. This addresses the defeats of 1969 during the campus occupations: a politics of multiplicity allows collective action while preserving a sense of individualism and avoiding atomisation and fragmentation. Therefore, *Burst City* is not a dystopia of resignation but indicates the possibility of change; a 'utopian horizon,' as termed by Moylan, shimmers beyond the closing credits (196).

***Tetsuo: The Iron Man* and The Radical Potential of Queer Love**

Released in 1989, *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* is perhaps the most well-known film of the Japanese cyberpunk movement, receiving international acclaim after its showing at the 1989 Fantastic Film Festival in Rome (Mes and Sharp 147). The film was made with an extremely tight budget and its director, Shinya Tsukamoto, could not afford to pay for translated subtitles for its festival showing. Budget constraints also shaped the film's visual style, with effects being animated often in stop-motion frame by frame (145). To provide a rough synopsis, the film follows a salaryman (Tomoro Taguchi) who runs over a metal fetishist (played by Tsukamoto himself), a character who gains sexual pleasure from inserting pieces of metal into their body, with his car. After the incident the salaryman gradually begins to transform into a metal monster. With extra metallic appendages growing out of his body, his flesh enters a symbiotic relationship with the metal that consumes him. This image of metal growing and twisting like an organic plant once again recalls Gibson's *Neuromancer*. In describing Finn's workshop Gibson writes that 'the junk looked like something had grown there, a fungus of twisted metal and plastic. He could pick out individual objects, but then they seem to blur back into the mass' (63). Once again spaces of rust and industrial decay often provide the backdrop of the film, with the metal fetishists' lair and other parts of the film being set in abandoned factories reminiscent of *Burst City*.

Once more, Ballard seems to provide aesthetic inspiration, as *Tetsuo* depicts a suburban dystopia of concrete apartment buildings, underpasses, garages and highways. The washed-out, grainy and black-and-white footage of the film gives the impression that the degradation of these spaces is causing the film within the camera itself to crumble. Spaces of decay are important in Tsukamoto's films because, as Mes and Sharp write, for him 'it's this decay that holds the key to life' (148). The opening of the film shows the routine of the salaryman's life as he takes the train to work. As his metal growths begin to disrupt his routine 'pain, destruction and confrontation with death remind one of what it feels like to be alive, much more than the daily grind does' (148). This interpretation is one which resonates with the values of the punks in *Burst City*: life under consumer capitalism is boring and creates, as Ernst Bloch writes, 'unfulfilled subjects' who have an 'appetite' for desires which capitalism cannot fill (75). Despite the abundance of post-war Japan, only superficial hungers can be filled.

This feeling, of being unfulfilled within an affluent society, provided the groundwork for another key global 1960s debate. In 1967 activists, academics and artists from across the world converged in London for 'The Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation,' with the talks later being collected and published in a book titled *The Dialectics of Liberation* (Cooper 7). As David Cooper outlines in the book's introduction, the Congress concerned itself with how, under the conditions of material 'affluence' in the 'First World,' 'personal liberation' and the merger of 'inner' and 'outer reality' might be achieved (10). Notably, Herbert Marcuse, an academic whose work found deep resonance in the 1960s counterculture, presented a talk titled 'Liberation from the Affluent Society.' Drawing from his earlier book *One Dimensional Man* (1961), Marcuse argues that until we see 'the emergence of new needs and satisfactions' social change will only 'replace one system of servitude' with another (178). While Tsukamoto may not have been familiar with the work of this congress when he directed *Tetsuo*, he was, as with Ishii, likely aware of such debates through the work of J.G. Ballard. Ballard's work was frequently translated and published in *Hayakawa's Sf Magazine*, one of Japan's most famous SF publications (Takayuki 86). Furthermore, Ballard achieved notoriety in the Japanese SF scene when at a 1982 SF convention he called upon the Japanese SF community to critique US culture by doing 'Pearl Harbour' in their imaginations (Tatsumi 91). Ballard, as he writes in his introduction to *Crash* (1973), was intimately concerned with 'inner space': 'that psychological domain… where the inner world of the mind and the outer world of reality meet and fuse' (7).

One interpretation of these metal growths in *Tetsuo* is that they symbolise the invasive and prevalent introduction of technology into daily life in post-industrial capitalism. One reading of *Tetsuo* would be that it reflects fears and anxieties around new digital technologies, as Japan rapidly became a global leader in the development of consumer technologies in the 1980s (Tipton 194-195). The 1980s in Japan also saw an intensified culture of overwork and academics such as Takaaki Yoshimoto increasingly questioned the country's pursuit of materialism over the liberation of subjective desires (Gordon 305). In this reading, we could consider the metal growths as a metaphor for the shackles of overwork, which eventually come to disrupt the home life of the salaryman with his girlfriend (Kei Fujiwara). However, such a reading would not account for the fact that, within the film, this process of transformation is presented as both pleasurable and seductive. The metal fetishist gains pleasure from the penetration of metal into flesh, and the salaryman has dreams of being penetrated by his girlfriend with a vacuum pipe. Erotic imagery is rife in the film: in one scene the salaryman's penis transforms into a giant mechanical drill and in another scene that is portrayed as auto-erotic he electrocutes himself on a plug socket.

These kinds of scenes give rise to another interpretation of the film, put forwards by Steven Brown. Brown describes *Tetsuo* as a cyberpunk 'coming-out film' as the salaryman's 'metamorphosis functions as a metaphor for coming to terms with homosexuality in a heteronormative Japanese society' (107). I would argue that it is this reading of *Tetsuo* that best allows for the film to be read as a response to the events of the 1960s. Brown notes that in the scene where salaryman and metal fetishist meet for the first time, the hit-and-run car crash, is accompanied by sleazy drawn out jazz music and slow swinging camera shots, parodying the conventions of a Hollywood romance film (107). This scene could almost be a film adaptation of one of Ballard's car accidents in *Crash*, where 'the crash… was a model of some ultimate and undreamt sexual union' (27). As in *Crash*, a form of techno-sexuality saturates *Tetsuo*, where technology creates new forms of sexuality: 'the sexual possibilities of everything… are jerked loose… by the crash', a meeting of metal and flesh (27). The salaryman's metal growths and drill penis, symbolic of his repressed homosexuality, quite literally destroy his heterosexual relationship with his girlfriend as the two fight, resulting in her death and the destruction of their apartment. In contrast, when the metal fetishist arrives at the salaryman's apartment after this destruction, he comes bearing flowers and after having put on makeup. These queer themes build until the film's climax, where we can find that, through this exploration of queer desire and sexuality, *Tetsuo* approaches similar questions of collectivism and individualism as provoked by the events of the 1960s and *Burst City.*

Figure 4. *Tetsuo*'s hybrid monster. *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. Third Window Films. 2018

It is the film's ending where we find the move out of dystopia towards utopia. In the film's climactic scene, the metal fetishist and the salaryman merge together into a hybrid monstrosity of metal and flesh. Together they combine to create a new being, one of their heads on the top of this mess of metal and the other at the end of a phallic protrusion of wires and cables. At the finale of the film, this new creature exclaims that 'we can mutate this whole world into metal… Our love can destroy this whole fucking world.' *Tetsuo*, as a film, asks a familiar question: how can we organise for radical change and make collective action possible without resorting to authoritarian collectivism and while making room for individuality without atomisation? In this final scene *Tetsuo* finds the answer in the radical possibilities of queer love. As well as embodying the 'undreamt sexual union' imagined in Ballard's *Crash*, this new monster also evokes Warren Montag's reading of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*. Montag argues that Frankenstein's monster is a metaphor for the proletariat: the monster is 'artificial' and quite literally 'assembled from… a multitude of different individuals, in particular, the 'poor'' and the 'urban mass' (303). It is, for Montag, this identification of the monster with the oppressed working class which challenges the Enlightenment myth that scientific and economic progress will create the 'conditions for perpetual peace and universal harmony' (307). Under the conditions of capitalism, such logics of 'reason' do not produce 'freedom' but only a 'new form of servitude' (307). This connects to Marcuse's argument that material affluence alone cannot lead to liberation unless individuals develop new desires beyond those sold to them through the logics of consumer capitalism.

Tetsuo, through the figure of its own monster, similarly challenges the logics of capitalism and asks us to rethink our relationship with technology. Instead of the oppressed working class, we instead find in *Tetsuo* a fusion of two young gay men. This eroticised image of two beings becoming one through metal metamorphosis and transformation serves as a metaphor for queer sexuality finding new ways of being with, and relating to, each other outside the constraints of capitalism. To apply this to Moylan's work, it might be posited that this scene explores the ''collective political strategies' needed to dismantle the present system and lead toward a better, utopian future' (193). The salaryman's heterosexual relationship, and the basic unit of consumption it represents under consumer capitalism, is destroyed and replaced with a queer love that thrives at the fringes of society off the waste and refuse of capitalism. Once again, we are left with a shimmering of utopian hope at the film's credits: the audience is encouraged to imagine what a world re-shaped by the desires and new ways of being created by the salaryman and metal fetishist might look like. This new hybrid way of being presented in *Tetsuo* echoes the multiplicity called for in *Burst City*. It presents a form of collectivism, two beings merged together, but for radical ends that challenge capitalism and heteronormativity rather than conforming to them.

√964 Pinocchio, the Body, and its Limits

√964 Pinocchio provides a fitting end point to my analysis. Released in 1991, its temporal distance from the 1960s allows us to reflect upon the lingering echoes of that decade's events and debates. Like the previous films, *√964 Pinocchio* was made on a small budget. In an interview, included as a special feature to the 2004 North American DVD release, director Shozin Fukui discusses the film's limited underground release in Japan, playing initially only in a single cinema as a late-night feature. Fukui also describes how he shot large portions of the film covertly at night to avoid having to pay for film permits. Roughly, the film concerns an android sex robot (Haji Suzuki) who is thrown out by his owner for failing to sustain an erection. The android, wandering alone on the streets with no memory of his past, is then befriended by Himiko (Onn-chan), a homeless woman who makes maps of the city for amnesiacs. Himiko names the android Pinocchio and teaches him to survive. Meanwhile, the company that built and sold Pinocchio hunt for him through the city streets, trying to destroy him before the public learn of their secret sex-robot business. Summarising *√964 Pinocchio*'s narrative is deliberately difficult, as the film is not edited in a realist mode but instead often follows a surrealist, dreamlike logic. Moments of grotesque body horror and metamorphosis are

interspersed with a use of shaky-cam, reminiscent of Sogo Ishii, that is often positioned at unusual and nauseating angles. The actors, in turn, seem to gargle, scream and vomit their way through large parts of the film. In one specific incident, there is several minutes of footage of Himiko staggering through a train station and vomiting. On the surface, *√964 Pinocchio* could be read as a horror or gross-out film.[4] However, I would suggest that the film has a strong utopian and critical dystopian element.

Figure 5. Pinocchio undergoes a grotesque metamorphosis. *964 Pinocchio*. Unearthed Films. 2004.

Like *Tetsuo* and *Burst City*, *√964 Pinocchio* is rooted in debates prominent in the 1960s. It responds to arguments over collectivism and individualism among protesters, as well as the need for personal liberation despite conditions of affluence and abundance within society under consumer capitalism. Pinocchio is himself a consumer object and, quite literally, a product of the system. While Fukui makes use of dark tunnels and foreboding underpasses for some scenes, for others the city in which *√964 Pinocchio* set is presented as bright and neon-lit, with crowds of people. In one scene, Pinocchio and Himiko wander a supermarket stocked with food as they eat straight off the deli counter, filling their mouths with food. This almost comical scene of bodily fulfilment once again provokes associations with Bakhtin's carnival. However, it is Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism that is crucial to a utopian interpretation of *√964 Pinocchio*. For Bakhtin, grotesque realism is the primary way in which the Carnival is represented and translated into literature, art and culture. As Bakhtin writes, 'grotesque realism' has a 'utopian aspect' (19). At the core of this principle is 'degradation': the 'lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal and abstract' down to the 'material level' of 'earth and body' (19). Such grotesque degradation has a utopian aspect specifically because it is opposed to stasis and embraces the possibility of change and renewal. As Bakhtin argues, 'degradation… has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one' (21). Rather than meaning 'absolute destruction', degradation is associated with 'the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth take place' (21).

We might argue that the fixation on excessive consumption, vomit and bodily fluids in *√964 Pinocchio* is an embrace of the 'grotesque body' which rejects all that is 'closed', static or finished (26). For Bakhtin, the grotesque body is 'unfinished, outgrows itself' and 'transgresses its own limits'; in *√964 Pinocchio* this process is illustrated quite literally as, in one scene, Pinocchio's body begins to convulse violently before swelling and oozing monstrously. Himiko's reaction to this transformation is also grotesque, as her face twists into an expression of equal parts horror, laughter and orgasmic pleasure. If the monster of *Tetsuo* is formed of repressed sexual desire, Pinocchio's monstrousness is identified with the waste of capitalist society. Not only is Pinocchio thrown away by his owner, but there is also another scene which reinforces this identification. Pinocchio is eventually betrayed by Himiko, who comes to view him as something which should be destroyed. In one a bizarre moment, Himiko beats Pinocchio over the head with a trash can and forces rotting wasted food into his mouth while taunting him. Through this act, Pinocchio is further associated with capitalism's decaying waste; he is monstrous because he embodies a culture of disposability and, in Marcusean terms, the misuse of scientific and technological development for the purposes of consumption.

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[4] The term 'gross', within film, is described by Linda Williams as the 'display of sensations that are on the edge of respectable' (2).

Figure 6. Pinocchio and Himiko emerge as a hybrid being. *√964 Pinocchio*. Unearthed Films. 2004.

Finally, *√964 Pinocchio*'s ending provides us with another example of critical dystopia. At the film's finale, Pinocchio confronts Himiko and the corporate scientist who created him. Upon their encounter, the scientist tells Pinocchio that 'monsters must be destroyed'. This line is revealing as to why the corporation wants Pinocchio hunted down and destroyed before the public see him and work out what he is. If Pinocchio is the embodiment of consumer excess, his existence in public reveals what the corporation, and their capitalist ideology, need to remain hidden: the grotesque result of consumer culture and the environmental damage it causes. As with *Tetsuo*, *√964 Pinocchio* ends with a transformation, as Pinocchio and Himiko fuse together to become a single entity. Himiko rips off her own head, causing a larger head made of a giant lump of stone to sprout. As they both scream, strangely relaxing ethereal music plays; Pinocchio tears off this new giant head and places it over his own, causing the creation of a hybrid being. This 'grotesque image', in Bakhtin's terms, 'reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming' (24). In the final lines of the film, the voice of Pinocchio remarks that 'this feels good… everything is so clear… I love being with you.' Himiko and Pinocchio's synthesis, the reincorporation and reingestion of waste it represents, encapsulates the desire of Japanese cyberpunk to reject stasis and embrace a utopian spirit of transformation and metamorphosis. *√964 Pinocchio* functions as a strange kind of critical dystopia, it insists on the possibility of change and reclamation. The influence here of Tsukamoto and *Tetsuo* is clear: both films, motivated by the stagnation, boredom, and unfulfillment of affluent society, find life in spaces of pain and decay. In both films, it is through the grotesque that new life, and new ways of living life, are birthed.

Conclusion

In our own historical moment, which looks increasingly dystopian, the focus of Japanese cyberpunk using decay and waste as catalysts for transformation and renewal remains relevant. *√964 Pinocchio*'s depiction of waste and metamorphosis resonate in our current era of intensified environmental destruction and degradation. Further to this, both *Burst City* and *Tetsuo* explore themes of utopian prefiguration, by offering new ways of living within the present and relating to others. This analysis also offers an insight into the workings of utopian thought beyond the West. Likewise, these films further our understanding of globalised cyberpunk and demonstrate a utopian potential within the genre, challenging assumptions that it is purely dystopian in form. Furthermore, their critique of 1960s activism, while attempting to reclaim and transform its utopian aspiration and spirit, offers those who currently seek to resist capitalism new possibilities for reinvigorating activism. It is through, rather than despite, their strangeness, monstrousness, and moments of grotesque horror that these Japanese cyberpunk films, in reflecting on the movements of the 1960s, insist on the possibility of change, radical transformation, and collective action, arguing that another world is possible.

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