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The Femme Fatale and the Exotic Queer within Shinya Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo*: Gender as Narrative Tool within an Allegory for Post WWII Japan's Industrialized Identity Crisis.

Within Shinya Tsukamoto's seminal independent horror masterpiece *Tetsuo*, the viewer's perceptions of reality and the present are distorted within a temporally disjointed blend of horrific fantasy and banal existence; this instability reflects the vocal and subconscious critiques of historical ontological truths exhibited within the emergent transnational genres of Japanese cyberpunk and American Avant-pop ideologies of the late 1980's. Author Takayuki Tatsumi uses Shinya Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo* (1989) to illustrate the emergence of the "Japanoid," a technologically driven fusion of American and Japanese post-war identity best understood as a manifestation of Donna Haraway's socio-political "cyborg." Tatsumi strongly advises avoiding interpretation through a "queer" lens, proposing that the use of "cyborg" and scrap iron serve as an analogy for the stratification and integration of disenfranchised post WWII Okinawan "scrap apaches." However, *Tetsuo*'s prominent homoerotic elements cannot be ignored. Arguably, The film presents as blatantly non-heteronormative; to ignore queerness and instead focus solely on Tatsumi's definition of "identity" ignores the meaning of masculinity in a patriarchal culture, rendering an incomplete (post)colonial reading. A queer reading clarifies Tsukamoto's take on the contemporary disenfranchisement of the so-called "Japanoid" identity that Tatsumi embraces. Within *Tetsuo*, representation of woman as femme fatale and an overt queering of masculinity problematize the traditional heteronormative Japanese identity.

Woman complicates Japanese identity within *Tetsuo*. Late 80's American representations of Woman reveal a misogynistic fear of her colonizing traditional male spheres (i.e. any Michael Douglas movie 1988-1992); the application of this theme to Japan does not seem unreasonable, as media and culture begin to share a reciprocal transnational relationship, as evidenced by *Tetsuo*'s admittedly Western-influenced visual production ("Metallic K.O." 59). Woman within *Tetsuo* can be explored through the film theory of Laura Mulvey, whose take on classic Hollywood cinema presents "the presence of Woman as an indispensable element of spectacle[...] yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of the storyline"; as such, punishing woman or deconstructing her body serves to reconcile the hero's dilemma (Mulvey 40). Woman within *Tetsuo* represents the tool that forces the film's men to reconcile their own inadequacies and sense of helplessness within a contemporary Japanese society tasked with confronting the contradictions of tradition and modernity.

*Tetsuo*'s disjointed narrative revolves around the haunting of a young Japanese salaryman by the "metal fetishist," Yatsu, who has been killed by the salaryman. At the behest of his girlfriend, the salaryman engages in sexual congress within view of the dying man, serving as the catalyst for retribution; thus the female temptress has damned the Salaryman, and sets a precedent for Woman as deliberate impediment within the film. Previously, upon viewing the necrotic and failed fusion of his flesh and scrap iron, the fetishist reacts by fleeing the scrap yard, only to be hit by the car of the Salaryman and his girlfriend. The music and the cinematography of the car crash scene are presented in an ethereal and arguably eroticized fashion. The fetishist, overtaken completely by technology, sees his flesh destroyed by unyielding iron. The romanticization of the collision and the following sexual encounter, when viewed through the lens of Haraway's "cyborg," represents the contrasting worlds of the consumer and the producer.

The pleasures derived through technological advances are manifest through the body of the disenfranchised. In *Full Metal Apache: Transactions between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America*, Tatsumi argues that *Tetsuo*'s pervasive theme of blending flesh and iron serves as a metaphor for post WWII era Japanese scrap iron "apaches" who subsist on scavenging (158). Notably, though, this idea of "scrap apache" proposed by Tatsumi also acts as an analogy for contemporary disenfranchised male Japanese youth who struggle to find their place in society.

*Tetsuo*'s pervasive queerness exhibits in dramatic fashion within the opening scene, wherein the film's antagonist transforms into a supernatural amalgam of iron and flesh. Viewers first encounter the fetishist penetrating a self-inflicted yonic gash with an iron bar. Arguably, the relationship between the individual and iron no longer appears as fetishistic, as it becomes sexual and reproductive, evidenced by his metamorphosis. Within Tatsumi's explanation of post WWII Japan, the disenfranchised scrap "apache's" relationship with iron manifests as means for survival. However, many dangers present in the "mining" of scrap; as such, the fetishist's penetration by--and rebirth through--iron represents the "apache's" dangerous and dependant cyborgian relationship with technology. Historically, peoples such as the post-WWII Okinawans and Koreans, whose very life depended upon the illegal deconstruction and fencing of the iron technology, become, in essence, outlaw cyborgs such as the fetishist. Considering that this penetration scene takes place in a scrap yard, the fetishist's festering wound demonstrates the inability for human beings – specifically, late twentieth century Japanese youth -- to integrate into an ever-expanding industrial landscape.

The Salaryman's second problematic interaction with Woman sees her as a tool of male destruction at the hands of the fetishist. A metallicized woman pursues the Salaryman at the train station, setting a precedent for the fetishist punishing the Salaryman through the female body.

While the first representation of Woman in *Tetsuo* is that of temptress (the girlfriend), one sees the second representation as that of fragmented tool whose body has been colonized by the fetishist for the purposes of his “narcissistic” revenge. The advanced development of the Japanese rail system is an extension of contemporary Japanese identity; The Salaryman, having been chased from a train platform, represents his denial of access to the Japanese rail system, referred to by Tatsumi as a “web of connectivity;” this inability to traverse a cultural and economic landscape denies access to culture at large (30). Furthermore, the late 1990s saw a push for young Japanese to adopt a voluntary exile in pursuing success within business outside of the country’s borders (167). Unfortunately, this trend toward cultural exile presents as an untenable situation in which to perform properly as Japanese, one must abandon being Japanese in terms of national locality.

A queering of masculinity manifests in spectacular fashion with the rape of the Salaryman at the hands of his girlfriend. The Salaryman’s girlfriend (within yet another dream) exhibits as a high camp representation of male anxieties of inadequacy through her exotic performance as penetrating seductress as she theatrically and dramatically emasculates the Salaryman with her articulated robot phallus. The subjugation of the Salaryman at the hands of his “monsterized” girlfriend mocks the legitimacy of heteronormative culture through its aggressive and bizarre performance. Although hypersexualized, the agency of the fantasy sequence girlfriend contrasts with the harsh reality of the Salaryman’s transformation into scrap and the emergence of his drill-like phallus that leads to the death of the girlfriend. The fetishist emerges again through taking control of the corpse and ultimately emerging from it. Woman, having been removed as obstacle, allows for the continuation of the narrative, wherein the

Salaryman rushes headlong towards his own destruction, but now with no one to blame for his metamorphosis into a scrap iron creature unable to operate within society.

Queer performance as challenge to heteronormative power becomes more overt and pervasive as the film builds to climax. Prior to the final confrontation with the Salaryman, through Yatsu's possession of the girlfriend's corpse, the fetishist is seen as isolated within scrap iron, while applying makeup. The fetishist's actions within the scene can be interpreted as a preparation for a final seduction. Haraway states that, "Cyborg replication is uncoupled from organic reproduction" (150). Arguably then, the disenfranchised must entice the dominant group if they are to survive. This sexualized performance presents the fetishist not as eeking to destroy, but rather to be accepted by the Salaryman, a representative for a society that ostracizes the deviant. Through destroying everything that the Salaryman holds valuable, the fetishist liberates the Salaryman from his ascribed status as unwitting exploiter. The difference between Yatsu and the Salaryman becomes a state of rusted and non-rusted, which could be interpreted as the Salaryman's pursuit of heteronormative stability and perceived power versus the vulnerability and disenfranchisement of Yatsu and the queer.

The core of Tetsuo is an imperative for the integration of the queered into dominant society and a call for the rejection of historic heteronormative patriarchal paradigms. The salaryman initiates the incorporation of Yatsu's "rusted" iron into his new, unrusted iron body. If the fetishist represents the disenfranchised, then the old guard/ Salaryman must recognize that he crafts a world that the "scrap apache" would seek to destroy if not attributed agency within it. If one lacks political power, complete destruction of the system becomes the only viable solution. And if one is not integrated into a society, one ultimately seeks to reform it in his or her own image. The allegory of post WWII scrap apache serves as a modern warning for the imperative

of integration. *Tetsuo* references Tatsumi's post WWII "scrap iron apache" for the purposes of demonstrating the state of disenfranchisement as persistent and shifting. Ironically, dominant male anxiety begins to emerge in the face of a rapidly shifting late 1980's social landscape that favors pluralism over traditional stratification. *Tetsuo*'s overt queerness would seem to serve as a challenge to the legitimacy of a claim for the heteronormative male's anxiety arising from the loss of prestige and power that follows social reform that values parity and equality. The fetishist's statements, "How about turning the whole world into metal?" and "Our love can put an end to this fucking world," punctuate the Salaryman's metamorphosis into scrap iron. The fusion of the iron men appears as a towering phallus that races through the streets of Japan; ultimately, *Tetsuo*'s queerness exists as a purposeful challenge to contemporary heterosexist western culture that must adapt lest the exploited turn the modes of oppression against the oppressor.

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