

Biomachines, metal bodies and masochistic masculinity in post-war Japan

Luca Capponcelli

Advances in technoscience and biotechnology have blurred the boundaries between body and matter, emphasising the urgency of rethinking the intertwining of anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism and androcentrism. This repositing also involves the relationship between the subject and technological otherness. For example, in the representation of cyborgs, Donna Haraway identifies the metaphor of overcoming biological determinism. Simultaneously, in cinematic and literary imagery, cybernetic bodies end up representing contemporary society's changes, fears and desires, exploring new paradigms of subjectivity.

This paper focuses on cyborg identities in Japanese imagery through the novels *Kachikujin Yapoo* (*Yapoo the Human Cattle*, 1956) by Shōzō Numa, *Nippon Apacchi Zoku* (*The Japanese Apache Tribe*, 1964) by Komatsu Sakyō and the film *Tetsuo* (*Iron Man*, 1989) by director Tsukamoto Shin'ya. Each of these works presents the search for transhuman and post-human subjectivities in Japanese science fiction imagery from the post-war to the postmodern period and share a masochistic representation of male bodies deeply interwoven with the question of identity. Starting from Tatsumi Takayuki's theorization of «creative masochism» and referring to the Deleuzian view on masochism, the aim of this paper is to investigate the connections between male masochism and Japanese cyborg imagery of the post-war period.

Keywords: post-war Japan, male bodies, cyborg identity, Japan's science fiction imagery, posthuman subjectivity, creative masochism, Deleuze, body without organs, masochism, abjection

1. Introduction

Edward Said (1978: 140, 183, 204, 218) highlights how Otherness represented by the non-Western ends up being characterised under categories of passivity, femininity, and peripherality, to the point of implying sub-human traits in diversity. If the differences are configured as a racial datum, sexualised, and territorialised, the body is then the main place of their demarcation, reduced under the hierarchical binarisms between West and East, male and female, white and non-white, human and non-human. Within this dialectic, advances in technoscience have blurred the boundaries between body

and matter, emphasising the urgency of repositioning humanistic knowledge to overcome the intertwining of anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism, and masculinism. Braidotti (2013) explores the possibility of overcoming the unitary definition of the subject based on the dualism between nature and culture, proposing a decentralisation of the human in favour of a transversal conception of the subject.¹ This decentralisation also involves the relationship between the subject and technological Otherness.

In examining the interconnections between human and machine, Donna Haraway identifies in the cyborg the metaphor of a relationship between identity and body that can undermine the hierarchical oppositions between human and non-human, male and female, body and mind, primitive and civilised. Cybernetic identity, for Haraway, thus overcomes biological determinism (1991: 163, 177).

Thus, if the body can be the marker of differences, it may also be the signifier of a process of identity transformation. From this perspective, these pages offer a reflection on cyborg identities in the Japanese imagery through the novels *Kachikujin Yapoo* (“Yapoo, the Human Cattle,” 1956) by Numa Shōzō, *Nippon Apacchi Zoku* (“The Japanese Apache Tribe,” 1964) by Komatsu Sakyō (1931-2011) and the film *Tetsuo* (“Iron Man,” 1989) by director Tsukamoto Shin’ya (b. 1960). Each of these works anticipates the search for transhuman and posthuman subjectivities in Japanese science fiction imagery from the post-war period to the postmodern. These three works are also part of a larger analysis by Tatsumi Takayuki through the keyword of “creative masochism.”² He conceives it as a category of postwar Japanese mental history connected to the trauma of defeat and the postwar reconstruction. Tatsumi’s «creative masochism» is a precious tool for understanding the dynamics of power, race and subjectivity entailed in the relationships between East and West from postwar to postmodernism, especially because his study goes beyond the polarity of Orientalism and Occidentalism.

Perhaps, since masochism is a plastic category allowing plenty of analytic possibilities across a wide range of disciplines from psychoanalysis to philosophy, Tatsumi does not specify the theoretical frame of his usage of the word. However, its combination with the idea of creativity should allow us to understand it not just as a death drive, but also as a generative force. On this premise, as regards

¹ ‘The post anthropocentric shift away from the hierarchical relations that had privileged “Man” requires a form of estrangement and a radical repositioning on the part of the subject’ (Braidotti 2013: 88).

² In his book *Full Metal Apache* (2006), “Creative masochism” and “Synchronicity” are the keywords of Tatsumi’s representation of Japan’s post-war to postmodern cultural transition. The former indicates a kind of warped aesthetic aroused in reaction to the reconstruction unilaterally modelled on the United States, while the latter indicates the stage of mutual influence and cultural contamination between the United States and Japan since the 1980s.

masochism, this paper will mainly make reference to Deleuze's study on the subject, looking with particular favour upon his nondual mode of thinking.

Through the works of Numa, Komatsu and Tsukamoto, the aim of this paper is to explore the connection between "masochism" and "body" representations in Japanese cyborg imagery of the post-war period, and how they interact with the subjectivities stemming from the categories of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.³

"Cyborg" was a term coined in 1960 to describe the union of human organism and machine in the context of space exploration (Clynes and Kline 1960: 26–27). However, the term has become increasingly popular only since the 1980s, with the emergence of science fiction and films, especially US and British science fiction. *Blade Runner* (1982), *Terminator* (1984), and the *Robocop* series depict cyborgs as war machines or genetically replicated creatures in the human image, in dystopian scenarios of the future. Hollywood, particularly, has represented cyborgs as embodiments of strength and hypermasculinity, associated with positive values such as heroism. A hegemonic and monolithic masculinity, therefore, which is the mythopoesis of an ideal humanity, corresponds to the categories white, male, and Western. These characters are an example of how even in the artistic imagination, cyborg identities contain a confirmation of traditional models of power and authority based on gender binarism (Balsamo 1996: 9–11).⁴ Tomas (1995: 21) argues that cyborg identity is a radical vision of what the term 'human' represents in the Western world towards the end of the twentieth century.

Based on this premise, the discourse relating to the new paradigm of subjectivity, given technological progress, remains self-referentially anchored to the Western context. In this way, the other cultural realities, by definition lagging behind the West and already excluded from the Western model of Cartesian subject, are placed in a marginal position with respect to the identity transition imposed by techno-scientific progress.

From this perspective, Japan represents an interesting case study, since it is a non-Western reality that boasts a copious production of cyborg imagery and creatures since the immediate post-war

³ Although none of the works examined here are pornographic, we can identify markedly sexualised aspects (in particular *Kajikujin Yapo* by Numa Shōzō and the film *Tetsuo* by Tsukamoto Shin'ya) that are open to critical investigation from the perspective of porn studies. In this study, we frame these aspects as modes of representation of the body in connection with the identity positioning that emerges from the text of belonging.

⁴ The Alien trilogy does not escape this paradigm. Lieutenant Ripley, while embodying humanity in the battle against the alien creature, affirms the gender stereotypes in relation to the themes of rape, fertilisation, and motherhood, which run through all the films in the trilogy.

period.⁵ As will be seen, this aspect is not simply a matter of technological progress; it is also intertwined with cultural factors and identity discourses.

2. Yapoo biomachines and Japanese ethnic identity

Before and during the Pacific War, the idea of a specific Japanese subjectivity had donned the features of an ideological, political, and historical construction aimed at opposing Japanese uniqueness to Western universalism. In this effort, the Kyoto school of philosophy distinguished itself, with the philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), as one of its most authoritative exponents. In a 1942 conference titled *Kindai no chōkoku* (overcoming modernity),⁶ the favourable evolution of the Japanese expansionist project posed intellectuals with the problem of reconciling the local and particular dimension of Japanese identity with the new role the country was assuming in the changing world order.⁷ This contradiction required a reconfiguration of Japanese subjectivity capable of synthesising the two opposites, namely the cultural (and spiritual) uniqueness of the East against the technological materialism of Western modernity.⁸ The attempt to recreate a cognitive map in these terms of Japanese subjectivity foundered along with the fate of the conflict. Japan was occupied by the Allied Forces, which, through the Supreme Command of the Allied Forces (SCAP), exercised political, economic, and social control over the country until 1951. Even after the US occupation, the film industry and the Western consumerist model prevailed across Japan. Through television, cinema, and advertising

⁵ For example, *Tetsuwan Atomu* (1952–1968) by Tezuka Osamu. Set in a future where humans and robots live together, Tetsuwan Atomu is a robot child with human feelings and superpowers that he uses to uphold law and order. In 1956, Yokoyama Mitsuteru created the cartoon series *Tetsujin 28 gō* (1956–), or *Iron-man* or *Super Robot 28* in Italy. It is the story of a remote-controlled robot created just before the end of the war to fight the Allies. The war ends before the robot becomes operational, and the robot is used to defend law and order. The work inaugurates the long and successful series of mecha (short for mechanical), featuring giant anthropomorphic robots usually piloted by a human hero. The line of cybernetic superheroes and mecha fighting evil scientists or aliens would be successfully exploited in the following decades, establishing itself as an important aspect of the Japanese cultural industry.

⁶ The proceedings of the symposium were published in the July 1942 issue of the journal *Chūō kōron* (“The Central Review”).

⁷ Japanese armed forces had occupied the British colonies in India, Singapore, and Southeast Asia. Taiwan and the Korean peninsula had been annexed to the empire since 1910, Manchuria was a protectorate, and since 1931, a war of invasion was ongoing in Chinese territory, with bloody episodes. In a sort of reverse Orientalism, Japan attributed to itself the mission of unifying and guiding the Asian continent, implementing a political and cultural project that had already emerged in the early twentieth century, and that was known as Great Asia or Pan-Asia, in which non-Japanese intellectuals and politicians, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Sun-Yat-Sen, also showed interest.

⁸ For a detailed account of the 1942 symposium, see Harootunian (2000: 34–44). Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit (2004: 4–12, 24) highlight the recurring idea among Asian cultures that the West lacks a spiritual culture, and that the materialism of modernity poses a threat to the spirituality of the East.

campaigns white men and women represented a model of superior technology and charm. However, they also represented an otherness that had to be neutralised through exoticising projection because they were potentially dangerous to Japanese integrity (Creighton 1995: 143-144).

It was in this scenario that Numa Shōzō published the novel *Kachikujin Yapoo*. The work initially appeared as episodes in the magazine *Kitan Club* (“Club of Bizarre Tales”), and then became a quadrilogy of which there is also a *manga* version that the same author continuously revised until 2000. Pauline is a princess of the future from the Galactic Empire of a Hundred Suns. Forced to make a crash landing with her spaceship, she falls, without realising it, into the twentieth century, specifically during the sixties. Here she meets a couple: Clara, a rich German girl, and her fiancé Rin'ichirō, a young Japanese man who is a brilliant academic and martial arts expert. Pauline is from a society where white women dominate and are obeyed by males of the same ethnicity. In the society of the future, black women and men are semi-human and enslaved. Due to an atomic conflict, Asian peoples are all but extinct, except for the Japanese who are considered sub-human creatures, generically called *yapoo*.⁹ They are beings with human intelligence, but they are treated like cattle or biomachines. Their bodies are genetically manipulated to transform them into living furnishings, musical instruments, machinery components, carpets, urine absorbers, vomit collectors, and even vibrators. Believing herself to be in her own era, Princess Pauline is horrified by Clara's humane treatment of Rin'ichirō. She embarks with the two of them in the spaceship, and leads them to her palace, where the man undergoes genetic modifications that make him Clara's pet. The latter then reveals that she likes the mutation of her fiancé, finding herself at ease in the erotic gynocracy of Aryan women on which the social organisation of the Empire is based.

The story, especially in the *manga* version, is apparently aimed at an audience sensitive to the sadomasochistic fantasies aroused by the numerous scenes of extreme eroticism. However, the plot is deeply intertwined with the issue of Japanese identity, when contextualised in the immediate post-war period. The country had been defeated and occupied by the Americans after the double atomic bombing. The emperor had been forced to publicly renounce his divine prerogatives. *Kachikujin Yapoo* is in its own way a satire on Japan's post-war identity, staging a racist dystopia in which the Japanese people are degraded to the level of sub-human creatures. The author demolishes the Japanese identity from its foundations when he narrates that the cult of the Japanese ancestral deities themselves is said

⁹ The name clearly alludes to the foul *yahoo* creatures of Jonathan Swift's short story, *Gulliver's Travels*. At the same time, *yapoo* is a further mispronunciation of the term *jap*, used derogatorily in the U.S. during the Pacific War to refer to both the enemy and the Japanese (including those with U.S. citizenship) interned in American prison camps between 1942 and 1945.

to have arisen due to the arrival, from the future, in protohistoric Japan of a princess from the Empire of a Hundred Suns (Numa, Ishinomori and Satō 1984: 49-53). Even the elf of the rivers, Kappa, a recurring creature in Japanese folklore, is said to be a *yapoo* that accidentally ended up in the past. In this way, Numa represents the very same Japanese identity as an exogenous (namely Western) construction. Moreover, this identity is much closer to the contemptuous ‘Orientalist’ representation offered by Pierre Loti in *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) than the exotic and alluring Otherness depicted in the works of Lafcadio Hearn. Numa reaffirms and radicalises the Eurocentric Orientalist paradigm according to which the category of the human is essentially Western and of white ethnicity. Through the canons of science fiction and eroticism, the novel stages the overturning of Japanese ethnocentrism, which, between the 1930s and 1940s, had crossed the political, ideological and cultural spheres of Japan.¹⁰ Numa’s story fits into the void left by the political and ideological discourse around Japanese subjectivity before and during the Pacific War; it is a demonstration of how popular culture replaced philosophical discourse in its reconfiguration. In *Kachikujin Yapoo*, technological advancement and capitalist consumerism turns against the Japanese, representing them as masochistic consumer goods (Tatsumi, 2006:57), downgraded to an evolutionary stage in which the margins between human and animal, flesh and matter, are absent. Christine Marran, focusing on Rin’ichirō’s perspective, analyses the *yapoo*’s text in terms of male abjection (2009: 261). Indeed, the exploration of the boundaries of male subjectivity through the violation of body and its scatological and fluidic dimension is a suitable foundation for a Kristevian approach to *Kachikujin Yapoo*. Nevertheless, shifting the focus onto the creative process of Numa Shōzō, we may stress that the Japanese *yapoos* represent a form of masochistic desubjectification. In the chapter *Kachiku ka no shōsetsu ron* (“Theory on the Domestication Novel”) of his essay *Aru musō ka no techō kara* (“From the Notebook of a Dreamer,” 1956), Numa Shōzō explains why he chose to create subhuman and masochist characters such as the *yapoos*.

Commonly, the sense of inferiority arises from the frustration due to the impossibility of fulfilling the desire of an egalitarian relation with the Other. Then, in order to delete this forced inferiority complex, it will be sufficient to abandon the pretence of an egalitarian

¹⁰ The postwar perspective of Japanese cultural nationalism has since been assimilated into the set of studies known as *Nihonjinron* (theories about the Japanese). This is a generic definition that heterogeneously lumps together works by Japanese and Western scholars that aim to identify specific traits of Japanese culture, social behavior, language, and psychology. Thus, *Nihonjinron* is broadly understood as a cultural discourse on Japanese identity. However, it is undeniable that this approach is not always neutral and that sometimes, it tends to define the Japanese national character in an essentialist way based on the concept of determinism and ethnic homogeneity, whereby specific traits of Japanese culture and people would be unique and immutable.

relationship. By actively affirming the superiority of the Other, the problem of the inferiority complex will disappear. The simplest way for an effective affirmation of the Other's superiority consists in ascribing the Self and the Other to two distinct groups ordered in terms of inferiority and superiority (Numa 1975: 139).¹¹

This literary device of a social system where masochists do not just pretend to be, but actually become human cattle is strikingly reminiscent to what Deleuze and Guattari wrote about masochism as a process of transforming, with the example of becoming a horse (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 155-56). The *yapoo's* transformation into cattle enacts a process of displacement of anthropocentrism.

This bestiary created through the biological manipulation of Japanese male bodies is then oriented, according to Numa, towards preserving a sense of the identity from an unbearable inferiority complex stemming not only from the defeat in war, but also from the cultural subordination to the new order established by the United States. Thus, the masochism staged in Numa's *Kachikujin Yapoo* is a negotiation with the symbolic and social order of post-war Japan. As such, even if abdicating control, this mechanism still retains a sphere of masochist agency consisting in the configuration of a new order. By relinquishing human status, Numa employs masochism as a device to repositing Japanese subjectivity. The self-annihilation staged through the dissolution of the body's boundaries offers a way to exist as a decentered subject.

3. The Metallivore Apaches and the Extinction of the Japanese

In Numa's novel, the transformation of Japanese bodies into transhuman creatures launched a narrative vein characterised by the intertwining of the human, animal and inorganic matter. The work *Nippon Apacchi Zoku* by Komatsu Sakyō, although unlike *Kachikujin Yapoo* in being devoid of explicit sexual connotations, represents a further evolution of Numa's bodies imagery. The story is set in an imaginary Japan in the 1960s, governed by a military dictatorship. With the abrogation of constitutional rights, work is no longer a right, but an obligation. Therefore, the crime of unproductivity (i.e. unemployment) is punished with exile in the vast area of a disused arsenal on the outskirts of Ōsaka.¹² The area is deserted, and its borders are controlled by the military. The deportees,

¹¹ Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

¹² It was the base with the largest weapons production facility in Asia during World War II. On 14 August, 1945, it was destroyed by a B29 bombing raid. The history of the Ōsaka war arsenal can be viewed at https://www.ndl.go.jp/scenery/e/column/kansai/osaka_army_arsenal.html (Japanese National Library website. Last accessed 23 October 2021)

having nothing to eat, are destined to die. The protagonist, Kida, who lost his job because of an altercation with his boss, also ends up in this place of exile. In the arsenal area, Kida meets Yamada, exiled for his revolutionary activism. He managed to survive for weeks by eating stray dogs. The dogs, in turn, maul the deportees and feed on them. Yamada has a plan to escape. Kida decides to join him, but the attempt fails and ends in Yamada's death. Kida is left alone and is on the verge of being attacked by a pack of dogs. He is saved by the intervention of a member of the *Apache* tribe. Kida had heard from the guards who had led him to the arsenal that the *Apaches* are creatures that feed on metal.

In the name of the tribe and in the setting of the story, there is an intertextual reference to a novel by Kaikō Takeshi (1930–1989), *Nihon no sanmon Opera* (“The Japanese Threepenny Opera,” 1959), which describes with a neo-realistic slant the underworld of the Korean community in Japan. Settled on the margins of society and the law, the Korean *Apaches* of Kaikō are called thus because of the raids they conduct on the old arsenal of Ōsaka, during which they steal war debris to sell on the black market. The *Apache* appellation associated this ethnic minority with the Native Americans. Through the eyes of the Japanese protagonist, Fukusuke, Kaikō Takeshi offers several accurate descriptions of the filthy environment where they live, the disgusting and stinky food (i.e., cow stomach and bowel immersed in a bucket of foaming blood, or raw pig’s uterus and placenta; Kaikō 1964: 51, 100) they can afford, and their smell of garlic. All these aspects emphasise their otherness compared with the civilised social frame of the city, only six minutes by train from Osaka Station. Before the end of the war, Korean citizens were subjects of the Empire. With the Treaty of S. Francisco (1952) they lost Japanese citizenship and became a foreign minority living outside the law and the civilised world, but inside Japan.

The *Apaches* in Komatsu’s science fiction story have no explicit Korean identity and speak in Kansai dialect. But they still retain the traits of a minority, living on the fringes of the civilised world. Their metallivore diet too, just like the food of the Korean *Apaches*, is a signifier of their otherness. Through a mutation caused by the test of a military weapon, the survivors became able to eat only the things available in the area, specifically the wreckage of abandoned cars and military vehicles. Their bodies have taken on a metallic consistency, and they are endowed with extraordinary strength. Their digestive system works like a steel plant and can produce pure steel dung, which would be used to support national industry, after a war against the dictatorship that ended with its overthrow. Their nerves work as electric conductors and empower them with lightning-fast reflexes. Mutant *Apaches* can survive underwater without breathing for one hour, and when injured they can repair the damaged part of the body. They are at the same time monstrous creatures and a new superior species.

Kida, the only human in the group of mutants, participates in the events of the tribe and is at the right hand of their leader, Nige Jirō (Geronimo),¹³ who leads the revolution that puts an end to the military regime. The new government recognises the autonomy of the *Apaches*, but another military coup triggers a conflict that leads Japan and its inhabitants to destruction. In the epilogue, the author writes that the *Apaches* who survived the Japanese represent a higher evolutionary stage of humanity (Komatsu 1964: 375).

Tatsumi (2006: 56–57) associates Numa's and Komatsu's novels with the paradigm he calls "creative masochism." The masochistic urge that snakes through Japanese culture is not simply a reaction to wartime defeat, but the expression of an aesthetic sensibility produced by conflicting tensions around national identity: the presumption of racial superiority (which reached its peak during the years of nationalist militarism but was never really assuaged), and the sense of inferiority and humiliation. The sense of inferiority could be attributed to technological backwardness, which, from the second half of the nineteenth century, transformed the country's transition towards modernity into a process of Westernisation. The sense of humiliation, on the other hand, derives from wartime defeat. These tensions would be, for Tatsumi (2006: 28), the way the dualism between the East and West is staged when the post-war reconstruction generation meets the consumerist lifestyle and the Western cultural industry. But it should be pointed out that *Nippon Apacchi Zoku* stages also the othering of an endogenous minority. Like the Korean *Apaches* of Kaikō Takeshi, the mutants of Komatsu represent the Japanese *lumpenproletariat* left behind by the industrial and economic growth of the 1960's, when the country was also going to host the 1964 Olympic Games. These rejected segments of society, including Koreans, Okinawans and Japanese outcasts, enact a violent insurrection against the social and economic system of Japan. In this setting, it is possible to see the echo of the political discourse in the context of the new left, namely Tanigawa Gan's theorisation of all society's destitute, like coal mine workers, rural communities, *burakumin* and ethnic minorities, as the new driving forces of the revolution against capitalism (Tanigawa 1961: 209-210). The idea of revolution gained new attention in the public discourse when, during the 5th National Congress of 1955, the Japanese Communist Party rejected armed revolution in favour of a democratic path towards communism. As a result, the radical current quit the Party two years later and formed the *Revolutionary Communist League*. The interest of Komatsu Sakyō for his contemporary political background is also a relevant aspect of

¹³ In the novel, the surname Nige is written with synographs that can also be read Nimō. For the Japanese audience, the allusion to Geronimo must have been obvious. The Native American chief was well known in Japan by the 1950s through John Ford's films such as *Fort Apache* and *Rio Grande*.

Nippon Apacchi Zoku. At the end of the story, the figure of the leader Nige Jirō is partially a parody of Stalin. In the epilogue of the novel, the protagonist Kida reports that, after the news of the supreme leader's death has spread, the new government criticised his cult of personality (like the destalinization process started by Khrushchev in the Soviet Union), and the Apache people destroyed his effigies in the country (Komatsu: 541-542). The fact that the Apache revolution ended up with a totalitarian regime reveals the pessimism of Komatsu, dissatisfied with the inequality of the Japanese social system and not believing in real socialism as an alternative. Komatsu expresses in the story of the metal Apache disappointment in his country where pre-war institutions, such as the Emperor, still existed in combination with the political and cultural subordination to United States, while Japanese leftist organization were incapable of changing society.

In the preface to *Nippon Apacchi Zoku*, Komatsu writes that the *Apache* outcasts absorb a sort of anarchist energy from the ruins of the Ōsaka war arsenal where they live. He also states that the novel deals with another possible future for the chaotic force arising from these ruins (Komatsu: 10-11). Indeed, the whole story seems to originate from the ruins of the old war arsenal. That anarchist energy embodied by the social outcasts is clearly antithetical to the symbolic order of the civilised Japanese society. The othering of these social outcasts takes place not only in their confinement to the war arsenal, but also in the representation of their bodies as markers of alterity.

This is how Kida describes his first encounter with a mutant Apache:

At first sight, it looked like a bumpy iron plate. If I'd knocked on it, it would surely have sounded like a bell. Moreover, with a better look, what I believed was a bronze glow was just reddish rust. The coldness of the skin was not human. The scene of this apparition was still imprinted on my eyes. Long loose dark hairs falling on the shoulders, a band on the forehead, a bow carried on the naked torso. Wasn't that exactly the style of the Apache tribes, the brave Indian Americans I used to watch in Western movies? (Komatsu: 79-80).

The story clearly presents a dualism between Japanese identity, which is human, and the inhuman identity of the Apache. Moreover, if human beings adopt the metallivore diet, they can become Apache mutants too. Nevertheless, the leader Nige Jirō is not trying to make human Japanese become like them. He conceives the transition from human to Apache as a personal and free choice:

The choice of those who are changing from human to metal deserves deep respect. If we protect them, on the contrary, we do not pay honour to their decision. Whether becoming Apache or remaining in the society of humans is up to them. (Komatsu: 292)

As already seen in *Kachikujin Yapoo*, as well as in *Nippon Apacchi Zoku* the dissolution of Japanese identity goes through a process of dehumanisation, or cyborgisation. In this case, the metallic inhumanity of the mutant Apache conveys the dream of the evolutionary transition towards a posthuman identity. If so, the ruins from which the chaotic energy leading to the revolution stems, represent not only the memory of the devastation of World War II, but also a primordial status, or pre-symbolic space, a precondition for producing new meaning and a renewed subjectivity.

In both *Kachikujin Yapoo* and *Nippon Apacchi Zoku*, the crossing between the categories of human and non-human produces creatures that are signifiers of Japanese national identity in the era of post-war reconstruction. The trauma of war generates an ambivalent response in which collective cohesion necessitates a process of erasing the past. In other words, imagining the destruction of Japan and the Japanese is a necessary step in the reconfiguration of the country's identity under a new symbolic order.

If it is possible to identify a continuity between Numa Shōzō's and Komatsu Sakyō's novels in the explicit ethnic implications of the yapoo biomachines and the Apache metallivores, on the other hand, the annihilation of identity through the metallic metamorphosis of the body underpins *Nippon Apacchi Zoku* and Shin'ya Tsukamoto's film *Tetsuo* (Iron Man 1989).

4. *Tetsuo*, technological abjection and masochism

Winning an award at the 1989 Rome Fanta Festival,¹⁴ *Tetsuo* is nevertheless a low-budget independent film. Unlike *Kachikujin yapoo* and *Nippon Apacchi Zoku*, the story does not focus explicitly on the question of Japanese identity. Yet, as suggested by Tatsumi (2006: 154-155), it was its reception in the Western world that lent it an ethnic connotation. The depiction of oriental cyborgs attracted Western audiences in the wake of the success of Vietnam War films, along with an ambiguous attraction to the yellow peril. It should also not be forgotten that in American science fiction literature of the early 1980s, a standardisation of Japanese imagery had already emerged in the cyberpunk vein,¹⁵ creating a strong

¹⁴ *Tetsuo* is now universally recognised as the founding work of Japanese cyberpunk. The success of this independent work, outside the circuit of large Japanese film production and produced at low cost, was followed up with the films *Tetsuo II* (1992), and *Tetsuo, The Bullet man* (2009).

¹⁵ In *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson, the protagonist Henry Dorsett Case is in Chiba, near Tokyo, to heal his central nervous system and be able to connect to the global network of cyberspace (the matrix) again. The novel also features a ninja bodyguard (Hideo) and Molly Millions, a recurring cyborg character in Gibson's stories, a mercenary bodyguard who is also called street samurai or razorgirl. Futuristic scenarios inspired by overcrowded Japanese megacities recur in the film *Blade*

connection between cyborg identity and cultural elements of Japan, and which was known as techno-orientalism.¹⁶ It is therefore possible to argue that the international success of this film was fostered by a cultural context sensitive to the combination of cyborgs and exoticism.

The plot, while not linear, is relatively simple. Yatsu (played by the director) is a man who is turning into a cyborg and is taking revenge on a couple (a *salaryman*¹⁷ and his partner) who ran him over. The story unfolds through nightmares, visions, and analepses, along with highly symbolic details. Yatsu is endowed with mysterious psychic powers, and television screens are a prosthesis of his mind, making his memories visible. In response to a childhood trauma, the man inserts industrial metal scraps into his body to become more powerful. Among the memories displayed on the screen is the bloody beating with an iron bar suffered by an adult male figure.¹⁸ In another memory, a doctor appears and, with an amused air, tells him that he has a shard of steel lodged in his brain. The place where the man performs the metal grafts is a disused industrial shed amid a pile of scrap metal. On a grate in the shed, the words *New World* appear, which recurs in several frames of the film. Yatsu, with his psychic powers, will show the *salaryman* (and the viewers) the new world, a chaotic expanse of wires and metal objects with no organic presence.

The grafting of a rusty steel rod provokes a rejection by his leg, which goes rotten. At the sight of the maggots devouring his own flesh, Yatsu runs in terror, and it is at this point that he is hit by the couple's car. The two decide to get rid of him in a forest, where they have sex, while the woman is aroused by the fact that the dying Yatsu is watching them. Eros, violence, and voyeurism are intertwined with the dominant motif of the story, the contagious force of metal that produces the metamorphosis from human to cyborg.

The *salaryman*'s first sign of contagion is the discovery of a tiny metal capacitor sprouting between his beard hairs. This is followed by an encounter on the subway with a woman who, contaminated by

Runner (1982). Here, in Los Angeles in 2019, replicants are produced for extraterrestrial colonies on behalf of a corporation that recalls the economic penetration by Japanese multinationals of the United States during the 1980s.

¹⁶ Among the first essays to use this definition was *Techno-Orientalism: Japan Panic* by David Morley and Kevin Robins, which compares the Western fear of losing technological supremacy, fundamental to its relations of force with the East, to the fear of the cultural emasculation of the West. In the same essay, it is explained that the Japanese threat, unable to be dehumanised as it was at the time of the Second World War, has been revised from an exoticising perspective that simultaneously acknowledges and neutralises Japan's economic power in the 1980s and 1990s (Morley and Robins 1995: 166-167).

¹⁷ In Japan, the term indicates an employee in the tertiary sector, impeccably dressed, socially integrated, equivalent to the concept of a white-collar employee in Anglo-Saxon countries. In the years of the economic boom, the role of salarymen in Japanese society was rhetorically associated with that of the samurai, corporate warriors, the embodiment of a socially, culturally, and institutionally hegemonic model of masculinity (Hidaka 2010: 2).

¹⁸ In the credits the character is referred to as *nazo no furōsha* ("unknown homeless").

Yatsu, turns into a cyborg and tries to kill him. After this terrifying encounter, the man goes to his partner's house. Here, he dreams of being sodomised by her, as she has become a metallic creature with a snake poking out of her genitals. Upon awakening, the metamorphosis progresses, and the *salaryman's* penis becomes a giant electric drill. Terrified, the woman tries to castrate and stab him. The struggle culminates in an embrace that kills her. The man watches in horror as his body gradually becomes hypertrophic and deformed, with metal pieces, wires, conductors, and other metal fragments merging with his own flesh. At this point, Yatsu reveals his intent to complete his revenge. The *salaryman* is forced to face him in a surreal combat in which hyperkinetic phases alternate with others of intense physical contact. The fight becomes an embrace¹⁹ when the *salaryman* repeatedly penetrates Yatsu with his mechanical phallus until he wraps his metal tentacles around him. At that point, their human likenesses float into an amniotic womb-like space. In the next scene, merged with each other, they form a gigantic phallus-shaped metallic creature. This is the final, and only, dialogue between the two characters:

Salaryman: Oh, I feel so good!

Yatsu: So, let's turn the whole world into a pile of metal!

Salaryman: ah.

Yatsu: And then we'll rust it, you and I, and return it pulverised to the universe.

Salaryman: Sounds like fun...

Yatsu: Come on, let's make the world horny with our love!

Salaryman: Ah...

Yatsu: Let's fuck it over and over again!²⁰

The elements of continuity between the film *Tetsuo* and Komatsu's story *Sakyō Nippon Apacchi Zoku* lie in the metallic imagery and the devastating force of the intertwining of the organic and the inorganic. However, if Komatsu's *Apaches* feed on metal to survive and their steel droppings sustain the nation's production system, in Tsukamoto's film, metal is characterised by being a destructively infectious force and its overt sexualization. Considering the context of the 1980s in which the screenplay was born, it is inevitable that the link between sexuality and contagion recalls the spread of AIDS (Orbaugh 2007:

¹⁹ In the first edition of the film this aspect is even more explicit in a scene, later deleted, in which Yatsu whispers in the man's ear the physical attraction he feels for him (Mes and Miike 2005: 66).

²⁰ *Salaryman*: aah, tottemo ii kibun da; Yatsu: yoshi! Kō dattara sekaijū o kōtetsu no katamari ni shimaō ka; *Salaryman*: ah...; Yatsu: sōshite, sekaijū o sabikusharashite, uchū no mokuzu ni kaeshite yarō ka; *Salaryman*: omoshiroi na; Yatsu: Saa, oretachi no aijō de sekaijū o moeagarashite yaru ze!; *Salaryman*: ah...; Yatsu: yarimakuru zo!

181). Although such a reading risks being reductive, the underlying themes of subjectivity, the body, and its vulnerable boundaries, certainly constitute a central aspect of the film, as they do in much cybernetic fantasy in postmodern Japan.

In the 1980s, Japanese society was hyper-technological and hyper-consumerist, to the point of inspiring in Western cyberpunk, even before local cyberpunk, with the image of Japan as a future topos (Sato 2004: 339-340). In *Tetsuo*, the devastating proliferation of metal and cyborg bodies, a collection of chaotically assembled metal pieces (as opposed to the perfect cybernetic bodies of the Hollywood industry), can be seen as a reaction to the technological bulimia that runs through Japanese consumerist society and its impact on human centeredness.

Cadzyn (2002: 242-243) points out that while in the post-war years the Japanese identity question was about what kind of subjectivity to pursue, in the years of globalisation the question is about what subjectivity is, and how to transcend it. Tsukamoto Shin'ya's film seems to follow this question. The story presents a continuous trespass between unconsciousness and consciousness, organic and inorganic, male and female. Yet, the theme of human centrality unfolds through a confirmation of traditional gender binarism. The only female figures, the salaryman's companion and the woman in the subway, are passively involved in the dynamics of revenge and combat between the two male characters. Their transformation is brought about by Yatsu's intervention and the companion's dream activity. In both cases, they become creatures that threaten the existence of the salaryman, the banner of masculine hegemony in Japanese society (*supra*, note 19).²¹ In this way, an overlap between female and metal otherness is delineated. Thus, the recurrence of phallic images in the film expresses the castration fear of postmodern masculinity generated by technological otherness and the collapse of the symbolic order. The metal that invades and transforms bodies eliminates any distinction between subject and object, determining, in Kristeva's terms, the collapse of meaning (Kristeva 1981: 9) and a regression into pre-Oedipal and maternal territory. Reinforcing this reading is the scene in which Yatsu and the salaryman return to a foetal state and float in the amniotic bubble, before regenerating into the phallic cyborg,²² a manifestation of an artificial priapism overflowing with destructive libido, which replaces the lost centrality of the male penis in his corporeality.

²¹ Barbara Creed (1993: 2, 5, 105, 110-111, 159), in her study devoted to a critical reinterpretation of the Freudian Oedipus complex, interprets female monstrosity in film iconography in relation to male castration anxiety, seeing in it a translation of the myth of the vagina dentata.

²² Somehow resembling one of those big phallic sacred palanquins on parade during the *Shintō Kanamara Matsuri* ("Festival of the Steel Phallus").

The Kristevian category of abjection, along with the feminine threat, allow the motif of castration to be linked with the metallic maternal territory pervading the reality in the film *Tetsuo*. This, in turn, makes possible a connection with the Deleuzian understanding of masochism, which is untied from the theory of Oedipal order and conceives the mother's figure as the threat and the object of love for the masochist. According to Deleuze, the masochist expiates father's likeness through tortures to undergo a second birth from woman alone, like in a parthenogenesis (Deleuze 1991: 99-100). Elements like the feminine threat, the emasculation of male hegemony (the father's likeness), the rebirth of the salaryman and Yatsu, and the dissolution of modern subjectivity in *Tetsuo's* story, match the view of Deleuze on masochism.

5. Conclusion

The masochistic portrayal of the transition of the body from human to non-human unites the yapoo, the Apache metallivore, and the salaryman of the film *Tetsuo*. Numa Shōzō reverses the evolutionist perspective by regressing Japanese identity to a sub-human stage. Komatsu characterises the political and economic system of Japan in the years of economic growth as plagued by inequality. *Tetsuo* reveals a decline in the theme of technophilia and Japanese future shock²³ through a traumatic destabilisation of the symbolic order.

The three works outline models of identity that are far removed from modernity's ideal of physical perfection. The representation of the bodies in each of them reveals subjectivities overwhelmed by the internalisation of dialectically irreconcilable categories in the identity discourses of their respective eras. Their hybridisation metonymically encapsulates the binarism between human and non-human, Japanese specificity and Western universalism, male and female, thus generating an identity aporia that reflects the transition from unfinished modernity to postmodernism.

The characters of the yapoos, the metal Apaches, the *salaryman* and Yatsu, epitomise a masochistic process of desubjectification and dehumanisation as a suspension of the reality where they are respectively placed. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "the masochist uses suffering as a way of constituting a body without organs and bringing forth a plane of consistency of desire" (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 155). The Deleuzian "body without organs" opposes any specifically codified network of organs. Therefore, the act of becoming an animal with a yapoo body as depicted by Numa Shōzō

²³ Expression coined by Alvin Toffler (1970: 1-4) to indicate the disorientation of individuals exposed to the acceleration of social changes brought about by technological progress.

represents the eschewal of the dialectic between Japanese ethnicity and a totalising model of society culturally shaped by Western hegemony. The social outcast Apache bring forth the opposition to a militarily organised capitalism. The cybernetic bodies of *Tetsuo's* protagonists are a disordered cluster of organs beyond the control of human techno bulimia.

Thus, the masochistic identities that emerge in the works examined are as much a product of their respective cultural contexts as they are a reaction to them. Numa, Komatsu and Tsukamoto amplify the fractures of their respective eras without the search for a suture; instead, through transhuman and posthuman imagery, they negotiate a different relationship to the symbolic and social order as a suspension of the conflicting dualisms they internalize.

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Luca Capponcelli is a research fellow in Japanese modern literature at Università degli Studi di Catania, where he also teaches Japanese language and literature. He holds a PhD in Japanese literature from Kokugakuin University of Tokyo. His research interests span Japanese modern poetry and narrative from the Meiji period to post-war times, with reference to the intertwining of representations of the body and subjectivity with the main political and social discourses in the respective cultural contexts. From this perspective, he is currently leading a research project on doppelgängers and cyborgs in Japanese literature as the extreme boundaries of the representations of the body and subjectivity. He can be reached at: luca.capponcelli@unict.it