

# In the Spotlight of Misperception: Japanese Science Fiction vis-à-vis Western Science Fiction Set in Japan

Baryon Tensor Posadas

## INTRODUCTION

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In 1984, William Gibson published a novel that began new traditions in science fiction writing—*Neuromancer*. The novel won a hat-trick of all three of the major science fiction awards: The Hugo, Nebula, and the Philip K. Dick. The opening chapter was set in Chiba prefecture, a large coastal region east of the capital Tokyo with the line “The sky above the port was the color of television tuned to a dead channel” (Gibson 1). It was the centerpiece of the cyberpunk movement characterized by a mix of high technology in the fields of computer networking and biomechanical interface and urban street life (Sterling xi).

Yet despite its opening scenes being set in Tokyo, Gibson at that time had never set foot in Japan. Furthermore, practically all of Gibson’s novels—*Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), *Virtual Light* (1991), and *Idoru* (1995) along with several of his short stories, have dealt with Japan in varying degrees, whether as a setting or by involving Japanese social systems such as the yakuza and the zaibatsu system of corporate management as atmospheric elements.

I choose to begin this discussion with Gibson’s novels since they represent a long fascination with Japan not only Gibson’s, but also that of a number of post-war Western science fiction writers. It has not merely been an occasional choice for a setting, but apparently a favored one. There are also other Japanese elements that tend to enter current science fiction works. This is not surprising since contemporary writers such as Alexander Beshar (*Rim*), Tricia Sullivan (*Someone to Watch Over Me*), Pat Cadigan (*Tea from an Empty Cup*),

and Bruce Sterling (“Maneki Neko”) have acknowledged recent developments in computer network technology that have, in a sense, placed science fiction writers in a position wherein they can no longer be parochial with settings. But older writers such as Philip K. Dick (*Man in a High Castle*), Norman Spinrad (“A Thing of Beauty”), Robert Silverberg (*Murasaki*), Poul Anderson (“Rokuro”), and Ian Macdonald (*Scissors Cut Paper Wrap Stones*) also share this particular fascination with Japan.

Moreover, in 1997, this fascination is highlighted by the publication of two science fiction anthologies. The first one, *The Best Japanese Science Fiction Stories* (1997), is an anthology of short stories by the Japanese themselves, while the other, *Black Mist and Other Japan Futures* (1997), is a bit different—it is a collection of stories by Western writers about Japan.

The reasons behind Japan’s popularity as a science fiction setting even among non-Japanese writers can be found in Keith Ferrell’s introduction to *Black Mist and Other Japanese Futures*:

Japan is science fictional in many ways—particularly over the last couple of decades when electronic wonder after wonder flowed from its factories, its video games captivated—or captured—the world’s young, when our eyes were guided by the neon pulse of its cities, when its economy seemed unstoppable (Ferrell 1997, 10).

William Gibson echoes this: “The Japanese live in science-fictional world,” he said in an interview with postmodern critic Larry McCaffery. Also, more than one writer has called Tokyo “Bladerunner Town,” in reference to the glittery chrome surfaces of the future Los Angeles portrayed in the Ridley Scott film (Gibson 320).

This phenomenon itself is not particularly new. Literary critics have long identified it, calling it Orientalism. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* defines this as follows:

Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she says or does is Orientalism . . .

The phenomenon of Orientalism as I study it here deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient . . . despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a “real” Orient (Said 3, 5).

There are few examples that show Orientalism better than this relationship between Western science fiction writers and Japan. The internal consistency in the writers’ fascination for a Japan of high-tech glitter is already apparent in their consensus in Japan’s depiction: Gibson’s cyberpunk novels show Japan in a near-future urban sprawl of neon-lit cities and cyberspace; Ferrell writes of Japan’s science fictional qualities through its electronic wonders; Tokyo is “Bladerunner Town.”

While Said’s study is not interested in looking for correspondences with a “real” Orient, in this case, Japan, with the sheer wealth of Western science fiction dealing with the idea of Japan, one is led to wonder whether there is any correspondence between Western perception and the Japanese writers’ own perceptions of their future. Because science fiction does not primarily operate using the literary mode of mimesis, but with the mode of speculation, this is a different matter altogether. This speculative fantastic mode the Japanese writers themselves use is subversive, in essence, both groups of writers are subverting the consensus reality of Japan (Jackson 35). However, is there a difference between the Western subversion of Japan from their outsider stance and the Japanese writers’ own subversion of themselves through the use of the fantastic mode?

Along with this, the issue of Japan’s own reaction to these outsider perceptions of themselves is also of interest.

## PERCEIVING JAPAN: THE JAPAN OF GIBSON AND CADIGAN

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More than any other literary genre, science fiction has clearly given highest importance to setting. The difficulty in creating science fictional settings draws from a need to create a fictional world that is both believable for the reader, yet at the same time invokes a sense of wonder.

Thus, in discussing the differences between the Western writers' perception of Japan and that of the Japanese writers in science fiction, it would be natural to open the discussion with their use of the country as a setting.

In his novel, *Idoru*, William Gibson tells the story of a Japanese computer generated self-aware "virtual idol." While the main characters are mostly American, much of the action takes place in a near-future Tokyo (the cover blurb sets the story in 2005, although the text of the novel itself does not mention any particular date). A passage from William Gibson's *Idoru* offers a glimpse of how this writer depicts Japan.

"There's a place where it's always light," the woman said. "Bright everywhere. No place dark. Bright like mist, like something falling, always, every second. All the colors of it. Towers you can't see the top of, and the light falling. Down below, they pile up bars. Bars and strip clubs and discos. Stacked up like shoeboxes, one on top of the other. And no matter how far you worm your way in, no matter how many stairs you climb, how many elevators you ride, no matter how small a room you finally get into, the light still finds you. It's a light that blows in under the door, like powder. Fine, so fine. Blows in under your eyelids, if you find a way to get to sleep" (Gibson 31-32).

In the passage, Gibson is describing Shinjuku, one of Tokyo's dense commercial districts. It is easy to note the sheer detail and length of his description. There is little question that he is writing the passage not for a Japanese audience who would most likely be familiar with Shinjuku, but is creating vivid pictures for readers who have never been to Japan.

More significant than length, the distinct focus of the description on the visual elements is noteworthy. There is little mention of the movement of people. The description is largely composed of a scene. Again, this is not surprising.

Of course, this pattern is not limited to the quoted passage above. Throughout the novel, Gibson uses physical icons to show Japan—high school uniforms, salarymen, manga (Japanese comics), among others. This is understandable when one considers that his

viewpoint characters are largely non-Japanese. However, it still highlights the outsider nature of Gibson's narration. In another story, "13 Views of a Cardboard City," Gibson primarily deals with the visual image of Shinjuku's underground complex built around the system of interlocking subway stations. Here, the story is told visually, like a series of still photographs, all taken in a homeless shelter in the district's underground corridors (Gibson 338-349).

In Pat Cadigan's novel *Tea From an Empty Cup*, however, we have a slightly different situation. This time, the setting is not Japan at all. One of her main characters, Yuki, is a half-Japanese woman in search of her Japanese boyfriend Tommy in cyberspace.

In the novel, the physical Japan has been destroyed by a series of earthquakes. Cadigan thus depicts her Japanese characters as refugees. As Yuki searches for Tommy, she stumbles upon a virtual Tokyo that was being reconstructed by these refugees within the computer networks but only pureblood Japanese have access to it.

Cadigan introduces elements of present day Japan through several flashback episodes of Yuki's conversations with her grandmother. Various details of the Japanese language, the Japanese corporate work ethic, their notions of honor are told through her (64). Another device Cadigan uses is the depiction of the reconstructed virtual Tokyo not in its modern industrial state, but as an image of old Japan where traditional arts flourished (220).

It is not surprising that Gibson and Cadigan focus on the visible icons in their depictions of a culture that is not their own. These writers have, perhaps, little choice in using images of Mt. Fuji or samurai along with other icons of Japanese history in an effort to invoke the idea of Japan to readers. Or, as is the case with modern science fiction writers, Shinjuku's neon lit alleys and electronic tinker toys become the objects of focus.

On the other hand, except for the stories of Yano Tetsu ("The Legend of the Paper Spaceship"), Tsutsui Yasutaka ("Standing Woman"), and Hanmura Ryo ("Cardboard Box"), the stories within the anthology *The Best Japanese SF Stories* do not even explicitly use Japan as their settings. And even in the three that do, only Yano's story "The Legend of the Paper Spaceship" makes an extended reference to Japanese places.

Of course, this could also be a result of the fact that for Japanese writers, it is often assumed that the setting is Japan to begin with, while Gibson and other non-Japanese writers are required to make this clear to readers due to the difference in their readership.

However, in these same 10 stories, none of the characters are named. This would suggest that the lack of exposition regarding setting is itself a deliberate one, designed to create a story that is focused less on the idea of Japan. In other words, perhaps, the settings of these stories are not explicitly stated because they are irrelevant.

If so and despite the unquestionable importance setting plays in an SF story, setting is not what ties these Japanese science fiction writers together. Perhaps the idea of Japan and Japanese identity are less important to the Japanese writers that this theme is no longer prevalent in their works.

Yet most critics of the fantastic mode in literature, to which science fiction is a close relative, argue that fantasy is inherently subversive. More importantly, the very absence of certain elements is a central signifier in fantastic literature. In the words of Rosemary Jackson, “The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over, and made “absent” (Jackson 4).

Perhaps the sheer pervasiveness of the idea of Japan in Japanese society is what prompts these writers of science fiction to make its presence invisible altogether. With all the material written on myths of Japanese uniqueness and Japan ideology, it is all too likely that the absence of Japan in Japanese science fiction is a reflection of these writers’ own ambivalence towards their culture. A closer look at individual stories is necessary if we are to understand this ambivalence.

## ZEN BUDDHISM AND JAPANESE AESTHETICS

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In the writing of science fiction, critic Darko Suvin notes in his essay “SF as Metaphor, Parable, and Chronotope,” the importance of what he calls the absent paradigm. According to Suvin, this so-called absent paradigm is a product of the relationship between the

two planes of reality in a metaphor, arguing that science fiction is largely a metaphor of the “real world” through the construction of an absent paradigm within a “possible world” (1988a, 196-198). Certain conclusions can be drawn as to the characteristics of Japanese SF, which is really an extension of the metaphoric form. The most important of which is that the science fictional “possible world” is largely born out of the “real world” (in this case, a “real Japan”) shared by all these authors. Thus the patterns we see in their “possible worlds” are reflections of their attitudes towards the consensus reality of Japan.

Researchers of Japanese literature have argued that, while markedly different in style, the worldview of modern literature is still largely the same as that of the classical works. In particular, traces of influences of Zen Buddhism, first present in Heian poetry, are still quite present even in recent works (Rexroth 182).

According to Saha, Zen aesthetics in literature is characterized by a preference towards understanding through the personal experience rather than through structured learning systems within the process of metaphorizing the self. Here alone, a potential point of contention arises. Science fiction, as a rule is built upon scientific speculation—a structured learning system. As defined by writer and science fiction historian Brian Aldiss, “Science fiction is the search of a definition of mankind and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science) . . .” (Aldiss 25).

Abe Kobo’s novel *Inter-Ice Age 4* (1970) shows one way this melding of science fiction and Zen aesthetics can be achieved. The crux of this novel is a computer developed by the protagonist, Professor Katsumi of the Institute of Computer Technique. The computer in this novel is capable of accurate predictions of the future, which in turn brings about a power play between Professor Katsumi and his colleagues after it predicts that Katsumi would betray the others if he were to learn of their artificial evolution of water-dwelling humans in line with computer’s prediction of a submerged future Earth.

This can very well be a direct manifestation of the conflict between personal experience as Professor Katsumi gradually unravels the conspiracy of his colleagues against him and a structured learning system represented by the omniscient computer and its followers.

Beyond this, the influences of Zen Buddhism are also evident in Japan's utopias and dystopias. A close relative of science fiction, utopian literature is essentially characterized by "a radically different location for the relationships of key figures" (Suvin 1988b, 33). Science fiction works essentially from the same principle in that they are both "estranged" genres, working with the benefit of a distance from consensus reality (34).

Japanese utopian and dystopian literature draws from Buddhist notions of perfection in nothingness or Nirvana (Napier 178). Yet, this sense of perfection in sheer nothingness might be better considered as an anti-utopia.

This is also seen in Abe's novel. Near the end of the novel, the conspirators finally capture Professor Katsumi. Though they sentence him to death, Professor Katsumi is granted one final moment to see the future the computer had predicted. He sees the new race of aquans living in a submerged world. While the aquans were depicted to be highly evolved and intelligent, they seemed to have no emotions at all.

Despite the author's own statement in the novel's afterword that he did not deliberately seek out to depict either a pessimistic or an optimistic future, Susan Napier, in her study of the Japanese fantastic, finds the anti-technology sentiment and dystopic qualities in *Inter-Ice Age 4* all too evident (Napier 201).

Considering the long-standing relationship between science fiction and utopian literature, the relationship of science fiction with utopian literature is a good place to begin tackling some Japanese science fiction texts as it is the point of intersection in the influences of Buddhism and the Western tradition of science fiction.

#### PESSIMISM AND ANTI-UTOPIA: HOSHI SHINICHI'S "BOKKO-CHAN"

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Hoshi Shinichi has written both science fiction and mimetic fiction throughout his life. His stories have a characteristic simplicity in his use of language and plotting. The story "Bokko-chan" is an example of his science fiction. Here, his plot is unsurprisingly simple.



It involves a robot bargirl and the male patrons who pine for her affection.

The robot was really a work of art. She was designed to be the perfect beauty. Every element that went to make up a charming girl was taken into consideration. The trouble was that she looked a little prissy, but who can deny that a prissy air is an indispensable prerequisite for beauty? (Hoshi 47)

While the focus of the exposition is the newly built female robot Bokko-chan, the narration regarding beauty and perfection is noteworthy. Early into the story, Hoshi already introduces this theme. In contrast, he gives little expository sequences regarding the actual science behind the robot, which is not common at the time of writing (1963), wherein believable scientific exposition was considered the norm (Aldiss 207-232).

“Bokko-chan” continues with the master of a bar (the person who built her) placing her behind the bar to chat with the patrons. Her popularity grows, until a certain customer falls in love with her. Bokko-chan, being a robot, does not return the affection. This man tries to poison her but inadvertently kills all the customers with the poison. Unfortunately, the bar master drains drinks served to Bokko-chan from a tube installed in her and serves them again to customers. In the end, the poison kills all the patrons, leaving Bokko-chan alone in the bar.

On that night the lights of the bar were not put out and the radio continued to play music. Nobody departed and yet nobody spoke. And the time came when the radio said “Good night” as the station signed off the air.

“Good night,” said Bokko-chan waiting with her prissy air for the next man to call her (Hoshi 51).

The concept of beauty is significant in this story. The clash of the concepts of a cold machine and an ideal beauty is made central to the theme. From the opening paragraph, we see the suggestion of a machine capable of achieving perfection (in beauty). In contrast, this beauty is uni-dimensional. It has no awareness of it, and in essence is no different from any machine.

This is suggestive of a pessimism towards science. In other words, it is a cautionary tale regarding the imperfection of science and technology, regardless of how perfect it may appear in its material/physical form. In essence, it is a challenge to the dream of a perfect world achieved through science, but can never be achieved (utopia)—an anti-utopia theme.

As I noted earlier, this anti-utopian slant is perhaps a manifestation of the Zen Buddhist tradition in Japanese literature. It reflects a certain sense of fragility towards the material world.

With science fiction, this fragility is apparently directed toward its depiction of scientific and technological elements itself. This is a stark contrast to William Gibson's depiction of Japan, wherein technology is given an ambivalent attitude—unnoticed as it interweaves itself into the daily lives of people. More importantly, unlike Hoshi's robot, Gibson's cyberpunk machines are intelligent, sometimes almost alive.

In an interview regarding the state of science fiction in Japan, critic Takayuki Tatsumi notes that the subway gassing incident by Aum Shinrikyo members in 1995 highlights a backlash against science fiction by mainstream society. The cult members were reported to be avid science fiction fans. The author notes that the incident has further entrenched the "falling out of love with science" by the Japanese (1997a).

## ARMAGEDDON AND JAPAN

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But it is perhaps unfair to compare William Gibson's work with just Hoshi Shinichi, since the two writers come from totally different traditions in science fiction writing. In particular, the cyberpunk tradition of Gibson's work calls for a more ambivalent tone towards technology, since rampant technology (particularly computer and biomechanical technology) forms one of the most integral elements of cyberpunk.

But a number of Japanese writers too have been associated with the cyberpunk tradition. Do these writers share this distrust of technology Hoshi Shinichi carries?

In interviews regarding Japanese subculture and Aum, with postmodern art group Anomaly I during their “909” performance project, Sawaragi Noi relates Japanese cyberpunk with the concept of Armageddon. Post-war Japanese culture, he notes, with the influence of Zen (in a promotion of the move to nothingness) has idealized Armageddon. Armageddon has always been present in Japan’s history, from the Meiji Restoration (where everything previously built was destroyed), the Great Kanto Earthquake, and Hiroshima. It can be said that it is something omnipresent in Japanese minds (Sawaragi).

Japanese cyberpunk, Sawaragi says, also bears this Zen/Armageddon background. In the end, despite the high-tech, everything is destroyed (Sawaragi). Perfectly anti-utopia.

This, in a sense, is also true with Hoshi’s Bokko-chan. While the scale in Bokko-chan is not exactly worldwide as is the image suggested by the term “Armageddon,” it is in essence, a sense of total destruction, with all the bar patrons being inadvertently killed.

Writer Mariko Ohara best represents the cyberpunk tradition in Japanese science fiction. In her story “Mental Female,” a Tokyo mother computer and a North Siberian father computer meet and fall in love in a television show. As foreplay, the two computers began launching ballistic missiles from both sides .

In yet another story of hers, “Girl,” the image of destruction is made clear from the very first line: “The city was an overripe fruit waiting to fall.” The rest of the story deals with what appears to be a post-war area of urban decay where issues of gender and sexuality have become far more ambiguous.

But the story that perhaps best concretizes the image of destruction is Yasutaka Tsutsui’s “Gamen Hokai (Destruction of a Face).” As is typical of Tsutsui, the language in this story is dense—layered with dialect, puns, double-meanings and metaphors. Much of these, unfortunately, are unavailable to someone reading a translation.

So, you’re going to Sharak Planet? Better be careful.  
Sometimes, really strange things happen there (Tsutsui 60).

The style Tsutsui employs is not exactly a common one. It is composed solely of a narrator explaining in great detail to another person the dangers of his destination. Apparently, a certain bean is present on the planet that explodes under pressure. The explosion not only causes severe facial damage, it also causes the growth of deroren larvae in the ensuing pockmarks.

Although on a smaller scale literally than Hoshi's story, the theme of destruction is even more evident here in the hypothetical face. The movement of the destruction is interesting. We see its progression from the scenes of burning during the preparation of the beans, to the infection and subsequent growth of deroren flies in the face (down to the tongue), the story suggests a cancerous process (which is further emphasized by the solution it proposes for the tongue—to have it cut off). The face becomes a war zone, evident in the descriptions of the facial surface ("cratered and pockmarked," reminiscent of a battlefield) and the movement of the deroren larva and microorganisms ("infiltrating") (Tsutsui 70).

This metaphor for war is noteworthy. In the same interviews regarding Japanese subculture, Sawaragi Noi also noted this point regarding Japanese cyberpunk. While American cyberpunk tended to be a glimpse into the high-tech streetlife, Japanese cyberpunk reminded him of World War II (Sawaragi).

## HISTORY AND IDENTITY: YANO TETSU'S "LEGEND OF A PAPER SPACESHIP"

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Other literary critics apparently agree with Sawaragi, noting that the motif of World War II is indeed a prevalent one in modern Japanese literature and film. In particular, Japanese science fiction has been said to be less about the future and more about looking at the past (Apostolou 17). Even the traditional Western icon of Japanese science fiction—the giant radioactive reptile of the film *Godzilla*, carries echoes of it in being the product of nuclear waste (recalling the Atomic Bomb), and in the image of a city-flattening monster.

Sawaragi continues his observation by arguing that many Japanese writers and artists born after the war have been torn from

their historical roots as a result of the government's distancing itself from the war and its aftermath. Thus, in essence there is a sense of searching, looking back at World War II, and other aspects of Japan in the past, and what it meant for them (Sawaragi).

In Tetsu Yano's moving story "Legend of the Paper Spaceship," this theme of self-searching is quite evident. The story, also quite notably, opens during the Pacific War, and is told from the point of view of a soldier in an isolated village. Osen is the village madwoman and whore. She walks around the village naked, singing children's songs to herself while chasing a paper airplane.

One—a stone stairway to the sky  
Two—if it doesn't fly  
Three—if it does fly, open . . .

A woman's voice, singing through the mist. As if pushed onward by that voice, the paper airplane lifts in never-ending flight. A naked woman owns the voice, and white in her nudity she slips quickly between the swaying bamboo of the grove (Yano 145).

The image of nudity in the story is very telling. She lacks the social burdens the other characters in the story carry. While she is also the village whore, Osen is essentially the purity that is contrasted with the animal primacy of the rest of the villagers.

It has been suggested that the image of the woman is a particularly pervasive one in Japanese fantastic literature, often as an agent in cultural retrenchment—a remnant of the older, purer Japan (Napier 1996, 224). Through this contrasting of her and the villagers, Osen seemingly serves this role in the story.

Yet, at the same time, Osen is literally an alien. She is not from this world. Her people's technologies are clearly more advanced than human technology. Does she then serve as both an icon of a cultural pure and modernity simultaneously? Furthermore, being an alien, perhaps Osen also represents the outsider to Japan—feared, misunderstood, discriminated, and abused for the simple fact that she is different from the rest.

While the idea of a woman as a metaphor for purity that still exists in present modernity is not new, Yano's handling of the character of Osen becomes even more fascinating when contrasted with the characterization of the village she resides in.

In the opening lines, the soldier narrating the story describes the village as being "in the heart of the mountains." We are shown what is essentially an isolated pastoral village. The village itself lacks the trappings of modernity. It is, in many respects, a member of the pastoral utopias that are common in Japanese literature (Napier 161-169).

Fascinated by her, the story continues as the soldier begins to look at Osen's songs in greater detail. While at first glance, the songs sound like a typical Japanese children's song, the narrator realized that a slight change in the letters changes its meaning altogether – it becomes what looks like a starship checklist.

The rope skipping song I recorded earlier in this tale. A little more theory: With only a shift in syllabic division the song now seems to mean:

|         |               |
|---------|---------------|
| Hitotsu | kitai         |
| (one)   | (ship's hull) |
| futatsu | kikai         |
| (two)   | (machines)    |

and with but a single change of consonants we have:

|         |          |
|---------|----------|
| mittsu  | nenryode |
| (three) | (fuel)   |

(Yano 163)

After Osen bears a child, the narrator carries on rethinking the madwoman's songs. Eventually, he reaches the conclusion that she is not from this planet. Osen is apparently aware of this past, singing songs that reflect this while her son does not, which causes tension between them midway through the story. Even with their close, almost telepathic bond, he fails to understand his mother's eccentricities. This is quite reflective of tensions between Japan's traditional generation, and its Americanized youth.

Not surprisingly, the story ends on a pessimistic note. There is no sign that Osen will be able to return home and will be trapped in the foreign environment she lives in, brought about again, by failed technology, in this case the crashed paper starship.

This identity theme, coupled with Armageddon and a general pessimism towards science is evident in Tsutsui and Hoshi's story as well. In Hoshi's story, it is Bokko-chan's lack of identity and self-awareness that causes the destruction in the end. Tsutsui, on the other hand, is more metaphorical. His use of the face as the object being destroyed suggests a destruction of identity, the face being the primary physical marker of one's identity.

## MISPERCEPTION

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The absence of correspondence between Gibson and Cadigan's visions of Japan and the Japanese writers does not come as a surprise. The two groups have different audiences and draw from differing experiences in their writing. While the Western writers view Japan as a source of fascination or with a "sense of wonder," the Japanese writers apparently look at themselves and their consensus reality with a more critical eye. To them, the idea of Japan is something to be subverted and questioned. There is little doubt that the Japanese writers have managed to adopt the Western tradition of science fiction to their own experience.

However, the relationship between Western science fiction set in Japan and Japanese science fiction is more complex than the mere absence of correspondence. As Said notes in *Orientalism*, it is not the absence or presence of correspondence per se that is of interest but the "internal consistency" within the process of Orientalism (Said 5).

There is a sense of internal consistency in the depictions of Japan by Gibson and Cadigan, as well as the Japanese writers' depiction of themselves. The root of this internal consistency is perhaps the real issue at hand.

I believe the issue of identity that we saw being tackled to some extent by the Japanese authors, discussed through their own devices (whether it is an emotionless robot, a metaphorical face, or the alien),

is critical here. As the Japanese writers challenge the myth of Japanese uniqueness in their stories, some Western writers seemingly reinforce this myth with their substantial fascination for Japan. Nevertheless, it is Japanese society which is criticized for whatever xenophobia that they express.

In his essay “The Japanese Reflection of Mirrorshades,” critic Takayuki Tatsumi highlights the irony of it all. Even as Gibson misperceives Japan by using it as a “semiotic ghost” in his cyberpunk novels, Japanese readers of Gibson misperceive him into a form of “ghostwriter” writing about them (Tatsumi 372). Japanese readers, thus, adapt themselves to this misperception and become it. In a sense, Japan, and perhaps the rest of the world as well, are in a situation wherein the process of perception and misperception already occur simultaneously.

In another of his essays, “Introduction to Cyberpunk Criticism,” in the *William Gibson Reader*, Tatsumi further emphasizes this process of perception/misperception in a seemingly innocuous statement modifying Gibson’s assertion that “The Japanese live in a science fictional world.” He wrote: “We Japanese live in William Gibson’s world” (Tatsumi 1997b, 90).

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*Baryon Tensor Posadas is an instructor at the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of the Philippines Diliman. He studied Japanese language and literature at the Osaka University of Foreign Studies and writes science fiction. His short story “Exit” appeared in the February 2000 issue of Altair Speculative Fiction.*