

**Within The World of The Body Horror Genre:  
The Ramifications of Excessive Technological Advancement**

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## Introduction

Body horror can be traced as far back as the early mid 1700s, by a writer named Marquis de Sade. De Sade's novel *Juliette* (1797), examines the body, and how a soul is not exempt from death. In other words the soul is what creates the individuality within a human, but in this case without a "soul" the body cannot exist. The body is a sentient mass since it is able to have sensory experiences ranging from pain to pleasure. Essentially, you are trapped within your own body which is susceptible to various kinds of bodily harm. Now in the present, from various literatures depicting these ideas there is a wide variety of films within this subgenre; it will now typically display the main protagonist undergoing horrific changes within their bodies transforming into a monster. A question one might ask themselves is why or what causes the initial push for the central character to transform into something other than human. There are a variety of films within the subgenre that hopefully could shed a bit of light to an abundance of questions that have not been properly answered yet.

Before getting on the topic of the specific films that have been selected, start to have in the back of your mind the word technology. And why do I say that? The reason for that initial thought is that by simply thinking about it, most people start to ponder how far technology has advanced in the past couple of decades. It initially can sound amazing by understanding: firstly, how life expectancy within our society has dramatically increased through medical machinery, in the palm of our hands we have a super computer that is capable of effectively helping manage our daily tasks in life with ease, etc... The lists could go on, so in the end there should be a happy ending to society with technology advancing forever right? Unfortunately, we do not live in a fantasy world. As such, reality will tend to show the negative and positive sides to the ever growing advancements of technological inventions. People have to come to terms with the

amount of problems as well as how quickly these new technological advancements could get out of control.

It is terrifying to come into realization of the potentially extreme dangers that follow by further advancing technology. Other subgenres of films such as Cyberpunk depict usage of infusing the body and technological parts together in order to visually show the improvement of the overall body. There are some popular cyberpunk films such as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) and *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995) that demonstrate this dystopian future that contain the results of what happened when society rapidly advanced technology. After viewing the films that were recently mentioned, the audience can pick up key terms that within this gigantic cityscape, one is able to virtually as well as physically enhance their bodies past human limits. When I was younger, it always sounded cool if we as humans had the technology to modify and upgrade ourselves so we could be strong enough to pick up a car or modify our legs so people could fly. As I got older, those thoughts left my mind after starting to realize that there could be some huge side effects that will permanently change in people who ever have the experience of having those kinds of implants within their bodies. After beginning to understand that once technology starts to mesh within human beings it can bring in deadly side effects it helped with narrowing with the films I want to talk further in-depth throughout this paper.

Films such as *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983), *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988), and *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (Shinya Tsukamoto, 1989) are prime examples from the subgenre that starts to try and understanding the deadly side effects that technology can do to the humans body. Within those three films, my research question contains two parts: The first part is Why, in the body horror genre, is technology consistently characterized as a plague or virus that corrupts the stability of the human body? In those three films each of the protagonists unwillingly underwent

traumatic change within their body, physically altering it until it was too late to help them. There will always be an attracted audience for this subgenre because people subconsciously view these films as an outlet to satisfy those small dark thoughts that are in the back of everyone's brain.

The second part: What does the body horror film reveal about social anxieties surrounding technology and the body? Once the viewer can get past the disgusting aspects within the body horror genre, that is when one starts to understand certain social influences that helped inspire to create these three films. One major social situation that was still occurring during when these three films were in production and aired was the Cold War. After WWII, everyone around the world understood the terrors that would come from these devastating weapons as well as continuing to advance military technology could lead to deadly consequences for the world from the impact of nuclear warfare. It is still a fear that has been instilled within people's heart of higher people in power having the technology to essentially wipe out a city with ease. That is why it is important to understand the gravity of the deadly consequences that could come from the Cold War if it were ever an actual spark that could've led to an actual full out war. Before going into a specified overview on what each chapter holds, I want to help the viewer understand the basics of the Cold War as well as give a better understanding on how it connects within these films.

The Cold War lasted a bit over four decades, starting on March 12, 1947 and ending on December 12th, 1991. The term is often used to describe an era of geopolitical tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. The reason it is called a "Cold War" is that there was not any world-scale fighting directly between the two superpowers, but both parties supported opposite sides in regional conflicts thus known as proxy wars. Proxy wars is a fight in which two bigger powers use third parties as a substitute for fighting each other directly. Prior to the start of

the Cold War, they had a temporary alliance in order to become victorious against Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan in 1945. Some historians believe that the Cold War was inevitable since after WWII ended, there was an overwhelming sense of distrust and enmity amongst the two parties. Shortly after WWII, the struggle to assert dominance between the two superpowers started to cause this tension and both parties showed who is superior through propaganda campaigns, psychological warfare, embargoes, and advancement of their technologies such as the Arms race as well as the Space race. It is terrifying to myself and especially to everyone back then when they had to come to terms with the world potentially being eradicated through the usage of world-ending technology created by superpowers in order to assert who is the superior one.

During the late 40s, the start of the deadly arms race began between the two superpowers. An arms race happens when two or more countries build and enhance their military resources in order to gain military and political superiority over one another. Both superpowers were creating nuclear weapons such as the Soviet creating an atom bomb of their own and to retaliate that the United States created an even deadly explosive called the hydrogen bomb. It is so deadly that, “It created a 25-square-mile fireball that vaporized an island, blew a huge hole in the ocean floor and had the power to destroy half of Manhattan” (*Cold War History*). As a result of these deadly technologies rapidly building, it had an impact on American domestic life since people were building bomb shelters from their own home in case a nuclear war were to occur. Through these terrifying experiences that was occurring came about a variety of films as well as different types of media that would describe nuclear wastelands as well as depictions of what the human body undergoes being mutated by the radiation.

Within Chapter One called Inevitably undergo Metamorphosis within Videodrome, I will be talking about what the Red Scare was about as well as the propaganda that was occurring throughout 50s America. I will then analyze and connect these situations to David Cronenberg's 1983 film *Videodrome* which has various similarities and interests that align with what was previously mentioned. I want to show the readers how Cronenberg uses the mix between body and technology to demonstrate the anxieties that 50s Americans were constantly living under. In Chapter Two, The dire repercussions due to governmental abuse of militaristic technology power seen within *Akira*, I will discuss the nuclear threat that was looming over America during the Cold War as well as go into greater detail behind the consequences of government misuse of power. After going over this, I would then connect these problems that were impacting people and connect it to Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 film *Akira* which incredibly demonstrates the worst case scenario of the government misusing their power and ending up creating dire consequences that will impact the lives of millions of citizens. I will also start to analyze how Tetsuo's body is the representation of the second bombing that occurred in Nagasaki as well as the test subject Akira represents the first nuclear bombing that happened in Hiroshima. In Chapter Three called Infusion between the organic and metal seen within Tetsuo: The iron man, I will be discussing the bubble economy within 80s Japan and demonstrating the different elements that were able to create this viscerally disgusting combination between the body and metal seen within Shinya Tsukamoto's 1989 *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. Overall with all of these chapters, I want to hopefully start to have the reader get a better grasp on how these late Cold War films were able to demonstrate the terrors behind technology through the use of the body horror genre. With the constant threat of nuclear war looming around, it can start to become a bit clearer how the people

who created these three films as well as many others from the Cold War era have been traumatized.



## **Chapter One: Inevitably undergo Metamorphosis within *Videodrome***

In David Cronenberg's 1983 *Videodrome*, the film follows a CEO of a small UHF(Ultra-High Frequency) television channel who happens to come across a signal of continuous snuff films. Snuff films are a genre of black market films that actually shows the actor being murdered. Multiple layers of betrayal and conspiracies of mind-control unfolds as he tries to uncover the original source of the broadcast signal. Through Cronenberg's own stylistic features, I am able to provide how the two main groups that were against each other in the film correlates to the ideologies that opposed one another which were the capitalist camp and communist camp. Essentially, within the film there are two main characters that have distinct goals in using the channel "Videodrome." Barry Convex is the CEO of an eyeglasses company that acts as a front for an arms company and he wants to send out a live transmission of Videodrome to all of North America for the sole mission of wanting to further strengthen all the citizens to a new level of humanity. On the other hand, Bianca O'Blivion is the daughter of Brian O'Blivion who fell victim to the channel and thus she understands that Videodrome must never be released to the public as well as it should be destroyed. No matter their goals, both groups are still using the same dangerous technology in order to achieve their goals without a care of the potentially disastrous consequences that lie in front of everyone. These ideas now are starting to tie back to how the clashing of the two groups within the film share a similar parallel to the Capitalist(Western) and Communist(Eastern) camps that were against each other's ideologies during the Cold War.

I will provide historical context about the distinct ideology on both camps and how both sides dealt with the opposing side in order to successfully achieve their goals. The first side is the

Western camp which consisted of countries from NATO that allied with the United States during this time as well as other countries that had similar ideologies such as Japan, parts of Latin America, parts of the Asia-Pacific region, and Africa. The ideology behind Capitalism is how the individual citizens are able to run the economy without the government having to interfere within the production or controlling the pricing. This in turn had the media during the time referring to the Western camp as the “Free World” since their ideology allowed the individual with the independence to start up private business within the market without the government overseeing everything and having complete access to the business. The second side is the Eastern Camp which consists of the countries within the Warsaw Pact and other places such as in central and Eastern Europe, East Asia, Southeast Asia, parts of Africa, and Cuba. The ideology behind Communism is that it advocates getting rid of private ownership and profit-based economies. Once this occurs, there will no longer be a class system since everything from buildings, machinery, tools, and labor will be communally owned and everything would be addressed through the government. After learning the ideology behind both camps, it is to no one's surprise how the tension started in the first place as well as the growth of both camps doing anything it took to have their goals be on top.

The Red Scare was a period from the Western camp that was affecting the United States where people were in a state of panic throughout the 1940s and into the 50s since there could be the potential rise in communism. Essentially, in order to stop left wing ideologies from influencing more “U.S”. citizens, at the time president Harry S. Truman as well as many workers within the government took multiple counter measures in order to ensure their victory on not being influenced by anti-capitalist ideas. Here is one part that the government did that impacted the film industry. Joseph McCarthy was an American senator as well as a major figure who

played a major part during the Red Scare period. McCarthy was one of the founding members of the House Un-American Activities Committee or HUAC was officially formed during the early 40s. What makes HUAC important to remember is how the government allowed this committee to investigate within the Hollywood film industry by interrogating and exposing people who were communist for their subversive elements in influencing citizens through the media.

Now to go back into *Videodrome*, I am going to analyze a few sequences to first start to help better understand how technology can be characterized as a plague or virus that corrupts the stability of the human body. Forty-three minutes and five seconds into the film, Max Renn is watching Brian O'blivion on the television explain how the tumor that grows into the brain after being exposed to massive doses of Videodrome, will essentially become another organ within the body that will take control of the hallucinations to the point where it will change human reality. After the videotape finished playing, Renn looked down to realize the scar on his stomach had opened up and it was pulsating like it was trying to breathe. He sticks his gun inside his stomach and after he places it, he can't find it anymore as well as the stomach closing back up. At this part of the film Max Renn has been warned from the dangers of *Videodrome* and the scene above perfectly demonstrates Renn's paranoia coming to life by first having the camera zooming into the television as it is acting as his eyes being fixated upon Brian o'blivion speech. As the camera switches back from the television to Max Renn, his character is constantly scratching his scar to signify that it will become important in a short moment. That will come to be true since the moment the television abruptly goes to black, it cuts back to a medium close up shot of Renn taking a deep breath before looking down at his stomach and proceeds to look again in disbelief this time for his stomach has a huge slit that is pulsating. Through the use of the camera work, it is able to further reinforce the character's paranoia setting in as he is seeing that because of

having been exposed to the channel for too long, the body is starting to go through physical changes that are otherwise humanly impossible.

To continue this first sequence, I also want to further help understand that as the stability of the human body is slowly becoming corrupted through the usage of technology, the sense of self identity follows close behind. This is the first scene where the character is shown to truly start to lose their grasp of reality by the hallucinations taking control to the point where they are witnessing their own body undergo metamorphosis. One of these anxieties that the character Max Renn is currently experiencing is the start of his loss of identification because it is a terrifying scenario in which after multiple exposures to watching the channel, he will eventually lose his sense of self now that their biological origins have been heavily blurred. In the scholarly essay called *Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism*, Veronica Hollinger goes on to state the science-fiction author Michael Bruce Sterling, “For Sterling, cyberpunk is ‘posthumanist’ SF based on the belief that the ‘technological destruction of the human condition leads not to futureshocked zombies but to hopeful monsters’” (206). As she reflects on this quote by Bruce Sterling, it can be interpreted as anti-humanist since once humans ascended into an evolution caused by the implants of the machinery, they ultimately lose their humanity or their sense of self. Within the context of this scene, it is Brian O’blivion who is relaying these messages of how there is nothing real outside of perceiving reality behind reality and behind the screen.

The next sequence within Cronenberg’s film that I am going to analyze will help the reader understand the purpose of the first group’s intent on how they are going to use the channel ‘Videodrome’. An hour into the film, Max Renn is learning that he is betrayed by one of his trusted coworkers Harlan after understanding that Harlan has been working under Barry Convex

for two years. Barry is curious to understand why Renn so desperately wanted to find out of 'Videodrome' when the channel itself is filled with mindless torture and murder. Harlan then starts off by giving a monologue about how America is getting soft as the rest of the world is getting tough. He tells Renn that his channel is an ongoing cesspool that continues to rot its viewers as well as are rotting America within so they will stop the rot from the core itself. The first group is the leader Barry Convex and his henchman Harlan. The channel 'Videodrome' at this point can be established as an advanced technological weapon. Convex wants to reprogram as well as eventually brainwash all of North America in order for everyone as a whole to become stand against the rest of the world which continues to grow in strength. To further drive this feeling of impending doom, Cronenberg effectively uses a long take of a medium close-up shot of Harlan intensely looking at Renn while he is giving a speech of Convex's goals on why they are going to use 'Videodrome'. Convex wants to understand why Max Renn, like many others, have been seeking out disturbing content on television without truly thinking of what they are watching. Linda Williams' scholarly essay called *Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess* helps understand how fragile the body can be by shedding light that, "The body spectacle is featured most sensationally in pornography's portrayal of orgasm, in horror's portrayal of violence and terror"(Williams 3). This is notable when people start to realize that Max Renn's television channel provides soft-core pornography services to its viewers. The whole reason Renn is trying to obtain 'Videodrome' in order to still have a steady supply of viewers watching since they will never be bored of the same materials. They have been desensitized to the extreme end of the spectrum that the only thing that will keep them watching is if the television channel consists of mindless torture and murder. In doing so, this is one way that through the usage of technology it has shown to wreak havoc and corrupt the human body.

The rest of the second sequence within the film demonstrates how technology is able to corrupt the body through the usage of mise-en-scene. An hour and two minutes into the film, Convex tells Renn that he is ready for a new level. He proceeds to pull out a VHS tape which causes Max Renn to see the VHS tape pulsating as if it was alive. Scared, Renn wonders what Convex wants and he says to open up to him. Renn's stomach is open again and Convex proceeds to put the pulsating tape inside the stomach. As the two leave, Renn falls to the ground in pain and proceeds to crawl out the same door. The VHS tape brainwashes Renn by telling him in Convex's voice to kill the other producers and give up Channel 83. Max finally takes out the pistol that was still inside the stomach and the gun starts to permanently screw itself into the skin around wrist. This later sequence is a great example in demonstrating the stability of the human body becoming corrupted by technology through the usage of mise-en-scene. First to look at is that there is a quick back to back close up shot of a normal VHS tape to Max Renn and back to the same frame, but now there is a pulsating VHS tape. The reason the tape is now pulsating is that now the audience is looking at it through Max Renn's perspective who has been exposed to 'Videodrome' for far too long now. Then following the tracking shot zooming unto Renn's now open stomach which is pulsating shows the power of technology which in this case is 'Videodrome'. This is the last time that Max Renn ceases to truly have ownership over his own body since after Convex inserts the tape, all Renn can hear in his thoughts are Convex telling him to carry out his tasks in order to have channel 83. Through the Medium Full shot of Convex inserting the VHS tape into Renn, Cronenberg is able to perfectly encapsulate the loss of identity through the usage of prosthetics in this body horror film. "If we are no more than the sum of our parts, where does our center lie? Do we indeed have a center?" (Huckvale 78). It is able to help further drive the message of people losing their self-identity or loss of having their individual

thoughts through the stability of the body being corrupted by the technology seen within *Videodrome*.

Here is the first part of the final sequence within the film that will further help demonstrate the stability of the human body being corrupted by technology through the usage of mise-en-scene as well as cinematography. An hour and ten minutes into the film, Max Renn is waiting for Bianca O'blivion in her house. She is explaining how he is under control while Renn is trying to shoot at her until he stops at a television. Upon viewing the channel, he gets shot at by the screen and it turns off the original program that Barry Convex placed in him. Bianca starts to reprogram the message "Death to Videodrome" into Max Renn and orders him to kill Convex and Harlan. The first indicator that demonstrates the loss over Renn's autonomy due to the brainwashing effects is shown in the beginning of the sequence of a medium close up shot in the dark of him talking in an inhumane tone to Bianca. Within this shot, the mise-en-scene is simple, but effective since the audience is able to understand that Convex has weaponized 'Videodrome' and has taken over Renn's own autonomy. From repeating the same voiceline in a monotone voice to not even blinking further drives home how far along 'Videodrome' or in other words this artificial virus has affected Max Renn's body. "The monster is recognized as a creature we do not aspire to be; even if the monster is traditionally beautiful like a succubus or a medusa, it is the abject monstrosity of inhumanity that forces them to the ugly side" (*Exploring Mutilation: Women, Affect, and the Body Horror Genre*). Ultimately, the moment Max was exposed to the broadcast signal 'Videodrome', his sense of self began to wither away eventually expanding throughout his body and leaving behind a husk of his former self.

The second part of the final sequence is able to demonstrate the second group's intention with 'Videodrome' as well as through mise-en-scene I will show how Max Renn truly never had

the power to do anything against these two other groups within the film. An hour and eleven minutes into the film, Static plays from the television until a hand holding a gun stretches out and it is made up of flesh. Max Renn is pointing at the television with the gun in bewilderment until the flesh gun shoots at him in his chest causing him to fall to the ground. Bianca is able to reprogram Max Renn into now going to destroy Barry Convex and Harlan. Cronenberg did an excellent job of demonstrating that Max Renn essentially became a puppet or a tool in this bigger war that is occurring between these two groups in the film. The second group is Bianca O'blivion and her main objective is to destroy the creators of 'Videodrome' as well as eradicate the weapon. In order to destroy 'Videodrome' she inevitably ends up using the channel and reprogramming Renn to kill the first group. This is shown through the mise-en-scene of watching the television screen stretch out and morph into a hand holding a gun that is all made up of flesh. That specific part is supposed to represent a mirror image of Max Renn's body because after he got shot by the flesh gun, the screen revealed a breathing chest with bullet wounds signifying his recent injuries. "So much attention goes to determining where to draw the line, discussions of the gross are often a highly confused hodgepodge of different categories of excess" (Williams 1). Even though it is gruesome to witness a television come to life and show a bloody chest that has been riddled with bullets; it is necessary to describe the message that is being sent by showing that to the audience. That message is trying to demonstrate how Bianca 'killed' Renn's body, but actually killed the original program that was forced into him. Inevitably, instead of becoming himself again, he was just thrust into another program to do the bidding of Bianca O'blivion.

Throughout analyzing these sequences of David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, I want to start to reestablish this idea of how technology can be seen as a form of terror that is instilled within the heart of countless civilians. Through these next two films which will be *Akira* and *Tetsuo*:



*The Iron Man.* I will continue to also express how through the usage of the body horror genre, one can start to understand social anxieties surrounding technology and the body.

## **Chapter Two: The dire repercussions due to governmental abuse of militaristic technology power seen within *Akira***

In Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 *Akira*, the film is set in the year 2019 and takes place in a dystopian Neo-Tokyo after the original city was suddenly destroyed on July 16, 1988 which triggered a World War. It follows the story of Shōtarō Kaneda, who is the leader of a biker gang and his childhood friend Tetsuo Shima acquires enormous telekinetic abilities after a motorcycle accident. Tetsuo's power eventually threatens an entire military complex while chaos ensues in the ever-growing futuristic city of Neo-Tokyo. To give some historical context, this animated film is considered part of a collective of numerous other postwar films that is still able to encapsulate the anxiety and fear that the people of Japan experienced back then in 1945 with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that was issued by the United States. The "U.S". created the Manhattan project which is essentially where nuclear weapons were first produced and this was also supported by the United Kingdom as well as Canada. The Project eventually produced two atomic bombs called "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" due to the shape of how the bombs looked. The majority of deaths were civilians from both cities and this incident instantly became extremely traumatic that it left a terrifying mark on the hearts of Japan as well as countries throughout the world to understand militaristic technology can bring on horrible consequences. With this lasting mark, it was able to influence popular culture within Japan and through the body horror language that is within *Akira*, I am able to start analyzing the societal anxieties that are shown when militaristic power is being exercised in any capacity. The quality of having this

film be animated is able to express with the usage of the body horror genre in many other ways that live action films could not portray since the possibilities are limitless in the animation world.

Here is the first sequence within the film that I am going to analyze and start to express a snowball effect that eventually leads to destruction due to the military's desire to expand their power. Twenty-one minutes and four seconds into the film, Colonel Shikishima is being reprimanded for his poor management skills by one of the members from the executive council. A phone rings for the colonel that prompts him to go to a secret government facility. Tetsuo Shima is currently in an MRI scan and Doctor Ōnishi explains to Shikishima that after Tetsuo came in contact with another esper it was most likely the trigger to his body becoming compatible with Akira. The doctor starts to tell the colonel how they might be able to fully merge Akira into Tetsuo and Shikishima asks if it is safe? He strictly tells the unsure Ōnishi that if Tetsuo power is on caliber to Akira, then will they be able to control him. The Colonel is hesitant at first with continuing to awaken Tetsuo's power but in the end urges the doctor to continue experimenting with him until he is ready. I would say this is the start of the snowball effect which starts off with how Tetsuo Shima is currently in the beginning stages of eventually becoming a weapon of mass destruction.

Within this scene, I have come to realize that the body of Tetsuo Shima is able to represent the development of the second bomb that ended up heading to Nagasaki. There is a Medium Full shot of Colonel Shikishima scolding doctor Ōnishi if they will be able to control Tetsuo if he becomes as powerful as Akira. The lighting within that shot was red as to further express the foreshadow that the government will amass a powerful weapon but not be able to control, ultimately leading down the same fate that Tokyo experienced within the universe of *Akira* in 1988. "Shikishima is depicted in the film as a tyrannical figure, one who is not only

disillusioned by Neo-Tokyo- which he so lovingly refers to as a garbage heap made up of hedonistic fools - but is also determined to protect it out of an obligation that he feels because he is a soldier” (*The Artifice*). Shikishima is the head of the military unit and it is clear from the start that even though he has some hesitations concerning with a potentially dangerous weapon of mass destruction. He ultimately does not care about the dangerous ramifications that can come from this newest experimentation which is Tetsuo Shima who is the personification of the second atom bomb. This is starting to help reveal popular culture depicting how they viewed the military’s will to stop at nothing in achieving militaristic technology far beyond their control.

In the final part of the first sequence, it is important to note that this is the start of Tetsuo’s mutation due to the government’s involvement. Twenty-three minutes and twenty-seven seconds within the film, Doctor Ōnishi says the power of god to the Colonel as they both look at Tetsuo’s MRI scan currently being conducted. Tetsuo weakly says the name Akira. Back in the room, the Colonel continues on with the doctor that we have to touch it and control it. He lastly tells Ōnishi that if he proves to be too difficult to control then there must be no hesitation in destroying him. To understand Akira is the original test subject who was the cause of the first destruction of Tokyo back on July 16, 1988. The mise-en-scene of Tetsuo weakly speaking the name, “A..ki..ra” as various other medical wires are strapped to his body is significant since this is the beginning of the end for Neo-Tokyo. The head doctor went to undergo an implantation of Akira's abilities into Tetsuo’s body since his body is compatible with Akira. All of this was able to be accomplished to Colonel Shikishima’s approval in capturing Tetsuo and experimenting on him in order to gain more power. It is insane to understand that within the beginning of the film, there is no clear motive from the government in why they want to access such a dangerous weapon after already knowing the deadly consequences. It is clear in *Akira* that Otomo wanted to

demonstrate to his audience that high-ranking members in the military only want to expand their dangerous military technology to where they can't be looked down on. This is again is able to reflect on how traumatizing both bombings were on the citizens of Japan because the fact that if only two bombs were able to create such devastating damage then, what will happen in current life if other countries decided to try and create weapons that were far more advanced than the original atoms bombs? It is terrifying to think about this since it will affect everyone around the world if the classic worst case scenario of nuclear war abruptly.

In the second sequence within *Akira*, I want to further reinforce the state of how the weapon(Akira) inside of Tetsuo is starting to affect and mutate within his body. Twenty-nine minutes and eleven seconds within the film, Kaori regains consciousness to see Tetsuo mercilessly beat up the ringleader of the clown biker gang. Kaneda tells him to stop beating the rival gang up and it is your fault in the first place for taking the bike for a joyride. An injured Kaori stands up as Tetsuo snaps back at Kanade by telling him to Don't order me around! He starts crying as he is yelling, Why do you always have to come and save me? Kaori finally moves towards the group and calls out for Tetsuo just for him to wipe his tears away as well as to leave him alone. As Tetsuo starts to leave his head starts to ache. He quickly gets flashing imagery of buildings crumbling and his body growing at an abnormal rate which causes him agony. A girl calls out to Akira inside his mind. Tetsuo yells out in pain that he doesn't know who that is as more images of his body expanding shows across his brain. He starts to hallucinate by first seeing the road beneath him crumble and he falls in the pit. The road reverts back to normal, but now he experiences his internal organs falling out from the stomach. As the group tries to see what is wrong with Tetsuo, government vehicles surround them and recapture Tetsuo to bring back to the hospital. It is important to note the mise-en-scene of Tetsuo crying out his

frustration of feeling inferior towards Kaneda because he has always been saved from trouble by him. This frustration will be the catalyst to Tetsuo's body as a ticking time bomb since his inferior complex will get the better of him. A scholarly author expressed Tetsuo's insecurities in how, "It becomes clear later, has bred a contradictory mixture of dependence and resentment in Tetsuo" (Napier 41). From understanding the reading by Susan J. Napier, she went into depth on expressing this adolescent angst going on within Tetsuo as well as essentially it cost him the life of everyone he cared for and became isolated in the end. I am able to extract that to make sense of how those mixtures of anxiety and rage are prime triggers for causing his body to further mutate.

After Tetsuo's fit of rage that was talked about just now it triggers horrific images that foreshadow his mutated body as well as hallucinations. Within the scene there are then images that are shown to the audience which are first buildings crumbling and later a quick image of his body abnormally expanding as the name Akira comes to mind again. Susan Napier comes to mind when she talks of how it "contains an extraordinary vision of almost unwatchable excess as Tetsuo's mutations become increasingly grotesque" (43). The specific quick frame of viewing exposed veins and muscles coming out of Tetsuo tells the audience the foreshadow that a catastrophe is going to occur soon or at the minimum something foreign has invaded his body. To further reinforce this there is then a shot of a blue flash that forms around Tetsuo's head which is able to tell the audience that this surge of excruciating pain that he is experiencing due to power that is building up within his body. Thirty minutes into the film, Tetsuo kneels down on the ground to then experience his internal organs falling from his stomach. In the next shot it is revealed that he has been hallucinating. Within that small segment of Tetsuo hallucinating that his organs fell from the body, sound was completely cut off and it resumed when he started

panting as he was trying to place back the internal organs into his seemingly intact body.

Removing the sound for that brief moment was able to enhance the audience's experience of understanding how horrific of a journey Tetsuo will lead until the very end. It goes to show that the power within Tetsuo's body is starting to slowly take over control and mutate by first starting with the mind.

Within the second part of the second sequence demonstrates how the government has already failed to understand the gravity of their consequences in containing their "weapon". Thirty-one minutes into the film, the head Doctor Ōnishi finds Tetsuo's location and demands the other doctors to retrieve him. Tetsuo and the group get surrounded by various military vehicles, one being the large truck that will transport the subject at hand. Colonel Shikishima silently oversees his men take Tetsuo as they bring him back to the hospital while the rest of the group of kids are helpless to do anything about it. In this section of the film, the amount of people deployed by the military to recapture one person establishes the urgency of containing this "dangerous weapon" which in this case Tetsuo's body represents. Susan Napier expressed in another scholarly paper called *Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster From Godzilla to Akira* that, "His actions become increasingly destructive and increasingly uncontrollable, even though what appears to be the entire military-industrial complex of Japan is eventually called in to stop him" (339). From Napier, this is eventually what's going to happen towards the climax of the film, but I want to empathize how the government neglected to understand from the beginning what they opened up. The viewers can understand these ideas, by looking within the mise-en-scene of this small montage of the amount of military employees marching in to secure the subject which is Tetsuo. There is a shot of Kanade's perspective of looking up at one of the body guards looking down on him while a military grade helicopter goes across the screen.

While this government within the film is exercising their corrupt power to do what they want, the viewer is given this false idea that the military has any permanent control in containing powers of mass destruction. The one true fact is that their weapon, Tetsuo Shima, has already escaped from their clutches once. It goes to show to the audience the repeated history of the military trying to acquire power without truly understanding the dire consequences of accumulating it without any second thought.

Lastly, in the final sequence I want to analyze the unfortunate but unsurprising result of the military trying to attempt to accomplish building up their military power. An hour and forty-six minutes into the film, Tetsuo cries for help to Kaneda as his body is mutating and expanding at an abnormal rate. Kaneda and Kaori are swallowed up by Tetsuo's ever-growing body and Kaori ends up getting crushed by him. Doctor Ōnishi is terrified, but fascinated by Tetsuo's growth. His growth momentarily stops, when Akira is reborn and the explosion starts to ignite again. Tetsuo's enormous baby-like form is being swallowed up by Akira and pleads to be saved by Kaneda one more time. The three telekinetic children enter within the ever expanding dome of destruction in order to save Kaneda who was dragged in by Tetsuo's body. The Doctor is in complete shock while looking at his charts because he says, it's almost as if this is the birth of a universe. Kaneda is teleported to Kei and watches as this current explosion annihilates Neo-Tokyo. "I am Tetsuo" is the last line of the film before the credits start rolling by. Now at the climax of the film, it has come back to a full cycle from the beginning of the film starting with the first explosion and now ending it with the second explosion. There is the *mise-en-scene* in the beginning of the sequence in which every organ in Tetsuo's body is growing at an abnormal rate and he cries out to be saved by Kaneda again. This first represents Tetsuo's dependency to be saved again by Kaneda shining through this part. This also represents the



irreversible outcome of holding that much power within his body due to the experiments. The body is paying the price by the skin being ripping since his other organs, veins, and everything else is protruding out from Tetsuo comparable to an uncontrollable volcano. Napier expresses how, “The mutating arm, growing more grotesque with each mutation, becomes a symbol of Tetsuo’s increasingly uncontrollable power” (343). To branch off from quoting the author, there is one main factor to consider the cause of this second explosion and that has to be the fault of the scientists from the beginning of the film. From the beginning of the film, there is the first explosion that was caused by the scientists back in 1988. At that point Akira was the one who was among other children that were being experimented on but he was the subject that ended up causing the first explosion to go off. Essentially, Akira’s body is used to represent the first bombing that occurred in Hiroshima and now in the ending of the film, Tetsuo’s body is being used to represent the second bombing that decimated Nagasaki. The message that the film gives off is anything but hopeful because it is demonstrating how simple the government will become corrupted once they have a taste of destructive power.

Another part to demonstrate this feeling of hopelessness is through the usage of sound incorporated throughout Tetsuo’s final mutation scene. A bit after the final mutation process for Tetsuo begins, he pleads saying, “Kaneda..? H-Help me...!”. After those lines are spoken is when the soundtrack starts to play and it starts with a low booming sound accompanied by other instruments that is able to help reinforce this complete lack of hope that has entered the atmosphere when the process began. This sense of hopelessness is seen through the shocked faces of Kaneda, Kaori, and the Colonel when they are all witnesses to the monstrous growth of Tetsuo’s mutation. Napier expresses that, “The power that wrecks Japan in the film is an almost monstrous one, one that is perhaps not so different from the energy released by Tetsuo’s

grotesque mutations” (349). The sound also starts to peak and distort which transforms into multiple screams. Eventually it is a loud but unison scream that is further reinforcing the agony that is coursing throughout Tetsuo’s mutated body that seems to never end. It is interesting to understand that the sound comes to a halt after the tubes which contained body parts that belonged to Akira shattered causing his body to reform. The sound then transforms into two parts. The first is this soothing melody that is being sung by a choir while the second part is everything within the explosion is being destroyed. While the debris of the city buildings is being heard the main soundtrack is of a choir singing a soothe melody that is able to reinforce the feeling of this state of despair because the explosion was inevitably going to happen due to the foreshadowing of Tetsuo’s body mutating from the beginning due to the experiments from the doctor.

There is one last scene I want to point out and that is Doctor Ōnishi’s amazement towards the progress of Tetsuo’s body. An hour and fifty-six minutes in, the doctor is staring at this holographic device that is able to demonstrate the second explosion that is occurring at the moment. Ōnishi runs over looking at a chart sending a multitude of messages and in a state of bewilderment he says, “If this is correct, it’s almost as if this is the birth of a universe!?” He looks back at the holographic device and sees this dome of destruction start to implode. This scene demonstrates that the doctor does not care about his own well-being considering that he is tremendously within range of the explosion he is witnessing through the holographic device. There is a shot of multiple reading charts spewing out information as he frantically runs to try and discover the latest progress within Tetsuo’s body. It is worth understanding the obsession with the head doctor trying to continuously experiment on Tetsuo regardless of the consequences. This allows the viewers to reinforce the idea of how the military can have the will

to continuously further advance itself without thinking of the consequences until after the damage was already done. Napier goes on to write on how, “A certain melancholy pride reveals itself when the scientists speak about the immense energy going on beneath the surface of Japan, as if this unique power were somehow a positive cultural attribute” (349). Napier essentially connects the scientist’s amazement towards Tetsuo’s mutated body rapidly growing to this pleasure of nothingness. As I mentioned beforehand Tetsuo’s body is the representation of the second bomb and the head doctor is portrayed as a cog to a much larger machine that will stop at nothing in order to achieve their goals no matter the repercussions in store for the military.

As a result, Katsuhiro Otomo’s 1988 film *Akira* was able to help provide enough evidence in first demonstrating how Tetsuo’s body was able to represent the bombing for the second attack that occurred in Nagasaki. Through the help of mise-en-scene, sound, as well as how it was edited, I was able to show the lengths that the military will go to in order to achieve their goals. In the last chapter of my paper, I will be analyzing different sequences within Shinya Tsukamoto’s 1989 film *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. I will be going in depth of the bubble economy that occurred within Japan and how through the usage of the body horror genre it is able to reveal these social anxieties surrounding trying to escape from the lifestyle of a salaryman back around 80s Japan.

### **Chapter Three: Infusion between the organic and metal seen within *Tetsuo: The Iron Man***

Shinya Tsukamoto's 1989 *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*, the film follows a person driven mad as maggots squirm around his self-inflicted wounds that have been embedded with various types of metal in his flesh is called the "metal fetishist." A Japanese salaryman with his girlfriend in the car accidentally hit the "metal fetishist" and proceeded to get rid of the body to quietly move on with their lives. The Salaryman quickly comes to realize that he has become infected by an aggressive curse that will eventually transform his flesh into iron. To start to dive deep into this film, it is important to understand the business culture in Japan. A 'Japanese Salaryman' is a term that signifies any white-collar employee working in a company. One defining characteristic when thinking of the average salaryman is the punctuality to be to work early as well as leave after work ended a while ago. There are some established concepts that are expected of these office workers such as placing the interest of the company as well as their seniors first before their personal values. I want to let it be known that overtime work and strict seniority are no longer the absolute norm in present day Japan, although change is a bit gradual. To give some more historical context, this film was made around the late 1980s when Japan was in a bubble economy. A bubble economy is during a time when the current asset prices greatly exceed their intrinsic valuation. In simpler words the price of goods far outweighs the item's actual worth. When this boom in prices occurs it is then later followed by a quick decrease in the valued good which is then referred to as a "bubble burst." During this time of potential economic setbacks, Shinya Tsukamoto quit his daily job as a salaryman in order to pursue filmmaking which angered his father to no end. In order to help reveal these questions such as how does the body horror

film reveal about social anxieties surrounding technology and the body? Within this final chapter there are three key terms to keep in mind which are Infection, mutation, and bubble economy. I want to argue how Tsukamoto is able to show his hatred of his former job as a Japanese salaryman through the use of the body horror genre. The stylistic features range from the Salaryman's body transmutation, guerilla style filmmaking, to the metal sound as well as rapid editing. Tsukamoto's film is able to represent this enormous system that produced this monotonous routine for the Japanese salaryman during the late 80s.

The first stylistic feature that sets the foundation in understanding why technology is consistently characterized as a virus that corrupts the stability of the human body is through Tsukamoto's guerilla filmmaking techniques. Guerilla filmmaking is another style of independent filmmaking that is often described as using minimal equipment, crews, and the scenes are often quickly shot without obtaining any permits. Within the first sequence of the film, It begins to express the origin of establishing who the "metal fetishist" is as well as his reason for intentionally infecting the once traditional lifestyle of the Japanese salaryman's body with metal parts. Four minutes into the film, the "metal fetishist" starts running in fear after discovering maggots are wriggling in his wounded leg after he embedded a metal rod. He was running for a while until a car ended up running him over. During this scene, Tsukamoto used a handheld camera in order to follow the character running which is why the camera is shaking. Towards the ending of the scene, the camera simulated being hit by the car as to give the audience from the perspective of the "metal fetishist." The cheery music that is being played while the camera is going around the headlights in swirls seems to be there to confuse the audience, but it starts to make sense later on when the same cheery music was being played inside the car when it was discovered that the salaryman hit the "metal fetishist."

Tom Mes is an author for a book that sheds light into Tsukamoto's strict independent style of filmmaking. In the book it was shown how the film has taken a toll on the original crew which led Tsukamoto to mention that, "People would just walk off and not return and eventually I was the only one left. I did all the frame-by-frame animation by myself, because there was nobody around to help me anymore" (52). This style of filmmaking is the foundation in reinforcing the chaotic and vile events that will further ensue in *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. Eleven minutes and 20 seconds into the film, The salaryman ends up being chased through a train station by a woman who is possessed by the spirit of the "metal fetishist." Towards the end of the chase the salaryman ends up killing the mutated woman by squeezing her body until it contorts in unnatural ways and he drops her body to the ground. The beginning of the sequence is able to first demonstrate that the cinematographer is using handheld instead of a tripod since filming in a public place such as the train station without a permit is illegal. This chaotic element of the quick cuts to the shakiness of the camera as the chase sequence is occurring is able to reinforce that through the use of guerilla style filmmaking it is the foundation in manifesting anxiety within the audience. From interpreting Tsukamoto's film, I show that the reason anxiety is being built up within the audience is to understand that the viewers are vicariously living through the salaryman's fear of being infected and eventually have his body be transmuted into a grotesque monster made up of a mix of metal and organic parts. Two other scholars bring up a point that says, "We might suggest, then, what differentiates the films that we call 'extreme cinema' from that which is merely violent or pornographic is an emphasis on cinematic form" (Kerner and Knapp 4). Extreme cinema is a subgenre of film which essentially consists of an excessive amount of sex and violence within the piece. *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* has some aspects of extreme

cinema with the combination of violence and sex manifesting within the bodies that become corrupted through the “metal fetishist.”

Building on from how Tsukamoto’s guerilla style of filmmaking demonstrates the chaotic elements that are being played within the film, the second stylistic feature to build upon is the metallic and grinding sounds that are able to contribute to the anxiety surrounding technology and the body throughout the film. “Tsukamoto’s idea for the soundtrack was to use a recurring pattern of metallic percussion sounds” (Mes 55). The second layer to add on that made this film chaotic was through creating a soundtrack that when heard is able to represent what it sounds to hear metal collide against one another. It felt like the film was created in order to support this soundtrack that represented what metal parts are supposed to sound like if it could make music. The reason I say this is because the film used for *Tetsuo: The Iron man* is 16mm as well as it was in black and white. Having no color is able to help reinforce the idea of being consumed by a grotesque world made up of this sickening infusion of metal and body parts. Twenty-three minutes into the film, the Salaryman starts spoon feeding his girlfriend and startles himself when he hears her chewing the food because it sounds like metallic parts grinding upon one another. As the girlfriend is seductively licking a sausage that the disturbed salaryman is currently feeding to her, the metallic screeching increases with every lick until she bites it causing various metallic parts to play at once. Within this scene the sound resembles a fork scratching up chalk board or plate causing this screeching noise that is repulsive to hear. The sound is indicating to the audience that the salaryman’s body has already been infected by the “metal fetishist” because he is hallucinating these abhorrent metallic sounds coming from the girlfriend. Kerner and Knapp talk about in their book called *Extreme Cinema: Revisiting Body Genres* how, “Extreme cinema hosts the body at the far reaches of the human experience from the ecstasy of pleasure to

excruciating pain”(3). While both authors are explaining how the audience’s reaction goes from extreme pleasure to severe pain within the realm of extreme cinema. I wanted to go a bit further in and explain how the metallic sound contributing to the scene is able to have a combination between the pleasure as well as pain. The sound is able to help create this infusion of pleasure and pain within the scene since the salaryman is writhing in pain from hearing the disgustingly metallic sounds while the girlfriend is seductively eating the food that he made for her. Overall, these sporadic sounds that at times sound like metal parts are grinding against each other is able to reinforce the uncomfortable feeling of metal forcibly trying to become one with the human body.

In this final part, it is important to understand the Japanese salaryman’s transmutation with the metal fetishist as well as start to connect the common thread that links between all three surrounding films from this paper. The whole reason why the metal fetishist is in the process of transmuting with the salaryman is in an act of revenge because the salaryman ran him over with a car and proceeded to have intercourse with his girlfriend while the metal fetishist is slowly dying. Forty minutes into the film, The salaryman is almost fully transformed into a man made up of flesh and metal that is startled that the television sporadically turned on. The television starts to play from the perspective of the metal fetishist when he got run over by the car. Even as the salaryman is trying to turn off the television, it continues to play as well as shows the metal fetishist being thrown into the woods and watches as the couple are having sex since they are aroused by the situation at hand. According to Tom Mes, Tomorrowo Taguchi who is the character that plays the salaryman expresses his experience during the costume design that, “Most of the material we used was real scrap metal that we’d found outside electronics and hardware stores. We collected all of it, took it apart, and from all the parts we composed the



make-up, which was stuck directly to my face with a double-sided adhesive tape”(51). After learning this, it is wild to think about how even the actual costume design was made out of actual metal parts to reinforce many of the film's ideas in this twisted fusion between metal and the body. The grotesque combination of the salaryman's transmuted body with metal is the result of the metal fetishist's revenge as well as it is performed in a perverted way since the couple ended up having sex after hitting the metal fetishist with the car. Such as how the metal fetishist had a goal in mind to exact revenge towards the salaryman by forcibly transforming him into a abominable figure that is comprised of both metal and body; there is a common thread that links *Videodrome*, *Akira*, and *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*. Each film is able to demonstrate the life-altering changes of the human body when it is being tampered with technological machinery. From Max Renn essentially becoming a puppet from over exposure to the channel videodrome to the impending time bomb that was Tetsuo Shima after coming in contact with the government's test subjects. Lastly to witnessing the infected Japanese salaryman slowly transforming into a hideous metallic monster due to the metal fetishist's corruption. In the end, I wanted to contribute to this ongoing conversation of figuring out Why, in the body horror genre, is technology consistently characterized as a plague or virus that corrupts the stability of the human body. The second question is within the same subgenre, How is it revealing social anxieties surrounding technology and the body? In analyzing these three films as well as the texts, I have come to conclude that there is this innate fear that has been instilled within the present hearts of current society which depict in popular culture the consequences of messing with potentially dangerous technologies that could cause more harm than good to the world.

## Filmography

### Part I: (full analysis throughout the project)

*Akira*, Otomo Katsuhiro, 1988, Japan

*Tetsuo: The Iron Man*, Shinya Tsukamoto, 1989, Japan

*Videodrome*, David Cronenberg, 1983, Canada

### Part II: (referenced in passing, or connection to other films)

*Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott, 1982, USA

*Ghost in the Shell*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995, Japan

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