

Societal Structures from Anime-Cyberpunk to Post-cyberpunk:

City Imagery in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Psycho-Pass*

Malte Frey

Volume 4, Pages 131-158

Abstract: This paper analyzes the imagery of cities as depicted in the cyberpunk anime *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and the post-cyberpunk anime series *Psycho-Pass* (2012). In these works, the filmic city is employed as a signifier for societal structures, and changes in these visual signifiers thus depict the shift from cyberpunk, which focuses the autonomous subject, to post-cyberpunk, which focuses on technological societies. Different depictions of society and the role of the individual subject within it are made apparent. The predominant bottom-up direction of view in *Ghost in the Shell* suggests a technological dystopia that the protagonist seeks to elude, while an upper-lower dichotomy in *Psycho-Pass* offers subjects a means of remaining within society. Certain concepts of Japanese architecture, urbanity, and postmodernity are employed to conceptualize and visualize these key differences. This project concludes that *Ghost in the Shell* depicts a dystopian society whose postmodern superficiality prohibits the protagonist from becoming autonomous, while *Psycho-Pass* acknowledges that postmodern signification does not equal material existence. Postmodern globality is evident in *Ghost in the Shell*, while *Psycho-Pass* takes a more nationalist and autocratic approach to society.

Keywords: post-cyberpunk, cyberpunk, society, city, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Psycho-Pass*

Author Bio: Malte Frey (*1990) works and lives in Düsseldorf, Germany. He started his ongoing dissertation on societal structures and therein proclaim concepts of subjectivity as depicted in the technological organized societies of postcyberpunk anime in 2020 at the University of Fine Arts Münster, Germany. He graduated from University of Münster in protestant religious education and in fine arts from the University of Fine Arts Münster, followed by working as an artist and exhibiting his paintings in numerous exhibitions. Since then, he mainly focuses on his scholarly work, specializing in media-specific visual analysis in anime on the one hand and posthuman studies within the framework of (post-)cyberpunk fiction on the other. He is driven by a profound interest in the culture surrounding anime and manga as well as concepts of non-Western traditions, starting from a semester at the Fine Arts College of Shanghai University in 2015/16.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Generic License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Introduction

The beginning sequence of Mamoru Oshii's cyberpunk classic *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, *Kōkaku Kidōtai*, henceforth *GitS*) shows the protagonist, secret security Section 9's Major Motoko Kusanagi, jumping off of a rooftop after having successfully assassinated her target.¹ She then escapes the authorities seeking her by activating her thermo-optical camouflage. Consequently, in the viewers' eyes, Kusanagi's shape merges with the nightly scenery of Newport City while she falls into the netlike structure of the metropolis, leaving audiences with the images of a near-future science fiction city. Right from the start, then, city imagery marks its immense presence which it continues throughout the entire movie.

City imagery, like that of the opening of *GitS*, can serve as an access point for examinations of filmic societies. How is it structured? Who has access to which parts? Which restrictions are implemented? The "city," broadly speaking, has been the focus of many and various sociological studies and has been labeled the "specific space of modern society"² in film as well.³ For example, sociologists Alexa M. Kunz and Bernhard Schäfers consider how spatial-urban elements signify societal structures of the city, such as how differentiating between an upper and lower part of the city can refer to a class system,⁴ while access or lack thereof to certain (public) spaces can demonstrate the individual's freedom to act.⁵

Another anime that features city imagery in a central role is the post-cyberpunk series *Psycho-Pass* (first season, 2012, henceforth *PP*).⁶ Produced by Production I.G., the same production studio that released *GitS*, *PP* can arguably be considered a successor to the ideological complexities of *GitS*, due to similarities in visual style, setting, and thematic concerns. However, the outlook on society that we encounter in

PP is markedly different from what had been introduced with *GitS* roughly two decades earlier. While *GitS* focuses on the individual subject and its struggles in a society permeated by technology, *PP* places more emphasis on how technology structures society itself.

This shift between the two anime, I argue, resembles the shift from the cyberpunk genre to post-cyberpunk as initially theorized by Lawrence Person.⁷ In the following work, I will examine the city imagery we encounter in *GitS* and *PP* as exemplifying how each anime constructs a particular form of society, particularly regarding structural hierarchies and the autonomy of its subjects. Because film itself as a medium is spatially structured,⁸ this inquiry is based on filmic spatial notions as well, and this lens will offer further insight into how the outlook on society has changed from cyberpunk's dystopian take in *GitS* to post-cyberpunk's also bleak but now more pragmatic counterpart in *PP*.

(Post-)Cyberpunk and Japan: A First Encounter

To better understand the background and stakes of this analysis, I turn first to considering cyberpunk, post-cyberpunk, and some key connections between the two, as well as how they depict cities. In cyberpunk narratives, media scholar Jiré Emine Gözen notes, urban space functions as the predominant setting.⁹ We may remember Ridley Scott's famous movie *Blade Runner* (1982) or William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984), both primary texts of 1980s cyberpunk, and both of which unfold their stories almost entirely in urban spaces. Cyberpunk narratives often feature a dystopian near-future world, controlled rather by hyper-capitalist mega-corporations than public government structures. Interaction with everyday technology leads to body alterations, typically becoming cyborgs, and questioning the idea of

human nature.¹⁰ In 1991, Fredric Jameson argued that cyberpunk fiction could be seen as a representation of what was then a technologically-changed present.¹¹ Likewise, anime scholar Susan J. Napier has contended that cyberpunk may be well suited to describe present times too, as they are also shaped by technology.¹²

Despite the continuing concerns with technology, though, the genre itself has changed since the 1980s and 1990s. New narratives in this tradition have been labeled post-cyberpunk by sci-fi-author and critic Lawrence Person, who coined the term in 1999.¹³ Whereas early cyberpunk deals with the *conditio humana* that is influenced by everyday technological interventions, post-cyberpunk primarily focuses on society structured by and even consisting of technology. Person, who focuses on novels like Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* (1995) and Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net* (1988) among others, argues that technological conditions for writing fiction have changed since the late 1980s, and that society comes to be conceived differently too. As he puts it, "In cyberpunk, technology facilitates alienation from society. In post-cyberpunk, technology is society." Unlike cyberpunk, which tends to feature outsider protagonists going against the system, characters in post-cyberpunk are anchored within society and strive to make it better.¹⁴

Although Person focuses on literature rather than visual media like film or anime, the elements that he identifies in his definition are also evident in works such as *PP*, making it logical to consider such visual texts as post-cyberpunk too. (Even so, it is also worth noting that Person himself in 1999 concedes that his conception of post-cyberpunk "will probably look misguided in a decade or so hence."¹⁵)

Though the series *PP* and the movie *GitS* share thematic similarities, and the former is rooted in the latter through their production, we might reasonably assume

that they depict society in complementary, but not completely similar, ways. Moreover, one means of understanding this would be to simply compare the two, focusing on how *PP* draws from post-cyberpunk interests and *GitS* is more classic cyberpunk, and then to examine what picture of society each one offers accordingly. However, , I assume not a divide between post-cyberpunk and cyberpunk, but instead an ongoing evolution and transition of established themes. This is both exemplified by my analysis, and also demonstrates an actualization of Person's account of post-cyberpunk as an evolving genre.

Further, the fact that both texts examined here are Japanese productions must be highlighted. Imagery of Japan—or supposedly derived thereof—has played a central role in the development of cyberpunk and its genre iconography. Kumiko Sato argues that images derived from the Japanese cultural environment and used in American cyberpunk “enabled Japan to find itself in the future of the West, which suggested that it [Japan] had already outpaced the West in Westernization thanks to its rapid technological progress.”¹⁶ In Sato's view, the growing Japanese cyberpunk functions as a discursive platform to re-inscribe premodern Japan in a modern—i.e., technological—context, therein fulfilling Japan's continued striving for Westernization.¹⁷ However, as Japanese cyberpunk involves an entanglement of premodern Japan and modern technology, Sato therein sees the danger of the construction of nationalist concepts of “Japanese uniqueness” through Japanese cyberpunk.¹⁸ In particular, the notion of a “cyborg identity” has been claimed as specifically Japanese, foremost by scholar Takayuki Tatsumi.¹⁹ The cyborg, constructed of organic and inorganic parts, has been conceptualized in Western posthuman studies as a fluid and relational identity-concept in contrast to fixed and static binary forms. In cyberpunk, characters are altered by technological

enhancement, and thus, transcend fixed identity structures as they consist of numerous and changeable parts. Scholars such as Tatsumi maintain that this particular form of technological incorporation of technology is a distinctly Japanese feature, one that is linked to the country's economic success because of technology, and thus, one that may come with nationalist undertones.

In this project, though, it is my premise that concerning oneself with (Japanese) cyberpunk from a Western perspective allows for going beyond a simplistic divide between Eastern and Western concepts by instead reading both through one another, thus avoiding any nationalist essentialism. The Western concept of a cyborg identity offers a useful tool to describe patterns within the Japanese cultural environment. Likewise, such patterns provide a rich pool of thoughts on concepts that relate to that of a cyborg identity. As we will see, this entanglement can enrich our readings of texts such as *GitS* and *PP*.

Dystopian Capitalistic Urbanity in Cyberpunk: The Case of *Ghost in the Shell*

Oshii's cyberpunk-classic *Ghost in the Shell* (alternately, *GitS*) takes place in the fictive futuristic metropolis of Newport City, which is the locus of the film's entire narrative. The protagonist, Major Motoko Kusanagi, is a cyborg who serves as head of the elite police unit Section 9. Because she is unsure as to which parts of her are human, Kusanagi questions the foundation of her existence because she feels that her persona might as well be technologically constructed from altered or even false memories. A solution to this problem—and perhaps even salvation from it—is offered to Kusanagi by the artificial life-form Puppetmaster, which was originally designed to be a hacker program and has since become self-aware in the data realms of the net.

Longing to merge with Kusanagi for reproductive purposes, Puppetmaster offers unlimited access to the data world. Therein lies the dual promise both of freeing Kusanagi from her bodily restrictions and also of eluding the uncertainty regarding her human status, as she would move to a higher or at least different ontological level. The film ends with Kusanagi-Puppetmaster, now merged in a childish-looking cyborg body, looking over Newport City from an elevated point of view.

Given its popularity, *GitS* has been the subject of much scholarship. Prominent analysis, such as those by Susan J. Napier, Christopher Bolton or Sharilyn Orbaugh among others, often focus on topics that regard Kusanagi as a protagonist, the narratives she participates in, and the ontological issues she raises, thus further delving into questions about gender and the construction of identity. With such interests though, most scholars tend to focus on the narrative and depiction of the character Kusanagi for their analyses, and in doing so, focus on her rather than the displayed environment visible around her.²⁰

By contrast, I will draw here from two approaches that examine the city depicted in *GitS*. One of the most substantial inquiries of *GitS*'s city imagery has been provided by Wong Kin Yuen who points out Hong Kong as a substantial model for the movie.²¹ He leans on statements made by Oshii himself, who held Asian cities in general and Hong Kong in particular as an image for future cities, and also by Oshii's art designer Takeuchi Atsushi claiming that, in Hong Kong, "on the streets there flows an excess or a flood of information."²² Oshii has also stated that the atmosphere of Los Angeles as portrayed in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) influenced his movie and that he views Hong Kong as an equivalent to Scott's Los Angeles.²³ Following those statements, Yuen emphasizes the "profusion of signs and icons"²⁴ in Hong Kong in connection to the "sea of data"²⁵ in *GitS*.

In a similar manner, regarding this final sequence of the film, Japan scholar William O. Gardner identifies *GitS*'s city in general with the data realm to which Kusanagi gains unlimited access by merging with Puppetmaster.²⁶ This "Net" is made visible by the weblike structures of the city Kusanagi finally looks down upon.²⁷ Additionally, according to Gardner, the data realm is constantly made visible by the massively detailed city sceneries deployed by Oshii to hint "at the even richer and vaster realm of digital information on the Net."²⁸ In this sense, the city is linked to the technological data realm deeply implemented in the society of *GitS*.

While I draw from both of these place-oriented lenses, I am in particular agreement with Gardner's reading in terms of what I call the "upper sphere" of the city in *GitS*. By this I mean the high-rising skyscrapers that mostly appear in the distance, far away, and even fading. This sphere is strongly separated from the "lower sphere" of the city, which appears close, dirty, and tangible. The significance of the former can be illuminated by an early sequence that shows Kusanagi sitting on her bed in a blacked-out room, gazing contemplatively at the futuristic architecture that reaches into a pale but nonetheless bright sky in the upper part of the frame. The high-rising structures seem to be the object of her longing here.

This longing is tied to a religiously-connoted hope for salvation. Napier observes that Kusanagi's merger with Puppetmaster, which ultimately liberates her from socio-economic restrictions, is accompanied by numerous references not only to Christian theology, but also to Buddhism and Shinto as well. According to Napier, Oshii himself equates the 'Net' with Shinto deities, the *kami*, thereby linking the data realm to a religious transcendence.²⁹ In *GitS*, therefore, the longed-for metaphysic is the 'Net' itself, promising to elude said restrictions. This data realm is hinted at by the upper sphere of the city's skyscrapers.

However, the lower city-sphere provides another perspective. In another of the most striking sequences of *Kusanagi*, she is taking a stroll through the city, moving along at ground level. Notably, the focus of the sequence lies upon the city itself. Emerging from the starting point of a blank white screen, the silhouette of an airplane overshadows the scenery in sharp contrast to the sky whose bright white is also contrasted by the ground-level buildings and figures, which are painted in rusty and dark colors. Instead of futuristic skyscrapers, the city here consists of dirty buildings and advertisements closely resembling contemporary Asian sceneries of Hong Kong, Shanghai, or Kuala Lumpur. Everything seems inhabited and in use by people walking in the streets or upon boats floating on the water. The artists of *GitS* made sketches in Hong Kong in order to grasp particular sites, as Yuen points out.³⁰ This verisimilitude or “realness” of the lower level exists in opposition to the metaphysics invoked by the upper city-sphere. Such contrasts are further highlighted by other artistic elements of the film. For example, predominant in this sequence, as well as in the entire movie, is a bottom-up direction of view. *Kusanagi*, like the viewer, finds herself on the bottom of the lower city sphere, looking up at the high-rising buildings that jut into the sky. As the sequence continues, the view is distorted as the sky becomes visible only in reflections of dirty water or in the glassy facades of the buildings, leaving only depthless surfaces.

This resonates with both architectural and theoretical concepts of postmodernism. Since the late 1960s, Japanese architects have envisioned an increasingly fluid city based on information and simulation.³¹ Likewise, *GitS* designer Takeuchi, when talking about Hong Kong, mentions “a flood of information” and “a whirlpool of information”.³² Further, as Gardner points out, “by the 1980s and 1990s, the interpretation of the Japanese city by Japanese as well as foreign architects, critics,

and novelists both influenced and was influenced by postmodern theoretical ideas, including Fredric Jameson's idea of 'depthlessness' as a defining feature of postmodernism [...]."³³ For Jameson, in postmodernist capitalism everything becomes a commodity, and therefore, merely superficial without substance: in a word, depthless.³⁴ Accordingly, in 1991, Japanese architect Hajime Yatsuka saw architecture rather as signs than substance. He stated that Japanese cities were "imbued with an 'visible and multi-layered network of information flow.'" ³⁵ Taking Oshii's and Takeuchi's statements into consideration, Yatsuka's claim seems valid not only regarding Japanese examples, but also, both Asian cities and postmodernist cities in general. Postmodernist cities, according to Jameson, abandon the concept of insight and outside, which could certainly fit as another way to describe a "multi-layered network of information flow." And, fittingly, Jameson saw that idea realized in parts of Tokyo.³⁶

Oshii appears to be strongly influenced by such ideas, given his prominent use of layering and the resulting shallowness of the architectural surfaces in the sequence described above. Nearly every shot consists of a foreground (e.g., figures and boats), a middle-ground (e.g., buildings) and the background (e.g., sky or skyscrapers), often overlapping one another. The predominant bottom-up view to the omnipresent sky, which in the final sequence is subverted by Kusanagi finally looking down, is constantly blocked by advertisements, bridges, or traffic lights. As described by media scholar Thomas Lamarre, the aspect of layering is significant to animation because, aside from the visual vanishing point perspective, layering is most often how the effect of spatial depth is achieved. By stacking multiple layers of images on celluloid over one another and varying the space from one layer to another, effects of movement, sharpness and spatial depth can be evoked.³⁷

Both in the sequence described above, and in *GitS* more generally, Oshii obviously not only makes use of this specific animation-element, but also emphasizes layering as an aspect of the narrative which can be illustrated by an exemplary shot (fig. 1):



here a group of what appears to be detailed figures, maybe students, run from right to left in the lower third of the frame (foreground). Behind them (middle ground) dirty dark buildings line up. The background, however, consists of skyscrapers bursting the frame's top border and thereby resembling the shot of Kusanagi's flat discussed previously. Whereas the dirty buildings of the middle ground seem to be connected to the figures walking in front of them, the skyscrapers appear far away and in a distant blue, over-towering the scenery while simultaneously almost fading away from it.

This distinction between fore-, middle- and background can be identified with different ontological levels. Both foreground and middle ground belong to the sphere of the *known*, which in this sequence is represented by anonymous people walking by and by the omnipresent advertisements that signify commerce. All of this seems somewhat dirty, and thus, tangible. By contrast, the skyscrapers belong to another

layer, one that is altogether different. These futuristic buildings are closely entangled with the image of the sky they seem to be reaching for, as suggested by a building under construction. Then behind the bridges and structures, the white sky juxtaposes with the tangible shabbiness of the lower sphere, thus functioning as an object of longing which, in the context of the film, is not really capitalist success, but actually, access to the data realm. The *known*, however, can be seen as a restriction from the sphere of the longed-for, since from the bottom-up direction of view, the way to the bright and seemingly endless sky and skyscrapers is always blocked by darker bridges, advertisements, and other structures that appear to be only depthless surfaces too. In this way, *GitS* invokes is a sense of emptiness and loneliness contradicting the optimistic intention for society's development into a "information society."³⁸

This further resonates with Yatsuka's assertion that in the "sea of signs,"³⁹ as he terms the structures of Japanese cities, everything becomes relative because nothing stands out. Rather, in the "sea of signs," all floating (architectural) works therein are not unique since they lack a purpose other than being an object for and the location of consumption. Accordingly, the city cannot provide distinct individual experiences outside the shallowness of consumption, leading to Kusanagi feeling uncertain and empty. This concept dovetails handily with the "confusion" caused by the multitude of signs described by Yuen regarding Hong Kong.⁴⁰ In this sense, Yatsuka's examination of the Japanese cities provides a critical frame by which the superficial and postmodernist city-scape of *GitS* can be understood as a rather dystopian and hyper-capitalistic scenery—a perspective that also offers a critical view on contemporary capitalistic society and urban structures. In this way, *GitS* suggests that a longed-for deeper connection cannot be found in the depthless structures of the "sea of signs." Accordingly, the city stroll sequence finalizes by fading to black, a stark contrast to the

white in the beginning, and one that further stresses the importance of the white sky that has been blocked by the middle-level bridges and signs.

Of course, Kusanagi is eventually able to overcome those restrictions and reach the longed-for upper sphere, though only through her merger with Puppetmaster. Eluding those restrictions appears to be something she cannot do on her own. Consequently, her falling down and disappearing in the city at the movie's beginning and her being within the lower sphere of the city is contrasted by Kusanagi/Puppetmaster looking down on the city from an elevated point of view. Her position within the societal structure changes both literally and metaphorically. However, her way out of her confinement to the lower sphere of the depthless information society, which can also be regarded as a longing for self-fulfillment, depends on her being a cyborg and also on the actions taken by Puppetmaster. The first aspect hints at economic factors that benefit Kusanagi, while the second reminds of rescue or even salvation. On her own, the longed-for would remain high up in the clouds for Kusanagi in this cyberpunk city of *GitS*.

Concealing Reconstruction: The Post-cyberpunk City in *Psycho-Pass*

The post-cyberpunk anime *Psycho-Pass* (henceforth, *PP*) paints an altogether different picture of its society. In the first season, young inspector of the Ministry of Welfare's Public Safety Bureau Akane Tsunemori hunts antagonist Shogo Makishima. The narrative derives from and revolves around the Sybil System, a technological government system that seems to flawlessly control a Japan of the near future based on empirical data about its citizens. Here crime is anticipated by screening of so-called psycho-passes, which are biometrically-generated statuses created through constant

surveillance of citizens' brains and bodies. Every citizen holds such a pass, which includes a Crime Coefficient (index signifying potential for criminal activity) and Hue (color that communicates coefficient), and may become "clouded" or "clear" (closer to or further from possibly committing criminal activity) depending on factors such as the individual's stress level, trauma, and exposure to crime. Psycho-passes and their constituent parts often determine one's place in society. Moreover, criminal intent is equated with actions against the system and labeled a problem of mental health, caused by stress. Once a pass reaches a certain stress-level, societal bodies—such as the Ministry where Tsunemori works—implement measures from therapy to confinement and even liquidation, in order to prevent crime from even happening. In this and other ways, the Sybil System seems to work to provide a secure, peaceful, and even happy society. Tsunemori is successful in this society, and she harbors a strong wish to keep the peaceful and seemingly just order. Makishima, though, seeks to disrupt, driven by a humanist sense of autonomy. As the anime progresses, audiences learn along with Tsunemori that the Sybil System itself aims to evolve by incorporating unknown factors, such as "criminal brains," into itself; we also learn that, far from an infallible machine, the Sybil System consists of a network of brains of people, unbeknownst to society's citizens, who think of it as an entirely technological structure. The season ends with Makishima's death and Tsunemori's learning of the Sybil System's true nature. While disapproving of its methods and intentions, Tsunemori simultaneously deems the System and its deeds necessary for upholding societal order.

Both visually and thematically, the series is rooted within the cyberpunk tradition. As much as *GitS* owes to *Blade Runner* (1982), *PP* leans on Oshii's earlier masterpiece, which is evident from the series' opening shot depicting the skyline of a huge nightly city as seen from above the neighboring sea, which strongly resembles Newport City

of *GitS*. The neon lights, advertisements, and highways shown afterwards relate to those of *Blade Runner* and *GitS*. However, *PP* also develops the cyberpunk thematics further by focusing its narrative on the government system and society rather than on the individual subject.

In this regard, the city in *PP* has a twofold appearance. First, it is linked to the series' governing system, which is heralded as early as episode 1, where we see police-drones patrolling the city in a clear representation of the system's influential presence in the urban sphere. In a bird's-eye shot, the drones appear as blinking red lights within the traffic on the city highway. One might associate the streaming lines of the streets, and especially the blinking dots of the drones, in the computer-grid-like city with common visualizations of digital data flows, e.g. download bars. Thereby, like in *GitS*, a technological 'Net' gains visibility but is rendered as the governmental presence of control in the urban sphere. Later in episode 14, the city itself is visually linked to the governmental core: here the core of the Sibyl System, visually similar to the tomb of Akira who in the eponymous movie (1988) brings apocalypse, is slowly overlaid by the netlike city imagery. Here, then, the city appears to be founded on the system.

This entanglement of the governing system and the city is also apparent in the way that everything being constantly monitored by the system's scanners. Permanent surveillance is a mechanism to achieve security and thereby control, as Maki Nakamura has argued. She links *PP*'s social system to Foucault's concept of "governmentality."⁴¹ Instead of executing disciplinary actions, governmentality is exercised by "structuring the possible field of their [the subjects'] actions"⁴² and thereby "shape[s] human conduct by calculated means."⁴³ By constant management of people's behavior, the system is able to "secure people's wellbeing."⁴⁴

The second appearance of the city notable in *PP* is notable for the way city imagery is linked to the narrative's society via montage. In episode 17, this functions as a context for conversations about societal structures. Likewise, the apparent equation of city and society is underlined by Professor Saiga, the series' ingenious profiler, who in episode 19 explains that the rural areas of *PP*'s Japan are completely uninhabited: the agricultural sector has been entirely automatized, leaving the urban sphere the only place of society. This concept has historical roots in Japanese urbanity, which has a higher density compared to most American and European counterparts, due to the lack of land and the "megalopolis project," which promoted the idea of a "city Japan" driven by industrial consumer society after the end of World War II.⁴⁵ Furthermore, certain economic and industrializing factors during the US occupation after 1945, which sought to undermine structures beneficial to a militarist Japan such as large-scale landownership and family-held cooperations (*zaibatsu*), led to a drastic advance in automation in the agricultural sector, laying the grounds for Japan to eventually become an industrialized country.⁴⁶ Interestingly, where the city of *GitS* offers a multinational postmodern take, *PP* thereby explicitly seems to focus on Japan in a nationalist manner.⁴⁷ Keeping this in mind, it seems fair to equate the one city we encounter in *PP* with *PP*'s (Japanese) society itself.

The governmental presence within this society is far from absolute, though. As the streaming line of drones elucidates, the system's 'Net' is present, but also moving and porous. Instead of being omnipresent, the system thus leaves areas out of control. This separation is visualized by three major factors: light-dark-contrasts, the architectural difference between worn-out structures and the glossy skylines of clean and possibly official buildings, and finally an embedded aspect of layering in the city's architecture.

All of these are further accompanied by an upper-lower-dichotomy which, in contrast to *GitS*, is supported by a predominantly top-down perspective.

Throughout *PP*, it is in the dark where the crime takes place. Where the upper sphere of the city tends to appear open and in warm-bright colors, the crime scenes are mostly dark closed rooms, back alleys, and uninhabited areas during the night. By contrast, the daytime appears sunny with bright glossy facades in a city without garbage or anything remotely displeasing. The light-dark-separation is most evident in episode 14, where enforcers Kogami and Masaoka pursue a culprit who has beaten a woman to death. Driven by the two policemen and the system's drones away from the city lights and towards a seemingly remote industrial area, the culprit is finally confronted inside an abandoned warehouse. The blue light of the city's skyscrapers shines through the upper windows, but the culprit and those in pursuit of him are not touched by it. The entire setting of the crime and all parties involved thus remain in the dark, separate from both the public and officially-controlled society.

Further, the explicit architectural differences of worn-down and even slum-like areas, which lay the groundwork for crimes, are mostly situated at the bottom of the frames, while the high-rising buildings, which can be associated with the controlling system and safe society in the upper sphere, highlight the contrast between areas where the systems exerts control and those where it does not. On the one hand, an implicit upper-lower hierarchy is enforced throughout the series by institutional architecture, such as two repeatedly-shown buildings, the Public Security Bureau of the Ministry of Welfare and the Nona Tower that holds the core of the Sibyl-System in its basement. Both tower over their surroundings, evoking a social hierarchy.⁴⁸ However, there is also an upper-lower hierarchy between the old and the new, shown most prominently in the establishing shots of Tsunemori's talks with her friends (fig.

2). While the girls speak, we see a functioning traffic infrastructure of the street and high-rising concrete-glass buildings on top of partly submerged ruins.



Tatsumi has pointed out the logic of “deconstruction of war and the construction of the city” that was predominant in postwar Japan, when cities had to be rebuilt out of the destruction.⁴⁹ This logic can be found in *PP* as well, where it is also connected to the aspect of layering since the system’s architecture is built upon the older structures. This layering often is accompanied by water signifying the presence of overbuilt structures of older times. For example, a flooded area marks the entrance to the hunting area of one of Makishima’s disciples. In episode 9, this man is introduced along as a hunter in early 20th century clothing with trophies from foreign countries in his house, thereby appealing to a stereotypical image of colonialist power. Making this connection even more overt, this character’s prey is people. As episode 9 progresses, we see that water proves to be the barrier that separates the seemingly healthy and safe world provided by the system’s care, from the dark and forgotten

places of crime lying underneath its opaque surface. It is thereby suggested that the controlling society overlays the seemingly chaotic and thus dangerous structures of the past. However, as the system has not yet managed to completely penetrate the older structures, so its order remains superficial, even running the risk of forgetting what may lie underneath. In these ways *PP* depicts a layered structure of society, still in the process of gaining control of something that was before. In this sense, the construction of the new on top of the old can be understood as both a development and a burial, negating the old by overlay.⁵⁰

This poses a different approach to depth than that which is described by Jameson, who claims that in hyper-capitalist societies there is no depth but merely surfaces without anything beneath them. Water as a surface in *PP*, though, acts as a barrier to the old, suggesting that there is something beneath the modern veneer and thus counter the postmodern depthlessness evoked in *GitS*. In *PP* something very real is actually lingering in the deep. In Jameson's postmodernism, depthlessness is also tied to a loss of the past as everything becomes present through signification, the past becomes style and text.⁵¹ Arguably, this too is the case in cyberpunk fiction like Charles Paulk argues regarding Gibson's *Neuromancer*.⁵² The past in *PP*, however, withstands its complete annihilation and older structures offer places of antagonistic resistance. Thus, instead of merely superficially covering them, *PP*'s society aims to fully reach the underlying structures and impose order there; or, if that is impossible, then to annihilate them.

A way to do so seems to shift attention, thereby rendering the old outside of society. In this sense, in addition to the notion of governmentality, Foucault's analysis on order through visibility in *Surveiller et punir* (*Strafen und Überwachen*)⁵³ proves insightful. Order through visibility denotes structures that steer attention. Building upon this,

sociologist Andreas Reckwitz notes that disciplinary vision is exercised by institutions aiming to control or even standardize human conduct through disciplinary action.⁵⁴ Contrary, the “quantified self” that is constantly monitored by devices such as smartwatches leads to a self-surveillance aiming for self-optimization. In what Reckwitz calls ‘post-disciplinary’ visibility orders, being visible is fundamental to participate in society. While he probably has social media in mind, this concept is visible in *PP* as well; in this fictionalized society, it is necessary to be ‘seen’ by the Sybil System in order to partake in this dystopian society. The use of burial-like layering thus suggests a negligence conspired by the ruling system to willfully ‘not-see’ the unwanted. This is visually depicted by the light-dark-contrast, the upper-lower hierarchy, and the aspect of layering in the city imagery.

However, all of this is still an ongoing process in *PP* because the unwanted has a way of crawling back into the upper order. For example, the antagonist Makishima provides criminals with helmets that mirror the lowest crime coefficient of people nearby. Consequently, it is possible for the wearer of a helmet to commit a crime in public without being detected by street scanners or even judged and perhaps executed by the system. This particular story arc peaks in episode 14 with the disturbing sequence of a culprit beating a woman to death one night while bystanders just watch, unable to see this as a crime because his psycho-pass is not displaying the Crime Coefficient or Hue expected to accompany a crime. The idyllic Christmassy atmosphere of the pedestrian area provides a high-contrast background, enhancing the unsettling violence. In the sequence, the conflict between the buried but now re-emerging layer of (past) violence and the layer of the order built atop it is sharpened. Hence, the system’s over-layering and progress is not a one-way street. Rather, forgotten things arise out of the dark.

Ultimately, the city imagery in *PP* counters the postmodernist depthlessness of an information society, as depicted in *GitS*; moreover, *PP* does this using an order through visibility which is attempting to pervade deeper structures that offer resistance. Whereas the system attempts to establish its new (visibility-)order by top-down layering, older things—such as colonial structures and, of course, crime—reappear on the surface, often re-emerging from water or the depths. In this process of burying and re-emerging, the city functions as a template for the ongoing structural changes in society. Certainly, there can be little doubt that the Sybil System in *PP* will be successful in its approach to alter the surface of its surrounding society. However, it remains doubtful whether a complete alteration of society can ever be achieved here, since it does not seem to suffice to address all the many elements and even people who remain unwished-for and presently outside of society. Not to be seen does not mean not to exist, though. Thus, *PP* offers a different take on reality that does not allow the postmodern depthlessness of signification to determine what is and what is not.

Conclusion

The societies displayed by means of city imagery in the cyberpunk movie *GitS* and the post-cyberpunk series *PP* clearly offer different approaches. While *GitS* employs its city imagery to invoke a depthless information society in a postmodern sense, with an implicit socio-economic hierarchy restricting the individual's freedom, *PP*'s city buries the unwanted and violent past of individualism under lighter structures of a technocratic governing structure. Most notable here is the change in the predominant direction of view: *GitS* favors a bottom-up direction, focusing the upper city sphere that functions as a metaphor for techno-metaphysical salvation or a 'cyber transcendence'⁵⁵ as restrictions on the ground level confine the protagonist, while in *PP*, there is a top-down direction of view that underlines the superficial covering of

older deeper structures by the ruling governing system. Places of resistance are thus found down below.

I have argued here that the invoked depthlessness in *GitS* stresses a postmodern loss of the past much like Jameson suggests, which arguably is a feature of cyberpunk fiction in general. Contrarily, in *PP*, the re-emerging past opposes the system's effort to establish a Foucauldian order of visibility, i.e.. willfully 'unseeing' the unwished-for. Such order, however, appears unable to completely annihilate the past and its remaining material existence. This marks a shift from a postmodern point of view, which mainly regards information and representation, towards an approach that recognizes that representation is not necessarily equivalent with existence. I maintain that Person did not think of this as a feature of post-cyberpunk in 1999, though that very lacuna is in keeping with his warning that post-cyberpunk would continue to develop well after he offered a preliminary definition.

Nevertheless, there are problematic notions that arise from these considerations. For example, *PP* seems to favor a more nationalist take on society than *GitS*. Whereas the latter displays a multinational postmodern city, *PP* explicitly focuses on Japan. Japanese cyberpunk functions as a discursive platform for Japan's relationship to the West. Therein lies the danger of constructing explicitly nationalist narratives, themes, and even texts. It seems that *PP*, contrary to *GitS*, favors nationalism over a postmodernist global hybridity. For another matter, the Sybil System's violence in *PP* is portrayed as justified by the violence of old underlying structures. In this case, one must wonder how autocratic systems generally relate to the processors upon which they establish themselves—is this dependence, inspiration, reaction, apathy, or something else entirely? Whatever the consensus may be, *PP* deals with it by portraying a collective well-being and peace achieved through oppression of the

individual via a surveillance state; one might even notice similarities to contemporary China as an example of a comparably autocratic governing system. Whether those are aspects of post-cyberpunk fiction in general, or of Japanese post-cyberpunk more specifically, should be subject to further inquiries.

Notes:

¹ *Kōkaku Kidōtai: Ghost in the Shell*, dir. Oshii Mamoru (1995); translated as *Ghost in the Shell* (Panini Video 1995).

² Jörn Ahrens, “Das Selbst Im Apartment. Gesellschaftsanalyse als Spielfilm”, in *Die Herausforderungen Des Films. Soziologische Antworten*, ed. by Alexander Geimer, Carsten Heinze, and Rainer Winter, (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018), 170.

³ Alexa M. Kunz and Bernhard Schäfers, “Architektur und Stadt im Film”, in *Gesellschaft Im Film*, ed. by Markus Schroer (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2008), 14-15, 18.

⁴ Kunz and Schäfers, 19.

⁵ Ibid., 26

⁶ *Psycho-Pass*, dir. Shiotani Naoyoshi (2012); (Kaze Anime 2014).

⁷ Lawrence Person, “Notes Toward a Postcyberpunk Manifesto”, *Slashdot.Org*, 1999 <<https://slashdot.org/story/99/10/08/2123255/notes-toward-a-postc>> [accessed 19 January 2019].

⁸ Alice Bienk, *Filmsprache. Einführung in die Interaktive Filmanalyse*, 5th edn (Marburg: Schüren Verlag GmbH, 2019), 38-47; Hans Jürgen Wulff, “Filmraum”, ed. by Hans Jürgen Wulff, *Lexikon Der Filmbegriffe*, 2019 <<https://filmlexikon.uni-kiel.de/index.php?action=lexikon&tag=det&id=170>> [accessed 17 February 2020].

⁹ Jiré Emine Gözen, *Cyberpunk Science Fiction. Literarische Fiktion und Medientheorie* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012), 123-130, 205.

¹⁰ Ibid., 123-130, 205.

¹¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 286.

¹² Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle. Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11.

¹³ Person.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kumiko Sato, “How Information Technology Has (Not) Changed Feminism and Japanism: Cyberpunk in the Japanese Context”, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 41, 3 (2004), 340-341.

¹⁷ Ibid., 340-341.

¹⁸ Ibid., 353.

¹⁹ Sato 2004, 346. Sato refers to Tatsumi's 1993 *A Manifesto for Japanoid* which is not available in English translation. In his book *Full Metal Apache*, Tatsumi however offers a multitude of Japanese cyborgian identity also in relation to U.S.-cyberpunk: Takayuki Tatsumi, *Full Metal Apache. Transactions Between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham / London: Duke University Press, 2006), 29, 43-59, 105-111, 137-170.

²⁰ Christopher Bolton, *Interpreting Anime* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 95-136; Napier, 103-116; Sharalyn Orbaugh, “Sex and the Single Cyborg. Japanese Popular Culture Experiments in Subjectivity”, in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams. Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, ed. by Christopher Bolton / Takayuki Tatsumi / Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 172-192.

²¹ Yuen, Wong Kin, “On the Edge of Spaces. ‘Blade Runner’, ‘Ghost in the Shell’, and Hong Kong’s Cityscape.” *Science Fiction Studies* 27, 1 (2008), 1–21.

²² *Ibid.*, 13. Yuen here quotes: Nozaki, Tohru et. al. *The Analysis of GHOST IN THE SHELL* (Tokyo: Kodansha Young Magazine, 1995). This book, unfortunately, is not paginated.

²³ Napier, 310, note 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁶ William O. Gardner, “The Cyber Sublime and the Virtual Mirror. Information and Media in the Works of Oshii Mamoru and Kon Satoshi”, *Revue Canadienne d’Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 18, 1 (2009), 48.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Napier, 113.

³⁰ Yuen, 14.

³¹ William O. Gardner, *The Metabolist Imagination. Visions of the City in Postwar Japanese Architecture and Science Fiction* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 11-16.

³² Yuen, 13, 14. Yuen again quotes Nozaki.

³³ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁴ Jameson, 12.

³⁵ Gardner “Metabolist Imagination”, 112; Yatsuka Hajime, “Eine Architektur Im Meer Der Zeichen”, in *Die Neue Japanische Architektur*, ed. by Botond Bognar (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 1991), 40.

³⁶ Jameson, 98.

³⁷ Thomas Lamarre, *Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 6-11.

³⁸ Gardner, “Metabolist Imagination”, 113.

³⁹ Yatsuka, 40.

⁴⁰ Yuen, 14.

⁴¹ Mari Nakamura, “Emancipation in Postmodernity: Political Thought in Japanese Science Fiction Animation” (Dissertation in Humanities, Leiden University, 2017), 120-36.

⁴² Nakamura, 121-22.

⁴³ Tania Murray Li, "Governmentality", *Anthropologica*, 49, 2 (2007), 275.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 133.

⁴⁵ Botond Bogнар, *Die Neue Japanische Architektur* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 1991), 12; Gardner, "Metabolist Imagination", 37-9.

⁴⁶ Harry T. Oshima, "Reinterpreting Japan's Postwar Growth", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, October 1982, 10-11, 38-40.

⁴⁷ In episode 19, it is stated that borders are closed and that there is no international communication, which reminds audiences of Japan being a closed state under the Tokugawa Shogunate until 1853. Further, the Sybil System seems to be the only way to provide order in this fictional world, as *Psycho-Pass: The Movie* (2015) denotes by showing the system exported to another country because Japan is depicted as the only orderly country while the rest of world has sunken into chaos.

⁴⁸ Kunz and Schäfers, 19.

As a further note, the Nona Tower presumably takes its name from a sister of the Morai in Greek (Klotho) and Roman (Nona) mythology, who weaves the thread of fate whose length is to be determined and then cut by the other two sisters. Accordingly, the Sibyl System controls its subject 'slaves like Nona weaves the thread of life.

⁴⁹ Tatsumi, 155-56.

For a starting point to further inquiries into posthuman studies I strongly recommend the *Posthuman Studies Reader* edited by Evi D. Sampanikou and Jan Stasieńko which holds key texts and arguments.

⁵⁰ A specific aspect of layering certainly is the recurrent display of holography in the anime, used for home-decoration, clothes, or to cover hideous crime scenes from the public eye. Nakamura finds this technology a signifier of the system's control, assuming that the architecture is also visually enhanced. There is, however, no evidence in to support that claim. Whereas the lack of the system's control is clearly visible in the decayed structures, those remain evidently present next to the glossy buildings (fig. 2).

Nakamura, 130.

⁵¹ Jameson, 18, 286, 309.

⁵² Paulk, Charles, 'Post-National Cool: William Gibson's Japan', *Science Fiction Studies*, 38, no. 3 (2011), 478-500, 487.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, *Überwachen Und Strafen. Die Geburt Des Gefängnisses* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977).

⁵⁴ Andreas Reckwitz, "Die Transformation der Sichtbarkeitsordnungen. Vom Disziplinären Blick zu den Kompetitiven Singularitäten", in *Vierzig Jahre 'Überwachen und Strafen'. Zur Aktualität der Foucault'schen Matchanalyse*, ed. by Roberto Nigro and Marc Rölli (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2017), 204-6.

⁵⁵ Gözen, 208.

Bibliography

- Kōkaku Kidōtai: Ghost in the Shell*, dir. Oshii Mamoru (1995); translated as *Ghost in the Shell* (Panini Video 1995).
- Psycho-Pass*, dir. Shiotani Naoyoshi (2012); (Kaze Anime 2014).
- Ahrens, Jörn, “Das Selbst im Apartment. Gesellschaftsanalyse als Spielfilm”, in *Die Herausforderungen des Films. Soziologische Antworten*, ed. by Alexander Geimer, Carsten Heinze, and Rainer Winter, (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018), 165-87.
- Bienk, Alice, *Filmsprache. Einführung in die Interaktive Filmanalyse*, 5th edn (Marburg: Schüren Verlag GmbH, 2019).
- Bognar, Botond, *Die Neue Japanische Architektur* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 1991).
- Bolton, Christopher, *Interpreting Anime* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).
- Foucault, Michel, *Überwachen Und Strafen. Die Geburt Des Gefängnisses*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977).
- Gardner, William O., “The Cyber Sublime and the Virtual Mirror. Information and Media in the Works of Oshii Mamoru and Kon Satoshi”, *Revue Canadienne d’Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 18, 1 (2009), 44-70.
- Gardner, William O., *The Metabolist Imagination. Visions of the City in Postwar Japanese Architecture and Science Fiction* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).
- Gözen, Jiré Emine, *Cyberpunk Science Fiction. Literarische Fiktion und Medientheorie* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012).
- Jameson, Fredric, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).
- Kunz, Alexa M. and Bernhard Schäfers, “Architektur Und Stadt Im Film”, in *Gesellschaft Im Film*, ed. by Markus Schroer (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2008), 14-48.
- Lamarre, Thomas, *Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).
- Murray Li, Tania, “Governmentality”, *Anthropologica*, 49, 2 (2007), 275-81.
- Nakamura, Mari, “Emancipation in Postmodernity: Political Thought in Japanese Science Fiction Animation” (Dissertation in Humanities, Leiden University, 2017).

- Napier, Susan J., *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle. Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- Orbaugh, Sharalyn, "Sex and the Single Cyborg. Japanese Popular Culture Experiments in Subjectivity", in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams. Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, ed. by Christopher Bolton / Takayuki Tatsumi / Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 172-192.
- Oshima, Harry T., "Reinterpreting Japan's Postwar Growth", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, October 1982, 1-43.
- Person, Lawrence, "Notes Toward a Postcyberpunk Manifesto", *Slashdot.Org*, 1999 <<https://slashdot.org/story/99/10/08/2123255/notes-toward-a-poste>> [accessed 19 January 2019].
- Paulk, Charles, 'Post-National Cool: William Gibson's Japan', *Science Fiction Studies*, 38, no. 3 (2011), 478-500.
- Reckwitz, Andreas, "Die Transformation Der Sichtbarkeitsordnungen. Vom Disziplinären Blick zu den Kompetitiven Singularitäten", in *Vierzig Jahre 'Überwachen und Strafen'. Zur Aktualität der Foucault'schen Matchanalyse*, ed. by Roberto Nigro and Marc Rölli (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2017), 197-212.
- Sato, Kumiko, "How Information Technology Has (Not) Changed Feminism and Japanism: Cyberpunk in the Japanese Context", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 41, 3 (2004), 335-55.
- Sampanikou, Evi D., and Jan Stasieńko, eds.. *Posthuman Studies Reader. Core Readings on Transhumanism, Posthumanism and Metahumanism*, Vol. 2. Posthuman Studies. (Basel: Schwabe Verlag 2021).
- Tatsumi, Takayuki, *Full Metal Apache. Transactions Between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham / London: Duke University Press, 2006).
- Wulff, Hans Jürgen, "Filmraum", ed. by Hans Jürgen Wulff, *Lexikon Der Filmbegriffe*, 2019 <<https://filmlexikon.uni-kiel.de/index.php?action=lexikon&tag=det&id=170>> [accessed 17 February 2020].
- Yatsuka, Hajime, "Eine Architektur Im Meer Der Zeichen", in *Die Neue Japanische Architektur*, ed. by Botond Bognar (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 1991), 38-41.
- Yuen, Wong Kin. "On the Edge of Spaces. "Blade Runner", "Ghost in the Shell", and Hong Kong's Cityscape." *Science Fiction Studies* 27, no. 1 (2000), 1-21.